

Talking About Mindfulness: Portrayals in Diverse Communication Communities

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Abstract

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Mindfulness as a concept and a practice has gained significant recognition, referenced and employed in academic studies and the popular press, among other communities. Within these literatures, broad conclusions are often drawn about mindfulness, its relationships to other variables, and its impacts or benefits. Given the surge of writings about mindfulness in these contexts, and the complexity of the mindfulness construct itself, it is not surprising that there is variation in its conceptualization across sources even as the same name “mindfulness” is used. It is therefore important to discern “what are different groups talking about, when talking about mindfulness?” to assess, among other things, the varying meanings and values imbued within the term by these different communities. Taking an Ethnography of Communication approach, this study performs a communication codes analysis on two communication communities (popular press articles and academic journal articles) to determine if there are particular communication codes associated with either community and, if so, what distinguishes them both within and across the communities. This analysis has implications for academic understanding on as well as practical application of the topic/practice.

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CHAPTER 1:

RESEARCH PROBLEM, QUESTIONS, AND MINDFULNESS BACKGROUND

Mindfulness is a term that has gained increased recognition in Western societies over the past few decades, especially in the last several years.¹ The term is found in popular news outlets such as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, MSNBC, FOX News, ABC News, and CNN. It has become the focus of many popular books, especially in the self-help, religion, and spirituality genres. It has also become the basis for or is applied in several clinical therapies, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Research on mindfulness within academic fields in particular has surged, becoming a part of research investigations in public health, medical programs such as nursing and occupational therapy, psychology, communication, education, informatics, business, recreation sciences, and neuroscience.

Countless benefits have been ascribed to mindfulness and its associated practices. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have, for example, been applied to mental disorders, physical ailments, emotional issues, as well as to more general categories such as awareness of the present moment and the development of healthy relationships (e.g., Carson et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Khoury, Lecomte, Fortin, Masse, Therien et al., 2013; Robins, Schmidt, & Linehan, 2004). Assessments of dispositional mindfulness have also been found to be related to improved health outcomes (Creswell, Way, Eisenberger, & Lieberman, 2007), self-esteem and

¹ See Google Trends analysis for visual: <https://www.google.com/trends/explore#q=mindfulness>

social anxiety (Rasmussen & Pidgeon, 2010), and depressive symptoms (Barnhofer, Duggan, & Griffith, 2011).

Given the variety of contexts in which mindfulness has emerged, as well as the concept's complexity and long history, significant variations exist in the ways mindfulness has been conceptualized across these different contexts. Discerning these differences has been attempted to some degree. Several scholars (e.g., Gethin, 2011; Rhys Davids, 1881, 1910; Wilson, 2014), for example, describe the emergence of the term in Western discourse in 1881 and chart its evolution in meaning throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries. Wilson (2014), in particular, explains the ways mindfulness has manifested in Western societies and the means by which it has done so. He focuses primarily on popular culture, investigating the ways in which mindfulness is marketed as a consumer product, how it has become “medicalized” or integrated into Western medicinal practices, and how it has been mainstreamed into Western culture on a number of other levels.

As a part of this investigation, Wilson demonstrates some of the ways that mindfulness has been re-conceptualized or adapted from its Eastern origins in order to better fit in the West. He points out how several prominent individuals in the Western “mindfulness movement” have shaped how mindfulness is conceptualized in particular contexts. As well as including historical analyses of mindfulness that will be described later in this essay, Wilson's assessment demonstrates that the meaning of the term mindfulness has varied over time and location. In doing so, he illustrates how the broad use of “mindfulness” suggests more consistency than may really exist, and, in doing so, conclusions are drawn across fora that may not be compatible. This dissertation will help reveal more fully what these underlying differences are and what implications they may have.

Rationale for Research

It is essential to engage in an investigation regarding these differences, for a few reasons. First is the topic's prominence: The number of academic studies, clinical treatments, and popular press publications concerning mindfulness has increased rapidly.² As noted, it has received attention from most major news media outlets and has been featured on blogs and on more informal news sites such as *Buzzfeed* and *The Huffington Post*. Mindfulness as a concept of study has also noticeably increased within academic discourses over the past several years. A Google Scholar search returns more than 37,000 hits on the keyword “mindfulness” in 2016 alone.³

A second reason for this research, and the one most germane to communication scholars, is that it can help explain what people in different communities are actually talking about when they use the term “mindfulness.” Specifically, talk shapes—and is shaped by—the culture in which it occurs (Kramsch, 1998). Therefore, the way a community speaks about mindfulness is shaped by pre-existing cultural beliefs and practices; these ways of talking about mindfulness typically reinforce those same cultural beliefs and practices. For example, neuroscientists might discuss mindfulness as a state of mind that is physically measurable by using an fMRI to examine changes or functions in particular areas of the brain (e.g., Farb, Segal, Mayberg, Bean, McKeon et al., 2007). This approach is shaped by the cultural premise that the world can be best known, or the answers to particular questions best discovered, through the practice of direct, third-person observation. If this method is the only method to be published in academic

² See Google Trends analysis mentioned above. Also, a Web of Science search returned 1,177 hits for “mindfulness” in 2015, 845 hits in 2014, 604 hits in 2013, and it decreases with each year into the past. Retrieved May 25, 2016

³ As of January 6, 2017:

https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=mindfulness&hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&as_ylo=2016&as_yhi=2016

neuroscience journals, it would reinforce that community's cultural premise that mindfulness can only be known through this form of observation. In other words, general understandings of the concept are influenced by the community's paradigmatic assumptions. Therefore, an investigation of the discourses concerning mindfulness within different communities will provide insight into the meanings attached to mindfulness by these different communities as well as a greater understanding of how mindfulness intertwines with community beliefs, values, and practices.

A third reason for the importance of this research concerns mindfulness' perceived effects or outcomes. Within these academic and popular press discourses, conclusions are drawn about mindfulness and its impacts or benefits for any number of issues, including mental health (e.g., de Vibe, Bjorndal, Tipton, Hammerstrom, & Kowalski, 2012; Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011), physical health (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 1982), emotional health (e.g., Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995), student study habits (e.g., Beauchemin, Hutchins, & Patterson, 2008), corporate success (e.g., Hayes, Bond, Barnes-Holmes, & Austin, 2006), interpersonal communication (e.g., Harvey-Knowles, Manusov, & Crowley, 2015), and sexual desire (e.g., Brotto, Rasson, & Luria, 2008). The generalizability of these claims is less clear, however, considering the apparent diversity and disunity of the discourses making these claims. It is important to be aware, for instance, if a popular press article references an academic study in promoting the benefits of mindfulness but describes mindfulness in a different manner than does the study.

For these reasons, this dissertation will provide an empirical case study concerning the ways by which diverse communities—specifically the popular press and academic communities—invoke the same symbol for different purposes. In doing so, it moves beyond

extant research on the topic, some of which has made brief note of the fact that mindfulness is employed differently across contexts. Most often, when differing understandings of mindfulness are discussed, the focus is on the evolution of the concept over time (e.g., Bodhi, 2011), or authors examine conceptual differences between the East and the West on the topic (e.g., May, 2016; Wilson, 2014). Recently, however, the academic community has begun to examine mindfulness' varying conceptualizations within scholarly research (e.g., Chiesa, 2011). Yet, a thorough investigation of the specific differences in understandings of mindfulness across the popular press and academic communities, and the ways these may reflect the communities who use the term, has yet to be conducted.

The differences discussed here are not simply definitional. When examining how mindfulness is employed within these communities, it is vital to understand the more encompassing *meanings* that mindfulness holds for community members. "Meanings" here refers to how mindfulness is situated with respect to cultural beliefs, values, and/or practices. In other words, how is mindfulness conceptualized within the broader existing culture? The ways in which mindfulness is discussed (and not discussed) tells us something about the culture in which these discussions are taking place and suggests ways in which the concept may (or may not) develop. Understanding these relationships between culture and conceptualization can give us a better idea of what these communities signify, therefore, when they talk about mindfulness.

In examining communities' "talk" regarding mindfulness, an Ethnography of Communication approach is particularly useful. Stemming from Hymes' (1962) development of an ethnography of speaking, this approach focuses on exposing the patterns and functions of communication within specific contexts (e.g., Hymes, 1962). This dissertation employs a communication codes analysis, which is one method of exposing and examining these patterns of

communication (e.g., Philipsen, 1997). Communication codes can be understood as “a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct” (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126). I examine particular communication codes that are employed by popular press and academic communities when they discuss the topic of mindfulness. In other words, I aim to “find and formulate those means of speaking whose use, in a particular community, have meaning and potential for those who use and experience them, and to specify what that meaning potential is” (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 361).

I therefore propose two primary research questions to move beyond extant research on this topic:

RQ1: In what ways do meanings of mindfulness differ within and between academic and popular press communities?

RQ2: What communication codes are utilized by these two communities, which evidence and enforce community norms and assumptions with respect to mindfulness?

Before proceeding to a more detailed description of the methods employed in this study and then to the analysis, the next section provides a literature review on scholarly research conducted on mindfulness and its benefits. It serves to provide evidence for the claim that mindfulness has received significant attention and enjoys widespread usage. In addition, the significance of many of the (primarily medical) benefits discussed also reinforces this dissertation’s argument that this is an important topic of focus.

Mindfulness and its Benefits

Perhaps the most commonly cited definition for mindfulness, at least in the Western world, comes from Jon Kabat-Zinn. A professor of medicine, a mindfulness teacher, and a founder of University of Massachusetts’ Stress Reduction Clinic, Kabat-Zinn created the

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program that is employed in clinical practice and academic studies around the world (e.g., Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004). The program is designed to elicit and promote the experience of mindfulness, which the author conceptualizes as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). This particular conceptualization of mindfulness, often accompanied by the MBSR program, has become the basis for, or a tool used in, an ever-growing number of academic studies measuring mindfulness and its effects (see Fjorback, Arendt, Ornobol, Fink, & Walach, 2011; Grossman, 2004 for meta-analyses).

Kabat-Zinn’s work marked the clearest beginning of Western scientific inquiry into mindfulness and its effects. Soon after, research from a variety of academic disciplines began to appear (e.g., Delmonte, 1988; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, Burncy, & Sellers, 1986; Simon & Allan, 1985). Many of these studies found a relationship between mindfulness practices, such as meditation, and particular outcomes. The benefits ascribed (or attempted to be ascribed) to mindfulness in these studies are vast (see U.S. Department of Veteran’s Affairs, 2014 for a broad range of examples). As noted, for example, mindfulness-based interventions have been assessed for their effects on mental disorders, physical ailments, emotional issues, as well as on more general categories such as awareness of the present moment and the development of healthy relationships (Carson et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011; Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995).

The benefits of mindfulness can generally be seen as falling into three major categories: (1) mental/emotional health, (2) physical health, and (3) relational health, although some studies

can be placed into multiple categories.⁴ This classification system is therefore not meant to be definitive but rather to provide heuristic value in discussing the ascribed benefits of mindfulness for the purposes of this dissertation.

Mental/emotional Health

Mental/emotional health is the largest category of ascribed mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) benefits. MBIs are mindfulness treatments that are given to groups of participants or patients to achieve a desired beneficial medical effect, similar to how one might prescribe a drug aimed at alleviating or curing an illness. Bishop et al. (2004) identified several controlled trials in which MBSR results in reductions in “psychological morbidity associated with medical illness” (p. 231). In other words, MBSR has been found to have a general, positive effect on the psychological state of the participants involved in these studies. Robins, Schmidt, and Linehan (2004), for example, found that the MBI Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) was more effective than active control conditions when treating borderline personality disorder. They also found that mindfulness helped to reduce the frequency and severity of suicidal and self-injurious behavior among suicidal women. The effect of reducing self-harm and suicidal thoughts and behavior has also been cited as a benefit of mindfulness by Bishop et al. (2004) as well as Brown, Ryan, and Creswell (2007). Specifically, Brown et al. used random controlled trial studies of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) that reduced self-harming

⁴ There have been benefits ascribed to mindfulness that might seemingly fall into additional/different categories. For example, literature examines the learning and productivity benefits of mindfulness across classroom or corporate settings, respectively (e.g., Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005). Many of these writings, however, apply benefits from one of these three categories to settings outside health contexts. Therefore, they do not, arguably, qualify as separate categories. That being stated, there may be useful categories that are not discussed here. These three were the most apparent that arose throughout the literature review and data collection processes and thus are the ones included here.

behaviors, stress in borderline personality disorder patients, parasuicidal attempts, and improved overall mental health.

Substance (ab)use is another sub-area of mental/emotional health where MBIs have shown promise. Bishop et al. (2004) cited two studies in which Buddhist philosophy or mindfulness-based interventions have been effective in treating patients with drug (ab)use issues, as well as showing encouraging signs for relapse prevention. Brown et al. (2007) pointed to other studies in which DBT has been effective in addressing drug (ab)use issues. In their systematic review of mindfulness and Buddhist-derived interventions in correctional settings, Shonin, Van Gordon, Slade, and Griffiths (2013) discussed Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP), which follows a structure similar to MBSR and is tailored to treating patients with substance use disorders. Marlatt et al. (2004) found “support for the feasibility and clinical effectiveness of the Vipassana meditation course for reducing alcohol and drug use and related problems, psychiatric symptoms, and thought suppression, and for improving drinking-related cognitions, optimism, self-regulation, and readiness to change” (p. 277).

The sub-area where the most attention has been directed is the effects of MBIs on depression, anxiety, stress, and negative emotion. In her seminal work analyzing mindfulness as a clinical intervention, Baer (2003) suggested that “mindfulness may lead to reductions in a variety of problematic conditions, including pain, stress, anxiety, depressive relapse, and disordered eating” (p. 126). Kabat-Zinn (2003) talked specifically about how MBSR creates physical brain changes that allow patients to cope more effectively with negative emotions during stressful episodes. Bishop et al. (2004) also pointed to several studies demonstrating the mitigation of stress, as well as the reduction in panic attacks and avoidance, in people with MBSR training. Khoury et al. (2013) concluded that mindfulness interventions treat a range of

psychological disorders effectively and are “especially effective for reducing anxiety, depression, and stress” (p. 763). These results are further supported in analyses by Eberth and Sedlmeier (2012), Fjorback et al. (2011), Orsillo, Roemer, Lerner, and Till (2004), and Shonin et al. (2013), among others.

Self-control is another construct that has been analyzed with respect to mindfulness training’s effects. Shonin et al. (2013) found several studies that demonstrate a connection between MBIs and greater impulse control and emotion regulation. Baer (2003) seconded this and noted that it also benefits maladaptive behaviors that stem from these issues. Shonin et al. (2013) specifically mention maladaptive self-blame and avoidance. Several authors (Bishop et al., 2004; Brown et al., 2007; Wilson, 2004) discussed MBIs’ impacts on eating disorders, conditions that are tied to self-control. These reviews and studies noted marked improvements for these disorders when people engaged in mindfulness practices. Shonin et al. (2013) pointed to studies that demonstrated MBIs’ positive effects on reducing anger, as well as criminal thinking, among inmates. Brown et al. (2007) also noted that ACT improved the rates at which nicotine-dependent smokers quit smoking.

The last general sub-area of improvement related to mental and emotional health studied commonly is general well-being enhancement and self-esteem. Brown and Ryan (2003) surmised that “[m]indfulness may be important in disengaging individuals from automatic thoughts, habits, and unhealthy behavior patterns and thus could play a key role in fostering informed and self-endorsed behavioral regulation, which has long been associated with well-being enhancement” (p. 823). In other words, the ability to notice and control personal behaviors results in a greater general sense of well-being. Shonin et al. (2013) also mentioned that

mindfulness-based interventions appear to improve self-esteem and grant improved psychological well-being.

Physical Health

The second category includes the physical benefits ascribed to MBIs and mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn first developed MBSR as a treatment to work with patients experiencing chronic pain, specifically those who had not improved with traditional medical care. In his 1982 study of 51 chronic pain patients who were treated with a program then known as the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program (SR&RP), Kabat-Zinn found that more than half of the patients showed a reduction of at least 50% of their original pain, according to the McGill Pain Rating Index (Melzack, 1975). His work has become a benchmark for later studies on the effects of mindfulness on physical pain and other variables. For example, Baer (2003) noted, “findings for chronic pain patients show statistically significant improvements in ratings of pain, other medical symptoms, and general psychological symptoms” (p. 134). She also reported that many of the improvements remained when assessed during follow-up evaluations. In a later study, Kabat-Zinn et al. (1998) demonstrated MBSR’s effect on clearing the skin of patients with psoriasis. Specifically, when delivered via audiotape during ultraviolet light therapy, MBSR was found to “increase the rate of resolution of psoriatic lesions” for patients battling this disorder (p. 625).

Davidson, Kabat-Zinn, Schumacher, Rosenkranz et al. (2003) investigated the effect of a mindfulness meditation program on the immune system’s response to an influenza vaccine. They found that the mindfulness meditation group, when compared with a control, had greater antibody titer responses, meaning that the meditation group had stronger immune responses. This suggests that mindfulness meditation may modify brain function and provide benefits for immune functioning. Other researchers have examined the impact of mindfulness therapies on

the physical health of cancer patients. Carlson, Speca, Patel, and Goodey (2003), for example, brought together 49 patients with breast cancer and 10 with prostate cancer for an 8-week MBSR treatment program. The authors were interested in the effects of MBSR on overall quality of life, stress symptoms, lymphocyte counts, and cytokine counts. They ultimately determined that MBSR led to enhanced quality of life, as well as decreased symptoms of stress, for the cancer patient sample. Carlson et al. also found slow changes in cancer-related cytokine production, which impact how well the body fights cancerous growth. Brown et al. (2007) noted a reduction in medical symptoms and increased health-related quality of life in cancer patients in their survey of the literature.

Despite these positive outcomes, systematic review of the impacts of MBSR on long-term physical conditions have found mixed results for a variety of conditions, noting, however, there was sufficient evidence to conclude that MBSR has a positive impact on the physical effects of primary insomnia and irritable bowel syndrome (Crowe et al., 2016). Lakhan and Schofield (2013) provide similar conclusions, noting that with regards to irritable bowel syndrome, mindfulness-based therapies “improved pain, symptom severity, and quality of life” (p. 12). Fjorback, Arendt, and Ornbol (2013) likewise reported evidence that mindfulness therapies are beneficial for a variety of bodily distress syndromes, such as fibromyalgia, irritable bowel syndrome, and chronic fatigue syndrome. In another meta-analysis of the general benefits of MBSR, Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, and Walach (2004) list medical symptoms, sensory pain, physical impairments, and functional quality-of-life as the “physically oriented measures” contained within the studies they examine. They note, however, that these physically-oriented measures are assessed far less commonly across studies when compared with mental health-oriented measures.

Relational Health

Mindfulness has been associated with a number of other benefits. One of its more commonly assessed categories of benefits, outside the mental/emotional and physical realms, concerns relationships. Brown et al. (2007) examined studies that investigated a number of relevant relational factors. They noted that some researchers argue, generally, that “mindfulness promotes attunement, connection, and closeness in relationships” (Brown et al., 2007, p. 225). The authors referenced Goleman (2006) who claimed that mindfulness might make people more aware of their partner’s communication content and subtle verbal and nonverbal cues, which would have relational implications. In addition, given that mindfulness tends to reduce stress, Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, and Rogge (2007) posited a connection between lower stress levels and the impact of conflict engaged in by couples. They write, “trait mindfulness was found to predict lower emotional stress responses and positive pre- and postconflict change in perception of the relationship” (Barnes et al., 2007, p. 482). The authors also noted that levels of mindfulness, specifically state mindfulness, were positively correlated with communication quality in couple’s discussions. Shonin et al. (2013) make a related claim: that mindfulness increases tolerance, respect, cooperation, and adaptive interpersonal skills.

Though much of the research on relationships has used trait mindfulness rather than MBIs, Carson et al. (2004) highlight Mindfulness-Based Relationship Enhancement, which has demonstrated benefits for couples. This approach aims to increase a couple’s relationship satisfaction through a mindfulness-based intervention, as opposed to trait mindfulness studies which often measure correlations between mindfulness and specific interpersonal variables, or MBI studies which look at the impact of a mindfulness intervention on individual outcomes. The authors found, utilizing a randomized control study, that this intervention “was efficacious in (a)

favorably impacting couples' levels of relationship satisfaction, autonomy, relatedness, closeness, acceptance of one another, and relationship distress; (b) beneficially affecting individuals' optimism, spirituality, relaxation, and psychological distress; and (c) maintaining benefits at 3-month follow-up" (p. 471). In addition, the couples who practiced more mindfulness experienced better outcomes in relation to relationship happiness and relationship stress, when compared to a wait-listed control.

Overall, mindfulness, with respect to relational health, has been associated with relationship, marital, and sexual satisfaction (Brotto & Heiman, 2007; Brotto, Basson, & Luria, 2008; Brotto et al., 2008; Goldmeier, 2013; Kozlowski, 2012; Sommers, 2013; Wachs & Cordova, 2007); empathy and perspective taking (Burpee & Langer, 2005; Wachs & Cordova, 2007); interpersonal cooperativeness (Haimerl & Valentine, 2001); less reactivity and enhanced feelings of safety in relationships (Pruitt & McCollum, 2010; Tloczynski & Tanriella, 1998); and enhanced initial romantic attraction during speed-dating scenarios (Janz, Pepping, & Halford, 2015). It has also been linked with improvements in parenting and coparenting (Bögels, Hellemans, van Deursen, Römer, & van der Meulen, 2014); and secure attachment styles (Cordon & Finney 2008; Goodall, Trejnowka, & Darling, 2012; Jones, Welton, Oliver, & Thoburn, 2011; Sahdra et al., 2011).

Summary

Thus far in this chapter, I have discussed the ubiquity of the term mindfulness across a number of platforms. Mindfulness has gained attention in mainstream media outlets as well as in academic literature, with many benefits being ascribed to mindfulness. I alluded to the somewhat nebulous nature of mindfulness in that its meaning is often unclear or inexact when comparing across sources and contexts. This conceptual confusion is the driving force of this research

project, which aims to elucidate the varying and potentially contradictory understandings and applications of mindfulness, and to determine what different groups are really talking about when talking about mindfulness. I also enumerated three categories of benefits (mental/emotional health, physical health, and relational health) that are often described in mindfulness research and described major findings and claims under each category. The next section presents, in greater detail, an examination of how mindfulness has been defined and operationalized across popularly-acknowledged sources. It establishes a general background knowledge from which the present research project stems.

Defining and Operationalizing Mindfulness: Differences of Opinion

MBIs and Correlational Studies

Though a plethora of studies (see above, and U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2014) have demonstrated that mindfulness is associated with positive outcomes on a large number of variables, it is not clear, as argued previously, that the research is focused on the same conceptualization of mindfulness. To begin, there is an important distinction between mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) and correlational studies of mindfulness, both active areas of research. MBIs entail the integration of mindfulness theory or practice into a therapeutic or clinical treatment. Common examples include MBSR, MBCT, DBT, and ACT. The goal of these studies is often to determine the outcome of a particular MBI on health variables such as depression or anxiety. Hoffman et al. (2010), for example, performed a meta-analytic study in which they find that MBIs have moderate pre-post effects with respect to the reduction of anxiety and mood symptoms (i.e., that there is a moderate reduction in symptoms as a result of the treatments).

Correlational studies of mindfulness, on the other hand, often seek to identify associations between various health variables, interpersonal variables, or personality characteristics and “dispositional” mindfulness, understood as a variable in its own right. Mindfulness from this perspective is most often determined via a self-report scale aimed at measuring a respondent’s state or trait level of mindfulness. For example, in a forthcoming study, Stofleth, Manusov, Crowley, and Harvey-Knowles (2017) found a strong correlation between mindfulness as measured by the Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) and the Active-Empathic Listening Scale (AELS), a measure of one particular type of listening that is important for both individual and relational health (Bodie, 2011). In other words, individuals high in mindfulness also tend to be more active-empathic listeners.

State vs. Trait Mindfulness

Scholars who conceive of mindfulness as a state (or “mode,” as described by Bishop et al. 2004) measure the experience of mindfulness in a given moment. In this view, mindfulness “is maintained only when attention to experience is intentionally cultivated with an open, nonjudgmental orientation to experience” (Lau et al., 2006, p. 1447). The premise behind this conceptualization is that the experience of mindfulness is a quality experienced by an individual in a particular moment as opposed to a more lasting quality of the individual. This perspective has been employed in the development of the Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS) (Lau et al., 2006). Those who understand mindfulness as a trait, on the other hand, view it as a more lasting quality of an individual. Siegling and Petrides (2014) write, “[i]n contrast to mindful states that can be actively altered (e.g., by meditation), trait mindfulness refers to a person’s baseline or average mindfulness” (p. 1). This conceptualization of mindfulness allows more easily for linkages with other more permanent personality characteristics, such as those described in the

Big Five measure (Siegling & Petrides, 2014). Trait mindfulness scales make up the majority of mindfulness measures, including the two most popular: the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer et al., 2006) and the Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

***Sati* as “Mindfulness”**

The differences in the ways mindfulness is being understood, assessed, and applied may stem from different conceptualizations of the term itself. The term mindfulness, as it is currently employed in modern Western discourse, comes originally from the South Asian Buddhist religious tradition. That is, this religious tradition and its philosophical tenets were appropriated by Western Buddhist enthusiasts and scholars who first began to employ the term mindfulness in the late 19th century. The term mindfulness was an English translation of a Pali word, *sati*. It was one translation among many, but it is the one that held.

Since then, but most especially in the past few decades, there has been some disagreement surrounding the accuracy of this translation as well as for the meanings ascribed to it (e.g., Bodhi, 2011; Gethin, 2011; Sun, 2014). Though there was initial disagreement regarding its translation and meaning, there was greater consensus regarding the term by the early to mid-1900s (Gethin, 2011). This particular conceptualization of *sati* as mindfulness became the basis for a lineage that catalyzed Kabat-Zinn’s (e.g., 1982, 1994, 2003) work, which, as noted, is often identified as a starting point for nearly all modern, Western mindfulness discussions.

“Mindfulness” has become the most common English translation for *sati*, a term used in canonical Buddhist texts and oral teachings. It is a concept of particular importance in modern Buddhism and in mindfulness practice. In Indian Psychology, *sati*’s counterpart *smṛti* was generally understood to refer to memory (Bodhi, 2011, p. 22). It has been defined as

“remembrance, reminiscence, thinking of or upon, calling to mind...memory” (Monier-Williams, 2005, p. 1272). Though *sati* is the Pali counterpart of *smṛti* and therefore has a similar meaning, the Buddha is said to have used the term *sati* to refer to much more than memory (Gethin, 2011). As a result, the scholars first involved in translating this Buddhist term had some difficulty, knowing as they did that the common renderings such as “memory” did not completely fit the term as it was being used in Buddhist texts (Gethin, 2011, p. 264).

Some of the first translation attempts on record come from Robert Spence Hardy and his work, *Manual of Buddhism* (1853). In this text, Hardy describes *sati* in two ways: as a component of awakening, as “the ascertainment of truth by mental application” (Hardy, 1853, p. 498) and as “conscience,” which appeared in the index (Hardy, 1853, p. 531). In other words, there were a few components that *sati* encompassed, but Hardy did not find one unifying term to represent what he thought to be the full meaning of *sati*, with perhaps the exception of “conscience,” which only appeared in the index.

In 1845, Daniel John Gogerly had defined *samma-sati* as “correct meditation” when discussing the eightfold path, understood as one of the principal Buddhist teachings. *Samma* for Gogerly means “correct” or “right,” whereas *sati* is translated as meditation. It is difficult to know for certain the different connotations of “conscience” and “meditation,” and how similar to one another these authors may have thought their own translations to be. Hardy’s and Gogerly’s interpretations of the concept are particularly useful, however, given that both of these scholars spent a lot of time with Buddhist monks and lay practitioners during their time in Ceylon, Sri Lanka (Gethin, 2011, p. 264).

Neither Hardy nor Gogerly ever used the term “mindfulness” to describe *sati*. The translator responsible for the first usage of the term mindfulness is thought to be T. W. Rhys

Dauids (1991), a British scholar and founder of the Pali Text Society. In his translation of the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta*, he writes,

sati is literally ‘memory,’ but is used with reference to the constantly repeated phrase ‘mindful and thoughtful’ (*sato sampajano*); and means that activity of mind and constant presence of mind which is one of the duties most frequently inculcated on the good Buddhist. (Rhys Davids, 1881, p. 145)

Rhys Davids acknowledged the historical etymology of the term and that it referred originally to memory; yet he also recognizes that something more than memory is being referred to and that he attempts to explain. By 1899, however, Rhys Davids “uses ‘mindfulness’ more or less consistently” (Gethin, 2011, p. 264). This was not, however, an easy choice for him: Rhys Davids (1890) describes *sati* as “one of the most difficult words...in the whole Buddhist system...to translate” (p. 107).

In his 1910 re-translation of the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta*, Rhys Davids provides a bit more information on mindfulness as he understood it. Although he acknowledges that *sati* is etymologically understood as “memory,” he writes that, within Buddhism, this translation is “a most inadequate and misleading translation,” given that *sati* in this context refers to,

the memory, recollection, calling-to-mind, being-aware-of, certain specified facts: Of these the most important was the impermanence (the coming to be as the result of a cause, and the passing away again) of all phenomena, bodily and mental. And it included the repeated application of this awareness, to each experience of life, from the ethical point of view. (Rhys Davids, 1910, p. 322)

This focus on the impermanence of all phenomena and the idea of repetitive application of awareness to experience greatly influenced the Western conception of mindfulness (Gethin, 2011). In addition, the author emphasizes his view that “the doctrine” detailed in the *sutta* he translated “is perhaps the most important, after that of the Aryan Path, in early Buddhism” (Rhys Davids, 1910, p. 322). This interpretation had implications for later interpretations of mindfulness’ importance and for the emphasis of particular teachings and practices over others.

The translation of *sati* as mindfulness caught on after Rhys Davids' 1910 publication. Other scholar-members of the Pali Text Society utilized his term in their own works, including Robert Chalmers's (1927) translations of the *Satipatthana Sutta* and *Anapanasati Sutta* and Isaline Blew Horner's translations (1954, 1959) of the same *suttas* much later (Wilson, 2014, p. 18). The Society's texts created the bedrock of Buddhist knowledge in the Western world. As Wilson argues, "[t]hey decisively cemented 'mindfulness' as the most preferred translation of *sati* over other possibilities, such as memory, remembrance, contemplation, or meditation" (Wilson, 2014, p. 18). Equally important, they simultaneously "established different translations for other words that easily might have been rendered as mindfulness," such as *appamada*, meaning "recollection, heedfulness, earnestness, or watchfulness, and thus is very close to the sense of mindfulness" as it is described by Rhys Davids and contemporary writers on the topic (Wilson, 2014, p. 18). This translational work, along with the application of the term mindfulness to other practices and concepts that were previously considered distinct from *sati* (effectively conflating *sati* with these other concepts), has led to "making *sati* far more popular than it once was" and "influenc[ed] how forms of Buddhist meditation other than *sati* are understood and talked about" (Wilson, 2014, p. 19).

Democratizing Mindfulness

One of the many authors who took up the mindfulness mantle and propagated it as a term and as a primary Buddhist meditative practice was Bhikkhu Nanamoli. A British national, Theravada⁵ practitioner, and Pali scholar, Nanamoli penned *Path to Purification* (1964), a translation of Buddhist doctrine emphasizing particular teachings and meditation techniques.

⁵ Theravada Buddhism is one branch of Buddhism (the other two are Mahayana and Vajrayana) that derives its teachings primarily from the Pali Canon, and was behind the propagation of Vipassana or insight meditation in the West (Fronsale, 1998).

This work paralleled the earlier effort made by Nyanaponika Thera, a German-born Theravada monk, in his *Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (1962), which discusses mindfulness practice and its benefits primarily. Nyanaponika's work was the first to refer to mindfulness as "bare attention," writing that it "applies preeminently to the attitude and practice of bare attention in a purely receptive state of mind...[and] is kept to a bare registering of the facts observed, without reacting to them by...self-reference (like, dislike, etc.), judgment or reflection" (Nyanaponika, 1962, p. 30).

More than just reframing the practice of mindfulness itself, Nyanaponika also helped to transform the idea of who should engage in particular mindfulness practices and in what situations they should practice. His writings imply that mindfulness is for other than just Buddhists in that theoretically anyone can participate (though he does not make this argument explicitly). He also writes that the goal is not just to reach nirvana: Mindfulness should also be applied to daily tasks (though he did not provide much detail on specific tasks). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, he "promises benefits to be enjoyed by ordinary people who engage in it" (Wilson, 2014, p. 26). Nyanaponika (1962) talks about positive outcomes including mental clarity, happiness, self-control, and well-being. In a sense, he helped "democratize" mindfulness practice, modified its general aims, and provided the groundwork for a benefits or outcomes approach to mindfulness.

As Gethin (2011) writes regarding these two authors and their works, "it is this tradition that lies behind the particular modern western reception of Buddhist meditation that has led to the adoption of both the term 'mindfulness' and certain practices in the context of psychotherapy" (p. 266). In other words, these authors' works and similar ones were the driving force behind crafting the popular concept(s) of mindfulness in the West. Sun (2014) argues that,

in particular, this approach became the basis for what is called “secular” mindfulness. She points out that, even though the description of mindfulness as “bare attention” was at odds with traditional Buddhist scriptures’ characterization, “the non-conceptual, non-judgmental and non-elaborative features of bare attention became influential” in the development of this secular mindfulness movement (Sun, 2014, p. 399).

Though the path charted above depicts a relatively clear evolution of mindfulness over the course of nearly a century, mindfulness’ recent popularity has given rise to some criticism or contestation regarding its development and its current state. For example, some authors point to how different contemporary Western conceptions and practices of mindfulness are from their traditional Asian, Buddhist roots. Wilson (2014), for instance, notes that the mindfulness meditation described by Nanamoli (1964) and Nyanaponika (1962)—which served as the base for the contemporary authors and teachers included in this section—was practiced nearly exclusively by ordained Buddhist monks and nuns. Furthermore, mindfulness meditation was understood to be “part of a much larger package of mutually supporting practices and beliefs, and ordinarily was associated with world renunciation and the pursuit of nirvana” (Wilson, 2014, p. 19).

At the same time, mindfulness is currently practiced extensively by individuals who identify as non-religious and who may not place importance on the previously associated beliefs (Wilson, 2014). As such, the practice of mindfulness in contemporary Western society represents a significantly different context than the one in which it was created and developed. As a parallel, McMahan (2013) emphasizes this difference when he points out that there are multiple forms of Buddhism that exist concurrently, with each “defin[ing] the human problem and its

solution differently” (p. 1). From this perspective, Buddhism and mindfulness are not static but are instead evolving concepts and practices that differ spatially and temporally.

Kabat-Zinn and MBSR

Nyanaponika’s (1962) conceptualization of mindfulness as bare attention, as something that can be engaged in by anyone, and as a practice that generates particular benefits took strong hold in the West in the second half of the 20th century (Gethin, 2011). His assumptions are clearly present in Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR program, created in the early 1980’s. Kabat-Zinn, who received Buddhist teachings but does not identify as a Buddhist, first developed MBSR as a treatment to work with his patients who were experiencing chronic pain, specifically those who had not improved with traditional medical care (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). The program has since been applied in myriad research studies and clinical treatments for a large number of concerns or ailments, as evidenced previously. Throughout the development and further application of this program, Kabat-Zinn came to operationalize mindfulness according to a definition that is now frequently-cited.

Kabat-Zinn (1994) defines mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (p. 4). He argues that this concept is universal, given that it entails a particular form of attention, and attention is universal. Therefore, though he is drawing from his own experience with the Buddhist religious/spiritual tradition in the development of this construct, he states firmly that mindfulness is not inherently a Buddhist concept. Moreover, Kabat-Zinn (2003) argues that the Buddhist teaching behind mindfulness “is neither a belief, an ideology, nor a philosophy. Rather, it is a coherent phenomenological description of the nature of the mind, emotion, and suffering and its potential release, based on highly refined practices aimed at systematically training and cultivating various

aspects of the mind via the faculty of attention” (p. 145). Since Kabat-Zinn’s conceptualization of mindfulness precipitated the concept/practice’s entry into Western science, however, there has been debate surrounding how the term should be defined and operationalized (e.g., Brown & Ryan, 2004; Chiesa, 2013). One of the biggest criticisms of the state of mindfulness in the scientific fields is the lack of a coherent, agreed-upon definition (Chiesa, 2011).

Varying Theoretical Approaches to Mindfulness

In order to engage with the varying definitions of mindfulness, it is helpful to understand that there are what could be described as at least two broad schools of thought with respect to theoretical approaches of mindfulness in academic research. One is the Kabat-Zinn lineage, from which nearly every study mentioned in the section discussing mindfulness’ benefits descends. The other is Langer’s (2000) conceptualization of mindfulness, which is for her “a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context” (p. 220). Langer’s interventions differ from the Kabat-Zinn (1994) tradition in that they are typically external, goal-oriented tasks that involve cognitive processing, often working towards solving a particular problem. For example, Djikic, Langer, and Fulton-Stapleton (2008) assess the impact of mindfulness (described as “active categorization”) on automatic stereotype-activated behaviors concerning the elderly. In this case, participants were primed with the concept of “old age” by being asked to categorize photos of the elderly according to one of four methods. Participants who were assigned to the more “active” categorization methods demonstrated decreased automatic stereotype-activated behavior. On the other hand, Kabat-Zinn’s approach is more often directed at inner experiences and is oriented towards simple observation rather than particular goals. Langer (1989) is clear in distinguishing between these

two conceptualizations of the term, noting that they come from different cultural and historical backgrounds, hers being contemporary social psychology (p. 126).

Langer's (2000) concept of mindfulness has also been applied—though not nearly as widely—throughout various fields including psychology, education, and communication. For example, Burgoon, Berger, and Waldron (2000) employ her version of the concept in their investigation of the connections between various mindsets and types of social interaction. The authors find that marked benefits stem from an interlocutor having a greater level of mindfulness before and during particular communication episodes. They examine five contexts in particular: “developing effective programs for solving workplace communication problems, training the public to detect scams and hoaxes, reducing stereotyping and cross-cultural misunderstanding, managing interpersonal conflict, and constructing effective public health campaigns” (p. 105).

For Burgoon et al., mindfulness is conceived of as “active and fluid information processing, sensitivity to context and multiple perspectives, and ability to draw novel distinctions” (p. 106). The framing of their definition, in line with Langer's (1989) conceptualization of the term, orients externally, with its focus on context. For instance, rather than focusing attention exclusively on present moment experience, the present experience is considered within the context of a larger goal structure, containing both primary and secondary goals of the interlocutors. This conceptualization differs from Kabat-Zinn's (1994) approach by privileging active thought and information processing as opposed to simply noticing when thoughts are occurring without engaging.

Langer's (1989) formulation of mindfulness has not been nearly as heuristic as Kabat-Zinn's (1994). Though most scholars reference Kabat-Zinn's original definition and therefore fall into that tradition, they often deviate from it, based typically on minor conceptual

differences. For example, Dimidjian and Linehan (2003) argue that mindfulness has six elements. Three of these elements relate to behaviors engaged in while being mindful (observing, describing, and participating). Three relate to the quality of how one does those things (nonjudgmentally, one-mindfully, and effectively). Linehan et al. (1999) used this approach to mindfulness in the construction of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), which has been found to be particularly effective as an MBI used to treat behaviors such as self-harm, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation.

Baer (2003) builds upon definitions from Marlatt and Kristeller (1999) and Kabat-Zinn's (1994) original definition to craft her own: "[M]indfulness is the nonjudgmental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise" (Baer, 2003, p. 125). Baer's definition was used to develop the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS), later reworked as the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). It is a multi-factor model of trait mindfulness, consisting of five components: observing, describing, acting with awareness, nonjudging of inner experience, and nonreactivity to inner experience. Support has been found showing that all five facets correlate with global mindfulness measures. Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemyer, and Toney (2006) criticize other models for being one-dimensional and only providing total scores rather than subscale scores. Specifically, the authors argue that "it is unclear what facets of mindfulness may be represented in some of these mindfulness questionnaires" (p. 33). They also find that mindfulness has both trait and state qualities.

Likewise, Bishop et al. (2004) discuss mindfulness as a state (what, as noted, they call a "mode"), as opposed to trait mindfulness, which can be thought of as a person's baseline mindfulness level. They define state mindfulness as "a form of mental training to reduce cognitive vulnerability to reactive modes of mind that might otherwise heighten stress and

emotional distress or that may otherwise perpetuate psychopathology” (p. 231). The authors view mindfulness as a psychological process, as “a skill that can be developed with practice” (p. 234). They acknowledge that their conceptualization of the concept diverges from many others, leaving out some components found in similar constructs. For example, they omit patience, trust, compassion, non-reactivity, and wisdom, some of which have been discussed by Kabat-Zinn (1994, 2003) and included in other measures.

Bishop et al. (2004) state that this omission is intentional: “In our view, many of the qualities or components that have been discussed are more likely outcomes of having learned mindfulness skills, or maintained a mindfulness practice over time, and are not implicit in the construct” (p. 235). In other words, they attempt to isolate the core construct of mindfulness. The authors propose a two-component model of mindfulness: (1) self-regulation of attention (focused on present moment experience); and (2) orientation to experience (curiosity, openness, and acceptance).

Brown and Ryan (2004) are critical of Bishop et al.’s (2004) approach, however. They argue that the terms “awareness” and “mindfulness” are not defined properly and are used interchangeably. They also take issue with Bishop et al.’s labeling of mindfulness as a “metacognitive skill” (Brown & Ryan, 2004, p. 233). The authors contend that “if mindfulness involves observing thought, it cannot *be* thought...Because it provides a ‘bare display of what is taking place’...it is not subject to the distortions and biases inherent in cognition and, evidence suggests, in metacognition as well” (p. 243). They therefore define mindfulness as “an open or receptive attention to and awareness of ongoing events and experience” (Brown & Ryan, 2004, p. 245). As such, it can be practiced by anyone, anywhere, rather than being bound to the practice of meditation, as Bishop et al. (2004) seem to suggest should be done. Brown and

Ryan's approach aligns closely with Kabat-Zinn's (2003) emphasis on the universalism of the practice and his caution of becoming too attached to particular techniques.

Brown et al. (2007) distinguish among the approaches discussed above. They note that mindfulness "has been defined as a self-regulatory capacity (Brown & Ryan, 2003), an acceptance skill (Linehan, 1994), and a meta-cognitive skill (Bishop et al., 2004)" (p. 214). They too are critical of the approaches mentioned previously. The authors point out that, since the first applications of mindfulness in Western scientific discourse and practice, the concept has been associated closely with practice and research from a clinical perspective, which has impacted the meanings given to mindfulness. Brown et al. (2007) also note that Kabat-Zinn's (1990) definition served to describe and be useful in MBSR training, and Baer's (2003) definition and KIMS/FFMQ were designed to investigate the skills proposed in DBT and similar MBIs.

They argue that their approach is different: "In contrast, other approaches (e.g., Brown & Ryan, 2003, 2004) have been directed toward examining the nature and manifestations of mindfulness with or without specific training" (Brown et al., 2007, p. 215). They strive for an approach that lies outside the clinical world. The authors do this for two reasons. First, they contend that there is a risk of defining and operationalizing mindfulness in a way that functions within a particular clinical lens but does not fit outside of that narrow lens. Second, they state that there is a danger of confusing the definition of mindfulness with the methods by which one engages in mindfulness practice. Indeed, they are critical of Kabat-Zinn (1990) for incorporating non-judgment into his definition, given that this may "reflect a particular attitude toward current events and experience," diluting the present moment experience (Brown et al., 2007, p. 215).

Hayes and Wilson (2003) summarize much of the confusion and debate surrounding mindfulness' definition and operationalization. They point out that,

mindfulness is treated sometimes as a technique, sometimes as a more general method or collection of techniques, sometimes as a psychological process that can produce outcomes, and sometimes as an outcome in and of itself. The actual principles that unite all of these levels typically remain unspecified. Furthermore ... the distinctions between mindfulness and related concepts, such as acceptance, are unclear. (p. 161)

Brown et al. (2007) argue further that this is because Buddhism is a “prescientific” concept, and so there is no scientific language for it. Scholars are still working through how to integrate it into Western scientific language, research, and practice.

Considering all this material, several core points of contention or confusion regarding the definition and operationalization of mindfulness can be identified. First, there are general definitional differences. These stem from viewing mindfulness as a technique, a method, a process that can produce outcomes, or as an outcome in itself. Is mindfulness a state, a trait, neither, or both? There is also debate surrounding its ties to Buddhism and the importance of acknowledging this connection. Second, there is debate over whether or not it is appropriate to define mindfulness from a clinical lens or if mindfulness itself should be free of such identification and defined of its own accord. Third, these definitional differences give rise to various, competing operational mindfulness scales that purport to measure participants’ levels of mindfulness. Some of these scales are single-factor, whereas others contain two to five factors. Fourth, there is debate over who is qualified to administer MBIs to participants. Kabat-Zinn (2003) places importance on the instructor having his or her own mindfulness practice. Others do not see this as a necessity. Chiesa (2011) summarizes it well: “Although there is general agreement regarding the involvement of sustained attention to the present moment, a broad range of differences exist between the proposed definitions and an unequivocal operational definition

of the construct of mindfulness is still lacking” (p. 407). This affects how the construct of mindfulness is understood and applied.

Summary

Though Kabat-Zinn’s (1994) definition of mindfulness is cited commonly in academic and applied literatures, it is often used generally rather than specifically guiding the work being done. The different conceptualizations of mindfulness mentioned previously undergird studies using the same term, but the authors may not be making these differences apparent to their readers. This concern is behind one of the biggest criticisms of the state of mindfulness in the scientific fields: the lack of a coherent, agreed-upon definition (Chiesa, 2011). Yet, this criticism has done little to slow the increasing number of mindfulness studies nor, importantly, are they noted in the increasing number of popular press articles on mindfulness that are reaching a large audience outside academia. The conceptual murkiness has implications on a number of levels, not least of which pertains to the benefits ascribed to mindfulness and its practices. In order to better understand these differences and their potential implications, and to really grapple with the nature of the concept theoretically, the present study investigates the specific ways in which mindfulness is discussed and what is meant by mindfulness when it is discussed.

The history of the term mindfulness presented in this chapter provides a window into some of the changes in its meaning over time, location, and context. The larger aim of this work is to apply a lens to this process as it is currently taking place in specific contexts. By more clearly understanding this process, we gain insight into “some important social and historical processes occur[ing] *within* language” (Williams, 1983, p. 22), which may give us insight into the nature of the communication communities in which this process is taking place.

More specifically, identifying mindfulness as an important concept or keyword in particular settings or contexts acknowledges its utility or power within those settings or contexts. In *Words and Values*, Rosenthal (1984) points out that “[b]y using a word extensively, we demonstrate our need for it, and hence its (positive) value for us” (p. 31). There is something about this term, and thus the meanings it holds for specific communities, that is particularly useful at this point in time in the settings and contexts analyzed in this study. What this utility or value is for these communities remains to be determined, though this study may answer this at least in part. Rosenthal reminds us that words operate “as receptacles into which different disciplines and ideologies and traditions of thought pour their particular meanings, their favorite value-laden concepts” (Rosenthal, 1984, p. 42). Therefore, this study examines the varying usages of the term mindfulness with the intention of discovering the meanings and values imbued within them.

CHAPTER 2: MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Questions

As stated earlier in this proposal, the primary guiding research questions of this study are as follows:

RQ1: In what ways do meanings of mindfulness differ within and between academic and popular press communities?

RQ2: What communication codes are utilized by these two communities, which evidence and enforce community norms and assumptions with respect to mindfulness?

This study is therefore concerned with determining the various meanings surrounding the “discussion” of mindfulness within and across different communities. In order to discover these meanings, I examine particular communication codes, or patterns of communication, that are employed by these communities when they are discussing the topic of mindfulness. In other words, I aim to “find and formulate those means of speaking whose use, in a particular community, have meaning and potential for those who use and experience them, and to specify what that meaning potential is” (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 361).

Ethnography of Communication

In order to discover and analyze these communication codes, this study utilizes an Ethnography of Communication approach (Hymes, 1962, 1972, 1974). Dell Hymes, the founder of this approach, writes that “[t]he ethnography of speaking is concerned with the situations and uses, the patterns and functions, of speaking as an activity in its own right” (Hymes, 1962, p. 14). In analyzing communication from this perspective, the emphasis is placed on identifying patterns and determining the function of these communication patterns in a given context (Bauman & Sherzer, 1975). These patterns “organize the use of language in the conduct of social life” (Bauman & Sherzer, 1975, p. 98). In Ethnography of Communication, “language” is used as a

method or tool of investigation to better understand various characteristics of social life in a particular social setting or culture.

Inherent to this approach is the relativistic belief, consistent with anthropological work, that the practice of communication varies by culture, understood as a community's shared knowledge and meanings (Johnstone & Marcellino, 2010). Communication, "like other systems of cultural behavior—kinship, politics, economics, religion, or any other—is patterned within each society in culture-specific, cross-culturally variable ways" (Bauman & Sherzer, 1975, p. 98). Therefore, the nature of communication in different cultures arises from different origins and unique environmental pressures and concerns and will manifest as a product reflecting these unique origins. As a result, those who undertake Ethnography of Communication analyze the communication of particular "speech communities" or groups who share common ways of communicating and common meanings for those patterns of communication (Fitch, 1999). These patterns and their functions give insight into the cultural norms and assumptions of particular communication communities (Fitch, 1999).

One method of examining these patterns of communication is through a speech or communication codes analysis (Philipsen, 1997; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005). Communication codes can be understood as "a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126). Philipsen formulates five propositions concerning speech or communication codes. First, he points out that there is a communication code for every speech community (Philipsen, 1997, pp. 134-137). Second, communication codes "implicate a culturally distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 138). In other words, they correspond to the culturally-constructed and culturally-situated identity of the individual or

community in question. Third, communication codes allow us to understand the meaning of particular communicative acts (Philipsen, 1997, p. 140). Fourth, communication itself contains “the terms, rules, and premises of a speech code” (Philipsen, 1997, p. 142). Thus, anyone who pays attention to speech patterns is able to glean an understanding of particular communication codes. Fifth, communication codes have discursive force, and utilizing shared communication codes allows participants to “talk about talk” (Philipsen, 1997, p. 147).

A sixth proposition was later added, which acknowledges that multiple speech codes are deployed in any given speech community (Philipsen et al., 2005). Therefore, a speech or communication code is specific to a community (and there are multiple codes in each community), carries particular significance regarding cultural identity, provides a window into the meaning of specific acts of communication, demonstrates a community’s norms, and showcases how meaning is shared between community members.

Although speech codes theory has been most often employed in studies of oral, spoken discourse, it has also been used in analyzing written texts (e.g., Coutu, 2000; Philipsen, 1992). Indeed, “its usefulness as a theory extends to the study of all discursive forms and their reflections and constitution of self, society, and strategic action” (Coutu, 2000, p. 181). This perspective parallels the work of discourse analysts, whose analyses are not confined to oral speech but incorporate written data into their work as well (e.g., Martin & Wodak, 2003).

A prominent example of communication or speech codes theory being applied to a written discourse is Coutu’s (2000) analysis of the communication codes of rationality and spirituality present in Robert S. McNamara’s memoir, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, and public commentary regarding this text. Coutu began her investigation by noting that there appeared to be a code operating within McNamara’s discourse that “allowed

McNamara to justify his role in Vietnam policy making despite his grave doubts” (Coutu, 2000, p. 181). His words provoked criticism from media sources that, throughout their discourse, seemed to be exhibiting a different communication code than McNamara. Employing oppositional codes theory (Huspek, 1993), Coutu (2000) mapped clear differences between these sources, identifying McNamara’s communication code as one of rationality (promoting the belief that communication between participants is something that can and should be forced, through debate for example) and the media’s communication code as one of spirituality (promoting morality with regards to communication norms). She argued further that codes provide insight into the meanings behind particular discursive actions, as well as representative “view[s] of self, society, and strategic action” (Coutu, 2000, p. 181).

Given that discourse around mindfulness also appears to contain different communication codes, or people are talking about mindfulness in different ways, a communication codes approach is useful for studying the various meanings of mindfulness expressed across communities by providing the means by which these meanings can be identified and described. This study investigates two communication communities (popular press articles and academic research articles) to decipher the particular communication codes—understood as “system[s] of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct” (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126)—associated with each group and to describe those communication codes in depth. This approach also provides a means of determining how various meanings and uses of mindfulness converge and diverge.

Through this process, the study seeks to provide both “descriptive” and “theoretical” value, two aims of Ethnography of Communication (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 357).

Investigating and detailing the communication codes within discourses surrounding mindfulness

in the popular press and in the academic articles provides descriptive value by associating these codes with particular popular and/or specialized “communal conversation[s]” (Philipsen, 2002). This study also has theoretical value in that it provides a contemporary case study scrutinizing how diverse communities invoke the same symbol for their own purposes. Furthermore, it moves beyond existing studies in the methodological field by engaging with a large number of written texts for data collection, as opposed to typical “in the field” research that is more commonly conducted. Additionally, this research will contribute to research in the broad field of mindfulness, potentially providing clarification regarding issues of definition and meaning.

Procedure

Materials and Data

The first of the communication communities within the present study is the academic community, represented by scholarly articles in fields such as psychology, medicine, occupational therapy, clinical psychology, psychiatry, public health, and social work. For this community, I collected the 50 most-cited academic articles across fields that employ the concept of mindfulness as it is discussed in this dissertation.⁶ The aim is to focus on a sample that represents the academic community at large, allowing a window into the most prominent conversations regarding mindfulness within this community. Given that the number of citations of an article is one reflection of its impact within a community, this study focuses specifically on the articles that have the most citations and therefore arguably the most influence within this

⁶ Book reviews and meta-analyses have been excluded from this list, as they represent overviews of other authors’ materials and perspectives rather than presenting their own. In addition, given that this study only examines popular press *articles* on mindfulness, focusing only on academic articles as well improves my ability to compare results across these communities more accurately than if I had included books and meta-analyses. This choice is discussed in greater depth in the section on study limitations.

community. To perform this task, I utilized *Harzing's Publish or Perish 4*⁷ to generate the list of citations. Once the list was populated, I selected the 50 most-cited articles and transferred their citation information to a Microsoft Excel sheet. I downloaded each academic article and stored it for later analysis.

The second of the communities included in this study is the popular press. As mentioned, mindfulness has received considerable attention in popular forms of media such as online newspapers and online pseudo-news outlets. Given that this is likely the method via which most people are exposed to the concept of mindfulness, it is a vital community to explore. I thus collected five articles on mindfulness from each of the top ten online news entities from 2015. The top ten outlets were determined by a study from the Pew Research Center⁸ and are as follows: Yahoo-ABC News Network, CNN Network, NBC News Digital, Huffingtonpost.com, CBS News, USATODAY Sites, BuzzFeed.com, *The New York Times*, Fox News Digital Network, and Mail Online / Daily Mail. For each website, I originally planned to use the website's "search" function to find all articles mentioning "mindfulness." Most of the websites, however, either did not have a "search" function, or what existed was inadequate for these purposes. Therefore, I performed advanced Google searches for each media outlet, searching for any articles from the specified media outlet that contained the keyword "mindfulness" using it as described in this study.⁹ Any references to Langer's (1989, 2000, 2014) concept of mindfulness

⁷ *Harzing's Publish or Perish 4* is a software program that retrieves academic article citations from Google Scholar and sorts them by the number of times they have been cited. Though it also provides a "rank" calculated by particular citation metrics, this feature will not be used in this study. More info can be found at: <http://www.harzing.com/pophelp/>

⁸ See for full ranking and more info: <http://www.journalism.org/media-indicators/digital-top-50-online-news-entities-2015/>

⁹ The uses I counted as relevant to this study were those that referred to mindfulness as a concept or practice as it is described in this study. Specifically, this entails identifying mindfulness as a "thing" in itself, as opposed to simple uses of the word "mindful" as it is otherwise utilized in the

or the simple use of the word “mindfulness” to describe general alertness were ignored since, as previously described, Langer’s “mindfulness” refers to something different from the mindfulness that is being considered in this study.¹⁰ I then selected the first five relevant results that appeared from the search, for each outlet. It should be noted that the Yahoo-ABC News Network, though identified in the Pew study as one media outlet, encompasses two distinct media entities. I selected five articles from each, bringing the total number of popular press outlets to 11, resulting in a total of 55 popular press articles.

By selecting data from the most-read popular press outlets, the selection approach for the popular press community largely parallels the approach for the academic community, facilitating ease of comparison between the groups. There is also precedence for this type of approach within ethnographic communication scholarship. For example, Coutu (2000) examined commentary from major news outlets such as the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *National Review* in her analysis of popular responses to Robert McNamara’s comments in his memoir concerning the Vietnam War.

Data Analysis

Hymes (1962) cites the “speech economy of a community” as the descriptive focus of the ethnography of communication method and advocates for a structural analysis of communicative behavior. For Hymes, this “means a scientific and moral commitment to the inductive discovery of units, criteria, and patternings that are valid in terms of the system itself” (Hymes, 1962, p. 107). Therefore, the means of data analysis “must be taken as ways of getting at individual systems, as analogous to a phonetics and perhaps part of a practical phonemics. The intent is

English language, separate from a context in which being mindful is the primary topic of discussion.

¹⁰ There were two academic articles that were eliminated from the corpus as a result.

heuristic, not a priori” (Hymes, 1962, p. 107). In order to perform this analysis, Hymes provides three focal points: communicative events, constituent factors of these communicative events, and the functions of communication. This study engages with each of these focal points.

The communicative events analyzed in this dissertation consist of the articles chosen for each of the two communities listed above. Hymes (1962) encourages us to question,

[w]hat classes of speech events are recognized or can be inferred? What are the dimensions of contrast, the distinctive features, which differentiate them? (This will include reference to how factors are represented and functions served.) What is their pattern of occurrence, their distribution vis-a-vis each other, and externally (in terms of total behavior or some selected aspect)? (p. 9).

These questions provided guidelines for comparing and contrasting characteristics of these communities’ communication events.

Hymes (1962) also describes several components or constituent factors that comprise communication events, building on Jakobson’s (1960) six-part model. Hymes’ (1974) updated SPEAKING model consists of eight divisions, each represented by a letter. This model addresses not only the ways in which language is utilized, but also the context in which particular communication events take place. “S” represents setting and scene, or “refers to the time and place of a communicative act and, in general, to the physical circumstances” (Hymes, 1974, p. 55). “P” stands for participants, including the speaker as well as the audience. “E” is ends, representing the purposes, goals, and outcomes involved in a communicative act (Hymes, 1974, pp. 56-57). “A” is short for act sequence, or the way in which order or sequence is involved in an event. “K” is key, and focuses on identifying aspects of a communicative act that construct its “tone, manner, or spirit” (Hymes, 1974, p. 57). “I” is instrumentalities, and refers to styles of communication, which might include its medium. “N” is norms of interaction, or the cultural or

social rules that guide the participants' communicative actions. Lastly, "G" is genre, and refers to the "type" of the communicative event (e.g., a formal speech, a causal interaction, an op-ed).

SPEAKING Model	
'S' (Setting, Scene)	Time, place, physical circumstances of a communicative act
'P' (Participants)	Includes speaker and audience
'E' (Ends)	Purposes, goals, outcomes of a communicative act
'A' (Active sequence)	Order or sequence of a communicative act
'K' (Key)	Tone, manner, or spirit of a communicative act
'I' (Instrumentalities)	Styles or mediums of communicative act
'N' (Norms)	Norms of interaction or social rules that guide participant action or behavior
'G' (Genre)	"Type" of communicative event (e.g., formal speech, casual conversation)

Table 1

Scholars focus typically on a small number of these components within a given communicative event rather than attempting to perform an exhaustive analysis of each component. The focus is on what is most salient in the particular communicative event or on those components that give the clearest glimpse of particular cultural rules, norms, or codes. I follow this tradition and focus on the components within these articles that are most salient. Although this framework is most often found in analyses of speech events and therefore applied to spoken words, there is precedent for applying it to written texts as well (e.g., Coutu, 2000). I take this approach in this study, wherever warranted.

In addition, this analysis utilizes approaches aimed specifically at identifying particular keywords, terms, phrases, and categories that may assist in identifying communication codes as

well as the meanings attached to these items (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973; Williams, 1983). This helps one better understand the functions of particular forms of communication. Mindfulness itself can be understood as a “keyword,” as discussed by Williams. He argues that with respect to these keywords,

we find a history and complexity of meanings; conscious changes, or consciously different uses; innovation, obsolescence, specialization, extension, overlap, transfer; or changes which are masked by a nominal continuity so that words which seem to have been there for centuries, which continuous general meanings, have come in fact to express radically different or radically variable, yet sometimes hardly noticed, meanings and implications of meanings. (Williams, 1983, p. 17)

I utilized the computer program Atlas.ti to facilitate organization for my data analysis process. Atlas.ti is a program that allows the user to organize, code, and annotate data. I began by importing all 105 articles into the program. I then created two sub-sections: one for academic articles and one for popular press articles. I then examined the entire text of each article, one at a time, within the program. The user is able to select excerpts from each text and write comments for these selections. I was also able to establish a system of coding that was applied subsequently to each article. For instance, I created codes for each of the SPEAKING model’s eight components. I also created codes for keyterms that were present, for explicit definitions of mindfulness, and for more general meanings and symbols that were associated with mindfulness. As I read through each article, I linked the relevant codes to words, phrases, or entire sections of text. This linking allowed me to later select one code in the program and have it display each instance of that code that I had selected across all articles. It also provided a useful way to organize the data based on the components examined in this study and allowed me to compare and contrast data more easily within and between codes and within and between communities.

The next step was to print the organized data and begin to investigate patterns within and across communities. I started by analyzing each component individually. I began with “Definition.” I found every coded excerpt for “Definition” and began to sort them by theme/commonly occurring ideas or motifs. I organized definitions that were similar in nature together and eventually gave them a heading that best encompassed the meaning of all definitions within that category. For example, the most common definitional theme for academic articles was found to be “awareness.” Once this process was complete for all definitions, for both academic articles and the popular press, I was able to compare and contrast both within and between communities.

I examined the remaining components in a similar manner. Some components were coded much less often than others, and so there were fewer examples to organize and compare (e.g., Genre). A more elaborate analysis process was needed for the “Meanings/Symbols” category, given its less succinct and broader conceptual nature. In examining this category, I settled on three sub-themes that arose during the analysis process. I created a spreadsheet with three columns: “Mindfulness as...,” “Qualities/Adjectives/Descriptors,” and “The Process.” I created these sub-themes to help me get to the core of what is meant by this category, and thus what is meant by mindfulness, within these communities.

“Mindfulness as...” contains words, phrases, and passages that discuss “what mindfulness is” or “what mindfulness is like” but do not overlap with the explicit definitions included in the “Definition” code. In other words, when an explicit definition of mindfulness was provided, it was coded exclusively under the “Definition” category and would not be re-coded under “Meanings/Symbols.” The purpose of this was to separate explicit definitions of mindfulness from more implicit understandings of the concept. For example, there is a

substantive difference between a formal definition of mindfulness as “the awareness that arises through paying attention on purpose in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (95)¹¹ and mere references to mindfulness as a “set of skills” (5) or “a psychological process” (7).

“Qualities/Adjectives/Descriptors” refer to excerpts that get at or imply some meaning of mindfulness through the words used to describe it, the qualities attributed to it, or the adjectives used in conjunction with it. For example, some articles describe “secular” mindfulness (52), or talk about it as a “transformative” experience (55). Other examples include “mindfulness training” (15), mindfulness being associated with “self-compassion” (4), and mindfulness having “spiritual origins” (5). In “The Process” category, I sought to determine the meaning of mindfulness with respect to how it takes place, or how it is understood based on its practice, however this may look. For example, some excerpts discussed mindfulness as a “practice” (55) or “technique” (71), such as “meditation” (68), which might involve “becoming one” (5) with a given activity. It is important to note that these sub-themes were not always mutually exclusive, but aided in the data organization and analysis process.

Throughout this last step, I was also taking note of when salient patterns seemed to arise within one code or across multiple codes. If it seemed that a great deal of attention was being given to a particular way of discussing mindfulness, or that mindfulness was often associated with a particular practice, idea, word, or phrase – such as meditation – I took note for later investigation. This represents a possible indication of a larger communication code present in the discussion of mindfulness. In other words, it might mean that mindfulness is often discussed or

¹¹ Throughout this study, when a number appears alone in parentheses, as it does here, it refers to a specific academic or popular press article that was analyzed for this research. A full list of articles is provided in the Appendix. For ease of reference, the numbers 1-50 all refer to academic articles, whereas numbers 51-105 all refer to popular press articles.

even expected to be discussed in a particular way within a community. This also led to the creation of another document that eventually displayed an organized categorization of all the salient patterns discovered throughout this analysis process along with references to specific excerpts from various codes which comprised these patterns. It is these patterns, or communication codes, that represent the bulk of the findings in this study.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS

As stated previously, the primary purposes of this research are to 1) identify variations in meaning, with respect to mindfulness, between and within the academic and popular press communities; and 2) identify the communication codes utilized by these communities in their discussions of mindfulness. A primary assumption is that these communication codes reflect cultural differences that arise from different origins and unique environmental pressures and concerns faced by each community. Thus, these codes and their functions give insight into the cultural norms and assumptions of each community. In this project, “functions” refers to the work performed or purposes served by particular patterns of communication. For instance, in his study examining the role of speech in Teamsterville, Philipsen (1975) found that it was often imperative for men in the Teamsterville community to respond to affronts to their female relatives or girlfriends with means other than speech. Philipsen argued that this type of response served to sustain the man’s reputation and thereby performed male role enactment for this particular community.

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the communication codes that arose during an in-depth investigation of the communication data collected for this study. Particular codes became salient upon an immersive analysis, and those codes are examined comprehensively here. When undertaking this analysis, it is necessary to establish an organizing category or core symbol around which the analysis emanates. In this case, the clear organizing category is “mindfulness.” As Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain, “[t]he core category must be the sun, standing in orderly systematic relationships to its planets” (p. 124). The “planets” referred to here are the properties attributed to mindfulness along with the various terms or concepts to which the term is linked, the purposes it is said to fulfill, and the contexts in which it is positioned. The

SPEAKING framework aides in elucidating many of these properties. Therefore, in this chapter I examine the ways in which mindfulness is discussed with respect to its yoked “planets.”

I begin by examining the explicit definitions of mindfulness provided by the voices within these communities. In seeking to answer RQ1 (“In what ways do meanings of mindfulness differ within and between academic and popular press communities?”), one approach is to turn to how writers define the concept explicitly. This can help reflect what is meant by mindfulness when it is used in different contexts (i.e., perhaps mindfulness is understood differently in a therapeutic context than in a work environment). This leads into a discussion of the concepts of attention and awareness, as they appeared often in proximity to mindfulness. The same was true of meditation. and the next section provides an explanation of these associations and connections. A third sub-section provides a comparison between academic and popular press communities with respect to explicit definitions of mindfulness, before turning attention to what mindfulness is described as *not* being.

In the second section, I discuss mindfulness as being described as Buddhist, religious, spiritual, or secular in origin and/or nature. A spiritual code becomes evident within the discourse and is expounded upon. There is also some discussion—implicit and explicit—of mindfulness as being connected to science. These discussions are analyzed and conclusions are drawn with respect to what mindfulness means within these two communities.

In the third section, I investigate the ways in which mindfulness is sometimes split into two categories: Western and Eastern. According to some community members, Western mindfulness is something active in nature, involving active thinking and representing a more “realistic” approach to incorporating mindfulness into daily life. On the other hand, Eastern

mindfulness is more concerned with “quieting” thinking and is non-active in nature. This section describes and expands upon this distinction.

Fourth, this chapter inspects and considers the prevalence of language discussing mindfulness as something that enhances productivity in the work environment. The SPEAKING method is particularly useful in elucidating this active code of productivity by highlighting the roles of mindfulness with respect to Setting, Participants, and Ends. Finally, this chapter points out the strong emphasis in these articles on the health benefits of mindfulness, arguing that mindfulness is often understood as a health tool or health technique.

What is Mindfulness?

Attention and Awareness

The academic articles in this study’s data corpus overwhelmingly associate mindfulness, in their explicit definitions of the term, with the words “attention” and “awareness” or as attention and/or awareness attached to or subsumed within other concepts. This analysis found 19 mentions of the word attention and 18 mentions of the word awareness in passages where a definition for mindfulness was provided in the academic articles. For perspective, the next most common definitional theme was “mindfulness as a practice or technique,” of which there were seven instances.

Academic article 5 defines mindfulness as a “way of directing attention.” Article 4 defines it as “bringing one’s complete attention to the experiences occurring in the present moment.” Other articles describe it as follows:

- “bare attention” (1)
- “focusing one’s attention” (5)
- “a process of bringing a certain quality of attention” (7)

- “self-regulation of attention” (7, 23, 35)
- a “form of attention control training” (19)
- an “ability to regulate attention” (20)
- “paying attention” (28, 38, 40)
- and a “specific quality of attention” (34)

Though there are nuanced differences within these definitions, it is clear that “attention” is a concept that is connected intimately with mindfulness as it is discussed by many in the academic community.

The same occurred for the concept of awareness. Academic articles 7 and 34 describe mindfulness as “a kind of nonelaborative, nonjudgmental, present-centered awareness.” Articles 18 and 32 call it a “moment-to-moment, nonjudgmental awareness.” It is also discussed as follows:

- “the nonjudgmental awareness of experiences” (24)
- “the development of awareness of present-moment experience” (25)
- “a form of awareness” (39)
- and simply “awareness” (36)

In the examples presented above, attention and awareness are described separately. In many other instances of the academic community, however, the two terms are used in the same definitional description of mindfulness. For example, Article 1 describes mindfulness as “bare attention, in which moment-to-moment awareness of changing objects of perception is cultivated.” In that article, mindfulness is described as “bare attention,” whereas awareness is said to be a product of mindfulness as opposed to its core definitional piece. In a different example, mindfulness is described as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on

purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment” (20). Mindfulness in this example is awareness, which emerges through the process of paying attention in a particular manner. At other points, the two terms are used interchangeably or without significant distinction. Academic article 9 states that “mindfulness can be considered an enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality.” Similar definitions, blending these two terms, are present in other articles as well (10, 15).

In addition to these varying uses of attention and awareness, in many of these academic articles, multiple definitions of mindfulness are provided, and it is not always explained clearly which take(s) precedence, if one or more should. For example, Article 7 provides at least six distinct definitions of mindfulness. This example provides evidence for the criticisms made regarding the state of mindfulness in the scientific fields, that it lacks a coherent, agreed-upon definition (e.g., Chiesa, 2013). Regardless, it seems clear that when defining mindfulness within the academic community, the authors often discuss either one or both of the terms attention and awareness.

Within the popular press community, my analysis found “awareness” at the top of the list when examining definitions of mindfulness. Article 61 writes, “The construct of mindfulness simply means non-judgmental awareness of the present moment.” Article 64, detailing an interview with Jon Kabat-Zinn, describes mindfulness as “awareness.” Also,

- “Essentially, mindfulness is a technique of open awareness without judgment” (66)
- “Mindfulness, in its most basic form, is simply a practice of awareness” (84)
- Mindfulness is “the awareness that arises through paying attention on purpose in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (95)

- Mindfulness is “the nonjudgmental awareness of experiences in the present moment (98).

Of the six popular articles that define mindfulness in relation to awareness, three do this by providing direct quotations from mindfulness or Buddhist scholars (61, 64, 95). Another implies that this definition of mindfulness comes from Kabat-Zinn (66). Another states that “Psychologists define mindfulness as...” (98). Only one popular press article provides a definition of mindfulness (incorporating awareness) that does not reference the religious or academic community directly.

Meditation as Mindfulness

The second most common way in which popular press articles defined mindfulness was as meditation. Article 72 defines mindfulness as “a form of meditation.” Article 82 provides a very similar definition: “Mindfulness is a simple, yet effective form of meditation.” Article 89 uses the two words in conjunction: “Mindfulness meditation is a form of meditation in which people learn to pay attention to what they are feeling physically and mentally from moment to moment.”

This definitional association of mindfulness with meditation is present in academic articles as well. Academic article 15 writes, “Mindfulness meditation practice, commonly referred to in the literature simply as mindfulness,” which implies that mindfulness is definitionally a form of meditation. Article 25 uses the same phrase, “mindfulness meditation,” in place of “mindfulness” in its definition of the concept. Another article identifies mindfulness as a “form of meditation” (41). There were four instances where mindfulness is defined in reference to meditation. This does not include general associations between meditation and

mindfulness, which are much more plentiful; rather, this only refers to those instances in which meditation is presented as synonymous with mindfulness.

Outside of examining the strict definitional understandings of mindfulness as meditation, the two terms—meditation and mindfulness—are otherwise linked inextricably across many of these articles, both academic and popular press. For a sense of perspective, a general “word crunch” of these articles, which tallies the number of times a specific word was used, found the term meditation to be used commonly by both communities. Outside of words such as “a” and “the,” “meditation” was the second most common word in both academic articles and popular press articles, second only to “mindfulness.” Academic articles used the word 1,866 times, whereas the total in popular press articles was 401 uses. “Mindfulness” was used 3,861 and 708 times, respectively.

Most Commonly Used Words Across All Popular Press and Academic Articles			
Popular Press Articles		Academic Articles	
Term	# of uses	Term	# of uses
Mindfulness	708	Mindfulness	3,861
You	422	Meditation	1,866
Meditation	401	Self	1,514
Your	307	Group	1,274
People	211	Attention	1,216
We	196	Stress	1,207
Their	176	Study	1,159
Pain	165	Practice	1,132

Table 2

This frequency is important because, although the two terms are often used in conjunction and seem to be understood as related, some caution against conflating the two terms was sometimes noted. Popular press article 91 points out, “the proliferation of meditation in the name of mindfulness and the combination of the two terms lead people to equate the two. Mistakenly so.” The author goes on to argue that “meditation is simply one of several tools for achieving mindfulness.” Another popular press article states that meditation is “usually associated with a sitting practice often guided by the breath,” whereas “mindfulness extends that practice into everyday life and focuses on cultivating awareness in the present” (75). Similar statements exist in other popular press and academic articles as well, often describing the difference as mindfulness being a byproduct of meditation (71, 81).

Comparisons between Communities

When comparing explicit definitions of mindfulness between communities, academic article communication was significantly more likely than popular press communication to provide an explicit definition. In total, 34 of the 50 academic articles contained explicit definitions of the concept, whereas only 19 out of 55 of popular press articles did the same. This is not surprising, given that the academic community at large values research that builds upon existing knowledge (Babbie, 2001). In order to do so, scholars tend to ensure that they are engaging with the same topic in a manner consistent with that of the previous research.

For example, if an academic researcher were to conduct an experiment measuring the intelligence of an individual, the researcher would first need to define what “intelligence” is. This would involve consulting extant research on the subject, which may uncover many distinct definitions of intelligence. The researcher would then likely choose one definition and construct an argument supporting that choice and, potentially, the decision to exclude other options. Future

scholars examining the research would then be able to better decipher if the definition of intelligence fits well with past research, and with their own understandings of the concept, before contributing further to this base of knowledge. In other words, the culture of the academic community often expects and even requires a communicator to be explicit with the definition of terms and concepts when communicating in this fashion. On the other hand, the popular press community does not appear to have the same cultural expectations. In this community's conversation, there seems to be less need for a communicator to provide an explicit definition of mindfulness.

What Mindfulness Is Not

Another useful approach in striving to understand the meanings of mindfulness, according to the academic and popular press communities, is to examine what these communities think mindfulness *is not*. What do they state explicitly that mindfulness *is not*? This can be of as much use as their explicit statements of what mindfulness *is*, because these statements create boundary-markers between what does and what does not qualify as mindfulness. These markers may also differ according to different sources, allowing for more direct comparisons of conceptualizations of mindfulness across sources.

Several academic articles refer to what mindfulness (or its outcomes) is not. Articles 7, 15, and 30 make statements to the effect of mindfulness not being a relaxation or mood management technique. One article operationalizes mindfulness as a 10-day intensive meditation retreat, "without the confounding influence of elements such as relaxation, yoga, and cognitive therapy that are utilized (for example) in MBSR and MBCT interventions" (15). Therefore, yoga and cognitive therapy and are also excluded from this conception of mindfulness. Another article discusses how mindfulness is not "preoccupation with memories, fantasies, plans, or worries"

(5). Related, it is “neither an analytic or ‘doing’ mode of thought” (20). It is “not about getting anywhere or fixing anything” (30). Moreover, for some members of this communication community, mindfulness is also “not a practice in thought suppression” (4, 7). Lastly, one article states directly that “there is nothing particularly Buddhist about [mindfulness]” (30), emphasizing the concept’s universality or at least its secular application.

The popular press community also discusses explicitly what mindfulness *is not*. Similar to what was discussed in the academic community, mindfulness in the popular press is “not another thing to add to your to-do list” (60). This corresponds to the academic article perspective that it is not a “doing.” Similarly, it is not a sitting or waiting: “When you choose to sit and be mindful do so without waiting for a miracle of enlightenment or expectation” (72). It is not something one can simply force: “We can’t force ourselves to relax because when we have to try to be mindful that is not authentic mindfulness” (72). Again, there is a similar theme to what was in the academic articles. Mindfulness, as discussed, cannot be forced, and it is not something that can simply be “done.”

The popular press articles also discuss specifics of where mindfulness could or should not be practiced. Though one article states that mindfulness is “a state of mind not confined to the cushion” (86), another notes that it cannot be practiced “in front of the TV,” and “not with the newspaper” (62). One popular press article also states that mindfulness is not an escape from the world: “We are not cutting off from our lives. We are not escaping the world” (96). Further, it is “not a sedated, boring activity” (86).

Within the popular press community, there are multiple statements about what mindfulness is not, which address the cultural, philosophical, or spiritual trappings of mindfulness. For instance, Article 55 states that mindfulness has more to do with stress reduction

and “less to do with being a tool on the path towards liberation and enlightenment.” Similarly, a few articles work to dispel what might be common perceptions of mindfulness as being associated with particular cultural or religious traditions or rituals. Article 58 declares, “[m]indfulness doesn’t involve chanting, bowing, sitting cross-legged, or burning incense.” Another states, “no mantras, invocations, chakras, or third-eyes are necessary” (81). Similarly, “there are no mantras, no specific postures or poses to be learned, no gurus or dharma talks necessary” (84). One article describes how a person does not need to be a monk to participate in mindfulness (61).

Paralleling these conversations of mindfulness not needing to be something associated with particular cultural or religious traditions, other articles discuss how mindfulness is being or has been “mainstreamed.” Popular press article 52 notes that “[o]nce considered outside the mainstream,” mindfulness has since become more acceptable and, in this case, more often covered by insurance plans (Article 63 says something similar). Article 59 talks about pushing meditation into the mainstream. Article 64 includes “[a]fter nearly four decades of teaching mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zinn is happy to see it hitting the mainstream,” and for Article 93, “[t]here’s no doubt that mindfulness has gone mainstream.” Further, article 75 talks specifically about “pushing meditation practices and mindfulness movements from hippie to mainstream,” the additional piece being the direct identification of mindfulness as a “hippie” practice. Therefore, among the popular press community, there seems to be a strong emphasis on mindfulness being something that is not inaccessible to the general population. Mindfulness does not need to involve chanting, mantras, etc. and does not need to be directed at achieving enlightenment. Rather, it is something that is going mainstream and is accessible to anyone.

Reflections on Defining Mindfulness

In the first section above, I described the various usages of the terms “attention” and “awareness” in defining mindfulness. For both academic and popular press articles, these terms were the most commonly occurring ones within sections coded for “Definition,” suggesting that these terms may be integral to an understanding of mindfulness in both of these communities. I also noted that, when these terms were employed within the popular press community, they nearly always cited or referred to Buddhist or mindfulness scholars and/or teachers as the source for the definition. This might demonstrate that understandings of mindfulness within the popular press community are influenced by the academic community’s understanding of the term. While this appears to be the case in part, it is not the full picture. Despite being the most common definition of mindfulness in popular press articles, “awareness” is still only present in mindfulness definitions in 6 of the 55 articles. This is much too small a corpus to provide much evidence for the argument that popular press definitions of mindfulness are inseparable from their academic article counterparts, though it may say something that, when popular press articles did choose to define mindfulness explicitly, they did so in this way.

The second section examined the relationship between the terms “meditation” and “mindfulness.” It was noted that a common pattern occurred linking the two terms/concepts, either explicitly when defining mindfulness or implicitly through constant association of terms. Again, given the small number of total definitions provided within these articles, it is difficult to make broad conclusions about the specifics of this connection. It could, however, also be informative that mindfulness is often talked about as being the same thing as meditation in at least some popular press and academic articles, as it is a point of some controversy with a few

academic articles addressing explicitly what they describe as the dangers of conflating the two concepts.

In the third section, I drew a comparison between the two communities, focusing on the differential value each community seemed to place on defining mindfulness explicitly. It was clear that the academic community placed a greater emphasis on this practice. This indicates that academic community members place greater value on the practice than those in the popular press community. This is likely because the popular press community does not have the same origin or environmental pressures as the academic community (i.e., the expectation that communication be built upon and thoroughly consistent with existing knowledge, at least to the same extent). Perhaps the most immediate environmental pressure for a popular press communicator is catching and keeping the attention of a reader (Croteau & Hoynes, 2015). The content and design of a message, therefore, will reflect these pressures. The typical reader of these popular press outlets might not be concerned with an academic or technical definition of mindfulness. It might not be as relevant to the ways in which s/he is interested in mindfulness. For example, as this study goes on to demonstrate, the popular press community puts heavy emphasis on specific, direct applications of mindfulness, as opposed to a deeper-level engagement with the concept, theoretically or definitionally.

Lastly, the fourth section reported on what the two communities said mindfulness was *not*. Though there were a variety of emphases here, one of the most interesting, and most useful for this particular analysis, was the focus on “mainstreaming” mindfulness. Specifically, popular press community members described mindfulness as a “hippie” practice that was perhaps becoming more “normalized.” This type of language is interesting, because it provides a window into the authors’ ideas of what readers may be thinking when they read about mindfulness. In

this case, it puts on display some potentially common understandings of what mindfulness is and what it entails or, rather, what the writer wants the audience to believe it is *not* and what it *does not* entail.

One idea that can be mined from this language is that mindfulness may have a stigma attached to it. To use more colloquial terminology, it may be perceived as “woo woo” by some popular article audiences. In one article (81), a person asks the following question: “I’m not a spiritual person, how do you expect me to get on board with this ‘woo woo’ stuff?” In this case, mindfulness is linked intrinsically with spirituality and its trappings, which are referred to using a term that tends to denigrate certain forms of practice.

Other popular articles seemingly seek to address this discomfort or dissociation with this particular conceptualization of mindfulness. Article 64 states, “[t]his is not New Age gobbledygook.” For 84, “mindfulness is not an empty gimmick.” “Mindfulness may sound like the latest buzzword, but... [it] is more than trendy philosophy” (85). This all implies that there may be some skepticism on the part of the reader with regards to mindfulness, and these are attempts at pacifying that skeptical approach. One article comes out and states directly “[y]ou don’t need to call it mindfulness” (60). One can simply engage in the activities themselves, without the apparent baggage of the term. One presented a more positive association, however, saying that it fits with “current fashion for New Age alternative care” (65).

The “baggage” reflected in some popular articles seems to concern the particular religious, spiritual, or “woo woo” nature of mindfulness as it is presented by this community. There appears to be a distinct effort to distance mindfulness from the pejorative connotations that are associated with this grouping of worldviews. But how common is this perspective? Do most community members believe that it is desirable or even possible to separate mindfulness from

these worldviews? Or are they a necessary component of the nature of mindfulness? The next section investigates answers to these questions as described by the two communities.

Specifically, it examines whether these communities understand mindfulness as a Buddhist, religious, spiritual, or secular phenomenon. It uncovers and provides evidence for a “spiritual code” with respect to discussions of mindfulness that runs counter to the previously discussed “stigma” narrative.

Mindfulness: Buddhist, Religious, Spiritual, or Secular?

In addition to providing explicit definitions of mindfulness or what it is not, another way in which popular press and academic articles communicate their varying understandings of mindfulness is through their explicit descriptions of the concept’s origins and its fundamental nature. For instance, in these discussions, some articles make it clear that mindfulness originated in the Buddhist or Eastern traditions, and they understand mindfulness primarily as a religious practice. Others may or may not identify mindfulness with Buddhism but talk about it as a spiritual practice. Others see it as a combination of the two. Yet others discuss it entirely as a secular concept, even if they acknowledge its religious origins.

Several popular press articles draw explicit links between mindfulness and Buddhism, citing Buddhism as its origin. Article 66 states that “Buddhism is synonymous with mindfulness in the West” and goes on to describe how ordained monks and nuns have utilized the practice. Article 84 writes that mindfulness “has its roots in the centuries-old tradition of Buddhism.” Article 61 describes mindfulness as a “Buddhist-inspired practice,” and Article 71 notes that “[t]he technique is derived from Buddhist meditation.” “Mindfulness is a Buddhist-inspired concept” in Article 87. Further, Article 95 provides some in-depth background information on mindfulness, citing Rhys Davids and his efforts to translate early Theravada Buddhist

terminology into English and describing how Rhys Davids came up with the term mindfulness as derived from the Buddhist concept *sati*.

Fewer popular press articles discuss mindfulness explicitly as a secular phenomenon. Article 52, which presents mindfulness and meditation as intimately connected, states “meditation practices in the health field are secular.” Article 55 writes, “it’s secular mindfulness,” in discussing mindfulness practices in the context of company workshops. Article 81 is likewise very explicit about the secular nature of mindfulness: “Mindfulness meditation is deceptively simple, and completely secular.” Another (55) discusses the fact that mindfulness is originally a Buddhist concept or practice but has “evolved” into something secular: “What we’ve seen evolve over the last three decades...is the evolution of a new kind of secular mindfulness...that uses themes from Buddhist teachings but not all of its lingo or metaphysics.” Overall, although most of the popular press articles do not make mention of mindfulness having a spiritual basis, there are examples in the popular press community that recognize the Buddhist or religious roots or nature of mindfulness. There is also a smaller contingent of the community that explicitly describes mindfulness as a secular construct.

There are both similarities and differences to be seen in the academic articles. To begin, though academic articles also describe mindfulness as Buddhist or Eastern in origin and/or nature, they do so with greater frequency than does the popular press community. Eighteen academic articles describe mindfulness with respect to Buddhist or Eastern origins, whereas only seven popular press articles do this. Fifteen academic articles also employ the word “spiritual” explicitly, something present in only three popular press articles.

There are many different combinations of this type of terminology in the academic corpus. Mindfulness is portrayed in the following ways:

- the “fundamental stance underlying all streams of Buddhist meditative practice” (3)
- it “has roots in the tradition of Theravada Buddhism” (2)
- it originates “in the Buddhist traditions” (3)
- it “has a long history in Eastern spiritual traditions, primarily Buddhism” (5)
- “originating in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism in India” (6)
- there are mentions of its “original religious/spiritual context” (2)
- it “originate[s] in Eastern spiritual traditions” (4)
- it “originate[s] from Buddhist spiritual practices” (7)
- is “rooted in the contemplative spiritual traditions” (11, 12, 13)
- it has “religious and spiritual traditions” (30)
- and is “derived from what were originally and primarily religious or spiritual practices” (44).¹²

In these examples, there is a blend of attributions made to Buddhism and to the East more broadly as well as to spirituality.

In contrast, very few academic articles discuss mindfulness as a secular practice. The word “secular” only appears 5 times across all 50 academic articles. When it is described as secular, it is done within the context of its religious and spiritual origins. For example, Article 44 writes “[d]erived from what were originally and primarily religious and spiritual practices, [mindfulness] meditation has been adapted for secular purposes” and in Article 4 “[d]escriptions of mindfulness...originate in eastern spiritual traditions...In recent decades, traditional

¹² Note: There are many, many more instances, but including these as samples will suffice for the purposes of this study.

mindfulness meditation practices have been adapted for secular use.” Within the academic community, then, mindfulness is presented primarily as a concept that springs from Buddhist or Eastern religious or spiritual traditions more so than secular in origin or practice.

A Spiritual Code

The previous section discussed the two communities’ explicit descriptions of mindfulness’ origins. Articles typically referred to mindfulness as a Buddhist concept or practice, though there were also some less common explicit mentions, depending on the community, of its religious, secular, or spiritual origins or nature. In addition to these explicit classifications of mindfulness, there also is a way of discussing mindfulness in these articles that makes what might be called “spiritual”¹³ references for the concept, without coming out and identifying mindfulness as something explicitly religious or even using the term “spiritual.” These references are so apparent that they seem to represent what I have termed a “spiritual code” with respect to discussions of mindfulness. To help elucidate this point, it is helpful to first say a bit about the term “spirituality,” which has a reputation for being somewhat vague or intangible.

In an article concerning the intersections of spirituality and teaching, Palmer (2003) writes, “‘Spirituality’ is an elusive word with a variety of definitions—some compelling, some witty, some downright dangerous” (p. 377). Speck (2005) cites a number of definitions for spirituality in his piece “What is spirituality?” categorizing them according to the varying

¹³ For clarification purposes, I explain in greater detail what I mean by “spirituality,” citing definitions provided by a number of scholars. The language used within these popular press and academic communities seems to align closely with language provided in these definitions. In addition, community members have linked mindfulness to spirituality explicitly throughout their communication in these articles, which is also described here. But “spirituality” may not be an ideal term to describe this phenomenon, given its variety of meanings across many diverse communities. I attempt to articulate the term’s meaning in this context, but it may also require further development in future work.

worldviews they affirm. For the purposes of the present project, it is useful to sample from these sources. Therefore, I provide the following definitional examples (all cited by Speck):

Basically, [spirituality] is the living out of the organizing story of one's life... The organizing stories of our lives turn around that to which we are ultimately loyal and which we trust for our fulfillment (Bennett, 2003, p. xiii).

By spirituality I mean a sense of compassion, nonviolence, truthfulness, loving kindness, being connected to the whole, and living a simple, peaceful harmonious life (Massoudi, 2003, p. 118).

Spirituality is the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos (Palmer, 2003, p. 377).

Spirituality is the experience of the transcendent, or the quality of transcendence, something that welcomes, but does not require, religious beliefs (Bento, 2000, p. 653).

In popular press conversations, similar language is used to describe mindfulness or when discussing mindfulness. For example, one article (93) discusses mindfulness as part of a “lifelong journey to become more accepting, less judgmental and kinder to oneself and others.” These characteristics of acceptance, nonjudgment, and kindness are often described as integral to embodying mindfulness and become an intrinsic component of a mindfulness practitioner's life story. These words parallel the definitions of spirituality provided by both Bennett (2003) and Massoudi (2003).

Another example of the use of this spiritual code is from Article 53, which states that mindfulness is “being able to know the truth and ‘let the truth set you free.’” There is no further description of what is meant by “truth,” or what this refers to, though it does appear to parallel Massoudi's mention of “truthfulness” in his definition of spirituality.

A third example of this spiritual code is popular press Article 53's mention that mindfulness is about “being connected to something greater than yourself.” Again, these words

bear a striking resemblance to Palmer's (2003) definition of spirituality as being connected with something larger than our egos and Massoudi's (2003) definition in which he emphasizes "being connected to the whole." A similar description of mindfulness goes, "It's one of the most profound experiences that you can share with other humans" (75). Sharing profound experiences with other humans is one means of feeling connected to something larger than oneself.

Fourth, a few popular press articles discuss how mindfulness can be "transformative":

- "It is a tool for seeking inner transformation" (52)
- "This is potentially transformative" (64)
- "transform garbage into flowers" (72)
- "transform any situation and bring deep meaning into our lives" (72)
- "a transformative practice that eases the troubled mind" (55)
- "I've seen it transform classrooms" (64)
- "can it truly be a transformative practice...?" (93)

Spirituality in this community is often envisioned as an active process in which a person is constantly transforming the self or seeking personal growth (e.g., Campbell, 2008). This emphasis on transformation seems to fit with that motif.

Finally, one article provides a lengthy conversation on the parallels between mindfulness and religion, but encourages the reader to

retrain our minds to see whatever is present in the moment without all the personal and cultural baggage that our constructs of God have accumulated over the millennia. If we wish to know God, we must strip away everything we think we know and are supposed to feel and come to the encounter afresh, or else we are not really understanding God but only the idea of God we have inherited from others. For this reason, I would urge any Christian, even if they are already engaged in contemplative practices, to learn and practice mindfulness as a way of cleansing their minds of automatic conditioned responses that actually inhibit our understanding of God rather than enhance it. (84)

Though there are explicit uses of the words “God” and “Christian,” neither is inherently incompatible with spirituality considered broadly. Given that the thrust of this article’s argument is on relinquishing the “personal and cultural baggage” associated with “constructs of God,” this statement can be understood as an encouragement to discard more orthodox conceptualizations of religion and embrace a new form of spiritual engagement, for which mindfulness is described to be an integral part.

This spiritual code, described above in the popular press community, is also present within academic articles. One article states that “[m]indfulness involves adopting a new life perspective which one carries through all situations, continuously, moment to moment” (43). This conceptualization of mindfulness contains elements of change or transformation, a theme discussed earlier with respect to spirituality, as well as an emphasis on living one’s life in a particular manner, namely, in an attentive manner that “embod[ies] compassion, impartiality, and acceptance of self and others” (Article 43, p. 583). Similarly, mindfulness is described as:

- a “way of being” (30, 36, 43)
- as “an invitation to allow oneself to be where one already is” (30)
- an “openness to the flow of one’s experiences” (37)
- and as “the work of a lifetime” (30)

Mindfulness is also described as a “virtue” (47), and it is stated that it can only be practiced from a place of “deep humility” (30). These comments are certainly fitting with spiritual dialogues describing virtues such as compassion, loving kindness, and truthfulness. Compassion in particular permeates academic article discussions of mindfulness. The term itself is used 116 times within these articles. Similar terms such as “compassionately,” “self-compassion,” and “compassionate” are also used frequently. The same holds for other morally-

valanced terms such as “kindness,” “loving-kindness,” and “self-kindness.” Mindfulness is talked about as a virtue that encourages the development of, or is at least closely associated with, these other virtues.

Lastly, mindfulness is presented by some as a “formal ‘medicine’ for treating [human nature’s] fundamental ‘dis-ease,’ typically characterized as the three ‘poisons’: greed, hatred (aversion), and ignorance/delusion (unawareness)” (30). This comment blends a medical frame with a larger philosophical/spiritual perspective which is, however, explicitly Buddhist: that human nature involves the struggle with three “poisons” or vices, which must be overcome in order to achieve the cessation of suffering in one’s life. This perspective fits within understandings of spirituality as a means of organizing one’s life story and the values that lead to fulfillment.

This spiritual code is also reflected in discussions of the “Ends” of mindfulness (i.e., its goals and/or outcomes). In other words, both academic and popular press articles discuss the spiritual benefits of mindfulness. This discussion includes many direct references to the ways in which mindfulness increases spirituality or has a positive impact on concepts related to spirituality. For instance, a few academic articles talk about how mindfulness treatment programs have increased scores on measures of “spiritual experiences” (2, 43) and how mindfulness is thought to “promote spiritual health” (2). Similarly, two popular press articles state that mindfulness can “help to achieve nirvana” (66), “provides intangible benefits for the soul” (84), can “improve one’s ability to participate in religious worship or practices” (84), and helps “[cleanse] the mind of automatic conditioned responses that actually inhibit our understanding of God rather than enhance it” (84). These are direct statements of spiritual benefits attributed to mindfulness.

There are also many more, less direct references to the spiritual “benefits” of mindfulness. For instance, academic articles discuss how mindfulness:

- “cultivates positive qualities such as wisdom and compassion” (3)
- can lead to “compassionate service” (40)
- entails the deployment of “wisdom” (31)
- “increases self-compassion” (41)
- “increased scores on overall empathy levels” (43)
- provides the “benefits of personal transcendence, equanimity, and tranquility” (44)
- increases positive qualities such as “awareness, insight, wisdom, compassion, and equanimity” (4, 5)
- “promote[s] the development of insight into self, others, and the human condition” (10)
- “decreases suffering” (5, 20, 29, 30)
- “fosters a greater sense of equanimity” (6)
- “may facilitate equanimity, ease... not contingent on circumstances” (10)
- allows one to “achieve enduring happiness” (24)
- helps one “gain insight into a view of the true nature of existence” (24)
- provides “insight” (31)
- moves people “towards self-exploration” and “towards self-liberation” (40)
- and provides “connection” (40)

Many of these listed benefits of mindfulness parallel the spiritual code. There are mentions of “connection,” as well as statements referencing something beyond oneself, such as “insight

into...the human condition.” There are also descriptions of transcendence, such as “self-exploration,” which may lead to “self-liberation.”

Many key terms of the spiritual code appear here as well. Quite a few of the academic articles discuss benefits with reference to “compassion,” “wisdom,” “insight,” “equanimity,” etc. Similarities are seen in popular press articles as well. Mindfulness helps one:

- “cultivate clarity of mind, equanimity, and wisdom” (52)
- “Help[s] you feel more love” and “more deeply connected” (56)
- “makes you more compassionate” (62)
- helps develop “insight, wisdom, and compassion” (96)
- “gives you back a sense of worth” (71)
- “can bring reconciliation, healing, understanding, and much happiness” (72)
- helps “develop a strong and positive desire” (72)
- improves “intuition” (81)
- helps “achieve peace of mind, greater self-awareness, and perhaps even more compassion” (93)
- leads to “personal growth” (95)
- helps “stabiliz[e] the mind, purify[] the mind (96)
- aids in “developing insight and wisdom” (96)
- and helps “build empathy” (98)

Again, there is a clear presence of themes such as “connection,” “compassion,” “wisdom,” and a drive for the fulfillment of one’s life story and values.

Though the focus of these articles is primarily on the benefits of mindfulness, there is some pushback. Of the few articles that question the positive impacts of mindfulness, one

employs the spiritual code in its scrutiny. Popular press article 66 mentions that, though the popular perception is that “mindfulness is always good for you,” “meditation can have dangerous psychological and physical effects as well.” For instance, the author writes “traditional Buddhist stories abound of meditators being taken over by evil spirits.” Therefore, though the spiritual code is nearly always employed in a manner that promotes mindfulness as a positive spiritual engagement, the sentiment is not entirely unanimous.

This focus on a spiritual code reflects the work of one Ethnography of Communication scholar who has discussed a similar topic. As noted, Coutu (2000) noticed the communication code of spirituality present in public commentary responding to Robert S. McNamara’s memoir, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. Coutu describes the code of spirituality as “a code that honors morality” (p. 179). Though my interpretation of a “code of spirituality” differs slightly in that it more specifically reflects definitions of spirituality as described previously, her process of uncovering and describing this code served as a model for my own. She refers specifically to the authors’ word choices in order to make the claim that this code did indeed permeate their discussions. For example, she points to words like “faith,” “moral,” “confession,” “sin,” “evil,” and others which convey a moral valence and occur throughout the texts. Coutu writes,

I do not claim that the media made a conscious effort to infuse their responses to McNamara’s book with spiritual imagery. Rather, I claim that the overwhelming presence of this theme in a variety of texts produced by contemporaries of McNamara points to the presence of a communication code that powerfully, although unconsciously, permeated the response to McNamara’s account of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. (Coutu, 2000, p. 195)

Similarly, I make the argument in this study that a spiritual code permeates both popular press and academic article discussions regarding mindfulness. This is exemplified by the evidence provided.

Reflections on the Spiritual Code

One purpose of identifying communication codes is to gain insight into the meanings behind discursive actions as well as representative “view[s] of self, society, and strategic action” (Coutu, 2000, p. 181). They help us to better understand the premises and rules of particular communities, with respect to communicative conduct. Therefore, I inquired what this spiritual code reveals about the communicative conduct within popular press and academic communities.

Primarily, I believe it tells us that it is generally appropriate within these communities to talk about mindfulness as something intimately connected to spirituality or at least connected to values consistent with descriptions of spirituality. Though there are also brief discussions that run counter to this spiritual code (e.g., mindfulness has “less to do with being a tool on the path towards liberation and enlightenment,” Article 55) or that contribute to the “stigma” narrative surrounding mindfulness (“I’m not a spiritual person, how do you expect me to get on board with this ‘woo woo’ stuff?,” Article 81), the overwhelming majority of articles, both academic and popular press, employ this code in their discussions of the concept. Even the articles that express a counter-narrative often go on to discuss the benefits of mindfulness, utilizing the spiritual code.

The instances of pushback may also demonstrate that, for some contingent of the popular press community, it may be necessary to address the potential skepticism of readers who may have stigmatized conceptualizations of mindfulness. In other words, for this contingent, one rule of communicative conduct might be that it is only appropriate to discuss mindfulness through a spiritual code once the author has in some way acknowledged the stigma of doing so.

Mindfulness and Science

Though this communicative rule of addressing mindfulness' stigma is much more present in popular press discussions of the concept, there is a lesser narrative within academic articles that also appears to deem it necessary to address potential skeptics of this spiritual code. But rather than doing so by addressing or even playing into the stigma directly, these academic articles strive to draw a connection between mindfulness, its origins, and science. For instance, Article 30 makes references to Sanskrit translations of early Buddhist terminology which describes mindfulness as being at the heart of the Buddha's *dharma*, "which carries the meaning of *lawfulness* as in 'laws of physics.'" This "scientific narrative" continues as the author provides more arguments that mindfulness and its origins parallel scientific approaches. The author writes,

One might think of the historical Buddha as, among other things, a born scientist and physician who had nothing in the way of instrumentation other than his own mind and body and experience, yet managed to use these native resources to great effect to delve into the nature of suffering and the human condition. (30)

Article 36 provides a similar comparison, drawing on Freud's work and noting the similarities between his work and Buddhist literature: "[T]here is a remarkable similarity between mindfulness as described by the Buddhist literature and Freud's characterization of the ideal mind state of the psychoanalyst during therapy." Comparisons and references to Freud's work are also made in Articles 9 and 10. Article 28 performs a similar action, drawing parallels between meditation texts and modern cognitive neuroscience concepts: "There are striking parallels between the concentrative/receptive dichotomy described in many meditation texts and recent cognitive neuroscience conceptualizations of dissociable dorsal and ventral attention systems."

In addition to this work of connecting mindfulness with science, Article 30 creates space between mindfulness and Buddhism, the religion that is most closely associated with the Buddha's mindfulness practices:

Of course, the Buddha himself was not a Buddhist. One might think of dharma as a sort of universal generative grammar (Chomsky, 1965), an innate set of empirically testable rules that govern and describe the generation of the inward, first-person experiences of suffering and happiness in human beings. In that sense, dharma is at its core truly universal, not exclusively Buddhist. It is neither a belief, an ideology, nor a philosophy. Rather, it is a coherent phenomenological description of the nature of mind, emotion, and suffering and its potential release, based on highly refined practices aimed at systematically training and cultivating various aspects of mind and heart via the faculty of mindful attention... And mindfulness, it should also be noted, being about attention, is also of necessity universal. (30)

This excerpt provides a lot to unpack. In addition to the separation created between the Buddha and Buddhism, the dharma and Buddhism, and therefore mindfulness and Buddhism, this excerpt contains overt scientific language in its descriptions of the dharma, which has mindfulness at its heart. The author cites Chomsky (1965) and his universal grammar. The author also discusses "empirically testable rules," which are necessary and prominent requirements of scientific theories. Scientific laws also apply universally, and the author makes note of the universality of the dharma and mindfulness three times in this short excerpt. Words and phrases like "systematic," "training," "nature," and "phenomenological description" also pepper this paragraph. Along with earlier references to "laws" and "physics," an association is being made with the objective, observationally-intensive, reproducible nature of science. This all serves to connect mindfulness with the language of science. In other words, mindfulness is a scientific practice from this perspective.

Given that spirituality and science are not typically described in the Western world as compatible, it is perhaps not surprising that some academic discussions of mindfulness create

separation between the concept and its religious or spiritual origins, or they draw explicit parallels between mindfulness and scientific language and concepts. Indeed, it could represent a “breach or protocol” or violate a communicative rule to promote a religious concept in the scientific community. Therefore, these efforts to not only situate mindfulness within scientific language and concepts, and associate it with scientists, but also to argue that mindfulness is a scientific approach and its founder (the Buddha) was a scientist, may serve to justify the introduction of and discussion surrounding a concept with religious origins within a community of scientists.

In addition, Article 5 makes it clear that this effort to move away from overt religious language and towards the language of science has a productive purpose. Specifically, it “may be beneficial to Westerners who are unwilling to adopt Buddhist terminology or traditions. Thus, mindfulness practices are sometimes conceptualized as sets of skills that can be taught independently of their spiritual origins.” This statement may explain in part the proliferation of Western therapeutic treatments such as MBSR and MBCT, which partly sever the spiritual origins of mindfulness practice in favor of more “accessible” sets of skills that can be more easily taught and are often done so in a clinical setting.

In sum, with regards to discussion of its origins and nature, both popular press and academic communities identify mindfulness as originating in Buddhist or Eastern traditions, with academic articles doing this more often. The popular press community also sometimes identifies mindfulness as a secular practice, absent of its religious or spiritual roots. On the other hand, the academic community does not explicitly identify mindfulness as secular. The academic articles are, however, explicit in their use of the word “spirituality” in describing the origin and nature of mindfulness. Both popular press and academic communities often utilize what I have termed a

spiritual code in their descriptions of mindfulness, in which they employ language that is not necessarily referring to spirituality explicitly but, rather, incorporates tropes or themes commonly associated with it and which promote its perspectives and values. Lastly, the academic community often describes mindfulness utilizing scientific terminology, labeling the Buddha as a scientist, perhaps in an effort to reconcile the examination of a historically religious or spiritual practice within scientific domains.

Mindfulness: East and West

So far, this analysis has examined academic and popular communities' understandings of mindfulness from a few angles. It started by investigating the explicit definitions provided by these communities. It then sought to better understand the nature of mindfulness by scrutinizing what these communities believe mindfulness is *not*. Third, having recognized the emergence of religious, spiritual, and secular thematic language, it sought to determine the extent to which mindfulness falls into one or more of these categories. And lastly, a spiritual code within the discourse surrounding mindfulness became evident and was described in detail, along with the scientific framing of mindfulness often employed within the academic community.

During close examinations of these articles, another theme emerged that merits examination. In addition to the discussions of mindfulness as a Buddhist or Eastern concept—as related to or contrasted with its ties to spirituality or its secular nature—there is also conversation that establishes a distinction between Eastern and Western conceptualizations of mindfulness. This section investigates these discussions and elaborates on these distinctions. Through this investigation, I note the emergence of two codes with respect to mindfulness: A Western, active productivity code and an Eastern, non-active code.

Article 91 from the popular press community makes a very clear, direct argument that “[t]here are two approaches to mindfulness: Eastern and Western.” It identifies the following characteristics of Eastern mindfulness: “The Eastern view indeed positions meditation as an essential tool to achieving a mindful state. But the Eastern view is more about quieting the mind and suspending thought.” This interpretation of Eastern mindfulness is then put in juxtaposition to Western mindfulness, which “centers on active thinking.”

The author goes on to discuss these two approaches in ways that expose a value differential, one which demonstrates an evaluation of Western mindfulness as a more “realistic” approach, one more appropriate, it is implied, for the modern world. The author writes,

given the speed of change today, it may not be realistic to suspend or stop thinking. Rather, we need to actively think through problems in new ways to achieve innovative, elegant solutions. These will not rain from on high in a meditation session. (91)

This statement gives insight into observations regarding the author’s understandings of mindfulness and its place in society. First, the author clearly presents “speed” and “change” as incompatible with Eastern mindfulness, which might be assumed to be “slow” and “unchanging.” Eastern mindfulness is not something “active.” Rather, it entails a “quieting” or a “suspending.” Second, this Eastern, non-active mindfulness is not appropriate if one wishes to “achieve innovative, elegant solutions.” Active thinking is what is necessary for these kinds of advancements. Third, the author does not seem to find an Eastern mindful approach to be compatible with the demands of “today,” a statement that seems to refer to the demands of the modern, Western world. For the author, these demands include the ability to think actively, change quickly, and provide “innovative” or new solutions to problems.

These solutions and advancements “will not rain from on high in a meditation session” (91). With this last statement, the author uses language that creates physical and metaphorical

distance between the mindfulness practice of meditation and the world in which active thinking and solutions take place. The phrase “rain from on high” stands out from the tone of the rest of the article: its word order atypical and its tone seemingly referring to biblical or religious themes to which this phrase is often associated. This serves to emphasize the author’s conceptualization of Eastern mindfulness as something atypical, something out of place, a concept that is not grounded in the demands of current reality. The literal meaning of the words “on high” seconds this idea, creating physical distance between the concept and Western modernity. This particular conceptualization of mindfulness, coming from one source in the popular press community, discusses meditative mindfulness as something that belongs in the Eastern world, and perhaps in the past, having less use “today,” in the Western world. Eastern mindfulness is a non-active tool that does not provide utility in an active world. This distinction between two forms of mindfulness is supported in discussions within other popular press articles.

Turning to Western mindfulness, the author’s (91) discussion of Western mindfulness as a tool of change that is performed actively is shared by many other popular press articles, referencing mindfulness from a Western perspective, which provide talk about its ability to generate change, and the desire for it to do such. For example,

- it “can be very effective for helping people change a host of behaviors” (51)
- provides “change on a visceral level” (51)
- “changes in experienced meditators” (52)
- “striking changes” (52)
- “things you want to change” (58)
- “biological changes” (62)
- “sensation changes” (63)

- “measurable changes” (63)
- “helping people change the way they think about pain” (68)
- “it’s changed your thinking and how you feel” (68)
- “change the activity of regions of the brain” (68)
- “the change could make it easier for people” (68)
- “it will change your life” (71)
- “changed her life for the better” (71)
- “change your expectations” (81)
- “changes the brain and body” (92)
- “change the structure and function of the brain” (94)
- “can change you” (96)
- “change habitual patterns” (101)
- “lifestyle changes” (101)
- “long-term behavioral change” (101)

The author of 91 also discusses Western mindfulness with reference to “noticing different ways to view [a] problem.” He states, “[t]he key to mindfulness is learning to look at the world in a more conditional way” and provides a visual puzzle to demonstrate how one must think outside the box in order to solve difficult problems. The author goes on to compare this mindful approach to the “impartial spectator first introduced in the 18th century by Adam Smith,” an economist famous for his *Wealth of Nations*, and the idea of the invisible hand of the market, a staple of laissez-faire capitalism. Again, the use of language in this description of Western mindfulness gives insight into the understood meaning of mindfulness. In this article, mindfulness is a means of solving a tangible problem. By viewing the world from a mindful

perspective of this type, one notices novel options or approaches that might lead to solutions. Given the example of the visual puzzle, it is clear that these solutions will require active thinking, a characteristic of Western mindfulness. Lastly, citing Adam Smith and drawing a comparison between his philosophy and mindfulness shows that, for the author (91), the Western conceptualization of mindfulness and that of Western capitalism are complementary. This connection between mindfulness and capitalism or productivity will be elaborated upon later in this study.

The previous discussion provides evidence for a communication code that views Western mindfulness as active, change-driven, and focused on finding solutions for problems. This is juxtaposed with Eastern mindfulness, which is identified as more passive and unchanging, less focused on active thought, and represents a second communication code present in this discourse. Other voices within the popular press community also utilize these codes, though they may disagree with the 91's value judgments. Article 66, for example, describes the "average mindfulness practitioner" as "a suburban soccer mom who meditates in order to increase her work efficiency, deal with her kids' needs, watch what she eats and keep her sanity." This perception of mindfulness practitioners as people trying to be more efficient and deal with a range of problems or challenges is in line with article 91's understanding of Western mindfulness. Mindfulness serves active purposes.

The goal of this particular article (66), however, appears to be to dispel common myths regarding mindfulness. The author points out that "[w]hen a foreign practice becomes mainstream [i.e., when an Eastern practice is exported to the West], naturally, some confusion occurs." Among the myths the author attempts to dispel is that mindfulness has always been used as a tool for self-improvement. He points to examples of how mindfulness, in Western culture,

has become a “hot trend” and is applied “to specific daily activities...to enhance those various activities.” He cites a number of media including books, TED talks, and websites that help the practitioner overcome a variety of difficulties or ailments, or to simply increase the pleasure of certain activities. The author offers “mindful parenting” as a method by which parents are actively trying to improve their parenting skills. He also mentions mindful sports, mindful work, and mindful eating as examples.

Article 66 goes on to argue, however, that in Eastern or Buddhist tradition, “mindfulness was typically used to create detachment from desire and to help achieve nirvana,” nirvana being understood as a state of freedom from desire and attachment. This statement supports article 91’s view that Eastern and Western interpretations of mindfulness, as they are understood here, are opposed in many ways. The means through which article 66’s author discusses this difference contains a different tone, however. He writes, “Americans have little tolerance for renunciation, and so mindfulness has been reoriented to provide us with the benefits we do seek.” In other words, Americans are not “cut out” for Eastern mindfulness, so they have modified it in a way that fits with their existing worldview and preferences.

Though there is much evidence that supports this active, change-oriented code within Western discussions of mindfulness, it does not always prevent the discussion and promotion of a more subdued, non-active code, one that aligns more closely with Eastern understandings of the concept. For example, article 91 pointed to “quieting” in its discussions of Eastern mindfulness and juxtaposed this orientation with the more active, Western approach. Yet, many of the same articles that discuss the active nature of mindfulness, its change-orientation, and its productive capacities also refer to it as a “quieting” process and/or related terms such as “relaxing” or “calming.” This idea of quieting appears in many popular press articles:

- “during meditation the brain acts to quiet the body” (52)
- “your conscious thinking needs to be quiet” (53)
- “quiet down” (54)
- “quiet moments” (55)
- “quiet their mind” (59)
- “sit there quietly” (64)
- “quiet and calm time” (67);
- “quiet space” (72)
- “quietening the mind” (73)
- “The Big Quiet” (75)
- “being in quiet” (75)
- “quieting your mind” (82)
- “quiets their mind” (84)
- “get quiet” (85)
- “sit quietly” (86)
- “fall quiet” (90)
- “quiet reflection” (90)
- “quiet time” (90)
- “quiet moment” (93)
- “quiet” (95)
- “we tell kids to be quiet” (98)

“Relax” is common as well:

- “relaxing” (52)

- “evoking a relaxation response” (52)
- “focus on breathing and relaxation” (54)
- “just relax” (56)
- “sit down and relax” (58)
- “relax their bodies” (59)
- “relaxation apps” (59)
- “mindfulness can help children relax” (60)
- “considerably more relaxed” (67)
- “helps them to relax” (74)
- “relax your body” (86)
- “felt more relaxed” (87)

As is “calm”:

- “calming yourself down” (64)
- “the mind is calm” (64)
- “calm time” (67)
- “restoring calm” (70)
- “calming benefits” (70)
- “calm the mind” (73)
- “calmness” (74)
- “calm and content” (74)
- “calm” (92)
- “helps children feel calmer” (94)
- “can calm everyday life” (97)

Some articles even discuss the *active* benefits of staying relaxed and calm, utilizing these seemingly mutually exclusive codes in conjunction:

- “a relaxed-alert frame of mind”
- “stay calmer at work” (65)
- “can bring more calm and effectiveness” (97)
- “calm down, stay on task” (98)

Therefore, it appears that two codes that might on the surface seem to be opposed, are sometimes utilized by the same communicators within the popular press community, as if they go hand-in-hand. Mindfulness is both an active and non-active process, all at the same time. It is of note that this distinction between active and non-active understandings of mindfulness was not found in academic articles.

Mindfulness and Productivity in the Work Environment

In the previous section, a connection was drawn (Article 91) between Western mindfulness and the philosophy of Adam Smith, considered by many to be the “father of capitalism” (e.g., Bassiry & Jones, 1993). Similarly, an emphasis was placed on the productive capacities of mindfulness or the ways in which mindfulness contributes to solving problems through active thinking. Additional language from the popular press community reinforcing a code of active productivity is provided in this section to make the argument that it is indeed present in this discourse. Specifically, this section points to discussions of productivity within work or employment environments, reinforcing Article 91’s remarks regarding the connection between mindfulness and capitalism.

Employing the SPEAKING framework, I was able to identify three primary means by which this code of active productivity manifests in popular press discussions of mindfulness,

with respect to work. The first is present in discussions of who it is, exactly, that participates (P) in mindfulness practice. Determining who the community believes is or should be engaged in mindfulness practice reveals something about this community's norms and values.

The words "employee" or "employees" were used 30 times across popular press articles. Out of all words and phrases coded for "participants," employee(s) ranked third in total number of uses, behind only "you" and "patients." Related, "companies" had a similar number of mentions throughout all popular press articles and was a close fourth in total mentions within the words and phrases coded as "participants." Examples of these uses include the following:

- "Leading companies...have meditation programs for their employees" (54)
- "many companies have "home grown" meditation practices, where it started with one employee" (55)
- "Mindfulness helps employees" (57)
- "Google now offers their 52,000 employees free lessons in mindfulness" (64)
- "create happier employees" (80)
- "offer mindfulness programs to their employees" (81)
- "mindfulness training for employees" (83)
- "help the employee adjust" (83)
- "facilitate the well-being of employees" (83)
- "encourages employees" (86)
- "sending their employees to classes" (91)
- "some insurance companies" (52)
- "Leading companies" (54)

- “companies that are incorporating meditation, mindfulness, and yoga” (55)
- “Mindfulness can help companies achieve” (57)

Given the prevalence of these terms within the Participants category, it is clear that the popular press community views employees and companies as some of the primary practitioners and beneficiaries of mindfulness.

The second SPEAKING component that highlights the code of activity and productivity within the work setting for the popular press community is “Setting.” Based on the passages coded for this category, it is clear that the popular press community understands mindfulness as something that can, and perhaps should, be practiced in work environments. For example, mindfulness can be practiced,

- “in the corporate board room” (54)
- “in the business world” (51)
- for companies such as Google, Aetna, General Mills, Apple, and Ford Motor (54, 86, 91)
- “[in] the workflow” (55)
- “at [a] desk at work” (55)
- “around the office at work” (55)
- and at “corporations” (84)

The application of mindfulness is also discussed within military environments and in schools (e.g., Articles 87, 90, and 98).

The third relevant component is “Ends,” which comprises the outcomes, goals, and purposes of mindfulness, with respect to the work environment. In popular press discussions, mindfulness is considered something that can:

- “help companies achieve their strategic priorities” (57)
- “build a resilient workforce” (57)
- “create happier employees” (80)
- “increase work efficiency” (66)
- “helps us manage even more work and stimulation” (66)
- “make CEOs more effective” (80)
- “help consumers save money” (80)
- “increase productivity and happiness in the workplace” (86)
- encourage “employees to be more adept at working with their minds, promotes better performance, benefiting the larger team, clients, customers, and stakeholders” (86)
- is “a way to improve employee health, increase productivity, decrease absenteeism and presenteeism” (101)
- and is “important to becoming an exceptionally effective leader or manager” (81)

If a person becomes unemployed, it “helps better withstand the stress of unemployment” (92).

The tangible benefits of mindfulness are one of the main foci within popular press articles, and framing these benefits within the corporate or work environment is one of the most popular approaches within this community. The productive ends of mindfulness are also discussed with respect to similar realms such as in the military and in schools. Mindfulness is something that can “enhance the performance of troops,” it can “help warfighters think more clearly under fire when they are often forced to make quick decisions that could mean life or death,” and it “help[s] reset their nervous systems after being in combat” (87). In schools, it has

been found to “[decrease suspensions] by 79 percent” and “attendance and academic performance noticeably increased” (90, 98), including “higher math scores” (98).

This code of active productivity is present in popular press discourse, but it is absent from the academic article discourse analyzed for this project. None of the academic articles discussed the benefits of mindfulness for employees or business interests or goals. The word “employee(s)” was used six times total across all academic articles, always in a brief citation of a study in which employees had been recruited as participants. When mindfulness in the workplace was mentioned, it was to demonstrate the wide range of research environments in which mindfulness has been applied, often outside of the academy.

The presence of the code of active productivity in popular press discourse reveals something about the ways in which this community conceives of mindfulness. For the popular press community, mindfulness is often a tool of productivity. It is something that can be incorporated into our existing economic and work structures in order to increase output. The benefits of mindfulness in this context, one of two most salient contexts discussed within this community (the other being the health context which will be discussed later), are explicitly about “increasing productivity” (101), “helping companies achieve their strategic priorities” (57), and “helping consumers save money” (80). In other words, the goals of mindfulness, conceived in this manner, fit neatly with the goals of the capitalist free market, where more effective, more efficient work (greater productivity) is expected to lead to increased output and thereby increased success and happiness. This conceptualization of mindfulness diverges significantly from the Eastern vision of the concept and its non-active code, one in which the aim of mindfulness is to create freedom from attachment and desire, to quiet the mind, relax, and be calm. This Eastern

vision of mindfulness is even understood by some to be an “antidote to consumerism” (8), certainly running counter to a consumerist-nested vision of mindfulness.

This being said, there is also the presence of a counter-code that pushes back against what is seen as “corporate mindfulness” (83) and the argument of mindfulness becoming too “consumerist” (93, 95). Article 83 argues that, not only are the benefits of mindfulness in the workplace being overstated and the results of relevant studies overgeneralized, but providing these mindfulness programs in business environments is akin to “dangling a carrot” in front of employees to keep them productive, while providing the illusion of company concern for their health. The author writes, “the drive to celebrate the links between mindfulness and wellness and organizational good is not free from the workings of power.” These linkages may be part of a “political endeavor to secure and legitimate the interests of corporations.”

Another popular press article (93), titled “The Hidden Price of Mindfulness Inc.,” states that “[t]hese days, it seems as if everyone is peddling mindfulness.” The author goes on to list the variety of contexts and situations in which mindfulness is being applied, as well as celebrities and well-known organizations who publicly endorse the practice. Examples include major sports teams and major corporations. The article reports a plethora of mindfulness consumer products, such as mindfulness apps, online mindfulness courses, and mindful tea. Though the author does not question the benefits of mindfulness, he does ask if mindfulness “can be bought as easily as a pair of Lululemon yoga pants?” For the author, the answer appears to be no: “With so many mindful goods and services for sale, it can be easy to forget that mindfulness is a quality of being, not a piece of merchandise.” He laments the fact that mindfulness has become a multibillion-dollar industry, simply another part of Western consumer culture.

Similarly, Article 95 notes that “[m]aybe the word ‘mindfulness’ is like the Prius emblem, a badge of enlightened and self-satisfied consumerism, and of success and achievement.” The author ultimately offers a damning critique of this Western, consumerist interpretation of mindfulness and, by extension, the mindfulness code of active productivity:

Putting a neuroscience halo around a byword for both uppers (“productivity”) and downers (“relaxation”) — to ensure a more compliant work force and a more prosperous C-suite — also seems twisted. No one word, however shiny, however intriguingly Eastern, however bolstered by science, can ever fix the human condition. And that’s what commercial mindfulness may have lost from the most rigorous Buddhist tenets it replaced: the implication that suffering cannot be escaped but must be faced.

Related to this pushback against productivity, some popular press articles also discuss the notion of “doing nothing” or getting out of the “doing” mindset. Article 72 says we should train ourselves “not to be afraid of doing nothing.” Another article positions mindfulness as an antidote to “never feeling as though we’re doing enough or doing it well” (85). Again, however, many articles incorporate the code of active productivity even as they seemingly promote the less-active code. For example, Article 86 advocates for the setting aside of the achievement-oriented attitude (“Don’t try to succeed”), even as it provides “7 tips for merging mindfulness into the workplace,” aimed at “enhanc[ing] productivity.”

In sum, the popular press community often employs a code of active productivity in its discussions of mindfulness. Its benefits are often explained in terms of the boosts in productivity and output that, it is argued, it confers. In addition, both the participants engaged in mindfulness and the settings in which mindfulness takes place are described in ways that highlight mindfulness’ possible relationships to work or business contexts. The practitioner is portrayed as an “employee” or “company,” who engages in mindfulness practice in a corporate or work environment. For the popular press community, the value of mindfulness appears to reside in its

ability to contribute to greater productivity for its participants. One conclusion that this talk suggests is that the popular press community places a great deal of importance on the value of productivity. But it does so at times with an incompatible message about the importance of non-action and there is a counter-code suggesting that the ‘selling’ of mindfulness can be problematic.

Mindfulness as a Health Tool or Technique: A Health Communication Code

One common pattern across these two communities with respect to their communication regarding mindfulness is the identification of mindfulness as a tool or technique of health. In other words, a health communication code is present. This section investigates the different components of this health communication code across both academic and popular press communities. Components include psychological or mental health, emotional health, physical health, mental skills, and behavioral health.

Rather than imposing artificial categories onto the data, these components arose from the data itself. In the literature review portion of this study, I originally categorized the benefits of mindfulness—as described in the literature—into three categories: mental/emotional health, physical health, and relational health. When examining the data corpus, however, different distinctions arose. Mental benefits and emotional benefits seemed to be discussed in ways that indicated a separation between these two concepts. Whereas mental health in this study entails discussions of stress and psychological challenges such as PTSD, items under the emotional health umbrella include explicit mentions of emotion, emotional reactivity, and feelings. This is in line with many conceptualizations of wellness, which distinguish between these two categories of health (e.g., National Wellness Institute, 1976).

Similarly, this and other models include a category for physical health, which was also apparent throughout this corpus of data. Though certainly connected with other aforementioned categories, what I term “behavioral health” arose as something distinct in and of itself. This category includes descriptions of substance abuse, smoking, sleep problems, and disciplining children. Given that these behavior-centric benefits of mindfulness emerged often, and generally in contexts that did not lend themselves to explicit identification with other categories, I created this separate category. Lastly, I created a category I identified as “mental skills.” This was in response to a multitude of noted benefits that were related in some ways to these other categories, but did not neatly well into any of them. Specifically, this category incorporates mental abilities that seem to always be considered positive, such as cognitive flexibility, self-observation skills, focus, awareness, and attention.

When analyzing the language of both academic and popular press communities, a health communication code was evidenced by at least three of the SPEAKING dimensions: Setting, Participants, and Ends. The previous section described how the popular press community often discusses mindfulness as something taking place in corporate or work settings. Popular press articles also talk much about how “employees” and “companies” are the ones who (should) practice mindfulness. Academic articles were not discussed often in that section, as there were few to no mentions of these settings or participants.

Both communities, however, discuss mindfulness as taking place in healthcare settings (S), and they discuss how it is practiced by “patients” (P), though the academic articles in this corpus are significantly more likely to discuss mindfulness as taking place in specific healthcare settings. This community describes mindfulness as taking place:

- “in the health care system” (30)

- in “inner city health centers” (30)
- in “hospital stress clinics” (6)
- “at the hospital” (9, 29, 42)
- “in the hospital setting” (13, 31)
- “in hospitals and academic medical centers” (17, 30)
- “in a range of clinical settings” (18, 31)
- “during hospital sessions” (29)
- in an “outpatient behavioral medicine clinic” (29)
- in “hospitals and clinics around the world” (30)
- “in health care clinics” (41)
- and at “psychiatric hospitals” (47)

Though popular press articles also sometimes point out that mindfulness is practiced “in hospitals” (52, 99) or in a “clinic” (77, 99), this occurs significantly less frequently than it does in academic articles.

Academic articles are also more likely to talk about how mindfulness is practiced by “patients”: the participants. The words “patients” and “patient” are used 1,290 times throughout all academic articles. This is contrasted with the 62 uses in popular press articles. Of course, academic articles are longer than popular press articles, and this must be taken into account. But even after accounting for this difference, there remains a substantial disparity. It is also important to note that “patients” were by far the most commonly coded type of participant for academic articles. The next two closest were “individuals” and “students.” For popular press articles, the most commonly referenced participant was “you,” followed by “patients.” One can conclude from this that, in the academic community, the typical mindfulness practitioner is understood to

be a clinical patient. This aligns well with the emphasis on hospitals and other healthcare settings as the locations or settings in which mindfulness is discussed as being practiced.

Perhaps the most common topic of general discussion across both academic and popular press articles is the plethora of benefits (“Ends”) that mindfulness practice provides its practitioners. The benefits discussed cover an extensive range, from the benefits in productivity discussed earlier, to relational benefits, to a wide assortment of health benefits. The latter are by far the most commonly discussed. These two communities describe mindfulness as:

- “a form of medication and as preventative medicine,” a “medical treatment,” and “self-care” (52)
- “alternative therapy” (61, 71)
- a “mental workout” (64, 87)
- “mind-body exercise” (88, 94)
- “mind/body or integrative medicine” (17)
- “a clinical intervention” (25)
- “a formal ‘medicine’ for treating human nature’s fundamental ‘dis-ease’” (30)
- an “effective and legitimate healthcare strategy” (2)
- a “psychosocial intervention” (6, 20)
- a “hot new trend in mental health” (80, 97)
- “just the next generation of exercise” (64)

Though these are more general examples of a health communication code, deeper patterns emerge when examining the types of health benefits discussed by these two communities.

The “Ends” category from the SPEAKING framework is relevant to this point. After coding all of the ends/outcomes/benefits of mindfulness for each article, I categorized them by

type. When examining the ends of mindfulness for academic articles, it was clear that there was an emphasis on psychological or mental health benefits. For example, academic articles mention the following benefits of mindfulness classified under this heading:

- it helps people deal with borderline personality disorder (1)
- (recurrent) depression (1, 7)
- depression (2, 15)
- obsessive compulsive disorder (2)
- psychoticism (2)
- paranoid ideation (2)
- anxiety disorders (1, 2, 15)
- neuroticism (5)
- it “reduces psychological distress” (1, 20)
- “reduces overall psychological symptomatology” (2)
- aids in “relapse prevention in affective disorders” (2)
- increases “positive affect” (17)
- fosters greater psychophysical well-being (2)
- increases self-confidence and “self-esteem (2, 21, 31)
- improves psychological well-being (3, 4, 15)
- decreases psychological symptoms (4, 5)
- lowers “experiential avoidance” (5, 20, 23)
- reduces “escape and avoidance behaviors” (5, 7)
- reduces stress (6, 7, 11, 13)
- aids in psychosocial adaptation (6)

- lowers total mood disturbance (6, 11)
- helps with panic disorders (6)
- and eating disorders (6, 24)
- promotes happiness (8)
- promotes good mental health (5, 7)
- discourages rumination and obsession and brooding (10, 15, 23, 38)
- enhances cognitive functioning (24)
- reduces mental anguish (38)
- and “provides greater peace of mind” (26)
- allowing people to “live more at ease” (13)

The articles mentioned here are merely a selection of the total number of articles discussing any particular topic. For example, many articles mentioned the benefits of mindfulness for depression, though I only list two. This is also not an exhaustive list of every psychological/mental benefit discussed by the academic community, but it does cover the most prominent examples.

The popular press community also discusses the psychological/mental health impacts of mindfulness, though to a lesser extent. Popular press articles discuss mindfulness as:

- stress reduction (52, 53, 58)
- relief for anxiety and panic (52, 59, 61)
- an aid for depression (58, 61)
- insomnia (61, 62)
- PTSD (66, 80)
- rumination (81)

- social anxiety (94)
- ADHD and bipolar disorder (94)
- and it “can help improve mood” (86)
- and “clear and clam the mind” (62)

The two communities are closer to equal in the amount of attention they give to emotional health issues. Academic articles talk about how mindfulness:

- Is correlated with emotional intelligence (5)
- reduces emotional reactivity (1, 5, 10)
- helps a person “self-manage emotional distress” (6, 7, 16, 20)
- treats emotion disorders (7)
- increases emotional well-being (7)
- provides “clarity of feelings” (20)
- and aids in “transforming destructive emotions” (23)

Similarly, popular press articles also mention mindfulness’ positive effects on:

- emotional reactivity (81)
- and emotion regulation (81, 94)
- its soothing effects (52)
- helping “users find calm” (59, 67, 72)
- making you “more upbeat” (87)
- it can help one become more emotionally intelligent (81)
- making you “less angry” (90)
- helps lessen anger (94, 96)
- and more generally provides great emotional rewards (96)

The two communities differ, however, with respect to the amount they discuss physical health issues of mindfulness. The popular press articles provide greater diversity in this category and discuss them with more regularity. For example, academic articles tend to focus on:

- chronic pain (12, 24, 29)
- immunological resistance (10, 12, 24, 17)
- specific disorders such as fibromyalgia (12)
- epilepsy (12)
- psoriasis (12, 30)
- hypertension (12, 40)
- diabetes (22)
- and blood pressure (13, 24)

On the other hand, popular press articles cover a much wider spectrum, if perhaps in less detail than in academic articles. They discuss mindfulness' effects on issues such as:

- chronic pain (52)
- more general types of physical pain (52, 53, 61)
- and specific types such as lower back pain (62, 68, 73)
- heart disease (52)
- cancer (52, 80)
- HIV infection and AIDS (52)
- headaches (52)
- migraines (98)
- high blood pressure (52, 62)
- heart attack and stroke (52)

- fatigue (52, 78, 88)
- skin disorders (52)
- immune system functioning (62, 71, 81)
- “coping with bodily change” (63)
- “overcoming sexual dysfunction and increasing the pleasure of intercourse” (66)
- increasing mobility (73)
- and overall “physical rejuvenation” (94)

The two communities also differ on how they discuss mental “skills” that come from practicing mindfulness. Academic articles describe how mindfulness makes one better able to “shift his or her attention flexibly” (3), and it

- “improves cognitive flexibility” (20, 23, 37)
- “improves attention” (7)
- improves “performance measures of working memory” (15)
- helps one “avoid errors related to absentmindedness” (4)
- “improves self-observation skills” (5)...
- ...of things such as sensations, feelings (5, 6)...
- ...“mental events” (7)...
- ...and “what is happening in the here-and-now” (7)

Popular press articles also describe how mindfulness can:

- “increase cognitive flexibility” (81, 94)
- prevent people from “being distracted” (99)
- help them “focus” (62, 63, 70)

- and “increase awareness” (52)...
- ...of “mental events” (65)
- and is related to “improvements in attention and memory” (64)

But popular articles also provide a lot more specificity in this category, similar to when discussing physical health. They talk about how mindfulness can “build awareness for cravings,” and help one choose how to respond to them (51, 69). They cover how it can help a person:

- “resist damaging thoughts or moods” (65)
- “step out of difficult thought patterns” (67)
- “gain clarity to solve problems” (57, 58)
- become more “creative” (57, 71, 100)
- “build resilience” (58, 81)
- encourage a mental “state of acceptance” (67, 93)
- and can specifically help “children focus” (60, 66)

This emphasis on specificity and its implications will be discussed later in this paper.

Behavioral health is another topic that is addressed by these two communities and another on which the popular press community focuses much more attention. The academic articles mention that mindfulness cultivates “[a]ttitudes of non-judging, acceptance and patience” (13, 17) and can improve “sleep quality” (11, 12). There were, however, few mentions of benefits of mindfulness in academic articles that would fall under this behavioral health category. On the other hand, discussions within the popular press articles are rife with examples.

Mindfulness is viewed as:

- a “treatment for smoking” (51)
- “at least as effective as current treatments with helping patients quit alcohol, cocaine, and gambling” (51)

- able to “treat addiction” (64)
- helping “build healthier behaviors” more generally (51)
- “help[ing] you be more patient” (56, 58, 60)
- allowing “you to respond rather than react in the angry, fearful moments so you cause no harm” (56, 60)
- helping one have “an easier time climbing up stairs, pulling on socks, and getting up out of a chair,” (62)
- helping a mother “deal with her kids’ needs” and “watch what she eats” (66)
- able to “de-escalate discipline problems” (98)
- and able to “curve fighting in children” (99)

In sum, both academic and popular press communities employ a health communication code when talking about mindfulness. In other words, they understand mindfulness as something intimately connected with health. This study has found, however, that the academic community is more likely to talk about mindfulness as a psychological or mental health treatment, whereas the popular press community is more likely to discuss it in terms of its physical and behavioral health benefits as well as its positive effects for various mental skills.

What do these differences tell us about how each community understands mindfulness? To begin, it seems clear that the academic community views mindfulness primarily as a practice aimed at alleviating psychological or mental challenges people face. This is, communally, more important than mindfulness’ positive implications for the other types of health or mental skills. This particular emphasis might be traced back to Kabat-Zinn’s original clinical studies on stress reduction, the work that was seminal for this growing field of academic mindfulness studies. On

the other hand, this study finds that the popular press community is more concerned with mindfulness' effects on physical and behavioral health along with increases in mental skills.

When considering the implications of these findings, it is important to consider the audiences for which these articles are intended. Academic articles are intended for an academic audience. Given that the majority of the academic articles in this data corpus deal with issues of psychological and mental health, we might expect these articles to come from a psychological background or be published in that field or related fields. This is indeed the case. It appears that mindfulness within the academic community assessed here is understood as something psychological or mental in nature, and its most useful applications relate to psychological research.

On the other hand, the audience for the popular press community is the general reader, often addressed as "you" in these articles. As noted, "you" is the most commonly coded participant in mindfulness practices as described by the popular press and the second most common word of substance (excluding words like "it" and "is") throughout these articles, behind only "mindfulness." Therefore, the reader seems of primary importance in this discussion of mindfulness and its benefits. What one sees are benefits that the article authors (and thus the popular press community) believe the readers will find most relevant, accessible, and/or applicable to their own lives. These appear to be more specific and "tangible" benefits or outcomes that are accessible to just about anyone: mental skills, physical health, and behavioral health. Thus, as discussed in the popular press community, mindfulness is something that is accessible to just about anyone and can be applied across a great variety of scenarios. This is doubly true when we consider the great depth in which the popular press also discusses mindfulness' benefits for productivity, described in the previous section.

These differing foci highlight a core distinction between the ways in which academic and popular press communities talk about mindfulness. Whereas the academic community is primarily focused on communicating within its own realm to its own members, the popular press community's messages are directed at a mass audience of readers who may have diverse backgrounds, interests, and desires. For the latter then, messages are constructed to be most appealing or interesting to this diverse population. Therefore, when discussing how mindfulness relates to health and provides health benefits, the popular press community talks about mindfulness with respect to those aspects of mindfulness which are the most accessible to the widest audience: physical benefits, behavioral benefits, and mental skills. Given that the majority of the population gets its information on mindfulness from these types of popular sources, one implication of this difference in community talk concerning mindfulness is that mindfulness may be increasingly understood by the general population as something that primarily addresses these particular health concerns or benefits, at the expense of its relationships to psychological or mental health concerns.

Interpersonal Communication and Relational Benefits

A final aspect of these discussions to be discussed in this study supports this thesis: that what the popular press community focuses on in discussing mindfulness is its tangible benefits, which can be applied to just about anyone's lives. This is its focus when centering on interpersonal communication and the relational benefits of mindfulness as well. Again, both academic articles and the popular press discuss mindfulness in terms of communication and/or relationships, but the popular press community does so in greater depth.

Two academic articles in this study's corpus specifically mention, albeit briefly, that mindfulness can take place within interpersonal communication and behavior (9, 16). Other

articles cite or find interpersonal and relational benefits for mindfulness and list them briefly.

These are:

- “improvements with respect to interpersonal sensitivity” (2)
- greater “psychosocial adaptation” (6)
- helping “curtail[] negative functioning and enhancing positive outcomes in interpersonal relationships” (10)
- allowing for “enhanced relationship capacities” (10)
- helping a husband in “relating more kindly to his wife” (40)
- and “may have helped students cultivate listening skills” (43)

Aside from these brief mentions, no academic articles in this data corpus engaged in depth or gave much attention to interpersonal or relational benefits of mindfulness, though studies outside of this corpus have such benefits (or contexts) as their focus.

On the other hand, the topic enjoys much attention within popular press articles. For example, they mention that mindfulness can occur “during conversations” (58) and “as you talk to people” (58, 59). One article discusses how a person can “love mindfully” (81) Several articles list various interpersonal and relational benefits of mindfulness. It can:

- “improv[e] your romantic relationships” (56)
- “enable you to approach your partner with curiosity so that you can continue to get to know him or her” (56)
- “help you note your feelings so you can communication them to your partner” (56)
- “be able to be present for what your partner is saying without the need to solve his or her problem... you can relax and just listen” (56)
- help “create healthy relationships, and this builds trust” (57)

- help “you say what you mean” (56)
- lead to “improved communication” (57)
- “improve your relationship with children” (60)
- “improve our relationships” more generally (71)
- “helps us develop the ability to keep ourselves from saying or doing something we later regret” (72)
- “strengthen connection with friends” (72)
- lead to “relationship satisfaction” (81)
- provide “benefits for social skills” (98)
- and, as one person cited in these articles states, mindfulness “makes me a better listener” (99).

In addition to these listed benefits, there are a few mentions within popular press articles of how mindfulness can be practiced or generated, specifically through interpersonal communication. For example, one article (56) calls upon the reader to “notice the impact you have on each other,” referring to a romantic couple. It suggests that you “pay attention to your partner’s facial expressions when you’re saying something,” a type of focused attention associated with mindfulness. One should be aware of “how your words and attitudes are affecting others” (58). This all is related to “being present in a conversation” (56), “being present” representing another stock phrase of mindfulness discussions. Last, it suggests that it is possible to engage in the interpersonal practice of mindfulness by simply “be[ing] in silence together” (56).

This deeper discussion of the interpersonal and relational benefits of mindfulness in popular press articles suggests something about its perceived scope of mindfulness’ applications and usefulness. It reinforces the thesis that this community is more focused on what might be

referred to as the more immediate, tangible benefits of mindfulness than is the academic community, given in part that these sorts of interpersonal and relational benefits are more widely applicable to a general audience than are the more specific psychological or mental benefits, which mainly focus on psychological and mental disorders.

The emphasis on the interpersonal and relational benefits of mindfulness is clear in the discussions of these articles, particularly in the popular press community. It is therefore worth identifying, as it provides further evidence for the earlier claim that the popular press is generally more concerned than the academic community with mindfulness' more immediate, tangible benefits. This frame of analysis connects less substantially with the bulk of this research, however. It therefore is less thoroughly integrated into the overall conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Research Questions

Throughout this study, I have been concerned with varying meanings of the concept of “mindfulness.” I began by noting that mindfulness as a concept and as a practice has gained significant recognition, being referenced and employed in a significant number of academic studies, clinical treatments, and in various popular press outlets. I indicated that, within these literatures, sweeping conclusions have been drawn about mindfulness, its relationships to various other variables, and its impacts or benefits. I provided detail on many of these articles, along with the conclusions often drawn concerning mindfulness’ benefits or more general impacts. I also pointed out that there is a great deal of definitional and conceptual confusion or disagreement concerning the term among varying communities, and that this has implications for the validity and reliability of mindfulness research, and potentially for patient health, among other concerns.

In order to lay the groundwork for this detailed investigation, I first provided an extensive historical background on the term mindfulness and its applications. I described the first uses of the term, its origins in translations of the Sanskrit word *sati*, conceptual disagreements, and its differing applications across a variety of sources. I then performed a detailed Ethnography of Communication analysis to assess the varying meanings and values imbued within the term mindfulness by these different communities, to better understand what they mean when they talk about mindfulness. In selecting the materials for this study, I chose to engage with the written communication of two communities: the academic community and the popular press community. For the former, I collected the 50 most-cited academic articles discussing “mindfulness.” For the latter, I determined the 10 most popular online news media outlets and performed a search for

each to locate five articles discussing mindfulness, for a total of 55 popular press articles, or 105 total combined articles.¹⁴

There is no extant published research providing this extensive of an examination of mindfulness discourse. Within academic fields, several meta-analyses have been conducted that seek to determine the efficacy of mindfulness practices and treatments on a broad spectrum of issues. One of the most extensive meta-analyses was compiled by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2014). I also came across several academic and popular press works that have sought to address the definitional and conceptual confusions regarding mindfulness. One such article, published in the *New York Times*, is entitled “The Muddied Meaning of ‘Mindfulness’” (2015). The title seemingly conveys the general sentiment of the article as well as of the present study. In a more detailed research investigation, Sun (2014) conducted an “historical discourse analysis” of mindfulness and provides an excellent thematic breakdown of her findings, many of which parallel the findings of this current study. Wilson (2014) investigates the concept in a similar manner and provides even more historical background on mindfulness. Again, many of the same themes arise and are expounded upon.

The primary characteristics differentiating this present study from the aforementioned two, however, are the type of materials collected and the data collection and analysis methodologies. The sampling for this study was designed to collect the most prominent voices in discussions regarding mindfulness, as opposed to an arbitrary selection of voices, or a sample of convenience. The logic for this approach was that, if we are attempting to understand what mindfulness means to particular communities, it is necessary to engage with the most prominent,

¹⁴ As noted in the methodology section, this ended up being 11 outlets, for a total of 55 popular press articles.

most referenced voices. The study was also designed to generate a balance between the number of viewpoints from both academic and popular press communities, which again differs from the data selection criteria for both Sun (2014) and Wilson (2014).

A larger methodological difference between the present study and those conducted by Sun and Wilson is my choice to take an Ethnography of Communication approach. In this study, I performed a communication codes analysis on a corpus of academic journal articles and popular press articles to determine if they employed any communication codes in their discussions of mindfulness. These communication codes were examined as reflecting and reinforcing commonly understood community meanings and values regarding mindfulness.

I posed two research questions to aid in exploring this conceptual confusion concerning mindfulness. This section summarizes my responses to each of the two questions:

RQ1: In what ways do meanings of mindfulness differ within and between academic and popular press communities?

RQ2: What communication codes are utilized by these two communities, which evidence and enforce community norms and assumptions with respect to mindfulness?

Research Question 1 allowed me to take a 10,000-foot initial perspective regarding the focus of this study, beginning from a very general point and then becoming narrower in concentration throughout the course of the project. I therefore began by casting a wide net and approaching the material from a variety of angles, each of which I hoped would help me better understand how these two communities understand mindfulness.

I documented each instance in which an article defined mindfulness explicitly. I then sought to find commonalities within and between the academic and popular press communities with respect to how they defined the term. I conducted various “word crunches” that allowed me

to identify words and phrases that were used most often in these definitions by members of both communities. I focused on specific words that were associated most often with mindfulness, such as “attention,” “awareness,” and “meditation.” This method gave me a clearer picture of how members explicitly conceive of mindfulness. Similarly, I closely examined the language employed in these articles to determine what mindfulness means to community members by focusing on what they say mindfulness *isn't*.

In part, it was this question that more explicitly began my more formal investigation of RQ2, in which I sought to identify cultural communication codes that would help me understand how these communities conceive of mindfulness. Although the two research questions are related and overlap to some extent, I utilized this distinction (one question focused explicitly on meaning more generally and the other focused on identifying communication codes, which imply meaning) to guide my approach to data analysis and found it useful in helping to organize my approach to data collection and analysis. In examining the data regarding what mindfulness is *not*, I was able to identify a communication code that conceptualized mindfulness as something distinct from what some popular press articles termed “woo woo” or “hippie” practices. In other words, there was a vocal contingent in this community that defined mindfulness in opposition to these notions, and argued that it has become “mainstreamed,” implying greater accessibility to mindfulness practitioners.

This cued me to look more closely at discussions of mindfulness concerning what I later described as “spiritual” language, such as “chanting, bowing, sitting cross-legged, or burning incense” (Article 81), or using the term spiritual language directly. I discovered what I went on to describe as a “spiritual code” throughout both academic and popular press communities. By this I mean both communities had a tendency to describe mindfulness using spiritual language,

as conceptualized by a number of sources. Not only did spiritual language permeate their descriptions of what mindfulness is, but it was also prevalent in discussions of the benefits (or “Ends”) of mindfulness. Among the benefits of mindfulness enumerated were “wisdom,” “compassion,” “insight into self,” and the like.

This distinct use of spiritual language and focus on spiritual outcomes of mindfulness implies that spirituality may be a core component of mindfulness, as it is understood within both of these communities. Although the word “spiritual” itself appears in a fraction of the articles when explicitly conceptualizing mindfulness, the otherwise pervasiveness of spiritual language indicates a strong implicit emphasis. Though one might initially assume that this connection has much to do with linkages between mindfulness and Buddhist or other religious practices as described in the language of these articles (given that many in these communities view mindfulness as a Buddhist or religious practice), even the articles that discuss mindfulness as secular in nature communicate with this spiritual code, indicating otherwise. In addition, the presence of spiritual language within the discussions of mindfulness’ benefits stands apart from similar language use in sections of these articles more directly discussing its religious or spiritual origins.

Continuing the investigation for communication codes present within these two communities’ discourses, I uncovered discussions contrasting what were termed Eastern and Western mindfulness. More specifically, two codes emerged: A Western, active productivity code and an Eastern, non-active code. The goals of Eastern mindfulness, as discussed in many of these articles, was to quiet the mind and suspend thought. This was juxtaposed with Western mindfulness, which “centers on active thinking” (91) and was described more often in terms of problem-solving.

The Western understanding of mindfulness appeared to be the dominant perspective in the popular press community. It is clear that this community views mindfulness as a tool of productivity, something that can be incorporated into and improve existing economic structures. This is evidenced by the ubiquity of language concerning “employees,” talk of “building a resilient workforce,” and multiple discussions of the economic benefits of mindfulness. Mindfulness has clearly been adapted to fit neatly into pre-existing Western capitalistic norms. This is not to say that there were not voices of dissent decrying this perspective, however. One popular press community member points out that, originally, “mindfulness was typically used to create detachment from desire and to help achieve nirvana” (66), nirvana being understood as a state of freedom from desire and attachment. The author argues that mindfulness has been repurposed to cater to modern Americans, who “have little tolerance for renunciation.”

Scholars and other authors have noted previously what they describe as an inappropriate employment of mindfulness theory and practice. Sun (2014), for example, provides a critique of these sorts of contemporary developments concerning mindfulness, referring to the removal of the Buddhist origins or meanings of mindfulness as the “de-Buddhification” of mindfulness. Sun points out that when mindfulness is discussed, there is often little or no reference made to its Buddhist roots: It has, for Sun, lost its cultural connections and become something else entirely. She notes that this separation served to facilitate the mainstreaming of mindfulness in Western culture, wherein mindfulness is framed in a way identifying it more broadly with “a wide range of religious and spiritual traditions, as well as Western philosophy and psychology” (Sun, 2014, p. 400). Others argue that this is a form of cultural appropriation, where cultural traditions are selected and applied sporadically and preferentially, without concern for their origins or the impacts of such action (e.g., Gethin, 2011; Moyer, 2015; Ng & Purser, 2015).

Purser and Loy (2013) make an argument similar to Sun's (2014), claiming that mindfulness has become "a lucrative cottage industry" in which the term is applied to a wide array of contexts, many of which are in fact counter to the original aims of Buddhist-inspired mindfulness itself. The authors point out that mindfulness has become "a stripped down, secularized technique" (Purser & Loy, 2013, para. 6) that is most often discussed in terms of relieving headaches, reducing stress, or increasing work productivity. This conceptualization conflicts with what they understand to be the concept's original purpose, which is concerned more with liberation from these very attachments (Purser & Loy, 2013).

In the last section, I described a health communication code that also appeared to be present in the discourse of these two communities. Similar in nature to the active productivity code, there was a strong emphasis in these articles on the health benefits ("Ends") of mindfulness. Specifically, mindfulness was clearly understood as a tool or technique of health within both communities, though the academic community tended to focus on the psychological and mental health benefits of mindfulness, whereas the popular press community focused more on physical and behavioral health benefits, as well as mental skills related to mindfulness practice.

Summary of Findings

Ultimately, several summarizing comments can be made regarding the findings of this study and the similarities and differences between the popular press and academic communities, with respect to how they talk about mindfulness. First, both communities define mindfulness foremost as "awareness." Though there are a variety of definitions discussed among these communities, this understanding of mindfulness was the most common. It demonstrates, at least on a definitional level, some congruence. Second, also concerning mindfulness definitions, both

communities tend to associate meditation with mindfulness, often employing the term when defining mindfulness, if not including it explicitly in their definitions. Though a few academic articles push back against what they describe as conflation between these two concepts, these terms are generally closely associated. Third, also concerning how mindfulness is defined by these two communities, the academic community was found to be much more likely than the popular press community to explicitly define mindfulness. This is one difference in how these two communities talk about mindfulness.

Fourth, both communities sometimes discuss mindfulness in a way that indicates a belief that the term is, to some extent, “stigmatized,” and that it needs to be “normalized.” However, this manifests differently between the communities, and they have separate approaches in seeking to normalize the practice. Popular press articles place much emphasis on describing the “mainstreaming” of mindfulness. Many articles point out that a person does not have to be a monk to practice mindfulness, or know anything about chakras. They quote laypersons who express concern over the perceived “woo woo” nature of mindfulness, before arguing that actually, anyone can become involved in the practice, without all the “spiritual baggage.” Taking a different approach, the academic community makes the argument that mindfulness is a scientific practice, perhaps in spite of its religious and/or spiritual roots. Academic articles talk about the Buddha as a scientist, compare his teachings to the “laws of physics,” and make it clear that mindfulness is a “universal” practice, available to anyone and everyone. The academic community utilizes the language of science to normalize discussions of mindfulness, which is historically a religious/spiritual practice. I argue that both approaches, though different in nature, seek to justify the discussion of mindfulness within each community against a perceived stigma attached to the term.

Fifth, both communities employ what I term a spiritual code in their discussions of mindfulness. As a part of this code, they employ language that is not necessarily referring to spirituality explicitly but, rather, incorporates tropes or themes commonly associated with spirituality and promote its perspectives and values, as described previously. I argue that this demonstrates that it is generally appropriate to talk about mindfulness in these communities as being intertwined with or connected to values consistent with descriptions of spirituality. Though there are examples that run counter to this spiritual code, some of which are described in the previous paragraph, the overwhelming majority of articles from these two communities employ this code in their discussions of mindfulness.

Sixth, both popular press and academic communities discuss mindfulness as a tool or technique of health. In other words, they both see mindfulness as something intertwined with health and their talk reflects this perceived connection. However, they differ slightly as to which aspects of health they believe mindfulness pertains to most. The popular press community more often discusses mindfulness in terms of its physical and behavioral benefits, as well as its positive outcomes with respect to varying mental skills. The academic community discussion centers more around mindfulness' benefits for psychological and mental health.

Seventh, one substantial difference between how the two communities talk about mindfulness has to do with who practices mindfulness and in what settings. The popular press community devotes a great deal of conversation to mindfulness in work settings, as it is practiced by employees, and how it benefits employers and businesses. There is a strong emphasis placed on productivity, specifically how mindfulness can boost it. I identified this discursive frame as the active productivity code, indicating that a prominent value shared within the popular press community is productivity in the work environment. Conversely, this code is nonexistent within

academic article discussions of mindfulness, indicating that the latter community's values lie elsewhere.

Overarching Narratives

Examining all the data, analyses, and conclusions from this study, it is possible to describe what can be understood as a theory of the case or an overarching story for each of these two communities. These stories work to explain the larger narratives that are being enacted or performed by the communities. In other words, this section seeks to summarize each community's character, values, nature, or ethos. When attempting to understand the cultural values of a community, it can be useful to more specifically identify the nature of the "ideal person" or "ideal personal activity" as understood by the community. In other words, what does it look like to "live the good life" in this community? What do community members appear to be striving for, given their discourse as evidence? This gives insight into deep community values.

Looking across the data corpus, and the specific conclusions drawn from it, the popular press community seems principally defined by its association of mindfulness with productivity, perhaps best understood as business or "busyness," a play on its explicit discussions of mindfulness' role in the corporate environment and its more implicit assumptions about the values of the practice. For this community, mindfulness is largely something that allows a person to be more productive. Underlying this focus is the belief that it is beneficial for persons in the role of "employee" and, by extension, for their employers as well to enhance their productivity. The typical mindfulness practitioner in this community appears to most often be understood as an employee.

Productivity in this community is, however, not always understood simply in the narrow sense of economic productivity. This lens of productivity is also applied to the community's

discussion of the relationships between mindfulness and health. In its discussions of health, mindfulness is described as having benefits primarily for physical and behavioral health and for improving mental skills. As described previously, these types of benefits are more specific and tangible than the psychological benefits provided much more frequently in academic discussions. Mental skills such as preventing oneself from “being distracted” (99) or helping one “focus” (62, 63, 70) also directly translate to the work environment; they help one to be even more productive. This emphasis on productivity also aligns neatly with arguments that mindfulness has been adapted within the West to reflect and conform to Western capitalist values, which place great value on productivity. Therefore, in this community, “success” can be understood as living a productive life. The “ideal person” is someone who is productive and who engages in activities that allow him or her to be even more productive, especially with respect to economic productivity. Mindfulness is portrayed largely as a tool that allows a person to be even more productive.

Within the academic community, the story is a bit different. There is no emphasis on productivity in a way that parallels the popular press community. There does, however, seem to be some consensus as to what role mindfulness should play and what it provides for individuals who practice it. There seems to be agreement on what the “ideal person” looks like as well. In this community, the typical mindfulness practitioner is a medical patient who uses mindfulness as a clinical treatment in order to improve his or her psychological health. This is reflected in the strong emphasis placed on patients as the primary participants in mindfulness, as described in discussions within the community, along with details on clinical or health settings as the primary locations or contexts in which mindfulness takes place. One tacit assumption here is that individuals are supposed to exist at some pre-established level of mental health homeostasis and,

if homeostasis is deemed to be out of a normal range, mindfulness is a tool that should be used to correct the imbalance. Therefore, the “ideal person,” as understood by this community, is someone who has achieved mental health homeostasis.

Reflecting on Method: Contributions and Critiques

This study employed ethnography of communication methods in order to answer its primary research questions. Given that the approach entailed a less typical application of the method, it faced particular challenges and required innovations in order to effectively accomplish its aims. This section reflects on the contributions this study makes with respect to the ethnography of communication method, and provides a brief theoretical critique regarding the methodological complications with respect to this particular study.

The contributions of this study are both descriptive and theoretical. Its descriptive contributions include the investigation and explanation of several communication codes present in the discourse of these two communities, with respect to mindfulness. Community norms and values were elaborated upon and analyzed in great depth. This study also makes a theoretical contribution, reflecting upon ethnography of communication theory and methodology more broadly. One contribution is that it expands the means by which one might examine a culture and its communication codes. Generally, ethnography of communication studies are conducted “in the field,” in the sense that there is direct interaction with community members who are being studied. This is a common characteristic of ethnographic studies more generally. Coutu (1996) expanded upon this approach by applying ethnography of communication methods to written texts, including one book used as the primary text and several news articles published in mainstream outlets. This current study follows in this tradition by applying the method to written texts, but takes it a step further. This study analyzes an expanded corpus of 105 articles,

published in both mainstream popular press and academic outlets. It therefore pushes the boundaries of what has been done in terms of size—analyzing a larger amount of diverse data – and context—examining the academic community. In particular, the expansion of the size of the data corpus was found to be especially useful, allowing for a broader understanding of the cultures of each of the two communities.

During the analysis process, one clear challenge arose that reflects a tension between the method and the parameters of this study. Much of what was discussed within community discourse, in both academic and popular press communities, included critiques of the ways in which mindfulness has been discussed, understood, operationalized, or practiced within and between different communities. Though this was certainly relevant to and integral in the process of understanding community norms and values—a vital component of the ethnography of communication method—the method did not allow space for full engagement with these critiques. Given the data collected and the analysis conducted as a part of this study, the author is in a unique position to provide a more critical reflection on community understandings, practices, and commentaries concerning mindfulness. The boundaries of the method, however, discourage the researcher from providing critical perspectives on community norms and values. Instead, this approach more closely aligns with other methodological approaches such as rhetoric or critical/cultural studies, which encourage this form of critique. Rather than necessarily being a defect in ethnography of communication theory, this tension is perhaps indicative of the need for using multiple approaches within a study, perhaps a combination of ethnography and critical approaches, for example.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. The primary issues concern the choices I made during the data selection process. First, I chose to eliminate from the research pool any studies or discussions of mindfulness that centered exclusively on Langer's (1989) conceptualization of mindfulness. I did this because she herself has argued that what she describes as mindfulness is qualitatively different than the forms of mindfulness investigated in this study. As a result, however, this study does not engage with all of the most cited academic articles that discuss "mindfulness." Langer's works are influential across academic fields, and several of her articles or articles by other authors engaging with her conceptualization of mindfulness were present in the top 50 most cited articles and would have otherwise been included in this research.

Second, though I was seeking to gain the fullest possible understanding of how the academic community discusses mindfulness, I limited my research materials only to academic *articles*. The main rationale for this approach was to enforce some kind of consistency that would allow me to compare results from academic articles to popular press articles most accurately. A book might provide a greater abundance of information and answer my research questions in more depth, but it would make it significantly more difficult to claim that I was comparing representative samples of data from these two communities. This does mean, however, that I cannot make claims regarding the entire academic community and its understandings of mindfulness. My findings are limited to academic articles. The same is true for books meant for popular consumption.

Third, though I strove to collect data in such a way as to create the best circumstances for cross-community comparison, I was unable to sample articles from both communities in exactly the same manner. The goal was to collect the most prominent voices from these two

communities. Ideally, I would have collected the 50 most *read* popular press articles on mindfulness in order to make a more direct comparison to the 50 most *cited* academic articles. This information was unavailable, however, and I therefore had to find another method of assessing what the most prominent voices were in the popular press community that concerned themselves with mindfulness.

Fourth, my research findings are constrained by the size of my sample. Though the top 50 cited academic articles and 55 popular press articles from the top 10 most popular sources provide a great deal of information that is likely generalizable to these communities writ broadly, this is still a very limited selection. It is possible that incorporating a larger corpus of articles would lead to different emphases with respect to codes and themes.

Future Research

One possible direction for further studies would be to investigate the communities I have described in greater depth. Though 50 articles for each community was sufficient to identify prominent themes and communication codes present in respective discourses concerning mindfulness, a larger sample size would likely lead to the identification of more themes and codes. On a related note, it would be useful to purposefully investigate the discussions of mindfulness within a wider variety of academic fields. Of the top 50 most cited academic articles, nearly all fell within the psychology or medical fields. Other fields, including communication, have only recently started to examine mindfulness, and thus these were not in the data corpus. It would be useful to conduct a similar study examining the most cited articles sorted by field. Not only would this likely provide more themes or communication codes as mentioned above, but it also would allow us to subdivide the academic community into smaller communities that could then be compared cross-discipline. We may find that mindfulness is

understood and discussed very differently in the education or fine arts fields, for example, than it is in psychology and medicine.

In addition, this approach of sampling and analyzing the most popular or cited articles from popular press and academic communities does not take into account change over time. It is possible that conceptualizations of mindfulness within these communities have evolved, which would potentially affect the results of this study. For instance, mindfulness within academic communities may have become less synonymous with meditation. This would be an interesting finding and useful in fully understanding what is meant by mindfulness when it is employed by members of this community. Future research might find it enlightening to examine the evolution of discussions concerning mindfulness within these communities.

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Appendix

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