

MAKING MEANING OF MINDFULNESS IN THE LIVES OF LAW SCHOOL STUDENTS:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Lisa Benjamin Mitchell

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

Chris W. Taylor, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Russell G. Yocum, Ed.D., Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this study phenomenological study was to understand how law school students make meaning of mindfulness as it relates to stress during law school. The Monitoring and Acceptance Theory guided this research study to understand the meaning of mindfulness and stress associated with law school. The Self-determination Theory tenet of autonomy also increased the ability to understand a mindfulness approach to managing stress. The central question of the study is: What are the lived experiences of law students and their mindfulness practice? The phenomenological study was grounded in constructivist methodology and viewed the truth as relative, and values the role of individuals' construction of their own meaning and interpretation. The study consisted of ten participants, including first-, second- and third-year law students who practiced mindfulness during law school. The data collected was through journaling, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. Confidentiality for participants was maintained by using pseudonyms. The data analysis used patterns, themes and content analysis. The validity was a triangulation of participants with participant reviews. Inductive analysis was used to discover patterns in the study. Transcendental-phenomenological reduction was used to analyze the qualitative data. The research was designed to understand how law students make meaning of mindfulness as it relates to law school stress.

Keywords: mindfulness, law school students, stress, academics

Dedication

To my husband and best friend, Robert and all of his encouragement, to my children and grandchildren, and to my parents. You're always in my heart. Thank you to my Heavenly Father for all that he has given and asked very little in return.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Chris Taylor and all of his words of encouragement throughout my dissertation. He was always so kind, understanding and demonstrated amazing insight and ability. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Richard Davidson for opening my mind to new ideas and research. And finally, Dr. William James, who stated in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890):

The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. No one is *compos sui* [master of oneself] if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education *par excellence*. But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical instructions for bringing it about.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	3
Dedication.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	5
List of Tables	11
List of Abbreviations	12
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	13
Overview.....	13
Background.....	13
Historical.....	14
Social.....	21
Theoretical	24
Situation to Self.....	25
Problem Statement.....	28
Purpose Statement.....	30
Significance of the Study	30
Research Questions.....	34
Definitions.....	37
Summary.....	39

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	41
Overview.....	41
Theoretical Framework.....	41
Related Literature.....	49
Summary.....	77
 CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	
Overview.....	79
Design	79
Research Questions.....	79
Setting.....	84
Participants.....	85
Procedures.....	86
The Researcher’s Role	87
Data Collection	89
Journal Prompts	90
Interviews.....	93
Focus Group.....	101
Data Analysis	102
Trustworthiness.....	104

Credibility	105
Dependability and Confirmability	106
Transferability.....	106
Ethical Considerations	107
Summary	108
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	110
Overview.....	110
Purpose Statement and Research Questions Review	111
Participants.....	112
Lisa.....	113
Lonnie	115
Sue.....	118
Violet.....	120
Nikki	121
Linda	124
Nancy	127
Allie.....	131
Andrew.....	133
Brody.....	136

Results.....	139
Theme Development.....	139
Research Questions Responses.....	150
Summary.....	156
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	158
Overview.....	158
Summary of Findings.....	158
Discussion.....	168
Theoretical	168
Empirical.....	173
Implications.....	175
Theoretical	176
Empirical.....	180
Practical.....	182
Delimitations and Limitations.....	185
Recommendations for Future Research	187
Summary.....	188
REFERENCES	190
APPENDIX A: LIBERTY UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL LETTER	225

APPENDIX B: STUDY SITE APPROVAL REQUEST	226
APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT LETTER.....	228
APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM.....	230
APPENDIX E: INTEREST SURVEY	234
APPENDIX F: RESEARCH QUESTIONS	236
APPENDIX G: SAMPLE JOURNAL PROMPT.....	239

List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of Themes

List of Abbreviations

Monitoring and Acceptance Theory (MAT)

Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

Mindfulness-Based Intervention (MBI)

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

1st Year Law (1L)

2nd Year Law (2L)

3rd Year Law (3L)

American Bar Association (ABA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The stress experienced by law students has evolved over time with the increased competitiveness related to overall law school performance. The impact of stress during law school is far-reaching with complex consequences (Doucet, 2014; Flynn, Li, & Sanchez, 2017; Larcombe et al, 2013; Lewinbuk, 2016; Skead, & Rogers, 2014; 2015; 2016; Tyler, 2016). Multiple studies have shown that mindfulness is a useful intervention for stress management (Flynn, Yan Li, & Sanchez, 2017; Rogers & Maytan, 2012; Shapiro, Oman, Thoresen, Plante, Flinders, 2008; Skead & Rogers, 2015). The ability to manage stress and anxiety has profound effects on individual mental and physical development, and overall wellness (Flynn, Yan Li, & Sanchez, 2017; Karthikeyan, 2017; Rogers & Maytan, 2012; Shapiro, Oman, Thoresen, Plante, Flinders, 2008; Skead and Rogers, 2015). The central question posed in this study is, what are the lived experiences of law students and their mindfulness practice? The purpose of this study will be to understand how students make meaning of mindfulness as it relates to stress during law school.

Background

Law school is inherently stressful. Students entering law school experience levels of wellbeing at least equal to the general population (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015; Flynn, Yan Li, & Sanchez, 2017; Larcombe, Finch, & Sore, 2015; Skead & Rogers, 2015). By the end of the first semester of legal studies, law students experience stress, anxiety and depression at rates significantly higher than their graduate school contemporaries in professional degree programs including medicine, nursing, psychology and engineering (Bergin & Pakenham, 2015; Skead & Rogers, 2015). The onset of elevated levels of stress has been linked to the first year of law

school during the second semester (Reed, K., Bornstein, Jeon, & Wylie, 2016; Skead & Rogers, 2015; Tyler, 2016). How students treat the symptoms of stress ranges from self-medicating including alcohol and drugs at one end of the spectrum to psychiatric counseling at the other (Doucet, 2015).

Mindfulness has shown the ability to improve an individual's ability to manage stress (Brown, Creswell, & Ryan, 2015; Scott, 2017; Shapiro, & Carlson, 2017; Verweij et al., 2018). These findings are supported by prominent neuroscientists as reflected in readings and analysis of Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging fMRIs (Davidson & Kaszniak, 2015). In light of the overwhelming positive attention mindfulness has garnered in other studies related to mindfulness and stress, investigating how mindfulness practices can be applied to the law school students, in a highly competitive educational environment that is marred by high levels of stress, may prove to be valuable information as it relates to the overall wellbeing of law students.

Historical

The experience of law school itself is often very stressful for students. McKinney (2002), Professor of Law at the University of North Carolina, recognized that law school is a "breeding ground for depression, anxiety, and other stress-related illnesses" and the stress experienced in law school is significantly higher than other post-graduate programs. Research, statistical, and anecdotal data have established that the study and practice of law are stressful (Lewinbuk, 2015). Until recently, stress has been considered part of law learning and practice without regard to the damage that such stress can inflict on individuals (Brostoff, 2017). Law students and legal professionals have a long history of unduly suffering from psychological disorders, suicidal ideation and substance abuse (Bergin & Pakenham, 2015). Law school stressors have been described by members of the legal community and have provided compelling depictions of

problems during law school (ABA Task Force, 2018). Stressors include emotionally laden and stress-provoking learning environment associated with factors including the competitiveness of grades and the Socratic approach to instruction. (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015; Skead & Rogers, 2015). Scientific studies explaining how to practically address law school psychological distress are lacking (Bergin & Pakenham, 2015).

Shanfield and Benjamin (1989) completed the landmark study related to levels of stress and law school students. This study compared students' distress prior to law school to the levels of distress after the first year of law school. Prior to the first year of law school, students experienced the same level of stress as the overall population (Shanfield & Benjamin, 1989). After the first year of law school, students' levels of stress were significantly elevated as compared to the overall population (Shanfield & Benjamin, 1989). These symptoms included, obsessive-compulsive behavior, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation and psychoticism (Shanfield & Benjamin, 1989). Depending on the symptom, 20-40% of any given class reported significant symptom elevations (Shanfield & Benjamin, 1989).

Prior to this study, in 1968, the University of Wisconsin measured levels of stress during the first 10 weeks of law school. Results indicated that some students failed to meet first-term grades expectations based on their undergraduate grade point average and their Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), and their failure to meet expectations was correlated with the level of stress and anxiety measured (Commet, 1968). According to the interviews of law students beginning in the late 1960s, the chief source of anxiety was related to the grading system and the impact of a single end-of-the-semester assessment (Commet, 1968). Law students understand that the single assessment typically determines law school honors, law review and potential

career paths. Additionally, the lack of assessment feedback at the end of the semester contributed significantly to student stress and anxiety (Commet, 1968). In Stevens' study (1973) he interviewed 45 first-year Yale law students after the first ten weeks of classes. Forty of the students reported high levels of classroom anxiety and 20 students indicated a high level of personal anxiety (Stevens, 1973). Additionally, Hedegard (1979) tested students from Brigham Young University (BYU) prior to their first year of law school and then again after their first set of examinations. He determined that both anxiety levels and feelings of internal conflict increased significantly for the cohort as compared to the overall populations (Hedegard, 1979). Hedegard (1979) found that the greater the need the student had for structure and order, the greater the tension; the omnipresent ambiguity of the law was identified as the primary source. Heins, Fahey and Henderson (1983) studied the difference between law students and medical students. As compared to medical students, this study found the law students reported significantly greater levels of academic stress and stress related to the fear of academic failure (Heins, Fahey & Henderson, 1983).

A recently published article discusses the history of law school stress. In the article, *Mindfulness in the Law: A Path to Well-Being and Balance for Lawyers and Law Students*, authored by Charity Scott in the Arizona Law Review (2018) reviewed the current state of stress among law students. Scott's (2018) results were based on the Survey of Law Student Well-Being (SLSWB), in which approximately 3,300 law students at 15 law schools across the country participated. The SLSWB study found 37% of the participants experienced some form of anxiety of which 23% experienced mild to moderate anxiety and 14% experience severe anxiety with 6% having had serious suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months (Scott, 2018). The national rate for suicide ideation is 4.3% of the population, which is significantly lower than suicide ideation

among law students (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.). The legal community is currently seeking partnerships between the social sciences and the legal community to offer new opportunities to develop creative ways to address these issues (ABA Task Force, 2018). The National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being has raised strong concerns regarding the poor state of the mental health and wellbeing of lawyers and law students (Scott, 2018). A recently released landmark study conducted by the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation and the American Bar Association Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs revealed substantial and widespread levels behavioral health problems in the U.S. legal profession (Vincent, 2017). The study's data indicated that 28 percent of licensed, employed attorneys struggle with some level of depression and 19 percent demonstrate symptoms of stress and anxiety. The study also found younger attorneys who are in the first 10 years of practice exhibited the highest incidence of these problems. (Vincent, 2017). The commission recently published a report, *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change*. In the report, the task force defines wellbeing, distress among the community in the legal profession, and then offers recommendation to enhance lawyer wellbeing, including mindfulness.

The practice of mindfulness has become increasing popular with the quest for wellbeing. Mindfulness has been radically secularized, taken from the Buddhist roots and been employed as a therapeutic wellness tool since the late twentieth century (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). The Buddhist concept of mindfulness dates back 2,500 years with early records from the ancient Indian Buddhism (Ditrich, 2016; Frisk, 2014). Mindfulness, in secular terms, has been defined by Kabat-Zinn "an awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. It's about knowing what is on your mind." (Kabbat-Zinn, 1990, p. 283). Kabat-Zinn describes the effects of mindfulness in detail in his book, *Full Catastrophe*

Living. Baer (2003, p. 77), another contemporary mindfulness scholar, aligns her definition with Kabat-Zinn's as she states that mindfulness is "particular qualities of attention that can be developed through meditation." Baer (2003, p. 77) goes on to clarify the difference between mindfulness and meditation, "mindfulness is an increased awareness of the present moment, it is the goal of meditation." In other words, meditation is one of the pathways to reaching a state of mindfulness.

Meditation practice has various religious and secular traditions throughout history. People have been practicing meditation for many thousands of years. Many religious traditions utilize meditation to gain deep insight, however, Shapiro and Carlson (2017) indicate, "mindfulness meditation itself is secular and does not intrude upon religious tenets." Thus, the concept of mindfulness can be approached "as a universal human capacity that transcends culture and religion" (Shapiro & Carlson, 2017, p. 34). Meditation can also be defined as a form of mental training that seeks to improve an individual's core psychological capacities, including attentional and emotional self-regulation (Bishop, 2004; Ditrich, 2016; Tang, Holzel & Posner, 2015). Meditation includes a group of complex practices that encompass mindfulness meditation, mantra meditation, yoga, tai chi and chi gong (Schure, Christopher & Christopher, 2008).

The heart of mindfulness is sitting meditation. Vipassana, also known as mindfulness, is the oldest of Buddhist meditation practices (Ditrich, 2016). Vipassana means to see things as they really are, is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation. Mindfulness meditation teaches an individual to focus on their breathing from the abdomen. Vipassana is a way of self-transformation through self-observation. Deep interconnection between mind and body can be experienced directly by disciplined attention of physical sensations that form the life of the body,

and continuously interconnect to the mind. This approach is a self-exploratory journey to the common root of mind and body (Salzberg, 1995). Using the abdomen gives individuals the ability to pay attention to a focal point. Breathing is a universally shared experience of all humans who are living (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). By using the breath as an anchor, the goal is to have an individual notice thoughts, feelings, ideas and emotions, and to not react (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). Mindfulness is the ability of an individual to focus their attention on his or her present-moment experience, releasing worries about the future and regrets about the past, has been shown to produce a host of benefits for both physical and mental wellbeing (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, Walach, 2004; Shapiro, Oman, Thoresen, Plante, Flinders, 2008; Skead and Rogers, 2015). Mindfulness is a focused approach of cognition (Shapiro, Oman, Thoresen, Plante, Flinders, 2008). Shapiro et al. (2008) believes this approach empowers individuals to participate in both the emotional and physical healing process. Kabat-Zinn suggests that many take the human activities from day-to-day and run on automatic pilot mode, which can cause individuals to feel out of control (1990). Additionally, Kabat-Zinn (1990) believes that many fears people deal with in their lives including death, loss or failure can cause them to search for ways to escape, avoid or deny these anxieties, which is why many turns on the autopilot. Acknowledging the anxieties without judgment is part of the mindfulness meditation practice. Both Kabat-Zinn and Shapiro consider mindfulness meditation as a form of mental training practice that involves the focusing on the breath (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Shapiro & Carlson, 2017; Thompson & Waltz, 2007). Utilizing the simple act of turning attention away from the everyday chatter of the mind and onto the breath can then help the mind to quiet down (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Shapiro & Carlson, 2017; Thompson & Waltz, 2007).

Many definitions of mindfulness can be found with the common emphasis that involves maintaining awareness to the immediate experience, as opposed to being distracted by past events, future directed thoughts or avoidance of an individual's experiences. Kabat-Zinn emphasizes the idea of maintaining an attitude of nonjudgment (2003). Kabat-Zinn indicates that mindfulness begins with the belief that if you are breathing, there is more right with you, than wrong (1990). With the cultivation of calmness, an individual can develop the ability to respond to a stressor rather than emotionally react to stress, thus decreasing impulsivity, stress and anxiousness. Kabat-Zinn has stated that the body and mind are inseparable in wellness; what happens with the body impacts the mind and therefore experiences of the mind affects the body (1990). Kabat-Zinn indicates that the goal is healing of an individual both emotionally and physically (1990). Mindfulness helps the individual to own each moment of his or her life, fully, and deal with each moment artfully (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., is internationally recognized for his work as a scientist, writer, and meditation teacher engaged in bringing mindfulness to medicine and society (Husgafvel, 2018). Kabat-Zinn received his Ph. D. in molecular biology from MIT in 1971. His research between 1979 and 2002 focused on mind/body interactions for healing. Most notably he is recognized for clinical application of mindfulness meditation training for people with chronic pain and stress disorders (Husgafvel, 2018). In 1979, as a professor of medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMASS), Kabat-Zinn founded the world-renowned Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society in 1995 (Kabat-Zinn, 2004).

The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program developed by Kabat-Zinn is an eight-week program with a daylong intensive. Kabat-Zinn asked doctors in the chronic pain

unit to give him their patients in which medication was not working (Khoury, Sharma, Rush, & Fournier, 2015). He believed that by helping patients work through a progressive set of mindfulness practices in a group format, it would help them develop the ability to see pain more objectively and learn how to related to it in a different manner so they would suffer less (Gazella, 2005). Mindfulness meditation is a combination of various mindful practices. These include breath awareness and focusing on the breath and letting thoughts and feelings pass without attachment or judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). The loving-kindness meditation is a type of practice in which individuals wish themselves and others peace, happiness and wellbeing (Salzberg, 2011). Kabat-Zinn MBSR also includes practices in yoga and walking meditation (Gazella , 2005).

Kabat-Zinn has since used the program in over 250 hospitals around the country and many more around the world supporting people with pain, stress, anxiety, depression, and alleviating stress related to medical conditions and much more (Khoury, Sharma, Rush, & Fournier, 2015). His work has contributed to a continuing movement to mainstream mindfulness in institutions such as schools, multicultural settings, corporations, prisons, the legal community, and professional sports (Gawrysiak et al., 2018).

Social

Human capital potential of a country is invaluable (Jacobs et al., 2017; Jones-Berry, 2018; Tehrani, 2016; Vanderlind, 2017). The legal community is concerned about the harm to human capital within its students and professionals and has expressed the need to address wellness throughout their profession (ABA Taskforce, 2016; Foster-Morales, 2018; Krill, Johnson, & Albert, 2016). Stress, alcoholism and mental health problems may impair an attorney's ability to serve their clients, community, and family (Krill, Johnson, & Albert, 2016).

Both anecdotal and empirical research has been conducted indicating that law school is a stressful learning environment (Krill, 2018; Krill, Johnson, & Albert, 2016). Supporting evidence of the onset of stress beginning in law and substantially increasing throughout law school has been empirically verified (Larcombe, Tumbaga, Malkin, Nicholson, & Tokatlidis, 2013; Skead & Rogers, 2016). Based on the retrospective empirical data collected from the Zemens and Rosenblum (1981, p. 1) they affirmed,

The enormous influence that lawyers wield in both the public and private sectors makes their professional development of particular concern in a democratic society. There is little doubt that the legal profession is both ubiquitous and extremely influential in the life of the American society. The prominence of lawyers in the public elective and appointed office, even considering the addition of lawyers holding numerous other government jobs or serving as important policy advisors, represents only a part of the political role of the bar. More pervasive and potentially more important is the public impact of the bar in its generally private role as a counselor and advocate of private interests.

The importance of an educated workforce cannot be underestimated. By design, life provides ample stress triggers and demands that are difficult to handle, mindfulness provides a practice or skill to manage stress and maintain overall wellbeing (Strauss et al., 2018). Stress is defined as an individual's physiological response to an external stimulus that triggers the fight-flight-freeze reaction (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress is a complex psychological phenomenon influenced by both biological and environmental factors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The management of stress is fundamental and an essential emotional ability that children, adolescents, young adults, and adults need to continually develop throughout their lives (Slavich, 2016).

Stress is associated with both mental and physical health issues, and levels of stress among the legal profession are disproportionately higher as compared to the general population (Foster-Morales, 2018; Slavich, 2016). Hans Selye, defined stress as “a set of nonspecific responses of the organism to specific demands (stressors) upon it,” (Selye, 1956). Other definitions of stress emphasize the subjective nature of the concept. Richard Lazarus (2002) commented on stress as “a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.”

Acceptance into law school is highly selective, even at lower-tier colleges. Undergraduate students who are preparing to apply to law school must achieve a highly competitive grade point average, document service hours, participate in internships, and engage in leadership opportunities. Additionally, acceptance is driven by rigorous law school aptitude test (LSAT) score (Stake & Alexeev, 2015; Taylor, 2018). Students who are accepted into law school have been very diligent in their pursuit of higher education and have typically excelled academically throughout their education experiences as shown by GPA and LSAT scores (ABA Law Students Edition, 2018). Data indicated that the demographics of students accepted into law school are becoming much more diverse with women now outnumbering men in law school attendance, as indicated by the American Bar Association for Law Students (2018). Students attending law school are intelligent and have a strong desire to contribute to the justice system and society (Gross, 2017). Attorneys are part of the human capital needed for a society to thrive and prosper (McIntyre, & Simkovic, 2017). Krill (2016) suggests that the consequences of lawyer mental health issues may seem less direct than that of a physician, but they can be profound and far-reaching. The legal profession influences many aspects of our society, economy, and governments and therefore impairment can lead to serious consequences at many

levels and therefore closely evaluated (Krill, Johnson, & Albert, 2016). The levels of stress and dysfunction of the legal profession may affect the legal outcomes for individuals and that of the society.

Theoretical

The Monitoring and Acceptance Theory (MAT) focuses on the synergistic effects of monitoring and acceptance skills (Lindsay and Creswell, 2019). “Acceptance is thought to transform how momentary experiences are observed and processed, facilitating engagement (welcoming in) and subsequent disengagement (letting go) with emotional stimuli and thus enriching experience while also reducing emotional reactivity” (Lindsay and Creswell, 2019). Studies of trait mindfulness components in non-meditating samples generally support MAT’s predictions that monitoring alone can increase affective reactivity, whereas monitoring and acceptance skills together promote emotion regulation and favorable affect, stress, and health outcomes (Bishop et al., 2004) People who report high levels of both monitoring and acceptance skills show evidence of successful emotion regulation, including lower negative affectivity, adaptive social relationship functioning, and salutary health behaviors and outcomes (Lindsay and Creswell, 2019). Monitoring and acceptance constraints are common across conceptualizations of mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004) and are the central practices instructed in mindfulness training interventions. MAT’s framework aims to predict how mindfulness impacts outcomes.

Mindfulness involves monitoring of the present moment to enhance awareness of an experience, and acceptance of emotion regulation such as stress (Keune, & Forintos, 2010). Mindfulness enhances the ability for an individual to monitor their state, actions and environment (Kabat-Zinn, 1009). Mindfulness represents the basis for which individuals

experience healthy self-regulation in the context of MAT (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007a, 2007b). MAT suggests that awareness and acceptance are conducive to high quality self-regulation and stress coping (Keune, & Forintos, 2010). Donald et al., (2016) suggested that daily stress responses are influenced by both general levels of present-moment awareness and also by event-specific levels of present-moment acceptance (Donald et al. 2016). Based on Kabat-Zinn's (1990) definition of mindfulness, the present-moment awareness buffering posits that mindfulness mitigates stress appraisals and reduces stress-reactivity responses (Keun & Forintos, 2010).

The theoretical premise of Self-determination Theory (SDT) believes that individuals are active and self-motivated with three basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Autonomy involves a sense of agency and choice where the individual experiences ownership of their behavior (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Sheldon, Cheng, & Hilpert, 2011).

Situation to Self

Many experience levels of stress in their daily lives, some more than others. My relationship to stress has always been conflicted with the inner belief that I should be able to monitor and manage my stress, but not necessarily having the tools or ability to do so. Believing in modern medicine, but also seeing the results of individuals not taking personal responsibility for the management of their health brought me to the mindfulness meditation experience. I believe healthy individuals can control aspects of their thinking. As a high school counselor, I have supported the concepts of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and that much of our lives is what we create in our minds and the stories we tell ourselves. I have built the perceptions of myself on the foundations of resiliency and attitude of growth mindset. I continue to develop through

a cognitive paradigm and MAT consisting of both monitoring and acceptance. Wanting to manage my stress through the ability to reason, lead me to the practice of mindfulness as a non-pharmaceutical approach to stress management.

This belief of knowledge naturally leads to an epistemological approach. The word epistemological comes from two different Greek words, first episteme, meaning knowledge and understanding, and second, ology, meaning the study, therefore, epistemology is the study of knowledge (*Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*, 2018). Aristotle said, "All men by nature desire to know," (Aristotle & Ross, 1981). What, however, is knowledge? First, the person must be able to justify the claim, second, the claim itself must be true and finally the person must believe it is true (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*, 2018). This is the contemporary philosophers definition of knowledge, *justified true belief (JTB)* (Turri, 2012). The crucial point about this definition is that all three components *must* be present and if any one of the three is absent, then it does not count as knowledge (Turri, 2012).

Two types of knowledge include empiricism and rationalism (Murphy, 2010). There are two central components to the rationalist position, innate ideas and deductive reasoning (Murphy, 2010). Innate ideas, according to Descartes, are concepts that we have from birth that serve as a foundation for all our other ideas by deductive reasoning. While they are inborn, we only become aware of them later in life. Innate ideas are what we know with absolute certainty, and it's impossible for us to acquire them through experience (Murphy, 2010).

Empiricism is the doctrine that all knowledge is derived from our senses and experiences. Locke's version of empiricism is often noted. His first task was to challenge the theory of innate ideas that he argued that none of our concepts are inborn (Locke & Yolton, n.d.). When we are born, our mind, is like a blank sheet of writing paper and through experiences the

paper is filled with knowledge (Thilly, 1900). As this applies to myself, I lean toward the Descartes beliefs, however sympathetic to Locke's challenge; therefore I became interested in Kant's philosophical understanding of knowledge. Kant argued that there are certain innate abilities within organized structures in our minds that automatically systematize our raw experiences. He theorized that the mind reconstructs information into three-dimensional images within a timeline. Cunningham (2015) explained that the mind imposes other organizational schemes with additional sensory information and the experience of the world, being the innate part of concession to rationalism and the experienced part of concession to empiricism (Cunningham, 2015).

The concept of mindfulness is most firmly rooted in the Buddhist religion; however, mindfulness practice is a secular form of meditation (Neves-Pereira, Carvalho, Marco & Aspesi, 2018). It is centrality a human experience, where the concept of mindfulness is rooted in the fundamental activities of consciousness, attention and awareness. Buddhism is a religious and philosophical model that emerged from Asia, however marked with multiple interpretations. Buddhism with its scientific rationalist teachings is seen in the works of Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh (Hanh, 2008). The scientific production of "real and/or reliable" knowledge brings back to the thoughts of how we know, and what is knowledge. The results of empirical studies validate the benefits of mindfulness and are constructed in the belief that mindfulness techniques are substantially effective in managing suffering (Baer, 2015). This goes back to the epistemological approach to this study. Do we know, or do we believe we know that mindfulness is a viable practice to develop coping skills to manage stress? My hope is to better understand how students make meaning of their mindfulness practice and if they believe, or know, that this practice does, in fact, make a difference in their lives.

I believe the human experience can be altered and determined by conscious thoughts. I also believe that we construct our beliefs and stories. I believe they evolve and are forever being modeled by the perceptions of our experiences. Constructivism promotes the idea that we are active creators of our own knowledge of the world through experiencing and reflection on those experiences (Adams, 2006). Meanings can be varied and multiple, thus leading the work to look for the complexity of view rather than narrowing meaning into a few orderly categories or ideas (Adams, 2006). My goal is to rely on the participants' view and experiences of mindfulness. The ability of students to make meaning and understand mindfulness as they develop their practice and explore their ideas is central to this research related to management of stress. Finally, Mostakas (1994, p. 104) encourages the researcher to conduct a phenomenological investigation with personal significance. If the participants of this study are able to demonstrate mindfulness has a positive impact related to the stress, they experience in law school, the law schools may want to include techniques to help mitigate stress and increase wellbeing.

Problem Statement

Law schools are institutions of higher education which mold and develop productive, contributing members of society who are responsible for various defending the law; however, they have also become breeding grounds for stress, anxiety, and depression (Larcombe, Tumbaga, Malkin, Nicholson, & Tokatlidis, 2013). Students entering law school experience levels of wellbeing at least equal to the general population and by the end of the first year of legal studies, law students experienced stress, anxiety, and depression at rates significantly higher than their graduate school contemporaries (Bergin & Pakenham, 2015). Law students have often resorted to self-medicating methods, such as excessive alcohol use, misuse of prescription medications and illegal drugs, as they believe they lack viable options, or

demonstrate an unwillingness to openly confront their mental wellness issues (Flynn et al., 2017) and to mask the symptoms of mental illness such as depression, stress, and anxiety (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015). By exploring the experiences of law students who are utilizing mindfulness, this study attempts to determine if mindfulness helps law students create a better relationship with stress during law school. The problem for this study is law students experience high levels stress and many are not equipped to handle the significant amount of stress associated with law school.

While there are a wide variety of issues that account for the onset of substantial increases of stress during the first semester of law school, among the most salient is the nature of the institution and the grading system (Flynn et al., 2017). This is an emotionally laden and stress provoking learning environment which is characterized by constant and intensive factors such as the competitiveness of the grading system, the Socratic approach to instruction, the financial pressures associated with law school, limited prestigious internship offers and the uncertainty of future employment (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015; Skead & Rogers, 2015). Additionally, stress experienced by law students is also associated with unstable personal relationships and regulation of emotions (Flynn et al., 2017).

Many empirical studies have been conducted to support mindfulness as a stress reduction activator (Verweij et al., 2018), however there are limited qualitative studies using the lived experiences to support the ability to manage stress through mindfulness in an academic setting (Fraiman et al., 2016). Law students have shown they lack resources to manage stress (Flynn et al., 2017). In the final year of law school, 35% of third-year law students reported high or very high levels of psychological distress, compared with 13% of the general population (Skead & Rogers, 2015). Understanding how law students are using and making meaning of their

mindfulness and mindfulness practice as it relates to their experiences during law school is the cornerstone of this research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover the meaning of mindfulness to law students as it relates to stress during law school. At this stage in the research, mindfulness will be generally defined as mental state characterized by nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment experience, including sensations, thoughts, bodily states, consciousness, and the environment, while encouraging openness, curiosity, and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). The theory driving this study is built on the Monitoring and Acceptance Theory. The tenet of autonomy in Self-determination Theory also supports this study as it relates to the internal motivation of monitoring and accepting thoughts to enhance wellbeing and foster positive psychological processing and outcomes (Schultz & Ryan, 2015). Despite a tremendous surge of empirical work on mindfulness and mindfulness training over the last 15 years, there have been few organizing conceptual or theoretical models offered for the mindfulness concept (Brown, Creswell, & Ryan, 2015; Creswell & Lindsay, 2014). Additionally, Monitoring and Acceptance Theory is just recently including mindfulness as a tenet of MAT related to stress and mindfulness. There is very limited research related to academic stress utilizing MAT to support mindfulness-based stress management (Weinstein & Ryan, 2011).

Significance of the Study

The practical significance of the study is the overall improved wellbeing of law students and their futures as attorneys. Providing law students tools to help manage stress is a proactive response to a well-established problem that is epidemic throughout law school (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015; Doucet, 2014; Douglas, 2015; Maloney, 2014). The American Bar

Association (ABA) has been very active in acknowledging that their organization needs to better serve the members of the association and understand that the mechanisms law students are using during law school to manage stress continue throughout an attorney's law career (ABA Task Force, 2018).

The negative impacts of stress interfere with both the physical and emotional wellbeing of most individuals. Stress manifests itself and unfolds physical symptoms that can include, shortness of breath, sweaty palms, fatigue, sleep disturbance, digestive issues, grinding or clenching teeth, dizziness, increase heart rate and elevated blood pressure (Keller et al., 2012; Salvich, 2018). Emotional symptoms include frustration, irritation, jumpiness, apathy, feeling overwhelmed and overworked develop during stress (Keller et al., 2012; Salvich, 2018). Additionally, stress takes a toll on the cognitive and behavioral abilities of an individual (Fletcher, Potter & Telford, 2018; Lease, Ingram & Brown, 2017). Under stress one may experience racing thoughts, mental slowness, confusion, foginess, difficulty with comprehension and often an overall negative attitude (Keller et al., 2012; Salvich, 2018). Behavior aspects of stress can diminish a person's desire for social interactions with both family and friends. This behavior can drive and encourage a sense of loneliness (Keller, et al., 2012; Salvich, 2018). Learning effective stress management techniques during law school can be a proactive approach to help control what feels uncontrollable to law students in an elevated environment of stress (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015).

The ABA has recently created a Lawyer Wellbeing Report-Task Force acknowledging long standing psychological distress and substance use problems. They have established lawyer assistance programs but believe those are not enough step toward the solution. The report indicated, "to meaningfully reduce lawyer distress, enhance well-being, and change legal culture,

all corners of the legal profession need to prioritize lawyer health and well-being” (ABA Task Force, 2018). They went on to include that all stakeholders must lead their own efforts aimed at incorporating well-being as an essential component of practicing law. The ABA Task Force (2018) acknowledges that changing the culture will not be easy.

The 2016 survey of Law Student Well-Being found issues of alcohol use, anxiety, depression and illegal drug use at law schools throughout the nation (ABA Task Force, 2018). Students are reluctant to seek help (Bergin & Pakenham, 2015). A substantial majority of students, approximately 80%, indicated that they were somewhat or very likely seek help regarding alcohol, drug or mental health issues, however few did (ABA Task Force, 2018). The reason for students not seeking help was concerns related to bar admission, job or academic status (Bamber & Schneider, 2016; Bergin & Pakenham, 2015). The ABA report (2018) indicated that students believed seeking help could create additional stress and chose to handle problems themselves to avoid related potential future repercussions and requirements to report by the bar test (Bergin & Pakenham, 2015).

Research supports that utilizing wellbeing skills enhances student assessment performance, improves study habits, grades and long-term academic success in addition to reducing stress and anxiety among students (Adler, 2017; Maloney, 2014). Mindfulness techniques and exercises have been shown to improve academic performance, including test performance by reducing anxiety and improving coping strategies (Dundas, Thorsheim, Hjeltness & Binder, 2016; Shapiro, Brown, Thoresen & Plante, 2011). Most academic success in law school is based on one single assessment at the end of each semester. Providing law students tools, such as mindfulness, to decrease their stress levels may create opportunities to facilitate higher levels of academic achievement.

Understanding the application of mindfulness as it pertains to law school students in a stressful learning environment may contribute to the understanding of other professional studies, such as medicine. Validating the empirical studies using law students' thoughts and ideas may help create learning environments that promote the understanding of legal education and the development of knowledge while supporting the wellbeing of students (Bamber & Schneider, 2016; Bergin & Pakenham, 2015; Roeser et al., 2013). The paucity of qualitative intervention studies looking at the effectiveness of students who practice mindfulness, specifically students who have taken a course in mindfulness has been noted. This study is specifically focused on mindfulness as it related to stress management of law students in a law school setting. Substantial evidence supports stress related to law school (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015; Doucet, 2014; Flynn et al., 2017; George, 2015; Kim, 2014; Krill, 2018; Tyler, 2016; Skead & Rogers, 2013; Skead & Rogers, 2016). Few qualitative investigations exist specifically to the effectiveness of mindfulness practice with law students' stress and limited understanding of the essence of the phenomenon.

Monitoring and Acceptance Theory explains mindfulness effects on cognition, affect, stress, and health outcomes related to wellbeing. This research may help add to the body of research as MAT relates to mindfulness practice. Lindsay and Creswell (2017) indicate two components most commonly used to define mindfulness and measures are,

1. By enhancing awareness of one's experiences, the skill of *attention monitoring* explains how mindfulness improves cognitive functioning outcomes, yet this same skill can increase affective reactivity
2. By modifying one's relation to monitored experience, *acceptance* is necessary for reducing affective reactivity, such that attention monitoring and acceptance skills

together explain how mindfulness improves negative affectivity, stress, and stress-related health outcomes.

The theory directly addresses these two basic components of mindfulness, monitoring and attention, and directly addresses the active mechanisms distinguishing it from other psychological constructs and interventions (Bishop et al., 2004; Quaglia et al., 2014). Along with understanding the experiences of students utilizing mindfulness practice as a means of stress management, understanding how MAT can be used as an underlying theory may add to the significance of the study and build on theory. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover the meaning of mindfulness to law students as it relates to stress during law school.

The scholarly literature gap with regard to law students lived experiences as it relates to their understanding mindfulness practices and how such practice informs their ability to manage stress (Doucet, 2015). The research addressed the deficiency, enriching and expanding the knowledge in this aspect of law students stress management abilities and mindfulness practices utilizing the Monitor and Acceptance Theory. The overarching research question was designed as a qualitative phenomenological approach related to law students and their mindfulness practices as it informed their stress management.

Research Questions

The central research question was related to the exploration of experience; therefore, a qualitative design was applicable. The exploration and understanding of the phenomenon lent itself to translation of the data into meaning utilizing the phenomenological methods approach (Moustakas, 1994) The phenomenological interview seeks the “how” and the “what” of a phenomenon and a description of what is “felt” as opposed to what was done (Moustakas, 1994). Using probing questions in an interview setting the researcher sought to understand what was felt

in the lived experiences of the participants. Moustakas has outlined five human science research questions which have definite characteristics: First, seeks to reveal more fully the essences and meaning of human experience; second it seeks to uncover the qualitative rather than the quantitative factors of behavior and experience (Moustakas, 1994), and the research methodology of this study supports the qualitative method; third, it involves engaging the total self of the research participant and sustains personal and passionate involvement (Moustakas, 1994). As stress management is a very personal and powerful concept for students, it is believed that students will engage; fourth, it does not seek to predict or to determine causal relations, as the research does not seek to predict the causal relationship of mindfulness as it relates to stress management (Moustakas, 1994); finally, “it is illuminated through careful, comprehensive descriptions, and, vivid accurate renderings of the experience, rather than measurements, ratings or scores,” (Moustakas, 1994). In this research, understanding the experience of mindfulness as it relates to the management of stress is central. Evidence indicates significant stress levels develop during law school, therefore understanding students lived experiences of mindfulness is impactful to their management of stress school (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015; Doucet, 2014; Flynn et al., 2017; George, 2015; Kim, 2014; Krill, 2018; Tyler, 2016; Skead & Rogers, 2013; Skead & Rogers, 2016). Ultimately, the goal to understand how students make meaning of mindfulness may be measured by the descriptions of their experiences as it relates to stress management. If students perceive mindfulness practice as a viable tool for the management of academic stress, this may have implications beyond law school, and into the lives of practicing attorneys.

Developing research questions using a phenomenological approach utilizes open-ended, evolving and non-directional questions that typically start with the either what or how. (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). The questions are few, between five to seven and start with global questions then lead to more specific forms of questions related to the research with recommendation of reducing questions to one all-encompassing, supported by several sub-questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Central Question: What are the lived experiences of law students and their mindfulness practice?

Sub-question 1: What contexts or situation have been experienced with the practice of mindfulness?

Sub-question 2: How does the act of monitoring and accepting guide the relationship to stress?

Sub-question 3: What academic experiences are associated with mindfulness?

Sub-question 4: How do mindfulness practices contribute to participants' meaning of social and emotional well-being?

The questions address what and how of the phenomenon of mindfulness and law students and their experiences with stress. Constructivism methodology promotes the idea that we are active creators of our own knowledge of the world through experiencing and reflection on those experiences (Adams, 2006). The central question supports the methodology of the research. Additionally, the central question developed the belief of knowledge as it related to the experience, which naturally leads to an epistemological approach related to the research of this study. The first sub-question was focuses on experiences and seeks to more fully understand the meaning of mindfulness experiences in context or situations (Moustakas, 1994). The second sub-question was related to monitoring and acceptance theory to more understand the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). The processes and practice of mindfulness was dependent on the ability for

an individual to monitor, accept and respond their emotional state in a non-judgmentally, which includes stress.

Monitor and Acceptance Theory (MAT) posits that (1), by enhancing awareness of one's experiences, the skill of attention monitoring explains how mindfulness improves cognitive functioning outcomes, yet this same skill can increase affective reactivity.

Second (2), by modifying one's relation to monitored experience, acceptance is necessary for reducing affective reactivity, such that attention monitoring and acceptance skills together explain how mindfulness improves negative affectivity, stress, and stress-related health outcomes (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017).

The third sub-question focused on the ability to analyze individual experiences from the first-person point of view where the phenomena and the structure of the experience of meaning and understanding are in relation to others is central (Moustakas, 1994). Last sub-question pointed back to the experience of mindfulness and how it contributed to the wellbeing of law students and their relationships with stress. The MAT views that acceptance is a dynamic emotional regulation skill, and critical for effective mindfulness training related to altering affective, stress reactivity and overall wellbeing (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017).

Definitions

Definitions were provided to ensure clarity and understanding of the language used in this study. The definitions were supported by peer reviewed journals and accepted throughout the mindfulness community.

1. Mindfulness: The most commonly used definition of mindfulness in current publications and adopted for this study originates from Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. It reads, "Paying attention in a particular way:

on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2004).

Mindfulness is also defined as “a receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience” (Lindsay, E. K., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). Sharon Salzberg (1995), meditation teacher, describes mindfulness as “both being aware of our present moment’s experience, and relating to that experience without grasping, aversion or delusion” (p. 177). Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hahn’s definition of mindfulness states, “Mindfulness is the energy of being aware and awake to the present moment. To be mindful is to be truly alive, present and at one with those around you and with what you are doing” (Plum Village Mindfulness Practice Center, 2018). Pema Chodron (1997), a Tibetan Buddhist teacher, explains, “The ground of not causing harm is mindfulness, a sense of clear seeing with respect and compassion for what it is we see” (p. 32).

2. Mindfulness Meditation: As a practice, mindfulness meditation is a nonsectarian form of meditation. It is intended to develop skills of paying attention to the world and encourages compassion, acceptance and kindness. It also brings awareness and presence to a person, helping one to avoid functioning on “autopilot.” (Salzberg, 1995).
3. Mindfulness Contemplative Practice: The terms mindfulness and contemplative practice are sometimes used interchangeably, but not all agree they represent the same meaning. Mindfulness is often defined as an intentional, regular or daily engagement in present-moment awareness, observation of what arises and an absence of judgment. Contemplative practice is considered a broader term to reflect a wider set of practices and does not always include an absence of judgment. The term contemplative originates from the concept of “a place reserved or cut out for observance” and infers opportunity for introspection (Barbezat & Bush, 2014, p. 21).

4. Wellbeing: Wellbeing is defined as the cultivation and existence of mental, emotional and physical balance and health. Lawyer wellbeing is a continuous process whereby lawyers seek to thrive in each of the following areas: emotional health, occupational pursuits, creative or intellectual endeavors, sense of spirituality or greater purpose in life, physical health, and social connections with others. Lawyer wellbeing is part of a lawyer's ethical duty of competence. It includes lawyers' ability to make healthy, positive work/life choices to assure not only a quality of life within their families and communities, but also to help them make responsible decisions for their clients (ABA, 2018).
5. Stress: "Emotional experience accompanied by predictable biochemical, physiological and behavioral changes" (Baum, 1990). People can overcome minor episodes of stress; however excessive chronic stress can be psychologically and physically debilitating. Stress arises when individuals perceive that they cannot adequately cope with the demands being made on them or with threats to their well-being. Stress results from an imbalance between demands and resources. And, stress is the psychological, physiological and behavioral response by an individual when they perceive a lack of equilibrium between the demands placed upon them and their ability to meet those demands, which, over a period of time, leads to ill-health (Lazarus, 1990).

Summary

Mindfulness has shown to increase overall health. Wellness issues for law students have traditionally been an issue. The ABA has recognized that they need to put into action resources to help law students manage their stress during law school and lessen issues association with attorney's wellbeing. Managing stress through the practice of mindfulness may be an option

for consideration. Research has supported mindfulness practices have been effective in the management of emotions related to stressful environment. Understanding how law students make meaning of mindfulness as the practice related to manage stress may give law students and future attorneys tools improve their overall physical and mental health.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The phenomenon of mindfulness has substantial wellbeing benefits for attorneys and for the practice of law (Bamber and Schneider, 2016; Kim, 2014). Students who participate in the practice of mindfulness during law school may be able to manage the perceptions of stress and increase the overall wellness of law students and their future occupation (Krill et al., 2016; Krill, Johnson, & Albert, 2016). Current studies indicate that chronic stress begins to develop during the first semester of law school and progressively worsen (Skead & Rogers, 2013). Researchers theorize that mindfulness meditation promotes metacognitive awareness, decreases rumination via disengagement from perseverative cognitive activities, provide an opportunity of acceptance and enhances attention capacities through gains in working memory (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Shapiro & Carlson, 2017; Thompson & Waltz, 2007). Understanding the motivation to utilize mindfulness as technique to manage stress may help improve the overall wellbeing of law students.

Theoretical Framework

The Monitor and Acceptance Theory (MAT) include the basic mechanism related to the effects of mindfulness. MAT is a testable framework offered by theorists Emily Lindsay and David Creswell that outlines the mechanisms of mindfulness driving cognitive, affective, stress and health outcomes (Lindsay and Creswell, 2017). MAT explains how monitoring and acceptance skills interact to drive mindfulness and mindfulness intervention. Specifically, MAT posits that

1. Skills in monitoring the present moment may enhance the vividness of experience, thus intensifying affective reactivity.

2. Bringing an attitude of acceptance toward monitored experiences is a key emotion regulation mechanism for the effects of interventions on affective, stress, social relationship, and health outcomes (Lindsay and Creswell, 2017).

These two components, monitoring and accepting, are key to develop mindfulness and are central in mindfulness training programs. MAT posits two distinct effects of attention monitoring and acceptance abilities, first, cognitive outcomes such as selective attention, sustained attention, and task switching, working memory and insight are developed, and secondly, enhancing attention to affective information including intensifying both negative and positive reactivity (Lindsay and Creswell, 2017). Monitor and Acceptance Theory (MAT) situates acceptance as an emotion regulation mechanism and reviews self-report mindfulness literature showing that attention-monitoring skills are only associated with beneficial mental and physical health outcomes when accompanied by acceptance skills (Lindsay and Creswell, 2017). Prominent theoretical models identify emotion regulation as a central mechanism for the effects of mindfulness on mental and physical health outcomes, acting to reduce affective and physiological reactivity and promote recovery (Hořlzel, Lazar, Gard, Schuman-Olivier, Vago , Ott U, 2011).

The core tenets of MAT include:

1. Attention monitoring skills enhance awareness of present-moment experience. As such, attention monitoring alone:
 - a. Is a mechanism for the effects of mindfulness on improving cognitive functioning outcomes in affectively neutral contexts.
 - b. Heightens affective experience and reactivity, both exacerbating negative symptoms and enhancing positive experiences. As such, attention-monitoring

skills alone are not sufficient for improving performance on cognitive tasks that balance attention controls with emotion regulation.

2. Acceptance skills modify the way one relates to present-moment experience, regulating reactivity to affective experience. As such, attention monitoring and acceptance skills together:
 - a. Boost performance on cognitive tasks that involve emotion regulation.
 - b. Reduce negative reactivity (e.g., anxiety, depression, stress) and reduce grasping of positive experiences (e.g., craving, substance use).
 - c. Improve stress-related health outcomes (Lindsay and Creswell, 2017).

The attention monitoring and development skills help enhance ongoing awareness of present-moment experience and involve staying in contact with an object, such as the breath. An emotion regulation meta-analysis study conducted by Kohl, Reif, & Glombiewski (2012) substantially confirms that acceptance is an effective strategy and acceptance training is considered a key therapeutic element of many clinical interventions targeting anxiety, depressive, and other disorders characterized by experiential avoidance. MAT posits that attention monitoring and acceptance skills are a critical feature of interventions that drive emotion regulation and subsequent improvements in mental and physical health outcomes. (Kohl, Rief & Glombiewski, 2012).

Attention monitoring skills are associated with better cognitive functioning related to non-affective tasks such as perceptual accuracy, attention performance and creativity (Kohl, Rief & Glombiewski, 2012). These skills are also associated with greater psychological distress in affective context such as depression, anxiety and stress symptoms, sensitivity to distress, and poor subjective health (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). In studies related to affect, attention-

monitoring skills also related to higher satisfaction with life, positive growth and positive behaviors (Lindsay & Creswell, 2015). By enhancing awareness, attention monitoring may heighten both negative and positive affective states. Noticing and monitoring a broad range of pleasant feelings, thoughts, and body sensations may allow positive experiences to be appreciated and savored (Garland, Farb, Goldin, & Fredrickson, 2015; Lindsay & Creswell, 2015).

Second, as specified by MAT, the combination of high attention monitoring and acceptance skills has been related to lower negative affective reactivity outcomes such as lower depressive and anxiety symptoms, rumination and worry, distress intolerance, affective lability, substance abuse and lower systemic low-grade inflammation (Lindsay & Creswell, 2015). These interactions suggest that high acceptance skills may moderate the impact of attention monitoring skills on negative affective states, psychological distress and physical health. With promising correlational findings, MAT provides an organizing and potentially generative theoretical framework for predicting outcomes in the emerging mindfulness scientific literature savored (Garland, Farb, Goldin, & Fredrickson, 2015; Lindsay & Creswell, 2015).

MAT-Attention Monitoring. According to Lindsay and Creswell (2017) attention monitoring is defined as an ongoing awareness of present moment sensory and perceptual experiences such as sounds in, body sensations, mental dialogue and images. The ability to monitor experiences relies on selective and executive attention networks. The executive attention is involved in the regulations of thoughts, emotions and responses (Malinowski, 2013). Monitoring and Acceptance Theory views that when an individual is actively monitoring their attention, the skill of monitoring enhances awareness whether the experience is positive, negative or neutral (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). Monitoring attention practice includes staying in contact

with a chosen focal object, such as breath, and then redirecting the attention back to the particular object when the mind begins to wander (Posner & Petersen, 1990). Harvard's study related to mind-wandering found that people spend 46.9 percent of their waking hours thinking about something other than what they're doing (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010); essentially, not being present. The study also correlated this type of mindlessness to unhappiness. "A wandering mind is an unhappy mind," Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). William James (1890) who is considered the father of American psychology, wrote in his two-volume tome, *The Principles of Psychology*, said, "that the ability to voluntarily bring back a wandering attention over and over again is the very root of judgment, character, and will." He went on to say that an education that sharpens attention would be education *par excellence*. But, he continues, "it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical directions for bringing it about" (James, 1890).

Monitoring skills enhance with attention training (Malinowski, 2013). Without, however, the orientation of acceptance toward the experience, monitoring compounds the experience of salient distressing stimuli and often exacerbates the symptoms which may impair cognitive task performance in affective or threaten contexts (Ehlers & Breuer, 1996). To illustrate, when panic disorder patients monitor body sensations during a panic attack, this monitoring can prolong the panic symptoms if acceptance is not also practiced (Ehlers & Breuer, 1996).

MAT-Acceptance. Acceptance is an objective and nonreactive disposition related to the momentary sensations (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). It is also defined as a mental attitude of nonjudgmental, openness and receptivity, and equanimity toward internal and external experiences (cf. Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2004; Desbordes et al., 2015). Regardless of the experience, acceptance allows these experiences to rise without judgment including unpleasant or stressful situations and diminishes as other experiences enter awareness

(Kabat-Zinn, 2002). By not labeling situations, but rather approaching them with an attitude of curiosity and interest, non-judgment will increase the ability maintain a sense of calm reflection, emotional stability and composure. (Kabat-Zinn, 2002). In an accepting mindset individuals are able to effectively adjust to chronic stress by noticing and reducing anxiety and depression symptom severity (Koh, Rief & Glombiewski, 2012). In the MAT, Lindsay & Creswell (2017), consider acceptance as a broad construction including non-reactivity, equanimity, nonjudgmental, openness, non-evaluative, and non-elaborative (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017).

Acceptance training has been theorized as an essential component of interventions for improving affective reactivity, stress, and health outcomes but no mechanistic dismantling studies had tested this hypothesis, until recently (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). Lindsay, Young, Smyth, Brown and Creswell (2018) conducted the first experimental evidence that acceptance is a critical component of mindfulness training for reducing biological stress reactivity; without acceptance training (monitor only training), mindfulness stress buffering effects are only slightly diminished. Specifically, monitor accept training reduced both neuroendocrine (salivary cortisol) and sympathetic nervous system stress reactivity biomarkers compared to monitor only and control training (Lindsay, Young, Smyth, Brown & Creswell, 2018). Acceptance may help to regulate stress reactivity by facilitating the acknowledgement of (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012) and subsequent disengagement from all momentary sensory experiences, even difficult or stressful ones (Lindsay, Young, Smyth, Brown & Creswell, 2018).

MAT builds on conceptual, clinical, and empirical work to provide a theoretical framework outlining the active mechanisms of mindfulness training (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). MAT depicts the basic skills acquired in mindfulness training interventions (attention monitoring and acceptance) that may help explain specific and dissociable effects on cognitive, affective,

stress reduction, and stress-related health outcomes (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). MAT complements recent theoretical work identifying psychological mechanisms of change following mindfulness interventions such as emotion regulation, attention control, and self-awareness (Hölzel et al., 2011; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). The basic components of attention monitoring and acceptance are common factors across all models of mindfulness.

Self-determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation that maintains that not all types of motivation are as conducive to wellbeing as others (Deci & Ryan, 2008b). The seminal work of Deci and Ryan on SDT was published in 1985 titled, *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. SDT is a theory of human motivation and personality that utilizes empirical methods to investigate individual's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs which highlight the importance of personality development and behavioral self-regulation (Ryan, Kuhl, & Deci, 1997). Individuals' inherent growth and psychological needs are the foundations for self-motivation and personality development including the environment to foster positive these processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan, Kuhl, & Deci, 1997). SDT is related to what types of motivation, rather than how much motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan, Kuhl, & Deci, 1997).

The theoretical premise of SDT believes that individuals are active and self-motivated with three basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. These three basic needs appear to be essential for optimal functioning, growth and integration to construct social development and personal wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Research conducted by Ryan and Deci (2002) in a variety of countries and confirms the idea of these universal needs is associated with wellbeing across all cultures. These societies include cultures that support both individualism and collectivism for optimal functioning (Deci and Ryan, 2008).

Competence. The need for competence relates to an individual experience with a sense of their self-efficacy and confidence as it relates to their abilities (Bandura 1977; Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individuals who are able to master their interactions with the outside world increase their positive affect and feel successful with fewer negative effects as opposed to those who continue to face failure (Bandura 1977; Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Relatedness. Relatedness is an individual's experience with a sense of connection to and support from others (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Mikulincer & Shaver 2007). This connection and support creates a sense of secure interpersonal base thus reducing external anxiety from outside environmental threats and therefore enhancing wellbeing (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Mikulincer and Shaver 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Autonomy. Autonomy involves a sense of agency and choice where the individual experiences ownership of their behavior (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Sheldon, Cheng, & Hilpert, 2011). Individuals who feel autonomous experience less anxiety and do not feel pressured to respond in a particular way such as "should" or "ought", which leads to vitality and an increased sense of wellbeing (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Sheldon, Cheng, & Hilpert, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Empirical research supports that the fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs which include autonomy, relatedness, and competence, predict wellbeing (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Reis et al. (2000) conducted research that found individuals' daily wellbeing, measured by positive and negative affect, was influenced by the degree to which these three psychological needs were met.

SDT characterizes optimal self-functioning in terms of autonomy, in which ones actions are integrated and self-endorsed. This entails individuals are fully informed by what is occurring rather than by controlling forces, either in the environment or in the self-concept. Hodgins and Knee (2002), “Individuals who are functioning autonomously are responsive to reality rather than directed by ego-invested preconceived notions” (p. 89). Within the SDT view, awareness identified as a relaxed and interested attention to what is occurring (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Deci and Ryan (2000) also argues, “when awareness is blocked or inhibited the person is typically less able to engage in effective self-regulation” (p. 254). Mindfulness, as presently defined, has accordingly been described within SDT as a foundation for healthy self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2004). Brown and Ryan (2003) provided some evidence for this connection mindfulness and autonomous self-regulation such as a self-endorsed, choice action. Although SDT may seem paradoxical to the mechanisms of mindfulness that support the quieting of self-concept concern, the parallel between the concepts both entail an attachment to fixed identities and concerns with self-esteem (Ryan & Brown, 2003). Ryan and Brown (2003) noted, a person “acting in an integrated mindful way seeks not self-esteem, but rather, right action, all things considered” (p. 75).

Related Literature

The concept of mindfulness is firmly rooted in Buddhist psychology, but it shares conceptual kinship with ideas advanced by a variety of philosophical and psychological traditions, including ancient Greek philosophy, phenomenology, existentialism, and naturalism in later Western European thought, and transcendentalism and humanism in America (Neves-Pereira et al., 2018). This mode of being suggests its centrality to the human experience, and indeed, mindfulness is rooted in the fundamental activities of consciousness: attention and

awareness (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Mindfulness is a practice that directly addresses cognitive context, the way that the mind processes thoughts and events. Mindfulness techniques seek to change the psychological context of cognition by directing the awareness from an engagement with concepts to a nonjudgmental, open, observation of the presence of concepts (Hayes et al., 2004).

As mindfulness has currently been adopted in Western psychotherapy and migrates away from its ancient roots, its meaning has expanded. Most notably, mental qualities beyond sati (awareness, attention, and remembering) are included in “mindfulness” (Bishop et al., 2004). Recently, scientists have become interested in the effects of mindfulness on mental health (Hayes et al., 2004). According to western scientific approaches the definition of mindfulness has many authors (Bishop et al., 2004). Jon Kabat-Zinn (2004), the foremost pioneer in the therapeutic application of mindfulness, defined mindfulness as,

“paying attention, in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally and bringing one’s complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis.”

However, other scholars have their own definitions. Bishop’s (2004) definition of mindfulness is defined in two parts:

1. The self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment
2. A particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment

This present moment orientation is also characterized by curiosity, openness and acceptance. Langer (2002) has written extensively regarding mindfulness and uses the idea of “a flexible state of mind where we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive

to context.” She also distinguishes from a mindlessness state when we act according to the sense of our behavior made in the past, rather than in the present. Getting caught in a single, rigid perspective creates a state of mind where alternative ways of knowing are not possible (Langer, 2000).

“Mindfulness isn’t just about knowing that you’re hearing something, seeing something, or even observing that you’re having a particular feeling. It’s about being so in a certain way – with balance and equanimity, and without judgment. Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention in a way that creates space for insight” (Salzberg, 2002).

Thich Nhat Hanh (2010),

“Mindfulness shows us what is happening in our bodies, our emotions, our minds, and in the world. Mindfulness is not about emptying the mind, but rather connecting individuals to what is happening in their mind. Through mindfulness, we avoid harming ourselves and others.”

Siegel’s (2018) defines mindfulness as,

“In its most general sense is about waking up from a life on automatic and being sensitive to novelty in our everyday experiences. With mindful awareness the flow of energy and information enters our conscious attention and we can both appreciate its contents and come to regulate its flow in a new way.”

Mindfulness scholars have provided accounts of how the mechanisms of action in mindfulness operate to produce beneficial effects and alleviate psychological distress and contribute to the theoretical understanding of the essential components of mindfulness practice (Bishop et al., 2004). The conceptual framework of mindfulness is the process wherein awareness is brought to experiences in a non-judgmental way and with positive recognition

(Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness promotes the purposeful focus on feelings the moment they are felt (Coholic, 2011; Heifetz & Dyson, 2016). Kabat-Zinn (2013) believed mindfulness was to be used to counteract moving through life in a systematic way “autopilot”, wherein individuals are encouraged to pay focus to each piece of their whole, and not just the whole as the entity. Individuals can be taught to pay attention to their minds and bodies, allowing them to trust themselves and their experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). Although mindfulness has its roots in Eastern contemplative traditions and is most often associated with the formal practice of mindfulness meditation, mindfulness, however, is more than meditation (Goleman, & Davidson, 2018). It is “inherently a state of consciousness” which involves consciously attending to one’s moment-to-moment experience (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Meditation practice is simply “scaffolding” used to develop the state, or skill, of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Meditation, as Kabat-Zinn (2005) proposes, is an individuals’ ability to be more mindful and aware of their thoughts and actions.

The discipline of meditation involves building a system of self-regulation practices. By training individual attention and awareness for greater voluntary control, practitioners can foster overall wellbeing and development in addition to specific qualities of calmness, clarity, and concentration (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Mindfulness is the practice of training the mind (Sedlmeier et al., 2012; Benson & Klipper, 1976).

Stress and Anxiety

Stress is any uncomfortable emotional experience accompanied by predictable biochemical, physiological, and behavioral changes (Hassard, Teoh, Visockaite, Dewey & Cox, 2017). Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) definition of stress reflects the amount of stress experienced by individuals which is determined by the perceived demands upon them as well as

by their perceived resources. Cognitive factors thus influence both the stimulus and the response sides of the equation. Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (1984) indicates that stress is "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her wellbeing." According to Lazarus (2000), stress is a two-way process; first the production of stressors by the environment, and second the response of an individual subjected to the stressor. Lazarus conception regarding stress led to the Theory of Cognitive Appraisal that occurs when an individual considers two major factors that contribute to response to stress (Lazarus, 2000). These two factors include the threatening tendency of the stress to the individual and the assessment of resources required to minimize, tolerate or eradicate the stressor and the stress it produces (Lazarus, 2000). Not all stress is viewed as negative, at times stress can benefit individuals by boosting drive and energy to work through situations such as exams or deadline; stress can be viewed as a motivator. Most commonly, however, extreme amounts of stress can have aversive health consequences affecting the immune, cardiovascular, neuroendocrine, digestive and central nervous systems (Hassard, Teoh, Visockaite, Dewey & Cox, 2017).

The two concepts that are central to psychological stress are an individual's appraisal that includes the evaluation of wellbeing and coping. It includes the thought process and action deployed by an individual to manage specific demands or thoughts (Ventegodt & Wiedemann, 2014). Lazarus (2002) detailed the reciprocal relationship with an individual's environment and provided a framework for understanding the experience of stress and related to multiple stressors. Environmental, as well as personal factors, may influence an individual's response to stress (Hickle & Anthony, 2013). Such factors may include financial resources, social skills and

abilities, social support, health concerns, environment factors as well as the type of stressor, duration and imminent possibilities of danger (Tan, 2018).

Stress has been viewed in three ways that include a stimulus, a response and a process (Slavich, 2016). Stimulus refers to stress and can be categorized as beginnings from three different sources of stress which include catastrophic events including natural disasters, major life events, such as death of a loved one, and chronic circumstances major health issues (Slavich, 2016). A response refers to how one responds to stress stimuli. The two components of stress response are physiological, such as rapid heartbeats and psychological involving emotions, including behaviors and thought patterns (Slavich, 2016). Stress is a process (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). A person experiencing stress is seen to be the active agent who can influence the impact of a stressor through behavioral, cognitive and emotional strategies employed to cope with the stress (Bamber & Kraenzle, 2016).

Anxiety is an ambiguous feeling that is worsened when a person experiences are unresolved stress or multiple stressors projected in to the future (Bamber & Kraenzle, 2016). Anxiety is a state of psychopathology where stressors have not yet occurred, but the individual's perception of future stress (Bamber & Kraenzle, 2016). The Royal College of Psychiatrists indicates that anxiety disorders, including panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and social anxiety disorder affect about one in ten (Dean, 2016). Another report indicated that as many as one in nine people had been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in the past year (Craske & Stein, 2016). There are numerous psychological and pharmacological treatments for anxiety disorders although reports show that there are more effective, evidenced-based treatment approaches currently being developed (Craske & Stein, 2016).

Individuals with anxiety disorders are extremely and excessively fearful, anxious or avoidant of perceived environmental threats that could include a social situation, and perceived internal threats to oneself such as unusual bodily sensations (Craske & Stein, 2016). The response to these perceived threats is out of proportion to the actual risk or danger that is currently posed. Fear and anxiety are considered normal responses to threats and very common in ordinary life (Craske & Stein, 2016) however it is the disproportionate reaction that is the cause for concern.

Without fear or anxiety, regulating mechanisms to analysis fight-flight-freeze response, individuals cannot skillfully judge danger. When fear is present, it is perceived as an imminent threat, as compared to anxiety is which is a state of anticipation of perceived future threats (Craske & Stein, 2016). Coping strategies associated with stress, fear and anxiety range from avoidance behaviors to subtle reliance on objects. The diagnosis for an anxiety disorder is the individual need to present with excessive or out of proportion response to the actual threat that is posed, it must be persistent and associate with social, occupation or other important areas of functioning of impairment (Dean, 2016). Often symptoms emerge in stressful periods of life, but not considered a disorder unless they persist for at least six months and significantly interfere with functioning abilities (Dean, 2016).

Mindfulness, Stress and Anxiety

Research has shown that when people meditate there is a greater likelihood they will have less anxiety and more positive affect (Davidson et al., 2003). According to Buddhism, intention is central to experiencing mindfulness and is necessary for understanding the overall experience and goal (Bowlin & Baer, 2012). Intention allows a person to self-regulate and self-explore with

curiosity their thoughts and feelings (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). It opens up the mind to be liberated and selfless.

Mindfulness meditative practices have been used to relieve stress and tension as individuals explore their thoughts and altering the relationship with stress (Davidson et al., 2003). The goal of mindfulness is not to achieve any specific outcome, such as stress reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). The intention is to help a person become fully aware of where they are, as they are and understand thoughts do not have value until an individual gives them value; changing the relationship with stress is how Kabat-Zinn (2004) explains the effects of mindfulness and stress. "Reality is created by the mind, we can change our reality by changing your mind." –*Plato*. Goleman and Davidson (2018) report that meditators recover more quickly from stress than non-meditators due to a more relaxed state before, during and after the experience of the stressor. Goleman and Davidson (2018) believe that how a person responds to a stressor impacts the way they respond. According to Kabat-Zinn (2004), "Healing implies the possibility that we can relate differently to illness, disability, even death, as we learn to see with eyes of wholeness" (p. 200). Kabat-Zinn (2004) believes that by coming in contact with one's wholeness, a person is able to connect with him or herself in state of connectedness that allows a person to make peace with their current situation. While it is important to keep in mind that the goal of meditation is not to achieve some special or heightened state, nor to eliminate symptoms or lessen pain, it is the ability to recognize, alter the relationship and accept the issue that can bring relief from the suffering associated discomfort and stress. "Acceptance as we see are speaking of it simply means that, sooner or later, you have come around to a willingness to see things as they are" Kabat-Zinn (2000). Kabat-Zinn (2004) suggests that healing comes through accepting the present moment and living with that acceptance. It is this awareness and the

relationship that has the potential to transform the way a person lives their life. “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” William Shakespeare, Hamlet.

Benefits of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a useful tool to help people understand, tolerate, and deal with their emotions in healthy ways with potential life changing results. It helps us to alter our reaction by taking pause and choosing how we will respond. When individuals are mindful, they may experience life as they are living it in that very moment. “The real meditation practice is how we live our lives from moment to moment to moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2004)

Stress/Anxiety/Depression Reduction. The benefits of mindfulness practices have been recognized by nearly every religious tradition, dating back for thousands of years (Langer, 2014). Studies have shown that more mindful people experience less stress, they react to stress more adaptively, recover from stressful experiences more quickly ~~and~~ than less mindful individuals (Bowlin & Baer, 2012; Kiken & Shook, 2012). Additionally, Bowlin and Baer (2012) found mindfulness and stress are negatively correlated. For example, in an experience sampling study, Weinstein, Brown and Ryan (2009) found that daily mindfulness was negatively related to daily stress. "When you meditate, you are better able to ignore the negative sensations of stress and anxiety, which explains, in part, why stress levels fall when you meditate," (Denninger et al., 2014). Kabat-Zinn (2004) indicates that the goal is to change the relationship with stress. Mindfulness creates a better relationship with stress and anxiety by calibrating momentary neutrality therefore creating space for tolerance (Salzberg, 1994). Practicing mindfulness for stress and anxiety is an open, compassionate attitude toward and individual's inner experience to help create a healthy distance between a person and their stressful thoughts and anxious feelings (Denninger et al., 2014). Its strong neuro-scientific base has enhanced the

credibility of mindfulness exercises as an intervention for anxiety and stress and stress-related illness (Davidson et al. 2003).

Depression continues to be a major health issue. Major depressive disorder affects approximately 17.3 million American adults, or about 7.1% of the U.S. population age 18 and older, in a given year (National Institute of Mental Health, 2017). Regular depression can lead to higher risks for heart disease and death from illnesses; stress and anxiety are major triggers of depression, and meditation can alter the reaction and relationship to those feelings (Denninger, et. al., 2014). "Meditation trains the brain to achieve sustained focus, and to return to that focus when negative thinking, emotions, and physical sensations intrude — which happens a lot when you feel stressed and anxious," (Denninger, et. al., 2014).

Studies have shown that meditation has been found to change certain brain regions that are specifically linked with depression (Williams, Jones, Shen, Robinson, & Kroenke 2004). Studies have shown that the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) becomes hyperactive in depressed people (Goleman & Davidson, 2018). The mPFC is often called the Me Center and is where individuals process information about themselves, such as worrying about the future and ruminating about the past. When individuals get distressed about life, the mPFC goes into overdrive (Williams, Jones, Shen, Robinson, & Kroenke 2004). Another brain region associated with depression is the amygdala, or "fear center." This is the part of the brain responsible for the fight-flight-freeze response, which triggers the adrenal glands to release the stress hormone cortisol in response to fear and perceived danger. As the body perceives stress, the adrenal gland makes and releases the hormone cortisol into the bloodstream (Braden et al., 2016; Hölzel, 2013; Young, 2018). The Me Center gets worked up reacting to stress and anxiety, and the fear center response leads to a spike in cortisol levels to flight-flight-freeze danger that's only in the mind

(Braden et al., 2016; Hölzel, 2013; Young, 2018). Research has found that meditation helps regulate the amygdala and lessen the reactivity of how outside events dictate the response both internally and externally (Williams, Jones, Shen, Robinson & Kroenke 2004). Mindfulness meditation has been associated with statistically significant improvements in depression, physical health-related quality of life, and mental health-related quality of life (Chiesa, & Serretti, 2011).

Promotes Physical Health. In a randomized controlled trial (RCT) conducted by Hughes et al., (2013) of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) for prehypertension, MBSR resulted in a reduction in clinic systolic blood pressure and diastolic blood pressure compared with progressive muscle relaxation training. Younge et al., (2015) study's included patients with heart disease who had high incidence of physiological and psychological problems. The results of the RCT indicated a significant lower heart rate in the mindfulness group as compared to the control group. They concluded that mindfulness training showed positive effects on the physiological parameters exercise capacity and heart rate and called for additional studies to be conducted patients with heart disease (Younge, 2015). Research has also indicated that meditation may reduce inflammation. Creswell et al., (2016) conducted a RCT of 35 unemployed, highly stressed adults and sent them on a three-day retreat where they were taught either mindfulness meditation or relaxation techniques without focus on mindfulness. Brain scans before and after the retreat indicated that the brains of participants who had completed the mindfulness retreat had developed increased functional connectivity indicating that the brain cells in regions involving attention and executive control were working together better than before the retreat (Creswell et al., 2016). Most significant in the study were the lower levels in Interleukin-6, an inflammatory health biomarker which is related to inflammation (Creswell et al., 2016). These

changes were not seen in the participants who were trained in relaxation techniques, this is significant because high doses of Interleukin-6 (inflammation) have been linked to inflammation-related diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's and autoimmune conditions (Creswell et al., 2016).

Immune System. Mindfulness meditation has emerged as a promising intervention for cancer populations. Bower et al., (2015) conducted a random control, wait list study with survivors of premenopausal cancer in women under the age of 50 years old. The experiment group participated in a Mindfulness Awareness Practice program at UCLA (Bower et al., 2015). Relative to wait-list controls, the 6-week intervention led to significant improvements in perceived stress and improvement in depressive symptoms, additionally significant reductions in pro-inflammatory gene expression and bioinformatics indications of pro-inflammatory signaling (Bower et al., 2015).

This increase in the immune system may be linked to the reduction in stress. The fact is that the brain is intimately connected to every organ in the body, including the immune system. When stress is activated in an acute form, this activates the fight-flight-freeze response (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The stress response has evolved overtime for humans to survive various life threatening situations, however prolonged stress, also known as chronic stress levels are not good and over time the immunologic health will be jeopardized (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The stress hormone corticosteroid can suppress the effectiveness of the immune system (Braden et al., 2016; Hölzel, 2013; Young, 2018). The nervous system discharges signals along two different pathways, which include the sympathetic system and the parasympathetic system (Seegerstrom & Miller, 2004). The sympathetic system is designed to charge acutely, but take a toll chronically and the parasympathetic system is designed to calm the system and is shown to be associated with anti-inflammatory properties (Seegerstrom & Miller, 2004). Mindfulness

practice is an activator to help control these systems and achieves optimal immunological health (Goleman & Davidson, 2018).

Improves Sleep. Most people experience sleepless nights. Sleep disturbances is estimated to affect 10-25% of the general population (Morin & Jarrin, 2013). Accumulated sleep deficiency can lead to both psychological and physical conditions including depression, heart issues, high blood pressure and diabetes (Rusch et al., 2018). Pharmaceutical sleep aids remain the first-line treatment for insomnia (Morin & Jarrin, 2013). While effective, they have the potential for abuse, cross-reactivity with other medications, and side effects, including memory loss, abnormal thoughts, behavioral changes, and headaches (Buscemi, 2007).

Research by done by Pattanashetty (2010) showed Vipassana (mindfulness) meditators showed enhance slow wave sleep and rapid eye movement sleep states with enhanced number of sleep cycles across all age groups. The study suggest that Vipassana meditation helps establish a proper sleep structure through its capacity to induce neuronal plasticity events leading to stronger networks synchronization and cortical synaptic strengthening (Pattanashetty, 2010). Meditation thus produces a continuum of global regulatory changes at various behavioral levels favoring quality sleep (Buscemi, 2007).

Improves Attention. Mindfulness meditation practice is known to affect various psychological outcomes, including cognitive performance and attention. Much research has focused on the positive effects of mindfulness meditation training on the attention processes, including alerting, orienting, and executive attention and studies indicate these three forms of attention are observed by three separable neural networks (Posner & Petersen, 1990). The alerting network maintains a state of vigilance or alertness and is measured as a readiness to attend to important or relevant stimuli when they arise, the orienting network is responsible for

attending selectively to a sense modality or a location in space such as focused attention by prioritizing attention to a subset of possible inputs and the executive control network which is responsible for deciding between competing inputs, and therefore plays an important role in conflict detection (Petersen & Posner, 2012). Studies suggest that even in novices, one brief 10-min audio-guided mindfulness meditation instruction period improve attention (Norris, Creem, Hendler, & Kober, 2018). The observed performance improvements varied as a function of the cognitive demands placed on the individual and when time pressure was applied, participants in the meditation condition exhibited a boost in accuracy reflecting increased attentional control (Norris, Creem, Hendler, & Kober, 2018). When the task was more complex but less temporally constrained, participants in the meditation condition were faster to respond correctly, regardless of the presence or absence of distracting stimuli (Norris, Creem, Hendler, & Kober, 2018).

Relationship to Pain. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction therapy (MBSR) has become a popular treatment for individuals with chronic pain. Chronic pain, often defined as pain lasting longer than 3 months or past the normal time for tissue healing can lead to significant medical, social, and economic consequences, relationship issues, lost productivity, and larger health care costs (Chou et al., 2015). Further, chronic pain is frequently accompanied by psychiatric disorders such as pain medication addiction and depression that make treatment complicated (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011). First described by Kabat-Zinn 15 as an out-patient program for patients with various conditions of chronic pain that could not be treated effectively within hospital, MBSR therapy combines meditation, body-awareness and yoga to enhance the individual's ability to self-regulate and hence cope with the pain experience. MBSR is not a method to reduce pain, but to have a different relationship with pain (Kabat-Zinn, 2004) and improve pain acceptance (Cramer, Haller, Lauche & Dobos, 2012). Study conduct by La Cour

and Petersen (2015) using the standardized mindfulness program (MBSR) concluded that MBSR contributes positively to pain management and can influence clinically relevant effects on several important dimensions in patients with long-lasting chronic pain. The secondary variables in the study showed significant medium to large size effects were found for lowering general anxiety and depression associated with chronic pain, better mental quality of life feeling in control of the pain, and higher pain acceptance. Small effect sizes were found for pain measures decreasing pain, indicating that the pain was not decreased, just the relationship with the pain was improved (La Cour & Petersen, 2015)

Mindfulness Meditation Clarifications

Mindfulness is a secular discourse insofar as it remains radically open to revision based on emerging evidence. The practice of mindfulness has migrated from being part of a religion, Buddhism, to being an integral part of Western psychology. Mindfulness is especially used in cognitive behavioral therapy but also in, for example, dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) (Frisk, 2012). Mindfulness makes claims that are explicitly empirical and are related to the nature of wellbeing, human distress and flourishing. These types of claims have been best evaluated and supported by scientific methods.

Mindfulness meditation is not emptying the brain; mindfulness meditation gives individuals a time in their lives when they can suspend judgment and unleash their natural curiosity about the workings of the mind, approaching their experience with warmth and kindness, to themselves and others, it is not about tuning out (Frisk, 2012). Meditation begins and ends in the body. It involves taking the time to pay attention to where we are and what's going on, and that starts with being aware of our body. That very act of meditation can be

calming; since our body has internal rhythms that help it relax if individuals are receptive (Kabat-Zinn, 2002).

Meditation is exploring. It's not a fixed destination. It's a place where each and every moment is momentous. When individuals meditate they venture into the workings of their minds, sensations, feelings air flowing through the nose, emotions such as love, hate, crave, disgust, and thoughts, such as stress (Salzberg, 1994). Mindfulness meditation asks individuals to release judgment and unleash the natural curiosity related the workings of the mind, approaching experiences with warmth, curiosity and kindness (Stratton, 2015).

Meditation is simple, but hard to practice. "Meditation is the only intentional, systematic human activity which is not trying to improve yourself or get anywhere else, but simply to realize where you already are." Kabat-Zinn (2004). The practice of mindfulness is extraordinarily simple to describe, but it is in no sense easy. True mastery requires commitment and a lifetime of practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2004).

One reason people believe that they cannot meditate is because their mind wanders during meditation. Mind wandering is a ubiquitous mental phenomenon characterized by the spontaneous shift of attention and disengagement from the external environment and directed toward internally generated thoughts (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Mind wandering isn't really a problem when meditating, it is expected, and it is the beginning for an individual to see habitual patterns of perception more clearly (Halliwell, 2015). With awareness, individuals start to see that thoughts are just thoughts, sensations just sensations, sights just sights, and sounds just sounds. Mind wandering has been associated with increased levels of unhappiness and stress (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). "People are not their thoughts," thoughts are simply thoughts (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). The idea in meditation is to notice that the

mind has wandered off and bring it back to the anchor, which is typically the breath (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). The mind will continue to wander during mediation, but will lessen with continued practice. Over time, as the brain is trained to notice and return, there is a shift from a place of unconscious habit to a place of clearer seeing. This shift typically happens gently and one moment at a time (Stratton, 2015).

Mindfulness and Neuroscience

Mindfulness meditation has potential for the treatment of clinical disorders and might facilitate the cultivation of a healthy mind and increased wellbeing. Since the 1990s, mindfulness meditation has been applied to multiple mental and physical health conditions, and has received much attention in psychological research, which include Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) (Tang, Hölzel, & Posner, 2015). Mindfulness-based interventions are increasingly used in the treatment and prevention of mental health conditions, including stress, anxiety and depression. Neuroscientific evidence suggests that mindfulness meditation increases overall self-regulation through three mechanisms: increased attentional control, improved emotion regulation, and a modification of self-awareness (Colibazzi, 2015). Recent findings suggest that mindfulness interventions are associated with changes in functioning of the insula, plausibly impacting awareness of internal reactions ‘in-the-moment’ (Hölzel et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2011; Young, 2018). Evidence is emerging related to mindfulness meditation and changes in neuroplasticity, structure and function of brain regions related to regulation of attention, emotion and self-awareness (Braden et al., 2016; Tang, Holzen & Posner, 2015).

Additionally, effects were reported by individual studies to have found in multiple brain regions that suggest the effects of meditation might involve large-scale brain networks (Goleman

& Davidson, 2018). This is supported by mindfulness research and the findings that showed multiple aspects of mental functioning using a combination of complex interactive networks in the brain and viewed in fMRIs (Braden et al., 2016; Hölzel, 2013; Young, 2018).

Mindfulness training has been associated with enhanced activation in and connectivity between several brain regions that are crucial to emotion regulation, both in health and anxiety disorder populations (Kim et al., 2011a). Kim's study suggests the neural network correlates with symptom improvement following treatment with MBSR. Mindfulness meditation intervention may influence brain activation and functional connectivity in a direction with important relevance for mental health (Kim et al., 2011a). The hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis is a major component of the endocrine system that controls the reaction to stress and is connected to a circuit of brain regions including the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex, all of which work in tandem to regulate our behavioral and physiological response to stress (Basso, McHale, Ende, Oberlin & Suzuki, 2019). Research indicates that the beneficial effects of meditation may be due to changes in this stress circuitry.

The most consistent findings observed increased insula reactivity after completion of a mindfulness intervention (Braden et al., 2016; Young et al., 2018). The insula is considered to support interoceptive awareness, the awareness of one's own body and internal physiological experience (Braden et al., 2016; Young et al., 2018). The prefrontal cortex, located behind the forehead, grows more prominently in humans. This area of the brain is also known as the executive center. The prefrontal cortex (PFC) receives input from all other cortical regions and functions to plan and direct motor, cognitive, affective, and social behavior across time (Braden et al., 2016; Kolb, Mychasiuk, Muhammad, Frost & Gibb, 2012; Young et al., 2018).

Another area of the brain associated with emotion is the amygdala. The amygdala has long been associated with emotion and motivation, playing an essential part in processing both fearful and rewarding environmental stimuli (Young et al., 2018). Emotionally significant experiences tend to be well remembered, and the amygdala has a pivotal role in this process (Young et al., 2018). The amygdala is the brain's trigger point, like radar for threat. It is associated with the fight-flight-freeze reaction response. It is a primitive activator of stress. There is a direct connection between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala which is a structure called the uncinate fasciculus (Goleman & Davidson, 2018). When mindfulness is practiced, the connection between the prefrontal cortex and the uncinate fasciculus is strengthened (Goleman & Davidson, 2018). This allows the prefrontal cortex to modulate the impulses from the amygdala and recover more quickly from stress. The amygdala is programmed to react, but the prefrontal cortex evaluates the emotion and calms down the amygdala if necessary, it is inhibitory (Goleman & Davidson, 2018). There is less of a reaction from the emotional experience and the ability to recover is increased. This increase in recovery is known as resilience to adversity (Goleman & Davidson, 2018).

Mindfulness practice research has indicated that attention is enhanced with mindfulness meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The anterior cingulate cortex is the region associated with attention in which changes in activity and/or structure in response to mindfulness meditation are most consistently reported (Braden et al., 2016; Colibazzi, 2015; Tang, Holzel, & Posner, 2015; Young, 2018). Meditation practice has the potential to affect self-referential processing and improve present-moment awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The default mode network (DMN) that includes the midline prefrontal cortex and posterior cingulate cortex, support self-awareness has shown to be altered following mindfulness

training (Holzel, & Posner, 2015). Mindfulness practice improves emotion regulation and reduces stress (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Frontal-limbic networks involved in these processes show various patterns of engagement by mindfulness meditation (Braden et al, 2016; Colibazzi, 2015; Tang, Holzel, & Posner, 2015; Young, 2018).

Although meditation research is in its infancy, several studies have investigated changes in brain activation, at rest and during specific tasks that are associated with the practice of training in mindfulness meditation. These studies have reported changes in multiple aspects of mental function in beginner and advanced meditators, healthy individuals and patient populations (Wheeler, Arnkoff & Glass, 2016). Future studies therefore need to replicate the reported findings and begin to unravel how changes in the neural structure relate to changes in wellbeing and behavior.

It is fascinating to see the brain's plasticity and that, by practicing meditation; we can play an active role in changing the brain and can increase our wellbeing and quality of life. Other studies in different patient populations have shown that meditation can make significant improvements in a variety of symptoms, and we are now investigating the underlying mechanisms in the brain that facilitate this change. (Tang, Holzel& Posner, 2015).

Types of Mindfulness

The terms meditation and mindfulness are often used interchangeably, however there is a difference. Meditation refers to a complex family of Eastern cultural practices for training mental attention (Goleman & Davidson, 2017; Bishop, 2004). “Meditation is a tool to a tool to achieve post-meditative mindfulness. To be mindful is to be present” (Langer, 2014) Mindfulness refers a quality cultivation of the mind (Goleman & Davidson, 2017; Bishop, 2004). In their 2017

book, *The Science of Meditation: How to Change Your Brain, Mind and Body*, Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson indicate that “mindfulness” is the most common English translation for the word “sat.” Sati is the first step towards enlightenment in the sacred language of Theravada Buddhism. It also translates as “awareness,” “attention,” “retention and “discernment” (Goleman & Davidson, 2017). Research indicates that different types of meditation have differential effects on psychological change (Kok & Singer, 2106). In the Kog and Singer (2016) study, they included for of the most popular mindfulness meditation techniques, breathing meditation, body scan meditation, loving-kindness meditation and observing thought meditation. They found that the types of mindfulness exercises had uniquely defined effects. The body scan had the greatest increase in introspective awareness (Kok & Singer, 2106). Loving-kindness was best in increasing positive awareness and other focused though which was the only practice to positively link thoughts of self and others (Kok & Singer, 2106). The observing thought meditation was best in increasing meta-cognitive awareness of thoughts (Kok & Singer, 2106). There were no unique effects attributed to the breathing meditation, which is used as a basic technique in many contemplative meditation practices (Kok & Singer, 2106).

Wellbeing

Good mental health and emotional wellbeing are fundamental to quality of life, enabling people to experience life as meaningful, handle daily stresses, work productively, and to have stable and fulfilling relationships. Beyond the direct impact on the individual, emotional wellbeing is identified as vital for society as a whole. It is an essential component of social cohesion, peace and stability in the living environment, contributing to social capital and the economic development of society (WHO, 2005).

Wellbeing emerges from thoughts, actions, and experiences and is something most people seek because it includes so many positive aspects of life such as feeling happy, health, connected, purposeful and fulfillment. It is a complex phenomenon related to a variety of factors including cultural differences, socioeconomic status, health, quality of interpersonal relationships and specific psychological processes (Dahl, Lutz, & Davidson, 2015). Wellbeing emerges from thoughts, experiences, actions, and situations. Some of the components of wellbeing are in our control and some are not. Emotional skill sets such as positive thinking, emotional regulation and mindfulness contribute to the state of wellbeing (Seligman, 2013; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). Having a variety of skills can help individuals cope with a wide variety of situation. With well-developed skills individuals can better cope with stress, emotions, and challenges and be more resilient (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). Other skills like purpose, gratitude, kindness, compassion, restful sleep, communication, positive relationships, nutrition and quality sleep all can contribute to the development of wellbeing (Huppert, 2014). Das (1997) along with Kabat-Zinn (2004) and Salzberg (1994), suggest that the intention of meditation is to become more alert and present in the moment. Meditation can help individuals awaken their mind and their heart; be open to experience of inner wisdom such as joy, compassion, and peace can be felt (Das, 1997). Through meditation a person can develop and improve concentration, therefore live unconditionally from moment to moment (Das, 1997). Das (1997) believes that the sole purpose of developing awareness is to eliminate ignorance as it relates to one's self, others, and reality. Ignorance is being the lack of knowledge. Ignorance describes an individual who deliberately ignores or disregards important facts, information, and awareness. Das (1997) suggests that the intention of this focused practice, the result of the elimination of ignorance about one's self, others, and reality, is the development of wisdom, selflessness, and compassion toward others to

improve the quality of life. Through meditation, the more a person perceives their surroundings and themselves as they actually are, the more a person connects with things as they are, and the closer they are to truth (Das, 1997; Kabat-Zinn, 2004; Salzberg, 1995) .

In theory, wellbeing is an abstract construct that includes both feeling good and functioning well (Huppert, 2014). In the book, *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*, Seligman (2013) has developed a model, PERMA, as a framework to assess dimensions that are valued by individuals and align to existing school structures and strategies. This is a five-core element outline of psychological wellbeing and happiness. Seligman believes that these five elements can help people work towards a life of wellbeing that include fulfillment, happiness and meaning. The acronym PERMA includes P-Positive Emotions, E-Engagement, R-Relationships, M-Meaning and A-Achievement (Seligman, 2013). Seligman (2013) suggests that wellbeing cannot be defined by a single measure, but is made up of various aspects that are more easily measured through the PERMA model. PERMA domains fall on the positive side of the mental health spectrum and indicate that wellbeing is not simply the lack of negative psychological states (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Feelings of wellbeing are fundamental and relate to the overall health of an individual (Seligman, 2013).

Stress and Academics

Stress is defined as the body's non-specific response to demands made upon it or to disturbing the events in the environment; it is a process by which individuals perceive and cope with environment threats and challenges (Lazarus, 2000). Literature shows a significant increase in major psychological problems such as stress, depression, anxiety, and panic disorder among college students (Steward, Warf, & Crandall, 2016). Stressors may result in anxiety, depression, poor sleep, quality poor academic performance, alcohol and substance abuse,

reduced quality of life (Said, Kypri, & Bowman, 2013). Academic stress is the body's response to academic related demands and these demands exceed the adaptive capabilities of students (Wilks, 2008). According to the 2016 National Survey of College Counseling Centers, 94% of directors reported recent trends toward greater number of students with severe psychology problems. The directors report also that 52% of the center's clients have severe psychological problems, up from 44% in 2013 (National Survey of College Counseling Centers, 2016). Of the 52%, 8% have impairment so serious they cannot remain in school or can only do so if they receive extensive psychological or psychiatrist help and 44% experience periods of severe distress such as depression, anxiety, panic attack, suicidal ideation and other mental health concerns (National Survey of College Counseling Centers, 2016). Additionally, sleep deprivation in college students is substantial and has been proposed as a trans-diagnostic risk factor for mental health (Gaultney, 2010). The level of stress amongst students is alarming.

Students enrolled in highly academic standards universities and graduate programs such as law and medical schools have significant levels of stress (Liu, & Lu, 2011). Depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, irritability, sleep disturbances are just a few of the many problems reported in students with high academic stress (Barnes, Potter, Fiedler, & Guion, 1983). Students driven to perfectionism tend to experience more academic stress (Kim, Seockhoon, Suyeon, Soyoun, & Boram, 2017). In a study by Defosier, Rank, Schwartz & Leary (2013) conducted research with six universities in the eastern United States they found that nearly half (49%) of all students reported feeling a great deal of stress on a daily basis and 31 percent reported feeling somewhat stressed. Females reported significantly higher levels of stress than males (60% vs. 41%) (Defosier, Rank, Schwartz & Leary, 2013). This study also investigated how students manage the various sources of academic stress indicated a spectrum from healthy

problem-focused coping to illegal drug and alcohol use. The effects of untreated mental health issues, including academic stress, are not insignificant. Students experiencing high to moderate levels of stress and anxiety typically have difficulties with campus engagement, personal relationship and graduation (Wilks, 2008). The three themes that emerged from the study related to positive coping skills included exercise, preventive activities and maintaining a balance perspective on school and grades (Defosier, Rank, Schwartz & Leary 2013). Overall, when mindfulness interventions were used in high-stress academic settings, 73% of the studies showed significant reductions in overall stress scores, supporting potential effectiveness for mindfulness in reducing perceived stress in college students (Bamber & Schneider, 2016).

Stress, Academics and Law Students

Law students and recent law graduates are experiencing alarming rates of depression, anxiety and stress (George, 2015). The University of Sydney reported that over 35 per cent of Australian law students' experienced high levels of stress (Skead & Rogers, 2015). It is compared with the 13% of the general population the same age group (Skead & Rogers, 2015). Students entering law school experience levels of wellbeing at least equal to the general population. By the end of the first semester of legal studies, law students experienced stress, anxiety and depression at rates significantly higher than their graduate school contemporaries in professional degree programs including medicine, nursing, psychology and engineering (George, 2015; Flynn, Li, & Sanchez, 2017; Skead & Rogers, 2015).

Law school is a powerful, transformative experience in which the psychological wellbeing as well as the intellectual wellbeing is at stake. The pure design of law school is stressful (Cassidy, 2015). The pedagogy, curriculum and instruction are designed to create students who are mastering the content at high levels with the Socratic approach as the primary

approach (Cassidy, 2015). The documented rates of psychological distress among law students make it imperative for law schools to identify and modify the institutional and curriculum factors that trigger or exacerbate student ill-health (Reed, et al., 2016). The legal community, operating alone, has been unable to significantly alleviate law students' distress. Thus, a partnership between the social sciences, particularly psychology, and the legal community may offer a new opportunity to develop creative ways to address these issues (Flynn, Yan Li, & Sanchez, 2017).

The stress of law students has evolved over time with the increased competitiveness related to overall law school performance. The evolving approaches to instruction, grades, assessment, internships and few elite attorney positions have heightened as prestige and pressures of lawyers have continued to increase over the last 50 years (Bergin & Pakenham, 2015). Instead of students mastering or meeting objective standards related to the case of law as law school instruction was initially designed, students are now forced to compete for grades utilizing the curve and outperform their peers creating intense competition. The idea of instruction that includes collaboration or collegiality among law school classmates as it pertains to grading and ranking is limited or vanished in modern instruction (Fordyce, Jepsen, & McCormick, 2017). Andy Benjamin, J.D., Ph.D., the lead researcher in the groundbreaking study in 1986 of law students and stress, *The Role of Legal Education in Producing Psychological Distress Among Law Students and Lawyers*, said in an article posted in the ABA for Law Students Journal (2018),

“Since the publication of our research about law student and lawyer depression, depression still runs heavy for law students and practicing attorneys – nearly a third of all law students and lawyers suffer from depression. The data to support this statement have been published since the early eighties when the stress studies were first conducted.”

In his original work, Benjamin believed that up to the point of his original research in the 80's, empirical studies were flawed with conflicting results. Of these issues Benjamin (1989) addressed were the collections of data, the validity and reliability and finally poor return rates that had plagued earlier research.

Many in the legal profession have long understood a need for greater resources and assistance for attorneys struggling with addiction or other mental health concerns. However, addressing those issues has been affected by the outdated and poorly defined scope of the history of problem (Association of American Law Schools, 2018). The historical scarcity of data has been addressed with recent substantial research as noted by the American Bar Association (2018) and has prompted the association to create a national task force addressing lawyer wellbeing. The ABA stated,

Too many lawyers and law students experience chronic stress and high rates of depression and substance use. Findings are incompatible with a sustainable legal profession, and they raise troubling implications for many lawyers' basic competence. This research suggests that the current state of lawyers' health cannot support a profession dedicated to client service and dependent on the public trust (ABA, 2018).

Mindfulness and Law Students

Yale Law School was the setting of one of the nation's first law and meditation retreats in 1998. At the time of the retreat, mindfulness was a traditional meditative practice of sitting, closing one's eyes and paying attention to the activity of the mind (Rogers & Jacobowitz, 2012). In the first paragraph of Rogers and Jacobowitz's (2012) book titled, *Mindfulness and Professional Responsibility: A Guide Book for Integrating Mindfulness into the Law School Curriculum*, they state:

The role of mindfulness in legal education is emerging as an important factor in the professional development of the law student. As legal education undergoes significant changes and law schools grapple with how best to offer students an education that prepares them, in today's rapidly changing world, for their careers as lawyers, mindfulness insights and practices are being looked to for the powerful impact they have across a number of fundamental domains.

Teaching law students to develop a level of awareness of mental process and emotion offers new insight students (Doucet, 2014). Understanding how to become aware of stress, anger, distraction and anxiety will help law students adjust and improve their legal skills performance and overall wellness (Lewinbuk, 2016). Mindfulness training allows students to better understand themselves and use this knowledge to become better advocates for their clients (Lewinbuk, 2016).

There have been several law schools that have begun to address the need to regulate stress and become a more astute lawyer using mindfulness techniques. In 2011 the Miami's Law school developed the first Mindfulness and in the Law Program. The continued goal is to prepare students at the highest levels of academic excellence in addition provide students with tools to maintain and develop their intellectual abilities and cultivate emotional wellbeing. The program includes four different courses, which include mindfulness training, mindful ethics, mindful leadership and mindful law. These courses contemplative practices supported by neuroscience research to optimize performance and reduce stress.

Other law schools to offer mindfulness courses include Harvard Law School, Georgetown Law School, Berkeley Law School, and Arizona State University Law School, and many are integrating mindfulness practices directly into curriculum in a myriad of ways.

Additionally, law schools are offering personal development training workshops and seminars that include, stress management, healthy relationships, emotional intelligence, and mindful leadership just to name a few.

Numerous studies have been shown to advance the practice of mindfulness for law students, however many law schools are unsure how to create mindfulness and law into the curriculum and instruction (Lewinbuk, 2016). Mindfulness helps law students understand the tendency for the mind to wander. With this understanding and natural tendency to be stressed, mindfulness allows law students the opportunity to acknowledge their attention status and redirect it back to the present moment (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2014). The use of mindfulness practice may help students recognize stress or anxiety and manage the effects rather than let a distorted perception of emotions control the view of the world (Doucet, 2014).

Summary

Chapter Two introduced concepts of the study related to mindfulness and law school stress. Buddhist scholarship has informed a great deal of the psychological research on mindfulness interventions, but mindfulness is by no means exclusive to Buddhism or contemplative practices (Anālayo, 2003). Mindfulness is a secular approach to interventions that aim to foster greater attention to and awareness of present moment experience (Stratton, 2015). The present moment experience that one attends to can take many forms, including one's body sensations, emotional reactions, mental images, mental talk, and perceptual experiences (e.g., sounds). Much of the interest in mindfulness has been generated by recent scientific reports describing the potential benefits of mindfulness-based interventions and the potential positive outcome related to increased wellbeing results for individuals who are experiencing high levels of stress (Brown, Creswell, & Ryan, 2015). Research has shown significant changes in areas of

the brain that trigger and calm emotions when individuals are meditating (Goleman & Davidson, 2018).

Law school students have been found to have more elevated levels of stress and anxiety as compared to medical students or other graduate school students (Skead and Rogers, 2015). Students practicing mindfulness have shown decrease levels of academic stress (Bennett, 2018). Creating opportunities to law students to reduce their stress and become more mindful in their approaches to their education may give students an opportunity to increase their wellbeing. Given this growing trend, and the clear evidence that mindfulness training improves attention, learning, working memory capacity, academic achievement, empathy, self-compassion, and creativity, and that it can reduce stress and anxiety, more law schools should be developing and offering courses or instruction on mindfulness (George, 2015).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how law students describe and made meaning of the practice of mindfulness as it related to their lived experiences of stress during law school. The nature of law school is very stressful and highly competitive. Research supports law school is substantially more stressful than most graduate study programs, including medical school and that law students look for various forms of stress management intermediations to alleviate symptoms of stress and anxiety (George, 2015; Flynn, Li, & Sanchez, 2017; Skead & Rogers, 2015). Teaching the tools to manage stress are typically not part of law school orientation or law course curriculum (Doucet, 2014; Skead & Rogers, 2015). Students who had an active mindfulness practice were selected to participate in the qualitative study to understand how they made meaning of mindfulness and how it pertained to their ability to manage stress and anxiety during their law school experience. The study was designed to provide information related to an alternative coping mechanism, mindfulness, as it related to law school stress.

Design

The aim of transcendental phenomenological qualitative research is to analysis experiences and meanings and “to capture as closely as possible the way in which the phenomenon was experienced within the context in which the experience takes place” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Transcendental phenomenology (TPh), largely developed by Husserl, is a philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology seeking to understand human experience (Moustakas, 1994). The writings of German mathematician, Edmund Husserl and to others expanded views regarding phenomenology research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A

phenomenological study is developed through rich descriptions or narratives that can illuminate the lived world. The goal is to see the phenomenon as the phenomena appears to those living the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology has its history in various philosophical assumptions with the common idea that the study is concerned with the lived experiences of a person and that their view of the experience is a conscious one.

This study was designed to bring to light mindfulness of law students and determine the essence of the phenomena related to stress during law school. This study was based on a phenomenological approach to provide insight and meaning into the experience of law students who had an active mindfulness practice while enrolled in the stressful and academically challenging study of law.

According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology involves conceptual concepts of intuition, intentionality, and inter-subjectivity. The development of descriptions of the essences of the experiences rather than the explanation or analyses of the experience is common among all phenomenological studies. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology, as stated by Heidegger (1977) means to bring to light of what lies before us. Ontological assumptions help to emphasize the lived experiences and worldview of participants and further aligned the epistemological leanings with this study (Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

Creswell (1994) believes the best criteria to determine the use of phenomenology is when the research problem requires profound understanding and meaning of the human experiences to the participants, also known as, co-researchers. While the experiences are shared, the co-researchers need to be able to articulate their lived experiences whereas the primary investigator or researcher must be able to construct the studied object according to the manifestation, structures and components (Litchman, 2006) The information I planned to

investigate in this study could not be derived or described from numerical data. Rather, the data analysis was driven by the desire to understand and make meaning from a textual format.

Phenomenological reduction was used to describe the technique that allowed for voluntary awakening which resulted in conceptual cognition through intentional analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The “knowing” of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). By the virtue of “knowing” the phenomenology offers a radical standpoint and this perspective then becomes the standard by which every other perspective is judged (Moustakas, 1994).

Understanding the human experience among law students practicing mindfulness was primary in this research. I focused on the wholeness of the experience to understand meanings and essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Utilization of journals, interviews, and group conversations I looked to obtain descriptions of experiences through first-person accounts. The idea of regarding data of an individual's experience as imperative in understanding of human behavior and evidence for scientific investigations manifested great enthusiasm and created an opportunity to formulate questions that reflected interest in mindfulness and law students (Moustakas, 1994). This study aimed to provide experience with valid descriptions of a complex psychological phenomena (a) the research inquiry explored the phenomenological dimension of human lived experience, (b) the meaning was fundamental in ways *co-created* in the encounter between interviewer and interviewee, and between the researcher and the data in subsequent analyses, and (c) the process was to develop knowledge from the research participants' descriptions involved acts of interpretation from the researchers' perspective (Adams & Leary, 2007). A "meaning pattern" can be defined as a condensed summary of the units of relevance for a particular research topic that may be identified when comparing the experiences of several participants (Binder, Holgersen, & Moltu, 2012). A pattern emerges when there is a high degree

of convergence between the experiences of different participants within an area, and at the same time a moderate degree of divergence between them that makes the pattern thematically rich (Binder, Holgersen, & Moltu, 2012).

A constructivist approach aspires to discover and describe the unique nature of those being investigated (Briodo & Manninig, 2002). The epistemological fitting will structurally place the student voice at the center of the discovery to determine the justified belief and opinion. The full description of the participant responses will guide my analysis of the data. The constructivist disposition as the primary investigator reflected how I personally made meaning (Crotty, 1998) and acknowledged that the student participants were likely to convey multiple meanings surrounding the same issue (Creswell, 2009).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989) a study steeped in constructivism asserts (p.83):

- the researcher-respondent relationship is subjective, interactive, and interdependent
- reality is multiple, complex, and not easily quantifiable
- the values of the researcher, respondents, research site,
- and underlying theory undergird all aspects of the research - the research product is context specific

As a researcher I used disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside any prejudgments regarding the phenomenon. This approach known as Epoche process, and helped deter the study from possible preconceptions, beliefs or knowledge of the phenomenon prior to the study. Moustakas (1994) indicated that the researcher needs to be completely open, receptive and naïve as they listen to participants describe their experiences.

The transcendental phenomenological approach also includes intuition, imagination and universal structures to understand the meaning and awareness in consciousness. Peer reviewed articles substantiated the increase in stress law students experience, especially after the first semester of the first year. The design of this research was intentional with of the level of involvement and personal commitment related to many years working with students in academic counseling settings.

Research Question

Moustakas (1994) indicates that two broad questions need to be asked:

1. What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?

2. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? Creswell and Poth (2018) add that other open-ended questions can be added, but the two as stated by Moustakas will lead to textual and structural description of the experiences. This is with the idea that ultimately a commonality of experiences will begin to evolve (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The questions are intentionally broad for interpretation of the question to develop as personal meaning. Additionally, I created questions to nullify any affirmative or negative response, as reducing the data to numerical form would not yield the deep understanding and essence to research is seeking to discover.

Central Question: What are the lived experiences of law students and their mindfulness practice?

Sub-question 1: What contexts or situation have been experienced with the practice of mindfulness?

Sub-question 2: How does the act of monitoring and accepting guide the relationship to stress?

Sub-question 3: What academic experiences are associated with mindfulness?

Sub-question 4: How does mindfulness practices contribute to participants' meaning of social and emotional well-being?

Setting

The site was a national organization established by licensed lawyers throughout the United States. This organization provided education and support for mindfulness in the legal profession and brought together lawyers, law students, faculty, judges and other legal professionals across the United States with 14 different divisions. The division chosen for the study was the student division. The ABA Center for Professional Responsibility, ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs and the BarBri Bar Review partner with this organization. The organization supports the interest of the members in mindful lawyering, yoga and other contemplative practices. It was given approval by the American Bar Association to provide accredited continuing legal education, training with centralized resources, national conferences and is supported state and local chapters. It is a 501 (c)(3) organization supported by memberships and donations. The board of directors included nationally recognized leaders in law, mindfulness and mindfulness training, which include attorneys, judges, and professors. Weekly mindfulness sessions are hosted by members of the board to directors via Zoom video conferencing to develop community of legal professions sharing mindfulness practice.

The students recruited and selected for the study had participated in mindfulness practices during law school, been active members of the organization, or taken mindfulness course during law school. In the search for excellence, many educational institutions are looking beyond traditional instruction and content and moving towards a 21st century model of education that includes critical thinking, communication, creativity and collaboration (Tindowen, Bassig,

& Cagurangan, 2017). The creation of the student division of this organization was an attempt to support the educational system.

Participants

Qualitative methods are, for the most part, intended to achieve depth of understanding while quantitative methods are intended to achieve breadth of understanding (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling in a phenomenological study includes participants who have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is a type of criteria sampling where all participants have a lived experience of the phenomenon. Participants for this phenomenological will have participated in a mindfulness course or have an active mindfulness practice. Participants were all members of American Bar Association-Student division. Participants had completed either a bachelor's or master's degree. According to the American Bar Association (2017) the typical age range for the law students is mid-twenties with exceptions as outliers. The socioeconomic status varies across the spectrum. Law school demographics are heavily Caucasian enrollment of 72% with a male and female enrollment of 60/40 respectively (American Bar Association, 2017). To gather the specific demographics as related to the participants of the study, a pre-designed and approved questionnaire was used to validate and record demographics.

The type of sampling for this research study was criteria sampling. The sample pool of participants for the study were active members of the organization, had a mindfulness practice during law school or taken mindfulness course during law school. Students came from several different law schools. This helped to establish maximum variation including documentation differences of individuals or sites based on specific characteristics, but these law students all had lived experiences in mindfulness developed in a mindfulness course or personal practice. The

focus of the study was the lived experiences of mindfulness by students who are currently attending law school and have participated in a mindfulness course or have an active mindfulness practice. Geographic location was considered as a criterion related to convenience; technology was used to overcome physical barriers related to location.

Purposeful selection of participants was based on an active mindfulness practice or mindfulness course taken during law school. Purposeful sampling recruited participants who were most likely to provide information that was directly related to the study (Patton, 2002). Students who were associated with the student division of the organization were sent an email related to the study. This method was used to recruit twelve participants. The researcher used snowballing as a method to expand the sample by asking participants to recommend others to participate (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Creswell (2013) indicated that participants who have experienced the same phenomenon can vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15. The research study required at least a minimum of 10 participants.

Given the nature of qualitative research, pseudonyms were provided. It is common convention in reporting research that pseudonyms are assigned to research participants when writing the study (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This is considered an important ethical safeguard to prevent identification of individuals and to the site who contributed to the research (Neubauer & Heurix, 2010; 2011).

Procedure

The Office of Human Research Protection and Food and Drug Administration Guidelines have established levels of research approval that include “exempt,” “expedited,” and “full review.” (Liberty University Institutional Review Board, 2018).

Research activities in which the involvement of human participants constitutes no more than minimal risk and falls within one or more of the *exempt* categories may be eligible for research activities in which the involvement of human participants involve no more than minimal risk and falls within one or more of the *expedited* review categories may be eligible for expedited review exemption. Research activities involving human participants in which there is more than minimal risk, or involves certain vulnerable populations (e.g., prisoners) must undergo a *full IRB review*.

IRB approval was established. An email was sent to the director of the organization for approval. After approval was received by the director, another email was sent to the student division which included all students who have taken a mindfulness course during regular semester of law school or have an active mindfulness practice. Mindfulness workshops or conferences were considered courses. A law school course must be taken through an accredited law school in a regional university accrediting program and the American Bar Association. Active mindfulness practice included meditation on average of three times or more per week. Students were asked to participate at the different utilizing video conferencing tools or session or through email correspondence after approval from the IRB. Once students had been recruited, the researcher began the student with journal prompts followed by interviews and then focus group (via video conferencing) to gather data. Analyzing data and finding were established and submitted.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers, conducting phenomenological studies, are interested in the life experiences of humans. The role of the researcher in qualitative research is critical (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher was considered a “Human Instrument” (Patton, 2015). As the primary instrument,

I was responsible for collecting and analyzing data, interviews and document data to uncover the emerging concepts, themes and patterns. Using the phenomenological philosophy required the researcher to attempt to lessen the distance between the researcher and the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I developed relationships with the law student participants through correspondence, so the subject evidence was developed based on individual views and settings where the participants felt a connection with the researcher (Patton, 2015). I deliberately planned to develop relationships to be considered an insider with subjective evidence as lived by the participants (Patton, 2015). I conveyed my standard of ethics by sharing my duties as an academic counselor. I utilized technology which helped me develop relationships and attain information I was gathering (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As a human instrument, I realized that I have potential for bias (Patton, 2015) and bias can be a source of error. This type of error could have impacted the study making it challenging for my view and actions to be neutral. The balance of being objective and nonjudgmental in thoughts, observations and actions was very difficult. Nonetheless, my experience, education and training aided in the data collection, inductive analysis and the understanding of the phenomena being studied. The use of epoche, field notes, and memos were vital in reporting and analyzing data (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Moustakas' focus on epoche involves investigators setting aside their experiences to take an unbiased view of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Jon Kabat-Zinn refers to this mindfulness concept as a "beginner mind" (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). I incorporated this concept and state of mind into my research. Equally important was to keep a non-judging mindset where the researcher noticed awareness of judgment. Humans are inherently judgmental, if not we would have not survived as a species (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). However, I maintained a high degree of non-judgment awareness

to ensure integrity. Asking participants to reflect on and comment on their construction and meaning of mindfulness allowed for a rich understanding and perspective of this phenomenon. The stakeholders involved had much to gain from an unbiased research study (Patton, 2015).

Another consideration was the protection of all participants by the research and was established through the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. A Collaborative Institution Training Initiative (CITI) was required prior to the research approval by the IRB. This training focused on the protection of human subjects and is widely accessed by academic institutions to ensure adequate training. Individuals interested in participating in this research study were provided with background information on the study's focus, description of interview process and research procedures, risks and benefits to participating in this study, and protection of their personal confidentiality. To secure answers that are truthful and honest, participants needed to have confidence in the confidentiality and the ethics of the researcher (Patton, 2015).

Prior to the research study, I did not have personal associations with the participants such as attending law school functions together, socializing, or personal relationships. I believed as the research developed, those relations would begin to form, however I remained an objective listener to allow my participants to be open and honest with their beliefs, feelings and perspectives of the phenomenon. The relationship I had in association to the law organization is only that my husband attended law school and is a member of the ABA.

Data Collection

Creswell and Poth (2018) provide a Data Collection Circle. The circle includes, locating site or individuals, gaining access and developing rapport, sampling purposefully, collecting data, recording information, minimizing field issues, storing data and at the heart (center) of

the circle, attending to ethical considerations. Triangulation of data was supported by a structured interview, focus group and journal data collection. Phenomenology research typically involves interviewing participants who have experience with the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Other forms of data collection in a phenomenological study include, observations, textual or visual analysis and document collection, however the most common are interviews and focus groups (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008).

For the purpose of this study, journal documentation, semi-structured individual interviews, and focus groups supported triangulation and were the order of the data collection. The documents were comprised of writing prompts related to law school, stress and mindfulness. Next, semi-structured interviews were used to understand how law students made meaning of mindfulness helped to create the setting for the focus group. Both the interviews and focus group discussion text were recorded and reviewed for analysis.

Journal Prompts

Journaling was the first method of data collection to be conducted. Journaling as a method of data collection has long been accepted as a valid way of accessing rich qualitative data (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson 2006). A journal is a diary and a log which blends personal reflections, accounts of events and descriptions of experiences (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson 2006). Journaling is a process of documenting and reflecting on experiences as a way of thinking, understanding and learning (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson 2006). Journal prompts were used to ask participants to write a retrospective, autobiographical, phenomenological account of their journey of mindfulness practice during law school. The prompts for journaling were open-ended questions and drove the content. The responses were developed in-depth during the personal interview and focus group questions to help participants recall their experiences. (Patton, 2002;

Creswell, 2013). Journals provided time for participants' reflection and perspective (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson 2006).

There are a few issues associated with journaling as a form of data collection which include, poor participation, feeling exposed and staying on track (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson 2006). Reluctances to participate in journaling can be attributed to poor confidence in writing skills, time and anxieties associate with sharing personal feelings in written format (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson 2006). Participants of the study showed great enthusiasm for journal prompts as was demonstrated by their responses. Their writing skills were well developed and ability answer the prompt was focused. All participants shared their feelings of stress and anxiety with openness and confidence of their feelings associated with various experiences. Many shared personal experiences with the impact mindfulness.

Chabon and Lee-Wilkerson (2006) offer suggests related to potential issues associated with journaling, first, coaching in journaling. Mackrill (2007) believes guided questions or prompts can help promote participate and confidence in the depth of information being shared. Also, clarity of terms and ease of use will help promote and encourage the participation in journaling activates (Hager & Brockopp 2009). Providing a timeframe for the journal period can promote participation because participants can see the end and are more likely to participate (Mackrill, 2007). Regular contact and reminders help participants to engage and stay on track. Hayman, Wilkes and Jackson (2012) indicated that weekly comments posted on participants' journal entries were a catalyst for rapid escalations of contribution. Students were given two weeks to respond to journal responses. Two reminders where sent to students. The researcher was very contentious not to overwhelm participants with too many notices. All participants responded to journal prompts with clarity and specific examples. These correspondences and

comments helped to develop and build relationships between the participants and the researchers creating an additional layer of safety in sharing personal information (Hayman, Wilkes & Jackson, 2012). The correspondences helped to develop relationships with the participants and better understand their lived experiences during law school. Research has indicated mixed opinions and data related to how much guidance to give to participants related to the topic information (Hayman, Wilkes & Jackson, 2012). Deciding how much guidance provided to keep participants on the topic, but yet allowing creativity and expression with broad and flexible instructions is not easy. Participants need to know the purpose of the journal to be able to provide quality data for the researcher (Mackrill, 2007).

1. Describe your journey through mindfulness, for example, where and why did this journey begin?
2. Describe a stressful situation during law school when you noticed stress, monitored those feelings and felt acceptance by changing the relationship with the stress.
3. How did the practice of mindfulness during law school affect your academic abilities?
4. When considering the entire experience of the practice of mindfulness during law school, what has been the overall difference in wellbeing?
5. What else that you would like to share about your experience with law school or mindfulness?

Journaling as a method of data collection is an accepted and valid way of accessing rich qualitative data (Hayman, Wilkes & Jackson, 2012). The journaling prompts used for this study were directly linked to the research questions; prompt number one specifically related to the understanding of the lived experiences of law students and the development of their mindfulness practices. Prompt number two addressed the stress associated with law school and the challenges

of acceptance. Academic abilities are addressed in prompt number three and finally prompt number four was concerned with the overall wellbeing of the law student. Finally, question number five utilized journaling reflection is a productive practice to recall and develop a deeper understanding of participants' experiences that had not been addressed in the previous questions (Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2012).

Once the final list of participants was completed, the researcher emailed journal prompts to all participants utilizing virtual shared document between themselves and the researcher. In the email, the researcher provided instructions and again in the shared journal document. These documents were only be shared between the researcher and the individual participant and participants only had access to their individual document. Participants were asked to return their responses within two weeks. An email was be sent at the end of the first week and then again on the tenth day of the two-week writing period. A final email was sent on the day journal prompt responses are due. The researcher had immediate access to the virtual shared document. Those not completing their response were to be given two extra days to complete, however all participants completed journals within the two-week frame. If the participant had not completed the journal prompts, then they would have been informed they were no longer eligible to participant in the study; this did not happen.

Interviews

Interviews explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivation of individuals on specific issues (Heath, Williamson, Williams, & Harcourt, 2018). Interviews used in qualitative methods research are considered a way to provide a deep understand of the social phenomena and are most appropriate where little is known as it relates to the phenomenon. Interviews provide detailed insights from individual participants and are particularly appropriate for

exploring sensitive topics where some participants may not be comfortable sharing in a group setting (Yin, 2014). When designing an interview, it is important to ask questions that will yield as much information about the phenomenon as possible (Yin, 2014). It is important to review the aims and objectives of the research to align questions with the study. Interview questions should be open-ended, meaning they do not elicit a yes/no response (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During phenomenological interviews, the researcher needs to ask appropriate questions and then rely on participants to discuss the meaning of their experiences that requires patience by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions should also be neutral, sensitive and understandable where the design of the interview begins with questions in which participants can answer easily and then proceeding to more difficult or sensitive topics is best practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This enables participants develop a rapport and build confidence for a safe, sharing environment. Creating ease will often generate rich data and subsequently develops the interview even further (Heath, 2018).

There are three fundamental types of research interviews that include, structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Gill et al., 2008). Structure interviews are a list of predetermined questions that are asked with little or no variation and no scope for follow-up questions to responses that warrant further elaboration (Heath, 2018). Unstructured interviews do not reflect any preconceived theories or ideas and are conducted with little or no organization (Heath, 2018).

An interview is a purposeful conversation between two people that is directed by one in order to obtain information from the other. As opposed to closed questioning which typically result in “yes” or “no” answers, open-ended questions are probing for details in a form of exploration (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher gathers descriptive

data from the participant by using the words of the participants to develop insights and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Mindfulness is a very personal experience; every word has the potential to unlock the mystery of the phenomenon and worldview (Kabat-Zinn, 2004).

According to Patton (2015), interview questions fall into six main categories that include, experience/behavior, opinion/values, feelings, knowledge, sense, and background/demographic. Additionally, the researcher must decide subtle nuances of an interview such as sequence the questions, how much detail to solicit, how long to make the interview, and actual word combinations when constructing questions (Patton, 2015). Time is a precious commodity during the interview process. Unnecessary digressions reduce productive time to focus on critical issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When assessing the instrument, the researcher can consider: (a) Does the instrument elicit detailed descriptive data? (b) Does the question sequence make sense? (c) Do questions seem to be missing? (d) Are questions worded to obtain good data? (Merriam, 1998).

Questions for this research were directed to the participants' experiences, meanings, feelings, beliefs, and convictions related to the theme of the question (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological approach to research was attempting to capture a rich description of the phenomena and settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All questions were related to the ability to extract experiences, meanings, feelings, beliefs, and convictions related to the practice of mindfulness during law school and stress associated by academic pressures. The questions aim was to focus on "what goes on within" the participants and searching for participants to describe their lived experiences in a language as free from constructs of intellect and society as possible (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

Questions related to developing an understanding of the participant and law school

1. Please explain why you chose to go to law school.
 - Who influenced you?
 - What drove you to pursue that career of law?
 - Where do you see yourself after law school?
2. What do you enjoy the most about being a law student?
3. What are your challenges as a law student?
4. How do you feel about your mindfulness practice?

Question one and two were related to the student's motivations to become a lawyer. First question considered the understanding internally or externally driven reasons become a lawyer and consider the SDT related to internal motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Question two was also related to SDT that creates an understanding in the motivation related to the student's enjoyment or excitement of attending law (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Question three related to the over challenges of law school and question four addressed mindfulness practice to determine if these challenges and practices were universal among participants to develop common themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Questions related to mindfulness and law school:

5. Briefly describe your practice of mindfulness?
 - a. Describe the form of mindfulness that you use. (i.e., breathing meditation, walking mediation, speaking)
6. People come to mindfulness practice in many different ways. What was it that led you to the practice of mindfulness?
7. How do you monitor your stress level?

8. If you have used mindfulness techniques during high levels of academic stress, what do those situations look like (exams, Socratic classroom format, meetings with professors)?
 - a. What were the results?
 - b. How has mindfulness affected your overall academic achievement?
 - c. How has that affected your overall experience in law school?
9. What other stress reduction practices that you use that would be important for me to learn about?
 - a. Including mindfulness in these practices, how would you rank these for most effective in stress reduction?
10. How have you seen your practice with mindfulness influence your relationships with others including law school classmates and personal relationships?
11. What types of physical-wellbeing and mental health-wellbeing is related to your mindfulness?
12. Please give examples of any internal & external barriers you have encountered with others when you explain your practice.
13. How would you describe your law school experience if you did not utilize mindfulness?
14. What else that you would like to share about your experience with law school or mindfulness?

Mindfulness has become a ubiquitous word. Questions five and six investigated the beginnings and types of practices of mindfulness that the student actively engaged for clarification of participants' definition of mindfulness practices (Tsai & Chou, 2016). Questions

seven, eight, and nine were related to the feelings and realization that the student was experiencing stress and what situations are activating stressors (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015). Participants may realize they have an unhealthy relationship and emotions to stress and understand the various benefits of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2000). Individuals often use many resources and interventions to manage behavior, especially stress was addressed in ten and eleven (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015). Mindfulness practices are used for various reasons and issues to improve overall wellbeing (Brostoff, 2017). Questions eight and nine also addressed additional types of practices believed to help the participants manage stress. Implementing mindfulness to manage academic stress may cross over in to the personal lives of law students and was discussed in question ten (Brostoff, 2017). Question eleven wanted to discover if law school students were experiencing the same type of results as those who are not in a high stress academic setting (Brostoff, 2017). Question twelve addresses the “new age” perception of mindfulness and was one of the main reasons people are reluctant to accept the practice as legitimate (ABA, 2018). Question thirteen was a reflective question related to the overall experience of mindfulness and stress during law school (Fulton & & Cashwell 2015). Question seventeen was a conclusion question to give participants an opportunity to develop their thoughts which may not have been expressed during the interview (Seidman, 2006).

Interviews were held through virtual video conferencing using Zoom as the primary tool to gather information during semi-structured interview and focus groups. Instructions related to the Zoom technology were emailed to students in advance of the interview. All participants were able to access the technology without difficulty. The researcher’s document had a list of times for Zoom conferencing. An email was sent to all participants with their pseudonym name to use to sign into Zoom for their interview time. This protected their privacy. Participants were asked

to select an open time for their individual interview from a list of times on a Google doc. If a student could not participate during the available times, the instructions were to contact the researcher. If a participant does not respond, a follow up email was sent. All students responded to a particular time or requested a time. Most interviews were scheduled in the late evening once classes were complete for the day.

There were no set locations for interviews, however students were asked to access a location with quality Internet connection, a location where the student would not be interrupted and felt comfortable sharing personal insights. Interview sessions were limited to one hour. Interviews were conducted once, with an individual or with a group. Generally individual interviews cover the duration of 30 minutes to more than an hour and focus group interviews 90 minutes (DiCiccon-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The questions in the interview guide were comprised of core questions related to the central question of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To assess the researcher's ability to conduct quality data collection, the interviews were recorded and backed up with an additional recording. These recordings were utilized with the recording feature of Zoom technology. Participants were informed in advance that the interview would be recorded for the researcher's purpose of reviewing responses. A high-quality iPhone app was also used as a second recording device to back up the Zoom recording device. Recording interviews helped the researcher keep accurate records of interviews and assist during data collection (Al-Yateem, 2012). The researcher took only a few notes during the interview as to create a naturalistic paradigm during the interview, creating rapport and establishing comfortable interactions (Cote & Turgeon, 2005). An email was sent to confirm the student's scheduled interview. In the email, a short summary of the research project was sent to review the

purpose and inform them what to expect and why it is an important topic to discuss (DiCiccon-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

During interviews, it was important to remain open and honest and maintain interest in the participant. Interviews can have profound meaning for interview subjects and may prompt deep reflection (Seidman, 2006). Actively listening to interviewees meant respecting silence and understanding that silent moments can be an opportunity for ongoing reflection (Seidman, 2006). Additionally, the researcher was open to clarification of interview questions.

Topics may evoke uneasy emotions during the interview. The researcher was sensitive to the participants' reactions when sharing their experiences. Ultimately, the participants were made to feel that they do not have to continue if they are feeling uncomfortable with the topic (Varpio & McCarthy, 2018).

In order to ensure ethical research, I used informed consent. I developed a specific informed consent 'agreement', in order to gain the informed consent from participants (Bailey, 1996, p. 11.). This consent form was created as a virtual shared document. The consent form was in the interview confirmation email. The confirmation included:

- That they are participating in research
- The purpose of the research (without stating the central research question)
- The procedures of the research
- The risk and benefits of the research
- The voluntary nature of research participation
- The procedures used to protect confidentiality

Focus Group

Groups were kept to a number that best created interaction and participation of members (Patton, 2015). A focus group should be at least five to eight members based on their response to the email to gather group level data (Patton, 2015). Focus groups typically bring together people with similar experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The background in this study involves first, second- and third-year law students who have taken a mindfulness course or have a practice of mindfulness during law school. The major discussion associated with this group of students is mindfulness and law school. The focus group consisted of five students.

1. As a group, describe stresses during law school.
2. As a group, describe mindfulness in academic experiences.
3. As a group, describe emotional and physical wellbeing regulation as it relates to mindfulness.
4. As a group, describe how mindfulness relates to personal experiences outside of law school.

The focus group questions related to understanding how a group interacts as they described and shared their experiences of mindfulness related to stress associated with law school including emotional regulations, academic achievements and personal stress. Question one related to understanding the stress experienced for law students and their ability to manage a stressful academic setting (Doucet, 2014). The second question related to academic experiences and to understand the depth of stress associated with law school academics. (Larcombe, Tumbaga, Malkin, Nicholson, & Tokatlidis, 2013). Question number three considered the emotional and physical wellbeing of law students and the application of their mindfulness practices (Brown, Creswell, & Ryan, (Eds.) (2015). Finally, the last question, considered the

phenomenon outside of the school setting and if mindfulness practices enrich participants experiences with personal relationships (Bamber, & Schneider, 2016).

Similar to the procedures used in the individual interviews, participants were sent an email with options of times to select for the group interview. The time options were fewer and participants were asked to rank the times most convenient to participant in order of first, second and third choice. This technology is available through Google Docs. A confirmation email was sent to participants to inform them of their scheduled group interview. If participants did not attend, another group interview was conducted to accommodate these participants. This was the final data collection source for the research. If participants participated in the individual interview, group interview and journal prompt, each participant received a \$100.00 gift card. If participants only participate in one or two of the data collection requirements, their data was not considered and they were not be eligible to receive the gift card. All participants received gift cards.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began during the data collection and continued after data collection has been completed. The procedures for data analysis include (1) coding; (2) developing assertions, propositions and matrices to organizing and analyzing the data (3) member checking; (4) triangulation of data; (5) debriefing with other researchers; (6) researcher reflections (Miles et al., 2014). To identify emerging patterns and themes constant comparative method of data analysis needs to be implemented (Miles et al., 2014). Merriam (1998) indicates that “continuous comparison of incidents, respondents’ remarks, and so on with each other. Units of data, bits of information, are literally sorted into groups that have something in common.” Coding provides a strategy to examine words or phrases that participants use to

make meaningful data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). “An assertion is a declarative statement of summative synthesis, supported by confirming evidence from the data and revised when disconfirming evidence or discrepant cases require modification of the assertion” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 99). With the development of the assertion, propositions and memos, the researcher will be able to begin to reflect and develop an analysis (Miles et al., 2014).

Inductive analysis involves discovery patterns, themes and categories in the data, as opposed to deductive analysis, where the data are analyzed according to an existing framework (Patton, 2015). Inductive analysis will be used to discover patterns in study; however analyzing data to an established framework could support a deductive analysis. The researcher intends to use a computer assisted qualitative data analysis system (CAQDAS). These types of system software programs are intended to facilitate data organization and analysis. CAQDAS provides tools to assist with qualitative research including transcription analysis, coding and text interpretation. The data types in qualitative research included various types of interviews, focus groups, observation notes and document collation (Woods, Macklin & Lewis, 2016).

Colazzi’s (1978) phenomenology data analysis model highlights conceptual patterns and describes the process for the investigation. The end result of the analysis is a concise but all-encompassing description of the phenomenon, validated by the participants that created it. The method depends upon rich first-person accounts of experience with the collection of interviews, journaling, group interviews, blogs, and other collection of data that are collected by the individual participants. Details of the data analysis include (p. 48-71):

1. The researcher thoroughly reads and rereads the transcribed interviews to identify with the data and to acquire a sense of each individual and his or her background and experiences.

2. From the transcripts the researcher identifies significant statements that pertain directly to the proposed phenomenon.
3. The researcher develops interpretive meanings for each of the significant statements. The researcher rereads the research protocols to ensure the original description is evident in the interpretive meanings.
4. The interpretive meanings are arranged into clusters, which allow themes to emerge. The researcher seeks validation, avoids repetitive themes, and notes any discrepancies during this process.
5. The themes are then integrated into an exhaustive description. The researcher also refers the theme clusters back to the protocols to substantiate them.
6. The researcher produces a concise statement of the exhaustive description and provides a fundamental statement of identification also referred to as the overall essence of the experience.
7. The reduced statement of the exhaustive description is presented to the study's participants in order to verify the conclusions and the development of the essence statement. If discrepancies are noted, the researcher should go back through the significant statements, interpretive meanings, and themes in order to address the stated concerns.

Trustworthiness

Four aspects of trustworthiness should be considered when evaluating qualitative research that include credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007). There are obvious overlaps between credibility, dependability and confirmability to establish an audit trail. And audit trail consists of accurate records of the

data and the researcher's thought process and preserving the original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Also including auditing the audit trail by an outside-qualified research for the appropriateness in design and analysis (Lincoln & Guba 1986). Finally, the audit trail should include a qualified researcher who does not have any direct involvement with the research to consult with the researcher (Lincoln & Guba 1986).

Credibility

Credibility, internal validity, speaks to the authenticity or "truth value" of research (Schwandt et al., 2007). To assure credibility, research implement several strategies that include prolonged engagement, member checking, triangulation, peer debriefing, constructing a chain of evidence, participant verifications of accuracy and interpretation, to enhance the credibility and determine credibility of the data. (Miles et al., 2014; Schwandt et al., 2007).

Credibility is imperative to qualitative research ensuring participant representation is accurately identified and depicted (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Creswell (2007) suggests numerous paths can lead to effective validation for researchers who seek parallel approaches. Strategies included in this research were designed to promote credibility and enable future verification. Peer review of the methods and analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Second, discussions with advisor, dissertation committee members, fellow PhD. students, and colleagues in higher education will be noted and compiled for further reflection. Participant checking occurred to allow participants to check transcripts for inconsistencies and to serve as a platform for further clarification. This process will help "check their own subjectivity and ensure the trustworthiness of their findings" (Jones, 2002, p. 469). Lastly, findings were communicated through thick-rich descriptions. The unique

voice of the student participants was at the core of the research process and allowed future researchers to determine applicable transferability of findings to other settings (Creswell, 1998).

Dependability and Conformity

Dependability and reliability ensure that the process of the data collection, findings, and analysis are consistent throughout the study (Schwandt, et al., 2007). Merriam (1998) defines dependability as consistency between the data and the findings. Dependability is strengthened by the quality research questions and solid study design, explicitly describes the research's role and bias, develops a method of consistent data collection, implements data quality checks and integrates peer review throughout the study (Miles et al., 2014).

Confirmability, neutrality, and objectivity, assure that research findings are supported by the data, and methods used to strengthen confirmability include clear description of data collection and analysis methods, reader ability to follow the sequence of data analysis to findings and conclusions, rival explanations and outliers have been explored and again that an audit trail will be created (Miles et al., 2014; Schwandt, et al., 2007).

Transferability

Transferability and external validity helps the reader of the study to make the judgments regarding application and suitability to their own setting (Lincoln & Guba 1986; Merriam, 1998). Detailed description of context and participant voice are provided to allow readers to make their own determination about the appropriateness of transferability (Merriam, 1998). Results from the study are expected to describe the phenomenon in depth rather than predict behavior in other contexts (Merriam, 1998). The descriptions should be rich and thick with details regarding the study and findings including the sites and sample (Schwandt et al., 2007).

Ethical Considerations

All elements of the IRB specification were met with great detail and fidelity; however, all possibilities cannot always be anticipated nor can a researcher's own responses (Merriam, 1998). The research study had IRB approval from the researcher's university, "Accurate moral and ethical dilemmas often have to be resolved situationally, and even spontaneously" (Merriam, 1998, p. 84).

Prior to conducting the study all approvals, examination of professional associations, local access permissions, and authorship was completed. A consent form was created using specific guides and participants, who are all over the age of 18, had a to opportunity to read and sign before committing to participate. Before conducting the study, the researcher disclosed the purpose of the study, refrained from pursuing participants, respected norms and charters, was sensitive to needs (Merriam, 1998). The collection of data required respect of the study site and minimized disruptions, avoided deceiving participants, respected power imbalances, and store data and materials using appropriate security measures. Pseudonyms were used for sites and participants. All data was stored electronically and password protected using a cloud-based server.

When analyzing data, the researcher avoided siding with participants and disclosing only positive results, respecting the privacy of participants. The researcher was proficient with the materials in the university handbook and the types of issues should be reported if they are discovered during review of data. The researcher understood the chain of command for reporting. The researcher did not have any direct supervisory role or type of authority over the participants. To effectively manage relationships that may develop during the timeframe of the study, the researcher debriefed participants. This enabled all who are involved in the research to

manage relationship expectations and boundaries after the research was completed. Bracketing is where the investigators set aside their personal experiences to take a non-bias perspective, for the integrity of the study; the researcher maintained a non-biased, non-judgmental viewpoint when collecting and analyzing data. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

When reporting data, the researcher avoided falsifying authorship, evidence, data, findings, and conclusions as well as disclosing information that would harm participants. Communication was clear, straightforward and used appropriate, professional language. The researcher did not under any circumstance plagiarize. Finally, when publishing the study, the reports were shared. The researcher did not duplicate or piecemeal publication and complete a proof of compliance with ethical issues and lack of conflict of interest (Creswell and Poth, 2013).

Summary

Chapter Three provided a framework for the research. The study was designed as a phenomenological study that would explore the meaning of mindfulness meditation and students' stress experienced during law school. Phenomenology was used to understand the experiences and meanings of individuals in the study as both a group and as individuals (Creswell, 2007). The qualitative method was instrumental in exploring the phenomenon in depth. The phenomenological study was grounded in constructivist methodology. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling and used snowball techniques to identify the potential participants who met the selection criteria. Raw data was sorted into manageable units utilizing the phenomenological reduction of data method as designed by Moustakas (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore Colazzi's (1978) phenomenology data analysis model highlights conceptual patterns and describes the process for the investigation.

Participants included students currently in law school in various law school sites throughout the United States or who had attended law school within the last five years, had taken course in mindfulness or had an active practice in mindfulness during law school. One-on-one interviews and focus groups were conducted via Zoom. Journal prompts were sent through Google Docs using Google sign-on features consistent with all Google accounts that maintain confidentiality. According to the research ethics, I maintained mutual trust with the participants by listening to them attentively, being non-judgmental to their expressions, and maintaining courtesy. The process of participants expressing their personal thoughts on the issues studied helped me to interpret data fairly.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter Four begins with restating the purpose statement, a review of the research questions and brief review of the design of the study, an introduction of participants highlighting their experiences and finally the development of themes. This research study concerns mindfulness as it relates to the lived experiences of law students to gain new in-depth knowledge of how mindfulness influenced students' stress experiences, resilience, wellbeing both physically and emotionally in settings common in law school. To develop a hermeneutic, or interpretative, research, the data were revisited again and again to experience fuller meaning from the participants data (Moustakas, 1994). A well-developed description of the participants' journey in mindfulness, using assigned pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the study contributors, is central in this chapter to make meaning their experiences.

All participants were active members of a student organization related to mindfulness and the legal profession. Participants were from three regional locations that included the southwest, northeast and southeast in the United States of America. Each participant's overall experience with the mindfulness practice during law school was their own unique, personal lived experience. All participants' level of experience and dedication to a mindfulness practice varied according to their own style, personality, interest, acceptance and need. This chapter includes well-developed, insightful quotes from participants to describe their experiences related to the study's research questions. Also included in this chapter are the developments and explanations of themes through the lens of the Monitor and Accept Theory (Lindsay and Creswell, 2017). The MAT incorporates two major tenets, first, attention monitoring skills that enhance awareness of present-moment experience, and second, acceptance skills that

modify the way one relates to present-moment experiences and regulating reactivity to affective experience. The theoretical framework also includes the Self-Determination Theory tenet of autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Answers to the central question and the research questions were developed through the analysis of the data collected. The chapter concludes with the study findings, analysis of codes, and the theme development.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions Review

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how students make meaning of mindfulness as it relates to stress during law school. Phenomenology research focuses on the perception that conscious life is intentional (Moustakas, 1994). This phenomenological study was developed through the rich descriptions and narratives that illuminates the lived experiences of law school students and mindfulness as it relates to academics. The findings emerged with the expectations of keeping descriptions as faithful as possible, not to delete from, add to, change, or distort anything originally presented in the data collection. All efforts were employed to bracket presuppositions and biases and hold them in consciousness through all phases of the research to minimize the influence of these beliefs and ideas. This chapter uses the voices of participants to explain their experiences of law school, stress, and mindfulness. The transcendental phenomenological design enabled to set aside opinions and interpret the participants' lived experiences and mindfulness practices.

Participants were from three different regional areas in the United States of America. Having participants from three different regional areas allowed for greater triangulation of data results. Triangulation provided a more thorough explanation of behavioral phenomena by examining it from multiple viewpoints (Patton, 2002). The codes and specific themes that emerged revolved around the tenets of MAT which included monitoring and

accepting, in addition to the autonomy tenet of SDT. These central theoretical concepts formed the basis of the thematic generalizations. It also included the more specific groupings within scope.

This study is grounded in one central research question and four sub-questions. To understand the phenomenon, the following research questions were examined within the theoretical lens of monitoring, accepting and autonomy:

Central Question: What are the lived experiences of law students and their mindfulness practice?

Sub-question 1: What contexts or situation have been experienced with the practice of mindfulness?

Sub-question 2: How does the act of monitoring and accepting guide the relationship to stress?

Sub-question 3: What academic experiences are associated with mindfulness?

Sub-question 4: How do mindfulness practices contribute to participants' meaning of social and emotional well-being?

Participants

A total of 13 people agreed to participate in the study, however only 10 actually participated. The 10 participants are identified in this section using their pseudonyms.

There were 8 females and 2 males, and all were between the ages of 18 and 35.

All had attended law school, had experienced stress during law school and had a mindfulness practice during law school. Participants of this study offered a wide range of experiences in mindfulness practices, and all indicated they experience high levels of stress during law school. Years in law school ranged from 1Ls to 3Ls, where 1L represents a first-year law student, 2L

represents a second-year law student and 3L represents a third-year law student. Many were preparing to take the bar exam after graduation.

All the participants agreed to the journal prompts, an individual interview and one group interview. Individual interviews used the Zoom technology and about half use their computer for the conferencing and the other half use their Zoom phone app.

Lisa

Lisa is a 3L, 3rd year law student. Her journey with mindfulness practices began in law school. Lisa had never experienced feelings with such great force, such as anxiety, depression, impostor syndrome and insecurity as she did during her first year of law school. She was unsure if law school was the cause of these feelings, because she had never recognized or experienced them before law school. She indicated that there were days when she had so much anxiety it was difficult to talk in class, even though she is typically a very social person. “Law school is stressful almost every day.”

There were hours spent of endless reading and memorization of laws and facts. This could be overwhelming and exhausting. She believed that her mindfulness practiced helped her study more efficiently and effectively, “I am able to catch my thoughts wandering off much quicker than ever before. As soon as I notice that I am starting to lose focus, I catch myself and refocus my attention to my studies.” Before she began her mindfulness practice, “I would spend hours and hours mindlessly scrolling through Instagram when I was supposed to be studying. I make more effective use of my time and I get more done in a shorter amount of time.”

Lisa indicated that before mindfulness she was a perfectionist. “I used to be a straight A student before law school and I never got lower than an A-.” Once she began to practice mindfulness, she focused her attention on what she could control, like “breathing while

studying”, while ignoring things she had no control over, “like the grade curve.” By shifting her focus, she believed she was able to achieve peace with herself. “When I get my grades back, I don't wonder what more I could have done. I now just appreciate myself and all the hard work I have done, and all the knowledge I have gained in the experience.” This change in approach to her grades was primarily attributed to her mindfulness practice.

Besides grades, one of the most stressful experiences during law school is “publicly speak in front of large groups of people, such as for oral arguments or negotiation competitions,” Lisa said. Before Lisa makes an oral argument or presents in front of a large group of people, “I always take 5-10 minutes to sit alone with my eyes closed. I focus on my breathing and re-center my body.” This helps her, “remind myself that this is just one experience in my life that does not define me.” The breath is Lisa’s anchor of focus, “I remind myself that each breath, I am in more control of my mind and body. Doing this helps me remember that there are much more important things in the world, like being able to walk and talk and breath.”

Law school has been only one stressful event in Lisa’s life; recently she lost her father two weeks before exams. “It was one of the most painful times personally, coupled with the most stressful times academically. I really had to change the way I dealt with my stress.” Instead of having constant anxiety and losing sleep just to ensure a good grade, Lisa realized that there were many other things she could be worrying about that were much more serious than a letter on a transcript. This was when she developed a habit of meditating. Before dealing with this grief, Lisa only used breathing techniques to relieve stress and anxiety. The meditation helped Lisa calm her mind from her grieving pain. After her father passed away, “sat with myself for extended periods of time. I wanted to feel what I was feeling, but on my own terms. I needed to find a way to keep going every day, and mindfulness is what helped me achieve that.” Lisa’s

practice gave her the ability to put life into perspective and work through various degrees of stress and anxiety.

Although stress did not get any easier, Lisa was able to utilize mindfulness activities such as mindful breathing and re-centering her body to remind herself that she was in control of her mind and body. “Mindfulness meditation skills combat stress because they allow you to refocus your energy. Instead of letting something spiral out of control, mindfulness allows me to understand what I'm feeling and take control of those feelings,” Lisa indicated in her interview. “Today, I couldn't imagine my life without mindfulness. The time I take to be alone with my thoughts and breaths has been invaluable.” Lisa is very active in her school's mindfulness association, “I help teach people about this practice as I continue to learn about it myself.” Lisa finished her interview by saying, “I take a second, close my eyes, and just focus on the one thing I could control - my breath.”

Lonnie

Lonnie is currently a 2L, 2nd year law student. Her mindfulness journey began during her freshman year as an undergraduate. Lonnie was introduced to the practice in a psychology course. The professor began each class with short and optional mindfulness mediations. Lonnie enjoyed the class very much; she pursued a teaching aide position with the same professor the following year and continued to integrate mindful practices into her undergraduate experiences. Once in law school, she realized that she needed to keep incorporating this practice to better recognize and manage stress. Lonnie said of her experience, “I KNOW that the little things I have been doing in the way of mindfulness have made a big impact on my overall ability to cope and be happy in law school.”

Once in law school Lonnie immediately joined the Mindfulness Society and attended all the guided mindfulness meditations. “I knew that law school was going to be an extremely mentally taxing experience so from the beginning I sought out people and resources that would help me get through it.” She befriended the president of the association and has since become one of her best friends. Another member of the association doubles as a yoga teacher at the rec center next to the law school building. They attend her weekly yoga class on Thursdays after their criminal procedure class. Her yoga class always ends with an extensive mindfulness meditation.

Many things have been stressful for Lonnie during her law school experience, especially having her entire grade based on a single exam at the end of the semester. She remembered the night before her first law school exam was exceptionally grueling. Lonnie called her mom from the dorm at 10:00 p.m. hyperventilating. Competing with others for grades was a different academic approach for her. “I had no way of gauging my peers’ intelligence and the self-doubt and worry physically made me sick.” The curve created an environment of uncertainty of personal academic ability and uncertainty of classmates’ ability. “The truth is I had no power to control how others did. I could only do my best and let the chips fall where they may,” Lonnie shared.

What was especially difficult was Lonnie’s scholarship. With this scholarship, her father was able to retire and not have to continue to work to help her with law school tuition. In addition, Lonnie did not have to take our student loans to support herself throughout law school. With the pressure of maintaining exceptional grades to continue her scholarship, parent obligation to do well, and intern and career opportunities based on grades, stress seemed to peer its “deadly head daily.” Lonnie acknowledged. “I’ve done guided mindfulness

meditations periodically throughout the semester whenever they were offered by the Mindfulness Association. But I've used mindfulness even more than that," Lonnie admitted. Presentations during law school, such as oral arguments competitions, "are particularly nerve wracking." Lonnie explained further,

In an oral argument, you prepare a 15-minute argument to explain to a panel of judges why your case should be affirmed or reversed on appeal. The judges take it upon themselves to jump in wherever they want and berate you with questions about the worst facts of your case. It really doesn't matter how much research and preparation you've put into an oral argument because you NEVER feel prepared. Adrenaline courses through your body while you stand at a podium trying to make sure your voice doesn't crack. The hardest thing is staying mentally present even though you are so nervous.

Lonnie indicated that she always tries to do a short meditation before an oral argument; she competed in six oral agreements in one semester. Before every oral argument Lonnie typically goes into the restroom before walking in the courtroom to monitor her stress levels and re-center herself. "I even did breathe exercises while I sat at my table waiting until it was my time to approach the podium." Lonnie recalled in her interview that people ask her all the time if "it works." She said that she really doesn't know how to answer them, however Lonnie has won every regional negotiation competition and advance to the nationals. "I was present. I was ready for the questions, the answers, and the offers. I don't know if, in the face of all those nerves, I would be as mentally present without mindfulness."

Lonnie believed that mindfulness skills don't really help combat stress as much as they just help individuals to recognize stress and assess options. Mindfulness made Lonnie feel very in tune with her body. It allowed her to rationally comb through her thoughts and

decide which ones are helpful and good to focus on and which ones are doing her a disservice and should be discarded. Lonnie felt that physical signs of stress are easily identifiable.

Going to law school has been the most has been the most challenging two years of Lonnie's life, but she is happy. "I'm trying to get through the rough parts but try to recognize and enjoy all the beautiful parts in between. Because life is still happening and entire years of your life cannot just be looked at as a chore." She has surrounded herself around people who are real friends and she has developed deep connections and relationships during law school.

Prior to mindfulness, I don't think I was able to enjoy the journey and really feel the highs without worrying about the upcoming lows. I'm not perfect and I sometimes still slip back into my old ways, but I'm trying and growing and evolving.

Lonnie concluded her journal entries with a reflection, "We need to instill in these young people the ability to recognize this stress and the tools to cope with it in healthy ways. Mindfulness may not be the cure, but it is definitely a key tool in that toolbox."

Sue

Mindfulness started with yoga for Sue. Sue took her first yoga class when she was in high school and continued through college. Although, at first, she felt she was not very good at yoga, Sue enjoyed it and found it relaxing.

Once I started going every day, I started to see both the physical and the psychological benefits of yoga. I was getting physically stronger and healthier, never mind flexible. I was starting to look at my life and stress differently. Ultimately, I did yoga teacher training with the studio I was with and fully dedicated myself to a mindfulness practice for life.

With Sue's yoga training she indicated that she could better understand the physical impact of mindfulness had on her body. She understood the effects of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and how they affect the overall mood. Sue indicated that she was able to take deep breaths and slow down her heart rate that escalated when she was feeling various types of stress including those associated with law school.

During high levels of stress, such as exams, Sue was able to notice the stress throughout her body. Loss of appetite, trouble sleeping, rapid heart rate are were physical issues Sue's experiences. Through mindfulness practice, she has been able to re-center herself. "I cannot stress over things I have no control over such as what other students are doing and studying. I just try to focus on things that I can control and staying in tune with my needs." With acceptance, Sue has been better to honor her dietary choices and sleep needs.

I feel like I have stayed in tune with my needs. I sleep when my body is telling me to sleep and I eat when I know I should eat. I still practice yoga, so I make sure to get some physical exercise in as well. I surprisingly feel healthy and strong and probably in my best physical shape I've been in in a while.

Sue believed she is calmer and better prepared for exams. Practicing mindfulness has helped her feel more confident in her approach to the stress of law school.

It has really changed my perspectives and approach to law school. It has by no means translated into stellar grades, but I feel more confident and happier with where I'm at. I've ultimately come to realize that I feel more comfortable taking my learning at MY OWN pace, rather than feeling limited by the time constraints place on me.

Throughout law school Sue has been able to develop relationships with her fellow peers and professors. As many law school students see their peers as competitors, Sue does not have

that view. “I like to help my peers and much as I can because I know that we are all working towards the same goal at the end of the day.” Sue felt that mindfulness was an attitude of living that promoted ideas of compassion and self-awareness. It involved deliberately directing attention Sue’s away from autopilot and negative, judging thoughts to be more present and connected with happier relationships. This helps reduced Sue feelings of competition among classmates, which has been a source of stress for many law students.

Violet

Violet is a first-year law student and started practicing mindfulness since experiencing stress related to bullying in middle school. This drew Violet’s interest into becoming more introspective and work on self-awareness, compassion and developing her personal traits. As Violet became older, her obsession with self-care books turned to inspirational podcast and daily journaling.

Violet used mindfulness techniques to focus and work through difficult and stressful situations related to her new academic experiences and personal life in law school. “My exams are a major source of stress,” she indicated. All participants of the study mentioned high levels of stress related to exams. One of the benefits of mindfulness was developing Violet’s ability to respond rather than react to high levels of stress. By noticing stress levels, Violet was able to respond with clearer approach. She said that, “Taking time to sit back and reflect on what I need to do for the day for school, my mental health, and my body has set me up for success.” Although it is a brief period of quiet, Violet said, “Those five minutes really center me and allow me to focus on here and now and not get carried away with what might happen or others around me.”

In addition to exams, the Socratic questioning style of instruction was particularly stressful, but with Violet's re-centering, "I answer the question I know and then honestly tell my professor I'm unsure if I do not know a follow up question."

Violet believes emotional self-awareness can help combat stress. "It's like when you start getting angry because you haven't eaten in a while, if you are aware that you are a hungry person you will combat the symptoms and not allow others to face your wrath." Violet's experience has been the same with mindfulness and stress. "If you are aware you are becoming stressed you are more likely to combat other qualities that arise with it because simply you are aware of them."

Violet indicated that there were several professors in law school who practiced mindfulness and their classroom teaching approach was very different from others who do not. "A professor that does not follow mindfulness is a lot quicker to yell or get discouraged with students when they get the answer wrong," Violet shared. The student mindfulness organization at her law school is very active and supported by many faculty members and staff. This helps to validate the practice for Violet.

Mindfulness has given Violet the ability to better manage her personal relationships too. Violet is more mindful of her words and actions towards her boyfriend, friends and family members. Her mom also practices mindfulness and they have been able to share experiences and ideas related to stressful situations, awareness and responds to stress, and a fulfilling life. Violet explained, "If you are aware you are becoming stressed, you are more likely to combat the other qualities that arise with it because simply you are aware of them."

Nikki

Nikki had read the Autobiography of a Yogi, by Paramahansa Yogananda several years before law school and said the book changed her life forever; this is where Nikki's mindfulness

journey officially began. As an adolescent, she began listening “to meditative music and slipping into meditation.” Nikki would listen to music with sustained notes, beats and focus on sound repetitions which calmed her emotions and she discovered inner confidence. She attended an ashram. An ashram is spiritual hermitage in East Indian religions to nourish the soul, deepen spiritual practice and become awoken to self. It is a sacred gathering of individuals stepping away from worldly affairs, to grow and mature spiritually and personally. Nikki spent a lot of time in Sunday services and in silent retreats with her ashram's practice.

Meditation for me is very much tied to connecting to a concept of a higher power, and focusing on that presence until I feel filled with calm and reassurance, that slowly gives way to joy. Having brief moments of feeling like I could feel the sun through the clouds was what sustained me through moments of stress, and believing that it was all going to be for something (not just in a professional sense).

Nikki, as with the other participants of the study, law school was inherently stressful for her. She felt as if she was not going to get through the next day. Nikki’s feelings most common were associated with negative self-thoughts, “Why am I here, I don’t belong here, everyone thinks I’m stupid and I am stupid.” Negative self-talk thoughts were all consuming. Nikki tried to remember, “for me, learning the law was also like a personal journey remaking myself and facing traumas that had been building up in my life thus far.” At times when everyone around her was frantic, studying, and preparing for finals, Nikki used mindfulness to stay calm. Nikki felt it was easy to inflate the volume of work simply by the anxiety level. “For me, practicing mindfulness to understand my triggers for anxiety helped me work through those triggers much faster, allowing me to move on with whatever task was at hand,” replied Nikki in an interview. One trigger is negative self-talk and Nikki emphasized she was working on minimizing the

activator. Nikki's practice helped her keep her heart from racing as fast when she was faced cold calls, Socratic questioning, and before presentations. It also helped her to be realistic with what she needed to get done. Nikki stated, "Mindfulness always helped me to slow down and hold things in seriousness, but without fear."

Among Nikki's peers, she was least likely to succumb to letting her anxiety cloud her thoughts, and she could approach situations more effectively. Meditation helped her stay grounded and accept the experiences of stress. "I did this by faithfully meditating every morning for about 20 minutes, and for 20 minutes before going to bed," Nikki shared. She believed that meditation teaches and reinforces the skill of interrupting stress patterns, which are very easy to get "sucked into." When Nikki interrupted the negative cycle of thinking, and effectively managed her thoughts, or recognize the root of negativity in order to process it, she always felt better.

Practicing meditation forces one's attention away from whatever is causing stress, not with avoidance, but with detachment. Avoidance is not acknowledgement that there is a problem (something causing stress), whereas detachment allows a problem to actually be dealt with. So many of my classmates could not zero in on what exactly was causing their anxiety, and therefore were ruled by it because they did not try to understand it. I found there is power in just acceptance of stress.

Nikki uses the practice of mindfulness to help her transform into the person she is becoming. Personally, she Nikki found more gratitude. In a journal reflection she said, "Gratefulness can be very powerful, and many times when I couldn't work through the stress, practicing mindfulness allowed me to identify at least some positivity and focus on that; invariably focusing on some small positive would grow it." Nikki said, "I am sure that people

have the experience from law school that they not only learn how to be lawyers, but they learn how to be themselves.” Nikki felt that this was especially true for herself because of her mindfulness practice. The combination of mental sharpening in the classroom, internship, and oral arguments reinforced her ability to face situations with a deeper kind of resolve.

She organized a student mindfulness group for law students in the urban law program. This contemplative student group offered several events open to all law students with the support of small comfort spaces, healing and respite from the rigors of law school and personal experiences. She also led de-stressing exercises for her fellow law school classmates. Through her practice of mindfulness, she found the power to “accept stress that is inherit during law school.” Her law school has a rich history of a mindfulness program. There is a well-developed network of alumni who engage with current students to maintain a mindfulness practice and provide retreats and events for law students. Additionally, meditation/prayer room are open for students, faculty and staff weekly meditation meetings. Nikki believes this has helped develop and create a culture of support and calm against a backdrop related to overwhelming experiences of law school. Law school is rigorous, with high expectations, “it often feels like there is no permission to be myself.” However, mindfulness has allowed Nikki to “find that permission to be myself despite it all.”

Linda

Linda began her journey the summer of law school when her professional responsibility professor invited a guest speaker to lead a guided meditation and introduce the basic practice of mindfulness strategies. Linda’s professor felt the topic was relevant after an in-class, intense discussion highlighting the frightening statistics of lawyer mental health issues and addiction. Linda indicated, “The statistics showed mental illness escalates in law school

and alarmingly high number of students develop depression and anxiety in law school, and many develop drug and alcohol addictions.” The guest speaker emphasized that substance abuse and destructive behaviors often continued once students graduate and entered their careers. The data impacted Linda, especially because she could relate to them herself. “I knew that many other students were also dealing with similar experiences,” she wrote. The problem, she believed, was that although stress was prevalent within the legal community, it was not discussed. Linda saw a number of students dealing with their struggles privately, but lacked early intervention, did not have resources to mental health professionals, or did not seek concerned with the stigma associated with mental illness and how it may affect future employment opportunities. Additionally, Linda thought many students only began sharing their internal struggles once the situation had escalated to desperate conditions. The response to stressors during law seemed to be reactive rather than proactive.

Linda describes her first year of law school.

My first year of law school was extremely stressful because of all the nuisances (including cold-calling, exams, etc.) that are completely unfamiliar to students in their first year. During the first year, I developed a fear of public speaking, I began feeling anxious more than ever before, I had difficulty sleeping, and stayed up all night studying very often. I also found myself feeling down and crying more than usual.

The personal experience of stress, in addition to information shared in her professional responsibility course, motivated Linda to explore and develop mindfulness. Linda had already begun her mindfulness practice when she entered the 2019 Regional ABA Negotiation Competition. During the competition, Linda felt extremely nervous and anxious. “I felt shaky, my heartbeat felt as though it was increasing at an extremely fast rate, I could not think about

anything other than how my body was reacting.” She was afraid she would forget everything she had practiced during negotiation run-throughs and Linda began doubting her level of preparation.

Within minutes, I acknowledged this as a normal reaction to irrational thoughts and began focusing on my breathing, trying to extend my exhale more than my inhale. I began visualizing the negotiation table and I visualized myself feeling calm and prepared. I thought back to all of the practices and hard work I put into preparing for the competition and I told myself that everything that happened from here on out that was external was out of my control, and the only thing I could control was my reaction to it. I told myself I would do my best no matter the circumstance. After calming my body, I smiled, struck a confident pose, and told my partner how excited I was for the negotiation. It diverted the stress to excitement and it was our best round of the competition.

Linda’s reflections and responses mostly focused on her desire to create, organize and provide support for students experiencing stress and other mental health issues. Just like Nikki, Linda decided to organize a student mindfulness group. She wanted to start the conversation about law student mental health issues, and alcohol and drug addictions with students before they began experiencing such issues.

That is when I decided to start a student mindfulness organization to start the conversation, to put resources out there for students, to bring in guest speakers and teach students about mindfulness and mindfulness techniques. I also wanted students to know that they are not alone, and that many students are going through the same experiences.

The goal of the student organization was to build a positive community of communication and promote overall well-being by encouraging students to develop a solid

foundation of mindfulness and healthy habits. Linda wanted to help classmates recognize and change their relationship with stress and have tools to work with their struggling emotions. Through helping others, Linda developed her own healthy habits and built the confidence to manage her emotions and stress levels. Linda indicated, “I also feel more confident and in control of my emotions. I am able to recognize my emotions quickly and work to calm them or change the energy to a more positive, productive emotion.”

Nancy

Nancy is a 2nd year law student. Her mindfulness journey began when she was studying for the LSAT in 2017. Nancy was in her early twenty’s and feeling excessive stress related to the upcoming law school entrance exam. She was stuck in a very unfulfilling job with many distractions. Nancy began to explore new avenues of spiritual development and the meaning and of life. She explored yoga. The class began and ended with a meditation session. Nancy had always flirted with the idea of meditation to foster more spirituality, but she never made the time. Experiencing high levels of stress, Nancy was concerned about her health issues, “I NEEDED to start this journey, and it began with yoga.” She believes that many people have the impression mindfulness is only meditation or "self-care" cures and expensive yoga classes, “it is so much more than that and also so much simpler.” The simplicity is just being in the present moment. Training the mind to focused on the here and now, stopping the wandering mind down the path of ruminating or catastrophizing. Nancy focuses on being present in the moment when she is cooking or washing dishes; simple daily tasks like brushing her teeth, just focusing on what is right in front of her. “I would try and put my phone away when I was watching a show or reading so that I could focus on the activity and not anxiously continue to check my phone and distract myself.” Taking a leap that many avoid, Nancy reduced her social media consumption,

“I frequently spend time off social media - usually a week at a time when I am feeling overwhelmed and distracted.”

Once she started law school, Nancy believed that the comparison of grades and internships associated with law school in addition to social media were the greatest distractions and contributors of her stress, anxiety and insecurity. “I am of the opinion that comparison is one of the greatest distractions and stress contributors. This day in age, we are constantly exposed to each other's lives, and especially their successes, their life highlights through social media”

Nancy continued, “and the constant barrage of easily accessible information.” Nancy had to change her relationship with stress by overhauling her habit of comparing herself to others. “The second semester of my 1L year brought immense stress. I was constantly comparing myself to others, constantly unsure of myself, and constantly putting pressure on myself to perform.”

Nancy monitored these feelings of overwhelming anxiety and insecurity. She reinforced her stress by participating in negative self-talk such as, “Maybe I should have never gone to law school, maybe I wasn't cut out for this, maybe I didn't deserve to be here, and I was wasting my time and money.” Self-defeating statements made it laborious to accomplish tasks without feeling exhausted. Nancy felt this type of stress made any undertaking twice as difficult. Nancy changed her relationship with stress by limiting social media and getting enough hours of sleep with a firm bedtime routine. Nancy consciously recognized and limited company who contributed to stress. She spent more time around people who talked less about grades and more about learning material. “I had to accept that we are all on separate paths and being competitive was good if I was competing against myself and not others,” Nancy said in a journal prompt. Nancy started rituals setting the tone for her day, waking up earlier and spending time alone, drinking tea, and contemplating the day. This supported Nancy’s ability to manage stress

by taking moments of solitude to focus, in silence. This evolution took several months, but by the conclusion of the second semester, Nancy felt renewed and experience a decrease in despair she had previously succumbed to at the beginning the year.

For me, being mindful also means refocusing on my goals and challenging myself to remember and re-engage with the reason I came to law school in the first place, which has a higher meaning than the individual test or task in front me of directly causing stress. Mindfulness has affected my academic abilities by allowing me to contribute more focused time and meaningful effort to my studies, my presentations, and my class participation.

Nancy used mindfulness to monitor her feelings and bring herself back to the present moment. The practice of mindfulness positively affected Nancy's academic abilities by making everything seem more feasible. By taking time for herself to breathe, it made the stress much more manageable. Mindfulness has affected Nancy's academic abilities by allowing her to contribute more focused time and meaningful effort to her studies and her presentations, and her class participation. Knowing her mind was wandering and then bring it back to the focused present moment has increased Nancy's successful study sessions. Nancy believed that mindfulness is not a catch-all solution, but it mitigates the fear, anxiety and stress and she has found the practice of mindfulness positively affects her academic abilities.

And the best thing about meditation is that there is no "right" way to do it... Meditation is free and can be as simple as focusing on your breath for just a few minutes before continuing an exam question or raising your hand in class. It makes me feel more connected to myself and my purpose for taking on the challenge of law school overall.

During presentations or class participation Nancy is able to lower her heart rate, stop her hands from shaking and calm her body's natural fight or flight response when under pressure to perform through re-centering and focusing on her breath. This approach has lowered Nancy's anxiety and stress levels to promote greater clarity in her thinking and overall perception of situations. Nancy used mindful breathing exercises before particularly stressful tasks to feel calmer and more confident. Mindfulness has been helpful with Nancy's public speaking in class or as part of the extracurricular activities, such as trial team, internships, and various legal societies.

With her breath, Nancy can continue a task, "Breathing increases my focus." Several years ago, Nancy took a yoga class that would end with a meditation. The yoga instructor would close out the session by reminding everyone they can always find their breath no matter where they were, "it does not only have to happen on the mat in the yoga studio" Nancy remembers.

Unfortunately, Nancy often reacts physically to stress by clenching her jaw, often while she is sleeping. She found that taking deep breaths before finishing her day and mindfully focusing on relaxing her jaw can help mitigate this clenching and prevents the headaches associated with her jaw clenching. With Nancy's ability to reduce her headaches, she indicated she is better rested, less irritable, and less frustrated, which inevitably made it easier to focus on academics. "I believe that mindfulness practice and meditation skills greatly increase focus and combat stress; the stress combatting benefits of mindfulness meditation have been scientifically proven through the physical benefits," Nancy shared. As someone who suffers from depression, Nancy has found that mindful meditation helped to regulate her emotions and bring more clarity and meaning, "There are so many more small ways that turning inward and

regulating our breath can give us even the smallest moment of peace to continue our day,” Nancy concluded.

The overall difference in her mental and physical wellbeing was positive and beneficial. Mentally, Nancy found more confidence in herself when she implemented mindfulness into her daily lifestyle. It allowed for increased focus and acceptance of capabilities, which mitigated the overwhelming feelings of “not being good enough” and doubting her abilities and strengths compared to others. Mindfulness did not immediately solve all of Nancy’s stress; it did, however, take the struggle and make it more manageable and sustainable in the long run.

Allie

Allie is a 2nd year law student. She actually started her mindfulness practice during undergraduate school. Allie decided to take a 200-hour yoga teacher training to improve her overall physical health. With the meditation techniques integrated into yoga, Allie was able to apply meditation into stressful academic settings during law school. Allie’s stress manifested in physical symptoms that most associate with anxiety and stress.

Spring semester of my first year I struggled a lot with physical symptoms of anxiety. I almost always felt like I was on the verge of death, like my brain was bleeding, or like I was going to have a heart attack.

Allie struggled with Socratic questioning and class presentations. She typically talks very fast and nervously. During moot court presentations, Allie still combats with physical symptoms of anxiety while defending arguments associated with her case. Allie has gotten better at using breathing methods to help her offset some of the symptoms. Most participants mentioned comparison of academic status and presentation ability as triggers to stress. Allie said, “I am now less concerned about what other people will think of me in class and more willing to speak up

even if I'm not sure of the answer." Meditation has also helped Allie focus, and felt more assured in the correct response with improved focus and engagement in the material at higher levels of concentration. Allie is not sure her ability to process content more fully is a result of meditation or simply adapting to the cognitive development law school requires. Allie does believe she is less emotionally reactive as a result of meditation. Allie said, "I am less likely to cry or breakdown in response to stress from school or my personal life than I would have been before."

Physically, Allie believes, she seen the most progress. "I don't get as much of the heart attack brain bleed feeling that I used to get when I was anxious." That is not to say stress has been solved, Allie still struggles emotionally and physically through constant headaches and neck pain associated with stress. She acknowledged that mindfulness techniques can be helpful, but believes it can require more. "I think you have to have a predisposed mindset at the time you employ meditation skills in order to really combat stress," Allie then added, "My 'meditation for anxiety' videos sometimes had the effect of making me more anxious because I thought I wasn't doing the meditation right." Believing she was not performing meditations correctly; she was catastrophizing limiting her ability to experience present moment awareness.

Allie began therapy sessions with a licensed counselor to helped her work through some of her mind-wandering issues. Now, she finds it easier to tap into her calm space. Weekly meditations at Allie's school, as well as participating in a 5-minute meditation before classes continue to be part of her practice. Allie labors to meditate on her own, so she uses various breathing techniques when becoming physically overwhelmed. Mindfulness is more than meditation, Allie explained, it's a way of being present.

At the end of the interview Allie went back to emphasize she had no idea her physical and emotional issues were related to stress and anxiety; initially she thought she was actually dying during her first semester of law school. Allie wishes someone had explained to her that stress and anxiety have very intense physical symptoms. With this information, Allie may have been in a different mindset and worried less about dying, "I think mindfulness has opened me up to be more sympathetic toward others and their issues, as well as making me want to promote my journey with mindfulness and anxiety." Allie doesn't want others to mistake stress for death.

Andrew

Andrew, "chose to practice mindfulness because of the stresses in law school and the legal field in general." He said, "The most stressful parts of law school are the grades and the job search." In Andrew's job market, southwest region, there are more graduating law students and unemployed lawyers than jobs available. Andrew believed failure to perform or compete academically or be pulled in by the powers and stresses of the profession, a line of unemployed lawyers would be ready to replace him at any moment. This catastrophizing belief lingered in his mind constantly. Andrew indicated the grading system was exceptionally problematic.

The standard curve was as follows: 25% A's, 60% B's, and 15% C's. This forced you to compete with your peers. No matter how well you objectively performed on a test, you were graded based on how well your peers did. It stressed me out that, in a 100 person class, the top 25 grades could be 99% on the test and if the 26th person receives a 97% on the test, they are forced to "earn" a B. Same thing goes that if the "B" group all received a 95% on the test, and the next person in line received a 94%, that individual would

automatically "earn" a "C" as a grade. The curve, paired with many law firms solely focusing on grades, created a lot of stress for me.

From Andrews point of view, he was able to substantiate what research indicates; the grading system related to law career prospects is inherently debilitating.

I constantly felt a form of anxiety where if I wasn't studying or I wasn't doing anything productive to further my career, I would be behind my other peers and therefore lose my chances of receiving a great job out of law school. My definition of success was to receive a big law firm job. However, in order to do so, you needed to have a top GPA in order to be competitive. There was constant pressure to do well in school, but also maintain a good life balance and meet the demands of personal relationships.

Andrew thought of exercise and the gym as a hindrance to his success rather than commodity. He explained, "If I spent an hour at the gym, that's an hour I could have spent studying." Andrew noticed that he was becoming physically unhealthy and mentally fatigued and constantly fogged. This exhaustion primarily was a result of constant fixation on academics and his future. Andrew said, "Sometimes I felt that my brain was on overdrive for every waking moment of the day and constantly trying to analyze my life situation on 'what ifs' and 'what could' happen with regard to school and career success." The practice of mindfulness helped Andrew to focus, calm down and "get out of my head."

By practicing breathing techniques and focusing goals, Andrew was able to curb feeling overwhelmed. Andrew said his study routine was also more effective and efficient. Once Andrew was able to step away from his head and focus on the breath, his concentration improved and critical analysis became easier. Andrew also noticed a change in his physical health,

Mindfulness practices also helped me create and participate in a healthy gym routine. I realized that by going to the gym and maintaining a healthy exercise routine, it actually helped me study. I craved the healthy relaxation that mindfulness meditation gave me, and so I sought that healthy relaxation through the gym. I was able to sleep much better and feel much more refreshed every day. By doing so, I was able to start off my studies in a well-rested state rather than a fatigued state. I'm glad that by practicing mindfulness, it helped improve my physical health, thus, my overall stress level.

Studying 24-hours a day was a misnomer Andrew learned during his first year of law school.

Mindfulness practices actually improved his communication with fellow law students, professors and friends. A big part of the legal profession is to think through a counter viewpoint. When faced with an issue, one-way thinking can be counterproductive. Regard for another person's perspective enhances problem solving. Mindfulness was a stepping-stone for Andrew to develop the skills to view the opposing standpoint. Andrew gave the example; there can be a situation where two people have a dispute. "A mindful practice would be to sympathize or empathize with the opposing side viewing their source of anger with perspective. Andrew believed that this could help pinpoint the actual source of the problem." Andrew believed this type of mindfulness practice could potentially develop his skills to become a more effective attorney. "There are conflicts that arise between yourself and opposing counsel all the time," Andrew explained. There is a saying, "the first thing to disappear with anger is a person's ability to reason." It works both ways. Andrew continued,

If you are angry, you might do something irrational that might jeopardize your client's situation. Conversely, if the other side is angry, they will cause great inefficiencies in resolving the case or closing the deal, which would cost your client to spend more

money. Mindfulness can help prevent that. Also, by practicing on viewing things from different points of view, it can help an attorney uniquely look at issues and more easily improve critical thinking skills.

Instead of succumbing to stress and anxiety, Andrew decided to change the way he subjectively viewed the stress. Andrew turned the stress of studying and performing into a privilege. Instead of thinking, “Ugh I’m forced to study to do well,” he re-centered himself and mindfully thought, “Wow, I have the privilege to study in law school and potentially have a great job. I just have to put in the work, and everything will fall into place.”

Brody

Brody is a person who enjoys learning and was attracted to law by the opportunity to investigate and analyze complicated aspects of the law. He enjoys critical thinking and application of sophisticated legal concepts. Brody’s mindfulness practice began during law school when a classmate discussed the school’s mindfulness course taught a retired judge. The judge required students to commit to a goal of practicing meditation every day. He believed to fully experience the benefits of the course and a mindful life; individuals must practice. The course required students to provide a reflective journal. These journals were reflections of the week’s mindfulness practices, readings or other events, stresses or challenges students encountered where a mindful practice could mitigate the experience. Though initially skeptical, Brody decided to take the course.

“The stress of law school, much like the stress of anything, surely varies from person to person. For me, law school was a very stressful experience,” he said. One of the most stressful aspects of law school for Brody, were unsurprisingly the final exams. As others indicated, grades are determined completely on one’s proficiency with the exam material and

competence/competitiveness of classmates. The grades earned are a reflection of a student's proficiency of content as compared to others. This determined the grading curve. "The first way in which it [mindfulness] improved my academic abilities is it allowed me to decrease my stress response to final exams." He continued, "Being able to think more calmly in preparing for and in taking exams surely helped me to be more effective." Before exams he would notice his face and shoulders would be physically tense in addition to the emotional tenseness. When feeling especially stressed Brody would silently complete body scan to observe what other parts of his body were experiencing the physical effects of the emotional. When Brody noticed his physical tenseness, he would acknowledge it, accept it, and relax his face and shoulder muscles. As Brody consciously relaxed the muscles throughout his body, the emotional stress would naturally decrease. This helped Brody relax and put things into perspective. "It's amazing what a quick body scan or short meditative session can do to your perception of life," he admitted. After acquiring his mindfulness skills during last year of law school Andrew wished he had taken the class sooner. "I employed them (skills) to help myself to notice the stress I would feel related to exams, accept the stress, and let it go."

Brody's experience helped him develop an understanding of how exactly to employ mindful techniques and manage stress. Brody believed a fundamental obstacle for most people to engage in mindfulness is a lack of understanding. "Most people think a mat and sitting crossed legged are required; those things are merely optional," he said. In fact, Brody has never meditated or exercised mindfulness using a mat. He emphasized this statement, non-judgmentally, as he had the same viewpoint before taking the mindfulness class. Throughout the semester, Brody's aptitude for practicing mindfulness increased; his ability for self-guided body

scans meditation, mindful eating, and other meditative activities were more profound and created a more reflective person.

The effect of mindfulness helped Brody improve his physical and emotional wellbeing and he indicated other people noticed a difference in his mood and appearance. One of Brody's passions is nature. Brody's focuses on nature during his lunchtime walks to help him get "out of that mind trap." Brody likes to listen to birds, watch the leaves fluttering on trees, feel the breeze and experience the warmth of the sun. One unintended personal consequence he experienced was an increase in patience and gratitude for a variety of the most quotidian aspects of his life, including showering, brushing my teeth, eating, and conversing with others. "While, I in no way view myself as an expert—in fact, I still view myself as very much a beginner—I highly appreciate the natural benefits that flow from my ongoing mindfulness journey," he reflected in one of his journal entries.

As with Andrew, Brody also experienced an increase in gratitude.

The most noteworthy net positive effect that accompanied my practice of mindfulness for me was an immense increase in gratitude—both for little, simple things in life and for the most significant aspects of life. My perspective of law school changed as well in that I returned to my pre-law-school view of law school being a blessing, rather than a burden. It also helped me to manage stress better, which in turn improved my physical and emotional health. It is astounding how much protracted stress has on a person physically. Improving my physical and emotional health made me a happier person. Naturally, being happier made me a more pleasant person to be around (or so I'm told).

Results

The results were organized thematically according to one central research question and four sub-questions of the study. Questions were created based the two tenets of Lindsay and Creswell's Monitoring and Acceptance Theory in addition to the autonomy tenet of Deci and Ryan's Self-determination Theory of motivation. The central question delved into the common lived experiences of law students and their mindfulness practice; what are the lived experiences of law students and their mindfulness practice? There were four sub-questions explored the practice of mindfulness and stress as it related to the central question. The first sub-question was interested in the contexts or situations students had experienced in their mindfulness practice. What contexts or situation have been experienced with the practice of mindfulness? The second sub-question included information regarding the monitoring and acceptance theory in relationship to stress. How does the act of monitoring and accepting guide the relationship to stress? The third sub-question related to the academic experiences of students who had a mindfulness practice. What academic experiences are associated with mindfulness? Lastly, the fourth sub-question explored the emotional and social wellbeing of students in law school who practiced mindfulness. How does mindfulness practices contribute to participants' experiences of social and emotional well-being?

Theme Development

Data collection occurred in three ways. Journal prompts were part of the first collection of data to record. There were several transcription services available online, however they were very expensive. The study used Temi to transcribe the individual interviews, it was the least expensive service. The program had good reviews and did not require a subscription. The participants were provided a copy of the transcription to ensure accuracy of meaning.

Participants then scheduled focus group interviews. The focus groups took place via Zoom conferencing program and recorded and transcribed verbatim. The focus group included four participants Andrew, Allie, Violet and Nikki. The participants were provided a copy of the transcription to ensure accuracy of meaning.

After the data was collected and transcribed, I gathered codes from each data collection and created a spreadsheet. The codes were organized with computer assisted qualitative data analysis system CAQDAS. In Vivo coding is a form of qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of the participants (Manning, 2017). Next, the codes were triangulated in the groupings to find meaning.

Theme: Competitiveness

Theme: Escalated Emotions

Theme: Improved Wellbeing

Theme: Increased Perspective

Table 2

Summary of Themes

Monitoring and Acceptance Theory Category	Perception Sub-Theme (Sub-Category)	Codes	# of Law Students Commenting	# of Unique References	Total	Overall Ranking
Monitoring skills in monitoring the present moment may enhance the vividness of experience, thus intensifying affective reactivity	Escalated Emotions	Stress	10	121	131	2
		Anxiety	6	32	38	8
		Emotion	6	26	32	9
		Worry	10	8	18	16
		Tension	3	8	11	22 (tied)
		Curve	3	8	11	22 (tied)
	Competitiveness	Exams Finals	10	45	55	5
		Compete	7	35	42	6
		Pressure	6	15	31	10
		Study	7	22	29	11
		Jobs	5	11	16	18
		Socratic Cold Call	6	8	14	19
Acceptance Bringing an attitude of acceptance toward monitored experiences is a key emotion regulation mechanism for the effects of mindfulness interventions on affective, stress, social relationship, and health outcomes	Improved Wellbeing	Meditation	10	60	70	3
		Breath	10	30	40	7
		Present	5	20	25	12
		Relax	7	14	21	14
		Sleep	4	15	19	15
		Gratitude (ful)	4	9	13	21

Self Determination Theory Autonomy Engaging in behaviors that are congruent with their purpose, value, standards and authentic interest	Increased Perspective	Mindful (ness)	10	179	189	1
		Focus	10	49	59	4
		Control	5	24	29	11
		Notice	4	13	17	17
		Improved Grades	4	10	14	20
		Meaning	4	4	8	24

Monitoring. Monitoring skills enhances the vividness of experience, thus intensifying affective reactivity (Lindsay and Creswell, 2019).

Escalated Emotions. Stress was coded over 121 times during the journal prompts, interviews and focus group with anxiety being the next most emotionally coded word 32. Other words coded included, “emotions,” “worry,” “tense,” and “thoughts.”

Lisa said, “Law school is stressful almost every day.” Finals seems to bring the most stress out for law students as one exam determines the entire semester grade which in turn determines opportunities for internships and possible employment options. Nancy explained her experience with exams.

The second semester of my 1L year brought immense stress. I was constantly comparing myself to others, constantly unsure of myself, and constantly putting pressure on myself to perform. I would monitor these feelings of overwhelming anxiety and insecurity; maybe I should have never gone to law school, maybe I wasn't cut out for this, maybe I didn't deserve to be here and I was wasting my time and money. These feelings often turn into an insurmountable mountain or tidal wave and it is difficult to get anything accomplished without feeling exhausted.

Emotions spirally out of control were common responses. Looking back on their experience mindfulness many participants reflected on how much more in control they felt of emotions and competition as a result of their mindfulness practice. Nancy said, “Feelings often turned into an insurmountable mountain or tidal wave.” “The concept of having your entire grade based on a single exam given at the end of the semester is enough to introduce a mild panic,” explain Lonnie as she spoke of her feelings related to exams.

The new academic approach to learning was stressful to many students. All had excelled in high school and undergraduate school. Most indicated they enjoyed learning and thrived when challenged, but law school was much more than a challenge, it was rising to heights never conceived due to the rigor, competitiveness, professors’ wrath and grading system which made them question their abilities that had served them well for many years. “The combination of self-doubt and level of rigor provided me with a level of worry that never left me,” Lonnie said, “It was always on my mind.” Several indicated prior to law school they were struggling with depression and the emotional intensity increased, especially during the first year of law school. “Many things are stressful in law school, it never leaves you, even when you try to do things with your friends, the stress monkey comes along to mess with your mind. It’s incredibly stress and wildly intimidating,” Lonnie’s journal entries.

Competitiveness. Participants found themselves in situations of high stress and competition. This theme gives understanding and reason students actively seek methods to reduce stress and anxiety. The most common code words included, “competitive,” “pressure,” “Socratic,” “exams,” “study” and “grades” during coding. When conducting personal one-on-one interviews with participants most participants reflected on their experiences of law school as extremely competitive. Andrew said in a journal prompt, “The most stressful parts of

law school were the grades and the job search. There is the pressure at home and in school to receive good grades.” He continued “The curve, paired with many law firms solely focusing on grades, created a lot of stress for me.” “One of the most stressful aspects of law school for me, were unsurprisingly, the final exams because many grades in law school are determined greatly or completely on one’s proficiency in the final exam,” was an excerpt in Brody’s journal response. Andrew’s response was,

You need to have a top GPA in order to be competitive. I constantly felt a form of anxiety where if I wasn't studying or I wasn't doing anything productive to further my career, I would be behind my other peers and therefore lose my chances of receiving a great job out of law school.

Many participants mentioned the nuisances of law school such as testing and Socratic method that were unfamiliar and lead to extreme levels of stress. Several participants developed a fear of public speaking and feeling anxious when they addressed professors. Many participants said that they would get physically ill and excuse themselves to gather their thoughts. Lisa added more fully developed the classroom setting.

This Socratic method of teaching is when professors randomly calls on a student who has not volunteered. The professor then begins to hound the student with questions and will often make them feel unintelligent or unworthy. This ruins people's self-esteems and excitement to come to school.

Competitiveness runs rampant in law school, comparisons of grades, ranking, ability, internships and law review are just a few. Violet had an experience she shared.

During finals last semester the stress hit everyone. Some people were going around trying to mess with others by telling them incorrect information, others were only talking about

the curve and who they think were the ones to look out for, some weren't studying, and others were just trying to get by.

Nancy concluded by saying, "I was constantly comparing myself to others." The culture of comparison towards others heightened the inability concentrate and to actively engage in the rigorous materials required practice of law require. Participants feared being perceived as "stupid," or having the appearance they were overwhelmed and inadequate to handle the pressures of law school. "You want to look like you have it together, like you can handle the pressure" explained Violet, "but you really are dying on the inside.

Acceptance. Acceptance is an umbrella term to describe an orientation of receptivity and noninterference with present-moment experiences which contrasts with tendencies to suppress, avoid, alter, prolong, or fixate on certain stimuli (Lindsay & Creswell, 2019). Lindsay and Creswell (2019) acceptance:

Rather than striving for pleasant experiences (craving) and avoiding negative experiences (aversion), acceptance and equanimity break the typical association between desire (i.e., wanting and not wanting) and the hedonic tone (i.e., pleasant and unpleasant) of experiences bringing an attitude of acceptance toward monitored experiences is a key emotion regulation mechanism for the effects of mindfulness interventions on affective, stress, social relationship, and health outcomes

Improved Wellbeing. "Mindfulness meditation skills combat stress because they allow you to refocus your energy," replied Lisa. Mindfulness was mentioned 143 times during the coding process. Other words associated with mindfulness practice theme included, "present," "focus," "notice," "control," "breath," "calm," "sleep," "mediation," and "relax", "exercise," "physical," and "yoga."

Lisa continued,

I am able to catch myself and prevent myself from spiraling. It [mindfulness] is also helpful when I am stressing out about things that are not in my control. By practicing mindfulness meditation, I am able to understand what is actually in my control and what is not. If something is not in my control, then I should not be spending time worrying about it. When I start to feel stressed about certain things, I go back to focusing on my breathing. By leveling out my breathing, I am able to just focus on the oxygen going in and out of my body. The nerves and anxiety running through my body are immediately relaxed. I keep doing this until my body is finally settled and no longer in a mode of stress.

Getting out of the stress by coming back to the breath and the present moment was a skill all participants used. This is the underlying theme of mindfulness meditation which puts distance between the past and the future stresses and anxieties. “Mindfulness meditation alleviates stress because it helps to develop the skill to focus on the present. Focusing on what is happening now reveals the truth of that moment’s positivity or negativity,” Indicated Brody. Andrew added to the idea of taking a break and managing stress from law school.

Sometimes I felt that my brain was on overdrive for every waking moment of the day and constantly trying to analyze my life situation on “what ifs” and “what could” happen with regard to school and career success. Mindfulness meditation skills allowed me to get away and “get out of my head” effectively. It allowed my brain and my psyche to take a break and enter into a sense of relaxation. I noticed that after every mindfulness break, even if said break was for 10 minutes, I would be more efficient and effective at what I was trying to tackle that day. This has helped me overcome many stressors.

Being aware of the stresses experienced in law school helped combat the stress. “If you are aware you are becoming stressed you are more likely to combat the other qualities that arise with it because simply you are aware of them,” Violet noted.

Mindfulness redirects the mind to the present moment. The definition of mindfulness includes being in the present moment. Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). He has also added to this definition, in the service of self-understanding and wisdom (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). Nikki’s reflection supported this addition to Kabat-Zinn’s definition.

I believe that meditation teaches the skill of interrupting stress patterns, which are very easy to get sucked into. When I can interrupt a negative cycle of thinking, and change my thoughts to positive ones, or recognize the root of negativity in order to process it, I always felt better. I believe that this happens because practicing meditation (a component of mindfulness) forces one's attention away from whatever is causing stress, not with avoidance, but with detachment.

Brody also talked about his academics,

I would say practicing mindfulness improved my academic abilities. The first way in which it improved my academic abilities was it allowed me to decrease my stress response in final exams. Being able to think more calmly in preparing for and in taking exams surely help me to be more effective.

“The overall difference in my mental and physical wellbeing has been positive and beneficial. Mentally, I can find more confidence in myself when I implement mindfulness,” Nancy replied. “I was able to sleep much better and feel much more refreshed every day. By doing so, I was able to start off my studies in a well-rested state rather than a fatigued state,”

indicted Andrew. The practice of mindfulness gave Violet a lighter feeling, “I am happier when I take the time to care about myself and what I need.” “When I began to practice mindfulness, I noticed that both my law school performance and my physical health improved,” said Andrew. Allie added, “Physically I think is where I have seen the most progress.”

Linda felt both improvement in her physical and mental state after she included mindfulness in her life.

In my first year of law school, I never exercised and I did not get an adequate amount of sleep. I went many nights (even consecutively) without sleeping because I would stay up studying or because the stress would not allow me to fall asleep. Now, I prioritize sleep, exercise, and dieting, and I am able to fit it into my schedule because I am more productive overall. I also feel more confident and in control of my emotions. I am now able to recognize my emotions quickly and I work to calm them or change the energy to a more positive, productive emotion. I feel happier and I do not worry about the future or linger about the past as much as I used to. I feel that I can do anything that I set my mind to, whether it is an academic goal, or whether it is changing my mindset or the way my body reacts to something. I also feel comfortable knowing that I have a support system of students and professionals who are open to listen and helping when I am struggling.

Additionally, I have improved my relationships with my family and friends because I am less irritable and do not snap at them like I used to.

Linda concluded by saying, “My overall wellbeing has increased tremendously.”

Autonomy. Autonomy reflects the need to feel ownership and volitional, or willingness, of action and behavior. According to the Self-determination Theory, it has been identified as one

of the three psychological needs that is critical to supporting the process of internalization and development of optimal personal well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Increased Perspective. This theme resonated in all participants' journal responses and interviews as it related to the central question and the ability to improve their relationship with stress. Participants utilized mindfulness to help create an improved, positive perception and focus throughout their law school experience. The coded words for this theme included, "react less," "perspective," "meaning," "control," "gratitude," and "happier." Although their academic lives were very similar to every other law student, their ability to insightfully place their focus in deeper, more meaning purposes lessened the stress. Brody included gratitude in his journal entry.

Practicing mindfulness also helped me to enjoy and be grateful for the rigorous learning involved in law school. This was the most significant academic benefit I received, in my opinion. I love learning, but I lost track of that passion during some of law school due to the high-stakes pressure involved. If nothing else, mindfulness helped me to view law school with a proper perspective: it was a privilege not a burden.

Nikki also talked about gratitude.

I also think that it allowed me to focus on things that I was grateful for, which in law school can feel like very little. However, gratefulness can be very powerful, and many times when I couldn't work through the stress, practicing mindfulness allowed me to identify at least some positivity and focus on that; invariably focusing on some small positive would grow it.

Linda reflected, “If I was feeling down one day, I would allow myself time to experience those emotions; eventually, I would meditate or work out and continue on feeling focused, rejuvenated, and motivated. These behaviors helped my overall happiness and confidence.”

Nancy included in her journal,

Of course, I still get stressed, but taking time for myself to breathe makes the stress much more manageable. For me, being mindful also means refocusing on my goals and challenging myself to remember and re-engage with the reason I came to law school in the first place, which has a higher meaning than the individual test or task in front of me of directly causing stress.

Nikki’s ability to feel safe and connected with others improved. She was able to increase her compassion and empathy for her classmates who were struggling, “Helping others, helped myself through grueling experiences.” Her ability to focus and experience inner peace was an example to others as they connected and developed friendships.

Research Question Responses

The following section provides the answer to the central research question and each of the four research sub questions introduced in Chapter Three. The responses to these questions were developed derived from the data collected. Direct quotations are used from the participants collected which were collected from the journals, interviews, and focus group. These answers use direct responses from the participants to provide evidence.

Central Question: What are the lived experiences of law students and their mindfulness practice?

Overwhelmingly participants indicated that mindfulness helped them to feel calmer, in more control and better able to manage stress related to law school. Lisa, “I began to worry less

about my grades. I decided to focus my attention to things that were in my control, like breathing and studying, while ignoring things I had no control over, like the grade curve.” She also added, “By shifting my focus to things like this, I have been able to achieve peace with myself.” Linda also said, “I visualized myself feeling calm and prepared. I told myself that everything that happened from here on out that was external was out of my control, and the only thing I could control was my reaction to it.” “I cannot stress over things I have no control over such as what other students are doing and studying. I just try to focus on things that I can control and staying in tune with my needs,” indicated Sue. “I decided to focus my attention to things that were in my control, breathing and studying, ignoring things I had no control over. By shifting my focus to things like this, I have been able to achieve peace with myself,” Allie added. “I also feel more confident and in control of my emotions. I am able to recognize my emotions quickly and work to calm them or change the energy to a more positive, productive emotion,” Linda explained. She also indicated in her interview, “Mindfulness is extremely beneficial in managing stress levels and allows you to feel more in control, which decreases anxiety of the past, future, and things out of your control.”

The stress of law school continued to be present for the participants, but their abilities to manage and change their relationship with stress improved. Stress did not have the same emotional or physical effects as it once did as a result of their mindfulness practice. They still had the same stress, but mindfully responded with present moment, non-judgmental awareness in order to more fully enjoy their experiences in law school.

SQ1: What contexts or situations have been experienced with the practice of mindfulness?

Law school has been defined as inherently stressful at all levels, especially the classroom setting and during final exams. Socratic questioning, cold calling, oral presentations, and exams were just a few situations where stress was escalated during law school. Students singled out during a Socratic session are required to know the correct answer and defend it based on their knowledge of the law; not knowing is frowned upon. Competing for grades that are determined by the curve is a context that all law students are uncomfortable with. Making an oral argument where the mock-judges are waiting to find any inconsistency in the presentation can drive a student into overload. All of these situations and context are to help law students become experts in the ability to understand and practice law with exceptional skills. These exercises practiced to develop legal expertise can be humiliating, stressful, emotional, depressing and anxiety provoking. Many participants talked about their feeling and emotions spiraling out of control.

All participants of this study said they were able to manage these obstacles better and experience healthier emotions when they used their mindfulness practices to work through their feelings. “Ever since I practiced mindfulness, it was easier to manage these stressors,” Brody indicated in his interview. Linda indicated, “I have developed my own healthy habits and have built the confidence to manage my emotions and stress levels.” In Lisa’s interview she said that public speaking, such as Socratic questioning, was particularly stressful. Before these activities Lisa would always re-center herself and use her breath to bring her into the present moment. Nikki said, “Mindfulness helped me to stay grounded in myself and accept that the stresses of law school.” Nikki went on to say that she could not control the situation of law school, but she would control her response to it. Lonnie said as she reflected on her experience with mindfulness and law school, “Law school is hell, but I kinda love it. Because no matter how hard it is,

I'm happy every day that I go to school, see my friends, and continue to build a beautiful life for myself.”

SQ2: How does the act of monitoring and accepting guide the relationship to stress?

The word “notice” was used extensively in response to emotional and physical discomfort. By noticing the cognitive outcomes such as selective attention to a discomfort or stress, these emotions became more developed. Enhancing this attention increases ability to respond. Therefore, the more “noticing” or monitoring skills individuals develop, the more attentive they become in cognition. MAT posits that bringing an attitude of acceptance toward the monitored experiences is key to emotional regulation mechanisms for the effects of interventions on affective wellbeing (Lindsay and Creswell, 2017). Noticing and then accepting helps to regulate emotions (Lindsay and Creswell, 2017).

The word notice was coded 23 times. The ability for law students to “notice” emotional, psychological, and physiological changes helped them to accept, intervene and regulate their relationship to stress. Andrew said,

I notice myself beginning to react to stress. I notice my head starting to get hot. I notice my back starts to sweat. This is when I close my door and my eyes and begin to focus on my response to this feeling. I remind myself I am here for a reason. I remind myself that they chose me. I remind myself I am well educated and have already come along way. I continue to breath and be more present.

By noticing, Andrew is also able to drive his path to acceptance of stress and reassurance of his abilities and talents. A big part of accepting is minimizing negative self-talk. Linda said, “Once I began my journey through mindfulness, I developed an ability to recognize negative emotions fast and change them to more productive emotions. I gained a feeling of self-control, which

boosted my confidence.” Sue shared, “We can begin to tune in more with our body and minds and notice and understand what we are feeling and responding to.”

Lisa wrote,

Before law school, I really did not know much about mindfulness, nor did I practice it. I remember one of the first things I learned from the Mindfulness Association's meeting was that it is okay to recognize your negative thoughts and feelings, but also okay to gently remind yourself that they are no longer needed right now, or serving you. Being able to recognize my feelings and set them to the side compartmentalize and managing the feelings has helped me tremendously.

Nancy finished by saying, “It [mindfulness] allows me to refocus and accept my own capabilities.”

SQ3: What academic experiences are associated with mindfulness?

Participants all agreed that their grades improved, or they ruminated on them less, after integrating mindfulness practices. Many students said they were able to study more efficiently and effectively. Brody’s response to academic was,

Although it may be a mere correlation, I also achieved my best semester of grades during the time I was taking the mindfulness and the law class. So, it was nice to see my grades improve. I never worried much about the commonly perceived daunting Socratic method of questioning in law school. However, I worried even less about it after I began practicing mindfulness. It became perfectly acceptable not to know all the answers.

Lisa indicated, “I think that once I began practicing mindfulness, I began to worry less about my grades. I also think that I study a lot more efficiently now that I practice mindfulness. Linda said,

Although my grades stayed relatively the same throughout the rest of my law school career, I was much happier, healthier, and more productive. I was able to fit many more things in my schedule and balance them all well, such as law review, moot court, and the negotiation team. My performance in each one of those three improved significantly and I began winning multiple awards in my extracurricular activities.

Without a doubt, my grades and performance have improved since I have implemented more mindfulness in my everyday studies and contributions,” Nancy said. She went on to include,

I consciously recognize whom I spent my time with and who contributed to my stress. I spent more time around people who talked less about grades and more about learning material together. I had to accept that we are all on separate paths and being competitive was good if I was competing against myself and not others.

SQ4: How do mindfulness practices contribute to participants’ experiences of social and emotional well-being?

Andrew shared that when he went out with his friends that weren’t in law school, it seemed like his mind wasn’t present. His mind wandered, constantly worrying if he should be studying or at the law library. Andrew enjoyed socializing with his law school friends more, because if they weren’t studying, he felt he was at least building relationships for future legal referrals. When Andrew was with his girlfriend, they would be in the same room physically, but emotionally not “in tune” with each other. After Andrew began his mindfulness practice during his third year of law school, he was able to feel more present and improve his social experiences. “I am just there now,” Andrew said. He also indicated he became more compassionate towards others and their experiences, “You never know another person’s story.” Andrew said that he was able to listen better and empathize more. Andrew shared an example of road rage intentions.

Linda explained that she has improved her relationships with her family and friends because she is less irritable and less likely to be snappy.

Lonnie said, “I truly believe that the mental and emotional intelligence I developed over the course of the last two years has allowed me to remain somewhat stable in what has been the most trying years of my life thus far—law school.” She continued, “I am happy with real friends, with whom I have deep connections and relationships. I have become close with such different kinds of people, ones that I might not have ordinarily become so close with outside of this shared experience.” Nikki added, “Emotionally, I would say that my practice allowed me to be measured and thoughtful in everything I did, which allowed me to never feel like I was making compromises to myself.” Nikki said she takes time to emotionally check in with herself which helps her be more aware of her physical needs and responsibilities, “I notice when I am not eating the right foods or drinking enough water.” She noted that when emotions get out of control, rationality diminishes. Nikki’s practice provides a set point for an emotional perspective and control, “This has helped me from feeling burned out, or overwhelmed with emotions, feelings and anxiety.”

Summary

The participants of the study all shared common reflection of inherit stress, sleep deprivation, emotional instability, negative self-talk, competition among peers, physical illness and hostile learning environments during law school. Their stories, however, included abilities to manage these outcomes through the practice of mindfulness where they were able to modify their relationship with stress, bring them into the present moment and incorporate the mechanisms necessary to achieve their goals. These themes included, less competitiveness, academic perspective, control and increased awareness and focus, and gratitude. Also, emerging themes

were the academic environment escalates the pathology of emotions and feelings, methods of instruction and assessments create stress and competitiveness and mindfulness practice and improved well-being. The themes identified in the study helped in answering the central question supported by the four sub-questions. Through mindfulness, students were able to overcome the pathology of instruction and competitiveness and refocus their inner capacity of a conscious mind to cultivate their willpower and realign their relationship with stress.

CHAPTER FIVE-CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand how law students make meaning of mindfulness as it relates to stress during law school through an analysis of their lived experiences. Included in this chapter is a summary of the findings, discussion of the findings and the implications of the relevant literature and theory, methodological and practical implications, an outline of the study delimitation and limitations and recommendations for future research. Concluding this section is a summary reviewing the chapter and the overall study.

Summary of Findings

Law school has been associated with high levels of intensity and stress as a result of the amount of content required to master, the instructional approach of law, competitiveness among law students who seek to earn coveted legal internships and the limited abilities to earn top rankings based on single assessments and grade curve. Students enrolled in high academic standards universities and graduate programs such as law and medical schools have significant levels of stress (Liu, & Lu, 2011). Depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, irritability, sleep disturbances are just a few of the many problems reported in students with high academic stress (Barnes, Potter, Fiedler, & Guion, 1983). Students driven to perfectionism tend to experience more academic stress (Kim, Seockhoon, Suyeon, Soyoun, & Boram, 2017). Participants in this study substantiated well documented research that supports stress among law school students. Reasons for this stress include, but are not limited to, excessive workloads, grading system that encourages academic superiority, status-seeking and instructional approaches. (Reuben & Sheldon, 2019). All participants activity shared their experiences of anxiety, stress, inferior self-esteem and negative self-talk that surrounded them daily. Symptoms associated with elevated

stress levels included inability to maintain quality levels of sleep, poor nutrition, headaches, agitation, inability focus and concentrate, foggy heads, relationships issues, emotional instability, anxiety, depression, isolation, and digestive issues. Research suggests that the first year of law school produces significant levels of stress (Skead & Rogers, 2015). Although those levels slow down over the next two years, depression and stress among law students is significantly higher than before entering law school (Skead & Rogers, 2015). This trend also continues throughout their legal career (Krieger, 2004).

The data analysis and coding including theoretical propositions, resulted in five major themes associated with the two tenets of Monitoring and Acceptance Theory, which included, attention monitoring skills that enhance awareness of present-moment experience, and acceptance skills that modify the way one relates to pre-moment experience, regulating reactivity to affective experience (Lindsay & Creswell, 2015). Self-determination Theory's tenet of autonomy was included to develop research questions and played a part in students understanding associated with feelings of ownership over their particular responses and settings. Autonomy involves a sense of agency and choice where the individual experiences ownership of their behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individuals who feel autonomous experience less anxiety and feel less pressured to respond in a particular way such as "should" or "ought", which leads to vitality and an increased sense of wellbeing (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Sheldon, Cheng, & Hilpert, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Ten individuals, who had attended law school and had a mindfulness practice, participated in individual semi-structured interview, replied to journal prompts and participated in focus group interview for this study. The central research question supported by the four sub-questions focused on the lived experiences of law students' stress and their mindfulness practice.

Law students experience high levels of academic stress (Skead, & Rogers, 2014; 2015; 2016). McKinney (2002), Professor of Law at the University of North Carolina, recognized that law school is a “breeding ground for depression, anxiety, and other stress-related illnesses” and the stress experienced in law school is significantly higher than other post-graduate programs.

The participants had integrated the practice of mindfulness into their daily lives to manage their relationship with stress, attained higher levels of focus, developed a realistic perspective of their law school experience and created environments for positive social, emotional and physical wellbeing. Mindfulness techniques are practices that can be implemented in any present moment which include mindfulness breathing to calm the amygdala and reduce stress (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). This secular practice has been defined by Kabat-Zinn “an awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. It’s about knowing what is on your mind” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 283).

The central research question explored the lived experiences of law students and their mindfulness practice. The question was designed to understand how participants viewed law school stress and managed the pressures associated with their academic and personal lives using mindfulness practices. This mindfulness practiced is centered in awareness. (Kabbat-Zinn, 1990). The ability to monitor and focus help to develop mindfulness approaches. The Monitor and Acceptance Theory and the tenets provided a foundation for constructing approaches to managing stress and to enhance awareness of present-moment experiences. The monitoring provides an individual the opportunity to beware of malice in the thought processes such as negative self-talk, catastrophizing and ruminating and improve cognitive functioning outcome in affectively neutral contexts. Acceptance provides a state of nonjudgmental acceptance and a clearer view. This acceptance modifies the way one relates to present-moment experiences and

regulate reactivity to affective experiences. Mindfulness has also been linked to boosting performance on cognitive tasks and involve emotion regulation, reduces negative reactivity such as anxiety, depression and stress and reduces grasping of positive experiences such as cravings and substance use resulting in improved stress-related health outcomes (Lindsay and Creswell, 2017). Teaching law students to develop a level of awareness of mental processes and emotion regulation offers new insight for students (Doucet, 2014). Understanding how to become aware of stress, anger, distraction and anxiety provides support to help law students adjust and improve their legal skills performance and overall wellness (Lewinbuk, 2016). The study supported the findings that law students experience high levels of stress and anxiety however, with the practice of mindfulness, they were better able to manage their outcomes. Overwhelmingly participants indicated that mindfulness reestablish a sense of calm, develop stronger feelings of control and modify their relationship with stress.

Sub-question one included the topics of context and situation. What contexts or situations has been experienced with the practice of mindfulness? Answers included, Socratic questioning, competition among law students, grading system, sweeping feelings of despair, motional exhaustion, and tidal waves of feelings. Participants overwhelming supported the traditional understanding law school was an extremely stressful academic setting. They, however, indicated that prior to law school they believed they had prepared themselves for law school academic rigor, but never realized the extend stress would be a factor in their ability to focus, concentrate or preform academically. “My journey with mindfulness actually began in law school. Before that, I had never experienced certain feelings with such great force, such as anxiety, depression, impostor syndrome,” explained Lisa. In these situations, students used mindfulness practices to refocus and regain composure. They often talked about re-centering themselves to reduce the

racing heart rate during times of extreme pressure. When talking with Violet she believed centering herself gave her an advantage,

Those five minutes really center me and allow me to focus on here and now and not get carried away with what might happen or others around me. For class presentations, when I get stressed, I do breathing exercises to get my pulse down and centered.

Lisa supported this idea, “Practicing mindfulness centers me and helps me be the best student I can be. I wish I would have implemented this sooner because the benefits are beyond measure.”

The stress of Socratic questioning was very clear through journal prompts and interviews, “I think that mindfulness has mostly helped with my apprehension against Socratic questioning,” Stephanie stated. Removing themselves from stressful context or situations was not always realistic, however, having tools to center, refocus and develop a sense of calm was achievable through their breath.

The second sub-question was related directly to the theoretical framework of Monitoring and Accepting Theory (MAT). How does the act of monitoring and accepting guide the relationship to stress? Participants discussed how they were able to monitor their emotional regulation during stressful settings. “Acceptance is thought to transform how momentary experiences are observed and processed, facilitating engagement (welcoming in) and subsequent disengagement (letting go) with emotional stimuli and thus enriching experience while also reducing emotional reactivity” (Lindsay and Creswell, 2019). The idea of knowing how they were feeling and being able to label the emotion was effective in understanding their response to stress. Brody noted,

I used monitoring to help myself notice the stress I would feel related to exams, accept the stress, and let it go. In particular, I would notice that my face and

shoulders would be physically tense in addition to the emotional tenseness that I felt.

When I would notice this physical tenseness, I would acknowledge it, accept it, and relax my face and shoulder muscles.

Lisa also indicated using the skills of monitoring and accepting in her journal entry. “I am able to catch my thoughts wandering off much quicker than ever before. As soon as I notice and realize that I am starting to lose focus, I catch myself and refocus my attention to my studies.”

Supporting the theory of monitoring feeling, emotions and triggers and acceptance. MAT explains how monitoring and acceptance skills interact to drive mindfulness and mindfulness intervention. Specifically, MAT posits that (a) Skills in monitoring the present moment may enhance the vividness of experience, thus intensifying affective reactivity, and that (b) Bringing an attitude of acceptance toward monitored experiences is a key emotion regulation mechanism for the effects of interventions on affective, stress, social relationship, and health outcomes (Lindsay and Creswell, 2017). The lived experiences are those of sensing stress, accepting the thought or feeling, engaging, and disengagement with the stressor. In Nancy’s journal entry she stated that, “I would notice these feelings of overwhelming anxiety and insecurity.” She refocused on her goals and challenged herself to remember and re-engage with the reason why she came to law school in the first place, and to accept she had a higher purpose.

The third question was devoted to academic experiences associated with mindfulness. It included understanding how the practice of mindfulness during law school affected academic abilities and outcomes. The rigor and limited opportunities for acceptance into law school draws students who have been driven by grades most of their academic careers. The direct approaches to instruction, grades, assessment, internships and few elite attorney positions have heightened as prestige and pressures of lawyers have continued to increase over the last 50 years (Bergin &

Pakenham, 2015). Law school is a powerful, transformative experience in which the psychological wellbeing as well as the intellectual wellbeing are at stake. “Learning the law was also like a personal journey remaking myself,” Nikki said.

The pure design of law school is stressful (Cassidy, 2015). The pedagogy, curriculum and instruction are designed to create students who are mastering the content at high levels with the Socratic approach as the primary approach (Cassidy, 2015). The grading system and the importance of grades in law school activated significant stress among all participants.

“The curve, paired with many law firms solely focusing on grades, created a lot of stress for me. Ever since I practiced mindfulness, it was easier to manage these stressors,” from Andrew’s journal entry. The stress of law students has evolved over time with the increased competitiveness related to overall law school performance (Cassidy, 2015).

Mindfulness helped all participants focus their attention on things that were in their control, such as breathing and studying, while changing their relationship with things they had limited control, like the grade curve. Lisa said, “When I get my grades back, I don’t wonder what more I could have done. I now just appreciate myself and the hard work I have done, and the knowledge I have gained (cannot be reflected by a letter grade).” “I think that mindfulness has mostly helped with my apprehension against Socratic questioning.” Brody was less concerned about what other people thought and was more willing to speak up even if he was unsure of the answer. He talked about the mindfulness skills he developed during the fall semester of his 3L and in hindsight wished he had taken the class sooner, “I employed them to help myself to notice the stress I would feel related to exams, accept the stress, and let it go.” He loved learning, but with high-stakes associated with grades, he had lost the passion during law school. The acceptance of Brody’s situation supported SDT tenant of autonomy that involves a

sense of agency and choice where the individual experiences ownership of their behavior (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Sheldon, Cheng, & Hilpert, 2011). Individuals who feel autonomous experience less anxiety and do not feel pressured to respond in a particular way, which leads to personal vitality and an increased sense of wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Nancy decided to spend more time around people who talked less about grades and more about learning. Managing emotional reaction to grades and instruction did not have a negative effect on participants overall grade outcomes; several said their grades did have a favorable increase, none said they experienced a decline. In fact, most students not only had time to study, but were very involved in a number of extracurricular activities, including various law school competitions and service clubs. Andrew and Linda's ability to communicate with their professors and classmates improved through the development of their practice. The key to all students' study habits was seen in their ability to increase attention and focus. "Meditation has also helped my focus, however, and often times I do end up knowing the answer because I was able to engage with the material at a higher level than I had been able to in the past," Andrew shared.

Sub question four focused on the relationship between mindfulness practices contributing to participants' meaning of social and emotional well-being. This question had participants consider the entire experience of the practice of mindfulness during law school and the overall difference in wellbeing. Law students and recent law graduates are experiencing alarming rates of depression, anxiety and stress (George, 2015). Law students have often resorted to self-medicating methods, such as excessive alcohol use, misuse of prescription medications and illegal drugs to mask the symptoms of mental illness such as depression, stress and anxiety (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015). This study indicated overwhelmingly participants were less emotionally reactive in response to stress from school or personal life. "I am able to recognize

my emotions quickly and work to calm them or change the energy to a more positive, productive emotion,” said Laura.

Physically they agreed they saw progress. Sleep improved with the implementation of mediation associated with the practice of meditation. The idea of self-care was associated with an improvement in overall wellbeing. Allie said, “Physically I think is where I have seen the most progress, as I don’t get as much of the heart attack brain bleed feeling that I used to get when I was anxious.” “When I began to practice mindfulness, I noticed that both my law school performance and my physical health improved,” Andrew shared. The general idea was that by taking care of their physical health and developing an exercise routine, they were better able to focus and concentrate, and start off their studies well rested rather than fatigued. Linda said that the overall difference in wellbeing that she noticed was that she is able to be in touch with reality more. Nikki talked about the importance of the breath and wellbeing. Stopping to focus on her breath brings her back to the present moment where she feels more energized and more awake. Additionally, improvement in relationships was noted. Violet shared,

I was getting discouraged and ended up having an argument/discussion with my boyfriend about our relationship and where we are. The day after that, I couldn’t study or concentrate I was so drained with everything going on and I was so nervous that my relationship was going to end any moment. I had to step back, breathed and I ended up finishing a gift for my boyfriend’s Christmas gift, it was a what I love about you book. By the time I finished the book, I was able to articulate my thoughts and talk myself down. I then made my favorite food and did some exercise and I was back and better than ever.

Many students actively included yoga practice. “Mindful yoga is a holistic approach of connecting the mind to the breath,” Lisa explained. It applies traditional Buddhist mindfulness meditation teachings to the physical practice of yoga. Linda’s comments reflected a common connection between mindfulness and yoga, “Since I have been doing yoga, I feel so much happier and healthier. I am able to get away for an hour a day and escape to the four corners of my mat.” She went on to say, “This helps me get in touch with the areas of my body that are carrying extra weight and/or stress and release them physically.” Nancy’s overall difference was in her mental and physical wellbeing. She has been able to find more confidence in herself when she implements her mindfulness practice into her daily routine. She continued referring to her yoga practice, “I have more mental clarity by decreasing my stress and anxiety while improving my self-esteem and self-regulation.” Nancy indicated that although many people tend to focus on mindfulness’s effect on mental wellbeing, she believes the physical benefits are just as important.

Lonnie shared her story related to food.

I used to cope a lot with food. It was my escape and my sanctuary. I would allow myself to take food breaks where I would binge for 30 minutes before returning to work. Now I recognize these unhealthy patterns even quicker. When finals time comes, I’m extra conscious of the food I am putting in my body. I try to make healthier choices and limit myself to healthy portions. I can proudly say that in my second year of law school I am about 20 pounds lighter than I was in high school. And although I’ve never been overweight and I’ve always been very athletic/active, this is the most balanced I’ve ever been. Mindfulness has helped me maintain that balance in one of the most chaotic phases of my life.

Nikki uses mental notes of awareness to check in with her emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing as she works to create a flourishing future.

Discussion

Within the theoretical and empirical review of the literature, mindfulness practices and the lived experiences of law students is discussed. The theoretical discussion uses Monitor and Acceptance Theory (MAT) and Self-determination Theory (SDT). This research study conducted confirms and reassess research as compared to the attributes specifically associated with MAT as applied to the ability to monitor and accept stressful lives during law school. The tenet of autonomy is one within the SDT. It specifically addresses the ability to monitor the present moment experiences and intensify affective reactivity. The empirical discussion is used to illustrate similarities and differences to previous research related to the symptoms and effects of stress as applied to the use of mindfulness practices.

Theoretical

The theoretical framework for this study was the Monitoring and Acceptance Theory (MAT), supported by the tenet of autonomy in Self-determination Theory. MAT posits that (a) skills in monitoring the present moment may enhance the vividness of experience, thus intensifying affective reactivity, and (b) bringing an attitude of acceptance toward monitored experiences is a key emotion regulation mechanism for the effects of mindfulness interventions on affective, stress, social relationship, and health outcomes (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). Although many conceptualizations of mindfulness have been offered, two components are commonly described across mindfulness definitions and measures: (a) the use of attention to monitor one's present moment experiences, and (b) a mental attitude of acceptance toward momentary experience (Bishop et al., 2004). Attention monitoring and acceptance instructions

are central to many well-known mindfulness training interventions, and increases in awareness and nonreactivity are considered common processes across mindfulness-based interventions (Bishop et al., 2004).

Attention monitoring is defined as ongoing awareness of present-moment sensory and perceptual experiences (e.g., sounds in the environment, specific body sensations, mental dialogue and images) (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). Attention monitoring skills are mechanism for the effects of mindfulness on improving cognitive functioning outcome in affectively neural contexts (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). The attention monitoring and development skills help enhance ongoing awareness of present-moment experience and involve staying in contact with a neutral object, such as the breath. For this study the ability to monitor emotional regulation was associated with monitoring stressful environments during their law school experience.

The ability to notice is key to monitoring skills (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). Participants' affective reactivity was enhanced with their mindfulness skills. For this study, the word most often used to describe their ability to monitor was 'notice'. Noticing is a state of observation (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Mindfulness is awareness in the present-moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). "I would notice that my face and shoulders would be physically tense in addition to the emotional tenseness," Brody's journal entry.

A cascade of stress hormones that produce well-orchestrated physiological changes is activate under stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Participants noticed they were affected be high levels of stress in various forms. Physiological changes including noticing rapid heartbeats, stomach and digestive issues, muscle tension, breathing quickening, sweat beads appear, and headaches (Lease, Ingram, & Brown, 2017). Participants notably referred to their ability to notice stress in various forms, "I felt shaky, my heartbeat felt as though it was

increasing at an extremely fast rate, and I could not think about anything other than how my body was reacting.” Linda said in an interview. Physically they were tired, gained or lost weight, acne issues and lost hair. Psychologically they had heightened affective experiences and reactivity such as changes in their ability to manage their emotions, they often filled their minds with catastrophizing and ruminating thoughts, they were more irritable and had fewer experiences with happiness and gratitude. “I also found myself feeling down and crying more than usual,” Linda shared and went on to say, “An alarmingly high number of students developed depression and anxiety in law school.” Socially, many excluded themselves from friends other than from law school, “I preferred my law school friends,” Andrew said. Participants also isolated themselves from others in library, and had poor communications with their family members. Andrew talked about how difficult it was to meet the expectations of, “my friends and family.”

The ability to notice and monitor stress, and the impact it was having, permitted participants to engage in more mindful approaches. Andrew would notice his response to the expectations and put them into perspective. Nancy, “I noticed when my body was not feeling good, like my body needed more water.” Participants spoke of noticing and then responding with a clearer picture. Noticing their obsession with grades gave several participants the opportunity to reevaluate their purpose for attending law school and to put grades into perspective of the greater meaning for their pursuits. “I remind myself that with each breath, I am more and more in control of my mind and body. Doing this helps me remember that there are much more important things in the world,” Lisa shared.

This capacity to monitor momentary experience relies on selective and executive attention networks (Goleman & Davidson, 2018). Specifically, monitoring skills are important

for recognizing when the mind wanders from its intended focus (e.g., breath), and orienting skills are necessary to redirect attention back to this focus object (Goleman & Davidson, 2018). Over the course of mindfulness training, sustained attention also improves as the ability to maintain contact with present-moment experience develops (Goleman & Davidson, 2018). Intentional focus was shared by many participants and their ability to maintain focus for long periods of time.

The second tenet is acceptance. Developing acceptance skills boost performance on cognitive tasks that involve emotions regulation, reduce negative reactivity including stress and anxiety, reduce grasping of positive experiences such as cravings and improve stress-related health outcomes (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). Acceptance modifies the way an individual relates to the content of monitored experience, tempering affective reactivity to produce a variety of beneficial outcomes across affective and physical health domains (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017).

There are seven attitudes of mindfulness as describe by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2002). These pillars include, non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and letting go (Kabat-Zinn, 2002). Participants of the study spoke of their ability to accept and let go of stressors. Lindsay and Creswell posit that acceptance skills modify the way one relates to present-moment experience, regulating reactivity to affective experiences. "I was constantly affirming myself and accepting where I was," Nikki said. One of the most stressful experiences for law students is Socratic questioning; it immediately activates the fight or flight response. This is a hyperarousal or acute stress response, physiological reaction, that occurs in response to perceived harmful event; this is how participants described the Socratic questioning. The ability to be aware of the present-moment helped students maintain their composure. Keeping a mind of

acceptance helped them to engage in non-judgment affirmations, such as, “this exam is not the end of the world,” explained Brody.

Mindfulness meditation is a practice to help sustain attention and develop present moment awareness. There are many forms of meditation. Meditation requires sustained attention and is reinforced by noticing (monitoring), and bringing back (acceptance) a wandering mind. It is a very simple practice but not easy to develop (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Participants all had different forms of meditation practices to help enhance their ability to monitor their experiences. Many used breathing meditations with sustained focus on the breath to slow down heart rate and reengage in a steady breathing rhythm. The increase oxygen throughout the body creates relatively stable equilibrium and homeostasis (Goleman & Davidson, 2018). Participants who had difficulty with sleep patterns regularly practice body scan. The body scan meditation releases tension by paying attention to parts of the body and bodily sensation in a gradual sequence (Kabat-Zinn, 2002). These meditations seemed help and promote sleep, body awareness, stress and relaxation among the participants. By noticing, monitoring, during the meditation process, the mind focuses on non-affective experiences and reactivity (Kabat-Zinn, 2002). Noticing (monitoring) and accepting the wandering mind, individuals were able to develop the ability of sustained meditation and increase outcome effectiveness. Participants who practice meditation felt calmer and more aware of their experiences.

Additionally, included in the study was the tenet of autonomy of SDT. Empirical research supports that the fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs which include autonomy, relatedness, and competence, predict wellbeing (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students indicated that they felt in more control when they had the ability to choose their own thoughts and not be driven by what others thought of them.

When people act with autonomy, they are engaging in behaviors that are congruent with their purpose, value, standards and authentic interest (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Participants supported the concept that activities or external pressures where regulation of their behavior was controlled or determined by others, was associated with diminished persistence and performance and impoverished experiences of wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Reengaging with their original purpose, rather than being affected by external pressures such as grades and correct responses helped to improve their ability to experience law school with a different view. “Being mindful also means refocusing on my goals and challenging myself to remember and re-engage with the reason I came to law school in the first place,” Nancy said. Students were able to assess their own perception of their abilities and purposes rather than having others label their outcomes.

Empirical

The study highlights a few major points with regards to mindfulness and the stress students experience during law school. Research supports that the law school experience is indeed stressful. Additionally, mindfulness is a practice to help monitor and modify affective responses and is supported by research. Throughout this study, all participants qualitatively supported law school stress and the effects of mindfulness.

Research on this topic began to accelerate during the 1980’s with Andrew Benjamin, J.D., Ph.D. Shanfield and Benjamin (1989) completed the landmark study related to levels of stress and law school students. The stress experienced by law students has evolved over time with the increased competitiveness related to overall law school performance in conjunction with pursuing elite internships and career opportunities. The impact of stress during law school is far-reaching and with complex consequences (Skead & Rogers, 2014; 2015; 2016; Tyler, 2016).

The University of Sydney reported that over 35 per cent of Australian law students' experienced high levels of stress (Skead & Rogers, 2015). Stressors include emotionally laden and stress provoking learning environments associated with factors including the competitiveness of grades and the Socratic approach to instruction. (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015; Skead & Rogers, 2015).

The empirical finding of the study added to the current research that law students experience high levels of stress and anxiety directly associated with their law school experience. Scientific studies explaining how to practically address law school psychological distress are lacking (Bergin & Pakenham, 2015). Common examples of law school stressors indicated by participants included grades, competitive nature, classroom approaches to instruction, limited time to learn great amounts of content and constraints on their personal life. The lack of assessment feedback at the end of the semester contributed significantly to the participants' stress and anxiety (Commet, 1968). The amount of content required to master seemed to overwhelm many participants. Stressors include emotionally laden and stress provoking learning environment associated with factors including the competitiveness of grades and the Socratic approach to instruction. (Bergin & Pakenham, 2015). One of the most stressful aspects of law school was unsurprisingly the final exams. The grading curve was viewed by the participants' as especially unfair. The idea that a student could receive a 92% on an exam which would result in a letter grade of a "C" was seen as extremely anxiety provoking. The nuisances of law school were unanimously shared. The thought that one test could potentially determine your future opportunities was felt by most students. They shared having experiences of sitting down to take an exam and going completely blank when they stared at the final. A few had supportive professors. These were typically the professors that had their own active mindfulness practice and had shared those experiences with students. Most professors, however, contributed to the

stress levels and seems to show very little concern for the effects of the classroom instruction. These experiences supported the theme that the methods of instruction and assessments created escalated emotions and competitiveness. Law school was stressful for participants almost every day and competition being one of the greatest distractors and contributors to stress. The documented rates of psychological distress among law students make it imperative for law schools to identify and modify the institutional and curriculum factors that trigger or exacerbate student ill-health (Reed et al., 2016). Many students who stayed up late studying only found themselves not retaining information because they experienced excessive fogginess and emotional exhaustion. Most experienced physical reaction to stress including clenching jaw and tight shoulders. Comments of sadness and isolation were particularly noticeable for one participant. The theme developed from this was that the academic environment escalates the pathology escalated emotions. Despite receiving warnings related to the level of stress most encounter in law school, all knew it was their direction and purpose in life.

Implications

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover how law students make meaning of mindfulness as it relates to law school student's ability to manage stress. The ability to manage stress has been documented to improve student effectiveness and focus academically by participants. Students who practiced mindfulness discussed their ability to efficiently manage their academic routines. They were able to increase their ability to focus and concentrate while studying and participating in exams. The effectiveness of their studying improved the outcome of grades. Improved ability to comprehend and master large amounts of content may result in higher and deeper levels of knowledge for participants' and their mindfulness practice. Complexities of analyzing and synthesizing matters of law may be a result of effective learning

supported with a calm and focused mind. Higher levels of learning may help create law students who are more confident in their abilities when sitting for the bar exam.

Effectiveness in oral argument presentation also was documented. Many documented their ability to compose themselves before competitions or exams by using breathing exercises designed to center and reduce tendencies of rumination and catastrophizing. The use of mindfulness practice may help students recognize stress or anxiety and manage the effects rather than let distorted perceptions of emotions control the view of the world (Doucet, 2014).

Theoretical

Mindfulness practices have blurred definitions; however, all definitions include two essential components which include the ability to monitor and accept the state of mind (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). Monitoring and Acceptance Theory (MAT), supported by the tenet of autonomy in Self-determination Theory (SDT). Implications of this research support monitoring the present moment to bring an attitude of acceptance toward the experience and to regulate interventions on affective, stress, social relationship, and health outcomes (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017).

This study helps add to MAT research. The MAT is a relatively new theory; few studies have been conducted using this theory in the qualitative research method. Research using MAT has been closely associated with mindfulness and cognitive behavior (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). This study supports the definition and conceptualizations of mindfulness which includes two components commonly described across mindfulness definitions and measures: (1) the use of attention to monitor one's present moment experiences, and (2) a mental attitude of acceptance toward momentary experience (Bishop et al., 2004). Attention monitoring and acceptance instructions are considered important processes across mindfulness-based interventions (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2004). Participants overwhelmingly supported

that their ability to monitor experiences was essential to the management of stress. Participants also supported the idea that their ability to monitor experiences had improved since they began to practice mindfulness. They believed their ability to monitor experiences was attributed to their mindfulness practices and did not refer to the understandings or theories of neurological alterations associated with mindfulness. Participants viewed mindfulness as a psychological intervention to stress, Brody said,

Instead of letting something spiral out of control, mindfulness allows me to understand what I am feeling and take control of those feelings. Before I start freaking out and being counterproductive, I am able to catch myself and prevent myself from spiraling.

Neuroplasticity can be defined as the ability of the nervous system to respond to intrinsic or extrinsic stimuli by reorganizing neurological structure, function and connections (Cramer, et., al, 2011). Individuals who meditate regularly, like Buddhist monks, have different neurological structures (Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, & Davidson, 2008). The area of the brain that processes awareness functions at higher levels than individuals who do not meditate (Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, & Davidson, 2008). A landmark study from 2008 found that experienced meditators had increased brain activity in awareness while hearing emotional sounds like crying or laughter than those with less experience practices (Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, & Davidson, 2008). The act of meditation developed more awareness (Desbordes et al., 2012). A group of Harvard researchers recruited 20 experienced meditators from Boston along with 20 non-meditators matching the criteria of age and gender to measure the differences in the brain between the two groups. The differences between the two groups indicated that the meditators' brain showed an increased amount of grey matter in areas of the brain considered crucial for effective functioning, the prefrontal cortex and the insula. The

prefrontal cortex is associated with the working memory and executive decision-making functions and the insula with the capacity of self-awareness and ability to process emotions (Van Dam et al., 2018).

The *Journal of Research in Personality* research showed that present-moment awareness was a key feature of mindfulness, stress reduction and effective coping development (Donald et al., 2016). Specifically, maintaining present-moment awareness involved monitoring current experiences rather than predicting future events or dwelling on past experiences. The study indicated that a disposition toward remaining in the present moment was directly linked to greater perceived ability to handle stress and become more reliant on core values to navigate the stressful situations (Donald et al., 2016). Recalling what Nancy said, “For me, being mindful also means refocusing on my goals and challenging myself to remember and re-engage with the reason I came to law school in the first place, which has a higher meaning.” The effect of the present-moment awareness was experienced in the same day, and in response to different stressors the following day in the Harvard study (Donald et al., 2016).

The second tenet of MAT is acceptance. Bringing an attitude of acceptance toward monitored experiences is a key emotion regulation mechanism for the effects of mindfulness interventions on affective, stress, social relationship and health outcomes (Doucet, 2014). Participants shared their ability to accept their experiences through focus, control and noticing, and increasing a mental attitude of acceptance toward momentary experiences. Monitoring the experiences without the attitude of acceptance did not produce the same results (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). Although not asked specifically, participants did discuss the concept, realization of acceptance, as a key in wellbeing. Brody,

After acquiring my mindfulness skills during the fall semester of my last year of law school (I wish I could have taken the class sooner in hindsight.), I employed them to help myself to notice the stress I would feel related to exams, accept the stress, and let it go.

Nikki also supported the concept of acceptance, “Mindfulness helped me to stay grounded in myself and accept that the stresses of law school experience were necessary to help me transform in the person I wanted to be.” Nancy included in her journal entry how acceptance was an important concept in mindfulness and stress management,

Mentally, I can find more confidence in myself when I implement mindfulness. It allows me to refocus and accept my own capabilities, which mitigates the overwhelming feelings of ‘not being good enough’ and doubting my abilities and strengths compared to others.

Acceptance of abilities or lack of among the participants aligns with the tenet of acceptance supported by research in mindfulness practices (Salzberg, 1995). Acceptance is intended to describe the development of a different relationship to the experience by noticing or acknowledging the emotion and then letting it be as it is (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). However, Kabat-Zinn (2004) insists that noticing and allowing the emotion to be is not the same as being resigned or passive. It is the registering of the experience, not resigning to the experience, before making a choice about how to respond (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). Benefits show accepting thoughts and feelings as they arise in response to stress rather than trying to ignore, increased wellbeing (Ford, Lam, John, & Mauss, 2018). Acceptance of inner experience is an aspect of mindfulness that can be developed through the practice of meditation and self-compassion (Salzberg, 1995).

Included in this study was the tenet of autonomy of SDT. The fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs include autonomy, relatedness, and competence, predict wellbeing (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Participants indicated that they felt in more control when they had the ability to choose their own thoughts and not be driven by what others thought of them. As Sue explained, “I cannot stress over things I have no control over such as what other students are doing and studying. I just try to focus on things that I can control and staying in tune with my needs.” Allie and Linda felt their ability to control thoughts, respond rather than react emotionally and personally accept situations that were out of their control was a revolutionary way of thinking and being. Linda’s ability to realize she had autonomy to choose decreased her anxiety for past and future events. This autonomy provided a path to improved wellbeing and stress management among the participants.

Empirical

This study highlights a few major points with regards to stress management in the academic setting. Although only recently explored within the academic setting of law school, mindfulness practices have many benefits that can be applied to the management of stress during highly competitive experiences. This study was designed to empirically develop research substantiating that mindfulness practices improve overall wellbeing while under extreme academic conditions of stress and pressure. Qualitative research was developed to help understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures as the participants feel it or live it (Creswell & Poth, 1994; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). The lived experiences of law students’ mindfulness practices supported other quantitative research studies and literature that substantiate mindfulness practices help individuals better manage stress designed for this study (Kabat-Zinn, 2004; Keune & Forintos, 2010; Weinstein, Brown, & Ryan, 2009). Additionally,

this study also added empirical evidence suggesting that mindfulness practices help students better manage their stress in highly competitive academic programs (Doucet, 2014; Leland, 2015; Lewinbuk, 2016; Reuben & Sheldon, 2019; Rogers, & Jacobowitz, 2012).

The empirical implication of this research is that law student participants managed stress as a direct result of their mindfulness practice. Mindfulness was a way to keep participants moving in the right direction. Participants managed their relationship with stress associated with academics with the assistance of their mindfulness practices that included meditation, mindful eating, mindful walking, management of sleep habits and mindful communication. Students practicing mindfulness have shown decrease levels of academic stress (Bennett, 2018).

One participant's comment related to a way of recognizing negative thoughts and feelings, and gently reminding herself that those thoughts were no longer need, or serving to move forward. Teaching law students to develop a level of awareness of mental and emotional processes offers new insight students (Doucet, 2014). There was a marked difference in demeanor when students talked about their mindfulness practice as compared to their stress levels and law school experiences. Participants seemed calm and reflective. The words that they shared related to their mindfulness experiences were important to them. Meditation's aim is to develop calmness or tranquility (Burnett, 2011). It is specifically focused on quieting the mind and increase focus (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). There was almost a reverence in participants' demeanor during interviews, as though mindfulness had a place in their heart. Participants demonstrated deep and reflective thinking often pausing to collect their thoughts. Pausing is a form of mindfulness to collect thoughts and reflect before responding (McIntyre, 2018). Emotional skill sets such as positive thinking, emotional regulation and compassion contribute to the state of wellbeing (Seligman, 2013; Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2012). As participants reflected on the most

stressful experiences of law school, the competition for highest grades, they all said that they were able to be more efficient and effective in their study habits. No participants reported grades declining and a few shared that their grades had actually improved. Research supports that utilizing wellbeing skills enhances student assessment performance, improves study habits, grades and long-term academic success in addition to reducing stress and anxiety among students (Adler, 2017; Maloney, 2014).

The idea of perspective was often noted by participants. Perspective taking accentuates the observer's thought during meditation for mental labeling such as categorizing thoughts and monitoring the comings and goings of those thoughts (Block et al., 2007). As it relates to the central question of this study and empirical data all experienced less stress, anxiety and competitive feelings, academic perspective was modified, increased awareness, improved emotional and physical wellbeing and focus followed by gratitude that were associated with their mindfulness practice. Empirically there is a significant variation in the types and intensity of changes occurring in reframing and reduction of daily stressors to transformational shifts in life orientation as a result of mindfulness practices (Kerrigan et al., 2011). Nancy's perspective began to change as she developed her mindfulness practices and reevaluated the effects of her legal studies, "I was starting to look at my life and stress differently."

Practical

The practical implication of the study is that participants were able to manage their stress better once they began to practice mindfulness, therefore if students were able to access resources for mindfulness trainings, they would have a tool to help them manage stress more effectively. Chronic stress increases levels of cortisol in the brain (McEwen, 2012). High levels of cortisol wear down the brain's ability to function properly in multiple ways such as shrinking

on the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain which is responsible for memory and learning (McEwen, 2012). Loss of memory and ability to process information such as legal concepts, can perhaps even increase stress more for individuals leading to additional stress. Providing opportunities for students to participate in mindfulness instruction to manage stress may help to improve the overall wellbeing of law school students.

Mindfulness seminars offered to students during the summer before entering law school have been offered by several law schools including University of San Diego. In the study, participants overwhelmingly supported their practice of mindfulness as it related to their ability to develop skills central to their academic success. Students accepted into law school have been driven by the importance of their grades, however the grading system law schools utilize are very different than those in undergraduate school (Bergin, & Pakenham, 2015). Seminars designed to teach students study skills along with stress management skills may help improve their overall performance and wellbeing.

Another practical implication is the use of mindfulness courses in law school. Courses in mindfulness and law are being to be implemented in several leading law schools, including Berkeley Law School, University of Miami Law School, Arizona State University Law School, and Georgetown Law School. Courses are typically taught by law professors who have a personal mindfulness practice and are usually offered once a year. Brody was convinced by one of his friends to take a mindfulness course taught by a retired judge and professor at his law school. This course was the pathway to his mindfulness practice. Numerous studies have been shown to advance the practice of mindfulness for law students, however many law schools are unsure how to create mindfulness and law into the curriculum and instruction (Lewinbuk, 2016).

Several law schools have created mindfulness units in their course related to professional responsibility.

The addition of guest speakers who are focused on the emotional and physical wellbeing of students could provide techniques for de-stressing. Allie indicated that she was introduced to the high rates of stress and anxiety lawyers experience by a guest speaker in her professional responsibility course and was surprised by the statistics concerning alcohol and substance abuse. The speaker described how these self-medicating practices begin in law school and perpetuate into the legal practice. This led Allie to develop a mindfulness club at her law school.

Professors can also integrate mindfulness practices into their instructional styles such as beginning each class with a moment of silence for calming and re-centering, less use of Socratic instruction, develop self-efficacy and create environments that are more compassionate rather than competitive. The concept of self-efficacy is central to psychologist Albert Bandura's social cognitive learning theory. A person's attitudes, abilities and cognitive skills comprise what is known as the self-system, according to Bandura (1993). This system, Bandura (1993) believed, plays a major role in how individuals perceive situations and respond accordingly. Creating a learning environment that promotes high levels of self-efficacy with positive feedback encourages deeper levels of understanding (Bandura, 1993). An example of self-efficacy would be when a student feels confident that they will be able to learn the information and do well on a test.

Setting up mindfulness clubs for law school students to access and understand effects of mindfulness may steer these students towards a mindful practice and lifestyle. Peers with mindfulness practices can serve as models and as sources of social support, friendship and examples of how to manage the obstacles of law school. One such club is the yoga club. Most

participants routinely participated in bi-weekly yoga classes. Several students were actually yoga instructors and instructed yoga on the lawn of the law school. Sue share of her yoga practice,

I got a membership to a yoga studio across the street from my apartment and started going every day since I was paying for it. Once I started going every day, I started to see both the physical and the psychological benefits of yoga. I was getting physically stronger and healthier, neverminded flexible. I was starting to look at my life and stress differently. Ultimately, I did yoga teacher training.

In addition to yoga, opportunities to participant in meditation sessions could be considered. Nikki leads her classmates in meditation, “Many students participated in these events, and even in my classes, my classmates would ask me to lead us in de-stressing exercises.” Creating meditation rooms and spaces where students can simply remove themselves from the stress of the classroom in a quiet environment for reflection and inner peace.

Delimitation and Limitation

The current study included several delimitations, the first being the sampling of participants. All participants had attended or were attending law school, were between the ages of 18-35 and all had a mindfulness practice. These parameters of age limited and restricted participation in the study. All participants needed to have a mindfulness meditation practice as opposed to other types of meditation practice. Participants needed to have attended an accredited law school which reduced the number of law school students who could participate.

Limitations included the number of female participants as compared to male. The experiences of males related to their mindfulness practice may be different than that of females. Additionally, the number of participants was very small. A larger qualitative pool of participants may have deepened the level of understanding as it related to mindfulness practices. The

researcher did not have any information of the participants previous mental health before law school. Understanding participants emotional and social development prior to law school would have contributed to a better analysis of the data.

All had various forms of mindfulness practice with difference intensity levels and elements of their practice. For example, some only practiced mindfulness meditation and very little emphasis on mindful self-compassion or gratitude. All had different levels of expertise as it related to mindfulness training. Participants had developed their mindfulness practice using different methods, mostly self-instruction or through different types of yoga. Individuals who had be trained by certified mindfulness instructions may have incorporated the mindfulness practices differently. Mindfulness is a very generic term that has many meanings and associations. With the widespread notion and popularity of mindfulness, ideas related to the practice run the spectrum. Specific training in particular types of mindfulness would have helped the researcher validate the knowledge level and expertise of implementing mindfulness by the participants. All participants were members of a mindfulness and the law association; therefore, they appeared to have substantial belief of the practice.

Another limitation is the demand effect when participants provide researchers what they perceive to be the answers seeking. Additionally, a potential limitation is disparity between what the participants believed they felt and what they actually felt. However, with the length of the journal prompts and interview sessions, the researcher sought to investigate contradictions in data. The generalization of data assuming mindfulness practices would improve grades, reduce stress and improve wellbeing for all law students. There is very little data supporting the effects of mindfulness practices within law school settings. This research, however, does help validate the high levels of stress among law students and wellbeing issues. The findings supported the

National Task Force on Lawyer Well Being's recommendation that law students understand and engage in the management of stress related to law school.

Recommendations for Future Research

This phenomenological study focused on making meaning of mindfulness and law school students. All students believed that their mindfulness practice helped them manage stressors associated with their legal education. The limited scope of this study highlights the need for further research related to the stress law students experience and their lingering effects after graduation. As the research highlighted, the environment of law school is inherently stressful, however the ability for students to monitor and accept their relationship with stress improved their ability to reduce reactivity to the environment. Understanding law students' perspective may combat the effects of stress and anxiety due to the nature of law school. Administrators and professors may want to consider providing the development of mindfulness practices by certified instructors. Understanding the effects of mindfulness taught by a certified instructor may more validate the outcomes. Therefore, I recommend the following:

- Research law students who have been taught by a certified instructor on campus
- Research law students who have been taught by a certified instructor in an online format
- Research law students who have taken a mindfulness course taught by a law school professor
- Research law students who have been taught by a guest speaker
- Research law students who belong to mindfulness clubs on campus
- Research law students who are yoga instructors
- Research law students who have professors actively using mindfulness methods in their courses

- Research that includes with equal number of male and female
- Research law students who are all from the same socioeconomic stations
- Research law students who belong to the same ethnicity
- Research law students from highly selective law school

This is not an extensive list and many others could be added. The idea behind future research is to understand and make meaning of mindfulness practices and their effects related to law students' relationship to stress.

Summary

This study explored the lived experiences of law students and their abilities to make meaning of the mindfulness practice. Research has established that the instructional practices, grading systems, competitive environments, significant study requirements and a workaholic culture contribute to the stress and mental exhaustion law students experience. The data supports students entering law school experience similar levels of stress and anxiety as the general public, however, by the end of their first year, levels drastically increase. Law school could appropriately be described as one big stressful three-year event.

Mindfulness is the secular practice of maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and the surrounding environment, with a gentle, nurturing acceptance. Mindfulness includes types of meditation, ways of seeing, feeling, listening and sensing. Through acceptance, paying attention to thoughts and feelings, without judgement, or believing there is a right or wrong way of thinking or feeling in any given moment settling of the mind can mediate emotions. Thoughts are focused on the present moment without consideration of past experiences or future events. Non-judgmental, present focus awareness is at the heart of mindfulness practices.

Understanding research supported benefits of mindfulness and established research for legal education stress helped to formulate the drive to better understand how mindfulness could help mediate stress among law students through their spoken word and reflections. The data was gathered from journal prompts, semi-structure interviews and a focus group. Upon completion, an analysis of the data was conducted. This resulted in five themes that included, less competitiveness, academic perspective, increased awareness and focus, and gratitude; academic environment escalated the pathology of escalated emotions; mindfulness practice, competitiveness, improved wellbeing and increased perspective.

Hopefully this study will inspire further research in this topic and help to initiate positive approaches to managing stress for law students. Much still needs to be done to address the overall health and wellbeing of law students and lawyers alike. As research continues to expand in mindfulness, mental health, neurology, physical wellness and lifestyles, new generations of students may be able to approach the perspective of academic stresses differently. Understanding the ability to improve individuals overall wellbeing may enhance overall learning and increase students' opportunities to more thoroughly enjoy the development of their intelligence.

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APPENDIX A-APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 23, 2020

Lisa Benjamin Mitchell

IRB Exemption 4051.012320: Making Meaning of Mindfulness in the Lives of Law School Students: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Lisa Benjamin Mitchell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,



G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
 Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX B-PERMISSION REQUEST

November 1, 2019

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in education. The title of my research project is Making Meaning of Mindfulness in the Lives of Law School Students: A Phenomenological Study and purpose of this study will be to understand how students make meaning of mindfulness as it relates to stress during law school.

I am writing to request your permission utilize your membership list to recruit participants for my research. The practical significance of the study is the overall improved wellbeing of law students and their futures as attorneys. Providing law students tools to help manage stress is a proactive response that I would like to further develop through the practice of mindfulness. Continuing to develop empirical evidence will further support the benefits of mindfulness as it relates to the management of stress and over all wellbeing.

I am requesting student membership list and membership list of law school professors who teach a mindfulness course and could forward the flier to their students. To keep, however, the process as localized and controlled as possible, the scope of the study will only include students who participate and are associated with the recruited organizations and/or their professors who teach mindfulness. This will keep the bounded system focused on the individuals who have an association with mindfulness, stress and law school.

Potential participants from your membership list will be sent an email outlining the details of the study. If they are interested then the email will provide them with a link to answer several questions related to the requirements for participants to participate. I have attached the email I will be sending for your review. If students meet the guidelines to participate, potential participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Participants will be asked to participate in a five question journal prompt, one individual interview conducted via Zoom video conferencing and another small focus group conducted via Zoom video conferencing. All participants will be given pseudonyms for purposes of confidentiality. Results and conclusions will be shared with participates and participating organizations, but data is restricted.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval, OR respond by email to the researcher's email [REDACTED]. My contact number is [REDACTED]. Additionally, a permission letter document is attached for your convenience to align with IRB requirements.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX C-RECRUITMENT LETTER

November 1, 2019



Dear Law Student

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for an Education Doctorate degree. The purpose of this study is to understand how law students describe and make meaning of the practice of mindfulness as it relates to their lived experiences of stress during law school. The central research question includes: What are the lived experiences of law students and their mindfulness practice? As a phenomenological study, I am seeking to understand the human development of knowledge and meaning from the interaction between a law student's experiences with stress and their meanings related to their mindfulness practice. I am writing you to participate in my study.

If you are between the ages of 18 and 35, have participated in a mindfulness course or have an active mindfulness practice and are currently attending law school, please consider participating in this valuable research. Participants will consist of both male and female law students and all ages will be included. Law students' socioeconomics varies across the spectrum; all will be included regardless of income or social background. Participants will not be excluded based on ethnic, racial, and religious affiliation. This study does not drill down to specific identifiable classes, but generally focuses on stress for all populations enrolled in law school.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one-hour individual interview, respond to five general journal prompts related to stress and the practice of mindfulness and participate in a one-hour group interview. It should take approximately three hours to complete the procedure listed at the most. Your participation will be completely anonymous and no personal identifying information will be collected. Your identification will be based on pseudonyms, but the results of the study will be shared with the mindfulness in the law organizations. No one will know that you participated unless you personally divulge that information.

To be considered to participate in the study, please go to [HERE](#) and complete the initial form with your electronic signature. You will be notified within two week if you qualify to participate. If you do not qualify, I will also send you a follow up email too. Once accepted into the study, you will receive a consent document containing additional information about the research. Once the consent form has been signed, you will receive an email with instructions related to the first step of the research. This step includes completing five short journal entries related to your mindfulness practice and experience of stress during law school. Once you have completed the journal entries, I will send you a link to will schedule your interview using Calendly.com. For the individual and group interview sessions, I will both use Zoom conferencing for convenience and ease. The Zoom conferencing will be recorded.

If you choose to participate and complete the entire study, you will receive a \$100.00 gift card from Amazon in your email.

Sincerely,



APPENDIX D-CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

MAKING MEANING OF MINDFULNESS IN THE LIVES OF LAW SCHOOL STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Lisa Benjamin Mitchell
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study related to law school stress and mindfulness practices. Demands made upon law students are daunting. Research indicates law students experience substantially high rates of stress as compared to their counter graduate students in medicine, engineering and nursing. Creating options and developing tools to better support our best and brightest is a goal of this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are between the ages of 18-35, attended an ABA accredited law school and have been noted to have either taken a course in mindfulness exercises or have an active mindfulness practice. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Lisa Benjamin Mitchell, a doctoral candidate in the School of at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study will be to understand how students make meaning of mindfulness as it relates to stress during law school.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, the researcher would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete five-journal entry prompts on a shared Microsoft 365 document that will be only accessed by each individual participate and the researcher. All participants only have access to their personal journal entries. To help prevent unauthorized access Microsoft 365 enables encrypted password protection that will be used. All participants will use an identifier for coding purposes using a pseudonym name. To have a clear understanding related to the participants experiences and thoughts, it is requested that each journal prompt consist of 250 or more words. As this is a qualitative study, words are extremely important in the collection of data. This should take approximately one hour and will ask to be completed within two weeks after receiving the prompts.
2. Complete a recorded one on one personal interview with the researcher that will include approximately 10 questions in a Zoom conferencing connection for approximately 60 minutes. Participants will have the opportunity to sign up for an interview time that best fits their schedule. Researcher will record the session to maintain integrity of the information provided by the student. The researcher will store all data on their personal computer in a password protection folder. All participants will use an identifier pseudonym for coding purposes.
3. Complete a recorded group interview the with researcher approximately 3-4 students. There will be approximately 6-7 questions in a Zoom conferencing connection for approximately 60 minutes. Participants will have the opportunity to sign up for an interview time that best fits their schedule. Researcher will record the session to maintain

integrity of the information provided by the students. The researcher will store all data on their personal computer in a password protection folder. All participants will use an identifier pseudonym for coding purposes.

4. After review of materials, researcher may contact students for simple clarification, however the researcher will try to be diligent as to clarifying points during the interviews.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks participants would encounter in every day life.

As a licensed counselor, the researcher is therefore in the category of a mandated reported. This is a person who, because of his or her profession, is legally required to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others. As a mandatory reported, the researcher is required by law to disclose this information to participants. These laws are in place to prevent children from being abused and to end any possible abuse or neglect at the earliest possible stage.

Benefits:

Direct Benefits-The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study for participants is to revisit and reflect on their mindfulness practices and the options provided by this practice to better manage stress and improved their relationship with stress. To share best practices with other law students during group interviews to enhance their own personal practice. To rekindle a practice that may have faded as students lives had gotten increasingly more hectic. A direct benefit may also include sharing stories with likeminded people and network additional opportunities to reaffirm the benefits of the mindfulness practice.

Benefits to society- Benefits to the overall society includes providing tools for law students to take into their practice to reduce the number of attorneys who are experiencing high levels of burn out and stress. Therefore creating a healthier group of attorneys practicing law.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. All participants who complete the study including the journal prompts, the one individual interview and the one group interview will receive [REDACTED] Amazon gift card via email. Only participants completing the entire study as listed above will receive the incentive. No option for pro-rate will be provided. Email addresses have been obtained for communication only by the researcher and the researcher will email the participant directly with instructions related to the gift card.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report the researcher might publish, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

The privacy of participants will be protected throughout using pseudonyms. Only the researcher and the study chair will have access to the pseudonyms and know the identities of the participants in the study. This list of names and pseudonyms will be protected by a password for the document. Interviews will be done via videoconference and recorded, so the interviews will be conducted in the privacy of my home office. During group interview sessions, participants

will be asked to use their pseudonyms. No other members of the researchers family will be in the researcher's office when conducting the interviews including professors, classmate, friends, mindfulness teachers or housekeepers.

The researcher will use a password-locked computer with password-protected documents. The records of this study will be kept private. The researcher does not plan or share information as it relates to future research. But if the researchers does opt for future presentation, all indetifying information will be removed. Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Research records and recordings will be stored securely, and only the researcher or study chair will have access to the records on a password protected computer with password protected folders. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym and the pseudonym will be used throughout to protect participant identity and stored on a password protected computer. Data (research records, interview recordings, transcripts, and documents) will be stored securely on a password locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Written records and documents will be kept in a secure file cabinet until converted to electronic form which will be done within three months upon successful dissertation defense. Then after the written records and documents have been coverted the hard copies will be shredded. As per federal tregulations, all data must be retainedf for three years upon the completion of the study. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted from the external hard drive. This study is not grant funded. Limits to the confidentiality include members of the focus group discussing with one another outside of the research setting.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. The participants decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, their attending law school or mindfulness in the law organization. If the participant decides to participate, they are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If the participant chooses to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should the participant choose to withdraw, data collected from the participant, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but the participants contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Lisa Benjamin Mitchell. Participants may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to [audio-record/video-record/photograph] me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX E-INTEREST SURVEY

Making Meaning of Mindfulness

MAKING MEANING OF MINDFULNESS IN THE LIVES OF LAW SCHOOL STUDENTS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Interest Survey

If you are interested in participating in a short research study related to law school stress and mindfulness we would appreciate your feedback. Complete a few short questions and we will notify you if you meet the criteria.

1.First Name:

2.Last Name:

3.I verify that I am currently enrolled in an ABA-accredited law school in the United States of America.

Yes

No

4.I verify I have an active mindfulness meditation practice or have taken a course in mindfulness meditation.

Yes

No

5.I verify I have experienced stress during law school.

Yes

No

6.I verify that I am between 18 and 35 years old.

Yes

No

7.I verify I would like to be considered to take part in a study associated with law school, mindfulness and stress.

Yes

No

8.I acknowledge the study will include five journal entries to be completed by me, a one-hour individual interview and one-hour a group interview.

Yes

No

9.Email Address

10.Cell Phone Number

11.Text Number

12. I acknowledge that I will need to fulfill all of the above requirements (journal entries, individual interview and group interview) to receive the \$100.00 for participating in the study. If I decide to drop out early, I know that I void the gift card.

- Yes
 No

13.I acknowledge I will do my best to answer all questions to my fullest ability for the study of stress and mindfulness.

- Yes
 No

14.Time Zone

- Atlantic Standard Time
 Eastern Standard Time
 Central Standard Time
 Mountain Standard Time
 Pacific Standard Time
 Alaskan Standard Time
 Hawaii-Aleutian Standard Time
 Samoa standard time
 Chamorro Standard Time

15.I verify that I have the technology to access Zoom technology including a webcam.

- Yes
 No

APPENDIX F-RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Central Question: What are the lived experiences of law students and their mindfulness practice?

Sub-question 1: What contexts or situation have been experienced with the practice of mindfulness?

Sub-question 2: How does the act of monitoring and accepting guide the relationship to stress?

Sub-question 3: What academic experiences are associated with mindfulness?

Sub-question 4: How do mindfulness practices contribute to participants' experiences of social and emotional well-being?

Journal Prompts

Describe your journey through mindfulness, for example, where and why did this journey begin?

1. Describe a stressful situation during law school when you noticed stress, monitored those feelings and felt acceptance by changing the relationship with the stress.
2. How did practice of mindfulness during law school affect your academic abilities?
3. When considering the entire experience of the practice of mindfulness during law school, what has been the overall difference in wellbeing?
4. What else that you would like to share about your experience with law school or mindfulness?

Personal Interview Questions

1. Please explain why you chose to go to law school.
 - a) Who influenced you?

- b) What drove you to pursue that career of law?
 - c) Where do you see yourself after law school?
2. What do you enjoy the most about being a law student?
3. What are your challenges as a law student?
4. How do you feel about your mindfulness practice?
5. Briefly describe your practice of mindfulness?
 - a) Describe the form of mindfulness that you use. (i.e, breathing meditation, walking mediation, speaking)
6. People come to mindfulness practice in many different ways. What was it that led you to the practice of mindfulness?
7. How do you monitor your stress level?
8. If you have used mindfulness techniques during high levels of academic stress, what do those situations look like (exams, Socratic classroom format, meetings with professors)?
 - a) What were the results?
 - b) How has mindfulness affected your overall academic achievement?
 - c) How has that affected your overall experience in law school?
9. What other stress reduction practices that you use that would be important for me to learn about?
 - a) Including mindfulness in these practices, how would you rank these for most effective in stress reduction?
10. How have you seen your practice with mindfulness influence your relationships with others including law school classmates and personal relationships?

11. What types of physical-wellbeing and mental health-wellbeing is related to your mindfulness?
12. Please give examples of any internal & external barriers you have encountered with others when you explain your practice.
13. How would you describe your law school experience if you did not utilize mindfulness?
14. What else that you would like to share about your experience with law school or mindfulness?

Focus Group

1. As a group, describe stresses during law school.
2. As a group, describe mindfulness in academic experiences.
3. As a group, describe emotional and physical wellbeing regulation as it relates to mindfulness.
4. As a group, describe how mindfulness relates to personal experiences outside of law school.

APPENDIX G-SAMPLE JOURNAL PROMPT REPLY

Journal Question: Describe a stressful situation during law school when you noticed stress, monitored those feelings (what were the feelings) and felt acceptance by changing the relationship with the stress (how did you do this). (Please complete with 200 words or greater.)

Law school is stressful almost every day. It is particularly stressful when I have to publicly speak in front of large groups of people, such as for an oral argument or for a negotiation competition. Before these activities, I always take 5-10 minutes to sit alone with my eyes closed. I focus on my breathing and re-center my body. I remind myself that this is just one experience in my life that does not define me. I remind myself that with each breath, I am more and more in control of my mind and body. Doing this helps me remember that there are much more important things in the world, like being able to walk and talk and breath. I still do this before any oral presentation and it's been great for me. There have been plenty of other stressful moments outside my academic life too. I lost my father 2 weeks before my final exams. It was one of the most painful times personally, coupled with the most stressful times academically. I really had to change the way I dealt with my stress. Instead of having constant anxiety and losing sleep just to ensure a good grade, I realized that there were many other things I could be worrying about that were much more serious than a letter on a transcript. This was when I developed a habit of meditating. Before dealing with this griever, I just used breathing techniques to calm me down. After my dad died, I sat with myself for extended periods of time. I wanted to feel what I was feeling, but on my own terms. I needed to find a way to keep going every day, and mindfulness is what helped me achieve that.