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Mindfulness for the Millennial Generation: A Clinician's Handbook for College Counseling Centers

Shaznin Percy Daruwalla
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MINDFULNESS FOR THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION: A CLINICIAN'S HANDBOOK FOR COLLEGE COUNSELING CENTERS

PROFESSIONAL DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF

THE SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

BY

SHAZNIN PERCY DARUWALLA, Psy.M.

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF
DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dayton, Ohio   September, 2012

COMMITTEE CHAIR: Robert A. Rando, Ph.D., ABPP

Committee Member: Jeffrey B. Allen, Ph.D., ABPP

Committee Member: Daniela L. Burnworth, Ph.D.

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

June 1, 2011

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY **SHAZNIN PERCY DARUWALLA** ENTITLED **MINDFULNESS FOR THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION: A CLINICIAN'S HANDBOOK FOR COLLEGE COUNSELING CENTERS** BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY.

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Robert A. Rando, Ph.D., ABPP
Dissertation Director

_____

Eve M. Wolf, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

Abstract

The current generation of college students, the Millennials (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007)

lead highly pressured and achievement-oriented lives. Along with generational changes,

change is occurring on university campuses, especially in terms of mental health

demographics. There is an increase in the severity of presenting concerns reported by

students as seen at counseling centers (Gallagher, 2008), and more students with existing

mental health diagnoses are seeking college admissions (Gallagher, 2009). Changes in

the current college student generation and socio-cultural changes underscore the need for

an effective stress-reduction program for university students. Mindfulness-based

interventions have received attention from researchers and clinicians. The current

dissertation modifies the traditional Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (Kabat-Zinn,

1990) to propose a new format for facilitating a mindfulness group suited for beginning

meditators within the Millennial college student population. In addition to emphasizing

flexibility of the group program, the handbook includes information on conducting pre-

group screening, debriefing, assessment of members' mindfulness skills, and allied

mindfulness practices such as Tai chi and Qigong. Future directions include gathering

empirical support for the proposed format and including practices suitable for college

students with severe psychological concerns.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

According to the American College Health Association (A.C.H.A.; 2008), 64.5 percent of students reported that, in the past 12 months, they had felt "overwhelmed by all that they had to do." This statistic on student stress levels has found validation in a wide array of related research studies, most prominently in a study conducted at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA conducts the Your First College Year (YFCY) survey at the end of each academic year. The purpose of the survey is to assess changes within the academic and personal development of college students as they experience their first year at college. Findings from the 2008 YCFY survey indicated significant changes in the mental health of college students during their first year at college. First-year students were more likely to feel overwhelmed and depressed during their freshmen college year compared to when they entered college. Additionally, almost 60 percent of the 240,579 incoming students in 2007 indicated that had they had "occasionally" felt overwhelmed over the past year. These findings give a brief glimpse into the chronic stress levels present within the college student population.

Apart from rising stress levels, today's college student is evolving in personality and lifestyle, and has drawn considerable attention within the research arena. Today's college student differs markedly from those of previous generations due to the socio-cultural changes that define today's world, such as easy access to technology and

globalization. Howe and Strauss (2000) coined the term *Millennials* to represent the generation born between 1982 and 2002. In this dissertation, the authors' description about the contemporary generation is used to highlight the intense pressure to excel and achieve experienced by today's college students. Some of the literature also suggests that these future leaders are increasingly at risk for leading a demanding lifestyle, using unhealthy coping patterns to survive in a fast-paced world, and potentially succumbing to stress-related disorders. Recent findings of the Counseling Center Director's Survey highlight the prevalence of severe psychological problems within the current college student population (Association of College Counseling Center Directors; AUCCD, 2008, 2009).

Given the recent health statistics pertaining to the Millennial generation, the current dissertation proposes a handbook for facilitating a mindfulness-based stress-reduction intervention for traditional aged college students. In recent years, mindfulness-based interventions have carved an intriguing and unique niche in research literature and clinical practice. Researchers and clinicians have demonstrated interest in mindfulness-based interventions (Allen, Chambers, & Knight, 2006), evident from an explosion in research related to these interventions and clinical practices integrating mindfulness.

The proposed handbook is based on Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. Kabat-Zinn's work is seminal and introduced mindfulness and meditation into the public psyche. Since its induction to the field of clinical practice, MBSR has been linked with promising physical and psychological health outcomes (Baer, 2003; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Interestingly, most research exploring the effects of mindfulness or MBSR on various psychological outcomes utilize the format

proposed by Jon Kabat-Zinn and his colleagues in 1979 at the University of

Massachusetts Medical Center (for example, Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007; Shapiro,

Astin, Bishop, & Cordova, 2005; Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998). However, the

meditative practices included in Kabat-Zinn's original model were suited for his work

with patients dealing with long-standing medical problems, such as chronic pain

(Salmon, Lush, Jablonski, & Sephton, 2009).

       Therefore, this dissertation seeks to modify Kabat-Zinn's MBSR to better match

the needs of the Millennial college student generation. More specifically, the current

dissertation is designed as a clinician's handbook for beginning meditators in

mindfulness groups conducted at college counseling centers.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Stress within the collegiate population is a common phenomenon. During their college years, students typically deal with a wide variety of issues spanning from identity development to career dilemmas. Scores of preceding generations have confronted and conquered these obstacles, and college has represented a rite of passage for them. However, a unique trend appears to be evolving with today's college students, who are setting a new standard for competition and achievement. The Millennial generation, while incredibly resourceful, is faltering with adequately managing the challenges of college life with nationwide figures reporting a rise in the prevalence of emotional disorders, severe psychological disorders, and college students taking prescription medication (Center for Collegiate Mental Health; CCMH, 2010). This is an alarming trend, one that the skill set of mindfulness can help attenuate and perhaps even mitigate.

College students and mental health

Recent mental health demographics on university campuses. The growing spotlight on college mental health has raised public awareness about the trials and tribulations experienced by university students. Statistics show a shift in the mental health concerns of today's college generation as compared to previous generations.

According to the Counseling Center Directors' Survey, 94 percent of college counseling directors believe that the number of students with severe psychological problems is a growing concern on their university campus (Association of University College Counseling Directors; AUCCD, 2009). Seventy-one percent of counseling center directors endorsed a rise in the enrollment of students with severe psychological

problems on their campuses (AUCCD). Similarly, close to 93 percent of counseling

center directors endorsed a greater number of students with severe mental health concerns

seeking admissions to their universities. Almost 49 percent of directors indicated that

clients seeking help at their centers had severe psychological problems (National Survey

of Counseling Center Directors survey; NSCCD, 2009). Stress reduction programs are in

the top five services offered on college campuses, with almost 80 percent of participating

universities acknowledging that this service is available to their students (AUCCD).

These statistics reflect the challenging environment within which the average college

student is required to function, and the constant pressure faced by all those involved in

higher education (the Center for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health; CSCMH, 2009)

such as the student affairs, on-campus organizations, faculty and staff, and the entire

university community.

Attitudes towards help seeking. With the current changes in the mental health

demographics on university campuses, knowledge about the help-seeking patterns of

college students can shape interventions implemented by university administration to

keep campuses safe and healthy for all students. What motivates students to seek help at

the university counseling center? What role does mental health stigma play in help-

seeking behaviors? Are there other factors that determine whether college students seek

professional help? These and other questions are answered in the research highlighted

within this section.

While no broad statistic exists about help-seeking behaviors among the general

college student population, research offers mixed results about help-seeking. Some

researchers have found help-seeking attitudes to be multi-dimensional in that they are

influenced by a host of factors (Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Gollust, 2007), while others argue that such behavior is influenced primarily by a few select variables, namely racial/ethnic identity and gender (Masuda et al., 2009).

Based on results from a web-based survey administered on large, public, Midwestern university campus, Eisenberg et al. (2007) concluded that students' help-seeking behaviors were influenced by a combination of diversity and knowledge-based factors. Decreases in students' help-seeking behavior were directly correlated to a perceived need for the service, being uninformed of services available on campus or insurance coverage related to the service, uncertainty about treatment effectiveness, financial constraints, or being Asian or Pacific Islander.

Racial and ethnic identity. There is research that discusses help-seeking as influenced by racial and ethnic identity. A skewed pattern exists in terms of racial and ethnic minority students' utilization of university psychological services. Caucasian students continue to constitute a large bulk of college students seeking help at university counseling centers (CCMH, 2010). Despite increasing enrollment of ethnic minority students on U.S. college campuses (Brinson & Kottler 1995; Kearney, Draper, & Baron, 2005), these students continue to underutilize university psychological counseling services (Kearney et al.).

The underutilization of mental health services evident in some minority groups could be an artifact of various factors, one of them being mental health stigma. There is research on Asian Americans' negative perception towards seeking psychological services for their problems, and viewing the use of such services as a sign of personal weakness and bringing shame to the family (for example, Root, 1985). Similarly, mental

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health stigma presents as a one of the barriers for help-seeking behavior for African American students (Ayalon & Alvidrez 2007; Thompson et al. 2004). In a recent study, Asian American and African American college students endorsed greater stigmatizing attitudes towards people with mental health disorders than did the Non-Hispanic Caucasian American students (Masuda et al., 2009).

Additional factors that may influence help-seeking behaviors among ethnic minority students relate to a lack of contact with persons having a mental health diagnosis or who have sought mental health services (Masuda et al., 2009). Alternately, students' inability to recognize their personal need for professional psychological help and a lack of confidence in mental health professionals (Fischer & Turner, 1970) could further influence the decision to seek mental health services. Interestingly, the counseling center's professional staff ethnicity and diversity representation correlates significantly with racial and ethnic minority students' help seeking at the center (CCMH, 2010). Students belonging to African-American, Asian-American, and Lationo/Hispanic ethnic groups were more likely to seek help at counseling centers based on the representation of their respective ethnic groups within the counseling center staff (CCMH, 2010). In sum, research highlights the need for intervention at various levels (student and administration) and through different means (outreach, trainings) in order to encourage college students to seek help when needed.

Gender. Research on differential attitudes towards help-seeking behaviors based on gender shows females tend to endorse more favorable attitudes towards help-seeking than males (for example, Fischer and Farina 1995; Masuda et al. 2005). Additionally,

females seek psychological services for their emotional concerns on a more frequent basis than do males (for example, Moller-Leimkuhler 2002; Rabinowitz et al. 1999).

Rising stress levels. Each year, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California at Los Angeles conducts the Freshman Survey, which draws data from approximately 700 two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and universities. Thousands of new students complete the survey when they enter college. Sax (1997) analyzed HERI survey's results from 1966 to 1995 to investigate changes in the health trends of entering college students. Her analysis revealed that during the last decade (1985-1995) of her survey, there was a rise in the levels of self-reported psychological stress among college students. The number of students who indicated that they felt "overwhelmed" frequently in the past year grew from 16 percent in 1985 to 25.3 percent in 1995.

The latest statistics confirm a similar surge in psychological stress and decline in the state of mental health of college students. Furr, Westefeld, McConnell, and Jenkins (2001) surveyed college students in four different universities and colleges and found that 53 percent of student participants self-reported experiencing "depression" after beginning college. More importantly, nine percent of all respondents acknowledged suicidal ideations. In 2007, 64.5 percent of entering students reported feeling "overwhelmed by all that they had to do" over a period of the past one year (American College Health Association; ACHA, 2008). Pritchard, Wilson, and Yamnitz (2007) noticed a comparable decline in physical and psychological health of college freshmen during their first year of college.

Sources of stress: A review of self-identified causes. In Furr et al.'s study (2001), college students identified academic, social, financial, and interpersonal problems as sources of their "depression." This section reviews some of the commonly cited sources of college student stress. Other questions addressed within this section include: How does stress affect college students? What stress coping mechanisms does the college student population adopt?

A number of research articles, books, and book chapters have dealt with the sources of college student stress (for example, Abouserie, 1994; Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, & Miller, 2009; Darling, McWey, Howard, & Olmstead, 2007; Dill & Henley, 1998; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Grayson, 1998; Hudd et al., 2000; Jackson & Finney, 2002; Misra & Castillo, 2004; Murff, 2005; Pritchard et al., 2007; Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999; Tyrrell, 1992).

Researchers have also investigated the impact of stress on college student health (for example, Darling et al., 2007; Hudd et al., 2000; MacKey, McKinney & Tavakoli, 2008; Oliver & Wardle, 1999) and stress management interventions (for example, Hale et al., 1990; Hudesman, Beck, & Smith, 1987; Rubin & Feeney, 1986; Somerville, Allen, Noble, & Sedgwick, 1984; Stevens & Pfost, 1984; Thomas & Scott, 1987). The wealth of research related to stress among college students and its management argues for both the presence and significance of the problem.

Due to the depth and breadth of research on the common sources of stress among college students, a comprehensive and recent literature review by Robotham (2008) is used as a guideline for the literature review. In Robotham's article, the areas of student life identified as antecedents to stress were: transition to college, academics, and financial

issues. Other areas reviewed include interpersonal relationships as a source of college student stress, effects of chronic stress on college students' mental health, and research on stress coping mechanisms used by college students.

Transition woes: First-year challenges. One milestone experienced early in the educational career of college students is the transition to college life. The extent of stress present during such a change is well-documented (Darling, McWey, Howard, & Olmstead, 2007; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Hudd et al., 2000; Lafreniere, Ledgerwood, & Docherty, 1997; Larson 2006; Robotham, 2008). Jackson and Finney's (2002) study supported the hypothesis that symptoms of depression and anxiety were related to the year in college (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). According to the authors, freshmen were more depressed than senior students were.

One of the reasons for the "transition" stress is the absence of familiar stress-buffering factors (Lafreniere et al., 1997), such as parents and close friends (Friedlander et al., 2007; Hudd et al., 2000). Furthermore, due to the contemporary overprotective style of parenting, today's college student may feel easily overwhelmed by the prospect of living independently (Young, 2003).

Lafreniere et al. (1997) noted that first-year college students experience stress due to the challenges associated with the novelty of the college experience and living an autonomous life. Embedded in this new lifestyle is the possibility of assuming new roles (Brougham et al., 2009) and responsibilities. Students in their first year at college may have to independently navigate the role of being roommates, dating partners, and possibly, leaders. College life may also require students to function in large groups (such

as, in class or student organizations). In sum, numerous things demand attention and psychological energy from first-year students. Some college students may navigate this new path effortlessly while others may have to stumble through it.

Considering the high levels of stress associated with the transition to college life, it may precipitate (Dyson & Renk, 2006) or exacerbate (Sax, 1997) psychological and physical symptoms. This is especially relevant given the data related to a large percentage of students developing psychological symptoms (such as depression) after the commencement of college life (Furr et al., 2001).

Striving for academic achievement. One of the purposes of seeking higher education is to graduate with a degree, which allows access to other privileges in life. It is not surprising, then, to find that academics is a source of significant stress for college students. Numerous researchers (Abouserie, 1994; Dill & Henley, 1998; Frazier & Schauben, 1994; Misra, McKean, West, & Russo, 2000; Tyrrell, 1992) have corroborated this finding.

Tyrrell (1992) conducted a longitudinal survey of 94 undergraduate psychology students during their four years at university. She consistently found academics as a major area of concern and stress for students. Main sources of stress included worries about being unable to keep pace with coursework, academic motivation issues, and students' high expectations related to their academic performance. Interestingly, Misra et al. (2000) found that students were more likely to experience academic stress due to pressure from external sources to excel versus self-imposed performance expectations. This may be due to the changing face of today's college student (the Millennial college

student) and the major influences in their lives (such as, parents, higher academic expectations, rising levels of materialism) discussed later in this document.

Abouserie (1994) reported findings similar to Tyrell's (1992) study. He administered the Life Stress Questionnaire to investigate the academic sources of stress in university college students. Almost 78 percent of student participants reported moderate levels of stress and 10 percent indicated high levels. Like Tyrrell's (1992) psychology students, participants in Abouserie's study were concerned about the course load and harbored great expectations about their academic performance. However, the chief source of academic-related stress was exams and their results. Similarly, exams seemed to precipitate stress among nontraditional students (Dill & Henley, 1998) and female college students (Frazier & Schauben, 1994).

Academic stress and mental health. Thirty-four percent of college students reported that stress had an adverse impact on their academic performance, while 18 percent reported feeling "depressed" (ACHA, 2008). Similar findings from the pilot study conducted by CSCMH (2009) underscored the reciprocal relationship between mental health and academic performance. The center collaborated with college counseling centers across the United States to collect information from 66 institutions about characteristics of students receiving mental health services (n=28,000) during the fall of 2008 semester. The findings are highly relevant for students who enter college with previous significant mental health concerns. Students who experienced symptoms of depression and anxiety reported poor academic performance. Moreover, those who had attempted suicide in the past were more likely to report a lower GPA than those who had never considered suicide.

For their latest annual report, the center, now called the Center for Collegiate

Mental Health (CCMH), compared data from the clinical sample of college students with

a random non-clinical sample of over 21,000 students from 46 campuses nationwide.

There were some interesting findings. For instance, three times as many students seeking

services at the counseling center had "seriously considered" suicide after joining college

than non-treatment seekers; 2 percent of treatment seekers reported a "prior suicide

attempt" compared to .4 percent of non-treatment seekers. This latest data attests to the

immense burdens of college students and the toll it takes on emotional health and well-

being. Therefore, universities need to pay careful attention to levels of academic stress

within their college student population.

Money troubles and stress. Another source of college student stress highlighted

in Robotham's (2008) review is finances. Financial stressors appear to be more relevant

for today's society given the current economic environment, high cost of education,

shortage of jobs, and a rising demand for advanced degrees from potential employers.

Considerable number of researchers who have examined financial hardships as a

potential cause of stress for college students (Abouserie, 1994; Frazier & Schauben,

1994; Jackson & Finney, 2002; Roberts et al., 2000; Tyrrell, 1992).

According to some researchers, financial concerns are secondary to academic

concerns (Abouserie, 1994; Frazier & Schauben, 1994) and others have found that

financial issues can significantly impact the psychological well-being of students

(Roberts et al., 2000). Nevertheless, a common finding among the above-mentioned

studies is the impact of financial hardships on the emotional well-being of college

students. According to ACHA statistics (2008), close to 28 percent of students work 20

hours or more each week (n=17, 327). Similarly, 22 percent of CSCMH pilot study's sample rated their *current* financial situation as "often stressful." Balancing work with school life can be a daunting task for students and can generate more stress for the already overwhelmed student

     Relationship stress. Some researchers have acknowledged relationship stress as a relevant source of college student stress (Dill & Henley, 1998; Jackson & Finney, 2002). However, evidence regarding the impact of relationships in the life of a college student appears mixed. As college students learn to navigate life independently, it exposes them to a wide array of interpersonal relationships including friendships and dating partners. Dill and Henley (1998) found that traditional students were more likely to experience stress from social and peer relationships than non-traditional students. Similarly, Jackson and Finney (2002) concluded that social relationships were responsible for a large share of distress among emerging adults. Brougham et al. (2009) found that female college students experienced more social and financial stress than did their male peers.

     Psychological impact of relationship stress. Numerous authors have explored the connection between relationship stress and psychological distress among college students. For example, in Frazier and Schauben's study (1994), 20 percent of the sample of college students identified relationship break-ups as "the most stressful" event in their life; academics and finances were secondary sources of stress. The authors found a positive correlation between such stressors and psychological symptoms. Female college students who reported more stressors in their interpersonal life were more likely to report a higher number of psychological symptoms (such as depression, anxiety) and changes in their belief systems about self and the world.

Relationship stress can also adversely affect academic performance. Edwards, Hershberger, Russell, and Markert (2001) found a direct relationship between peer group interactions, especially negative exchanges, and physical symptoms. Students with more negative peer interactions were likely to report more symptoms that were physical.

Conversely, Carrell, Fullerton, and West (2008) noted the positive effect of peers on academic performance, especially for first-year students. Other researchers have similarly highlighted stress-buffering effects of social support, especially for entering students (Friedlander et al., 2007). Initially, these students may have limited or no social support on campus (Misra et al., 2000), gradually building them as they adjust to the transition. Consequently, establishing social networks has a dual effect on freshmen students; it corresponds with a decrease in stress levels and enhances students' adjustment to college (Friedlander et al.).

Coping with stress. Developing healthy ways of coping with stress is especially important due to the link between life stress and psychological distress (Chang, 2001), especially with psychological problems such as anxiety and depression (Rawson Bloomer, & Kendall, 1994). The following research highlights how students cope with stress.

Ways of coping. Based on a cross-sectional survey of 294 students at a Midwestern university, Misra et al. (2000) found that the most common routes of coping with stress were emotional (such as depression, anxiety, fear, apprehension) and cognitive (reevaluation of the situation). Jackson and Finney (2002) noted that the differences in the patterns of coping with stress were contingent on the students' year in

college. Freshmen students were more likely to adopt maladaptive ways of coping such as avoidance, while senior students used more proactive ways of dealing with stress.

Both sets of authors speculate that one of the reasons for differential coping mechanisms may be developmental. As students progress through their college careers and move towards adulthood, they may be more likely to manage stress in a healthier way. It is also likely that seniors may have expanded their worldview and knowledge base regarding stress coping mechanisms since their initial years in college.

Stress perception and coping. Hudd et al. (2000) examined the effects of stress on health behaviors of college students attending an Ivy League institution. The authors found associations between perceived stress levels and health perceptions. Students with high stress levels adopted a skewed view about their health and consequently, were more susceptible to adopting less healthy behaviors. In other words, beliefs about one's compromised health status due to stress can further encourage individuals to engage in unhealthy behaviors.

Unhealthy coping. In her article, Cook (2007) discusses the numerous negative coping mechanisms observed among the college student population ranging from substance use and abuse to self-mutilating behaviors and excessive spending. The outcomes of such maladaptive coping methods can vary, and include consequences such as suicide and weight changes.

Not surprisingly, some methods are more likely to generate, rather than reduce, stress (Ross et al., 1999). Ross and colleagues found that changes in diet and sleep patterns, adopted initially to cope with ongoing stressors, tended to elicit more stress among thirty-eight percent of college undergraduates. Recent statistics corroborate Ross

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et al.'s findings. The ACHA's National College Health Assessment (2008) assesses the health status, problems, risks, and protective behaviors of college students (n=71,860). According to the latest ACHA statistics (n=18,223), 26 percent of college students reported that sleep difficulties interfered with their performance in academics and contributed to their existing stress levels.

Based on the adverse effects of unhealthy stress coping methods, it is imperative for college students to learn to manage their stress in healthy ways. Since a balanced perception of one's stress levels influences the methods chosen to combat stress, there is a need for a stress reduction method that gives students appropriate information about stress, mind-body connection and its role in stress perception, and how to respond to stress versus reacting to it.

Summary

The link between college life stressors, maladaptive coping and consequent health issues, and rising mental health statistics makes it necessary for universities to develop a stress-reduction program that provides college students with the life-skills necessary to confront stress and its negative effects. Some authors have echoed similar sentiments (for example, Misra and colleagues, 2000; Murff, 2005). Murff advocated teaching college students coping strategies that enables them to tackle stress with confidence rather than frustration. Misra et al. recommend educational institutions to develop programs that target the symptoms of stress, buffers students against the harmful stress effects, and makes them less likely to using unhealthy stress management behaviors.

Recently, mindfulness-based interventions have gained popularity among researchers and clinicians (Allen et al., 2006), especially regarding its efficacy in the area

of stress management. However, in order to develop a mindfulness group that adequately addresses the needs of today's college student, it is necessary to explore the face of today's college students.

Today's college students

What do today's college students look like? What are their dreams and aspirations? What role does stress play a role in their lives? This section attempts to capture the essence of today's college students while highlighting the sources of stress that maybe unique to the lifestyle of the contemporary generation (for example, cutthroat competition across all life domains, increased materialism, digital technology and hyperconnectivity).

There is widespread interest among researchers and authors about the current generation of college students and is evident from extant literature (for example, Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007, Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008; Twenge, 2007; Twenge & Campbell, 2008; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). However, there is a paucity of empirical research related to this topic. The data presented in this section of the review are from a wide array of sources including research articles, books, results from surveys conducted by non-profit organizations, and articles from popular magazines.

Forces that define the current generation. The socio-cultural forces preceding the current generation play a significant role in determining the nature and attitude of today's college student. A number of researchers have explored this area (for example, Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007, Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008) using new techniques (for example, Twenge, 2007; Twenge & Campbell, 2001; Twenge et al., 2008) and data points (Arnett, 2000; Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Howe and Strauss (2000, 2007) were one of the few early authors, who elaborated on generational differences. They proposed six birth-cohorts based on birth-year boundaries: the "Lost" generation (born 1883-1900); "G.I." generation (born 1901-1924); "Silent" (born 1925-1942); "Boom" generation (1942-1960); generation "X" (born 1961-1981); and finally the "Millennial" generation (1982-2002). They also investigated the psychological effects of generation-specific cultural and societal changes. In their book, "Millennials Rising" (2000), the authors linked an upsurge in divorce rates during Generation X to higher prevalence of cynicism, feelings of alienation and depression among its members. Further, the authors predicted that Millennials would be more dutiful, group-oriented, and anti-individualistic. However, the authors did not cite empirical data to validate their cause-effect statements (Twenge & Campbell, 2008).

Getting acquainted with the Millennial generation. The description of the Millennial generation as proposed by Howe and Strauss (2000, 2007) have attracted considerable attention within the field of generational research. One particular Howe and Strauss contribution, namely the seven characteristics of the Millennial generation, has drawn broad attention (DeBard, 2004; Fleschner, 2008; Howe & Strauss, 2007). The following section attempts to shed light on the psychological characteristics of the Millennial generation as discussed by Howe and Strauss (2000, 2007).

Lack of consensus. Howe and Strauss (2000, 2007) outlined the seven characteristics of the current generation; however, there some researchers have debated the presence of some of these generational differences (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, & Robins, 2009; Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2008; Twenge et al., 2008). Therefore, research presented in the next part of this document may sometimes appear

mixed, unconvincing and weak, embedded within broad generalizations and ambiguity, thus highlighting the immense potential for future research to clarify the existing picture.

Howe and Strauss (2000, 2007) define the Millennial generation to include persons born between 1982 to 2002. Other commentators broadly use dates between early 1980s to early 1990s inclusive for the Millennial generation. In addition to differing birth-year boundaries, several nicknames abound for the current generation, such as DotCom generation, NetGeneration, GenNext (Pew Research Center, 2007), iGen, "We Want It All" (Alsop, 2008), Generation Y, and Echo Boomers. In some way or another, most of the nicknames refer to the population surge or the technological developments that emerged during the childhood years of today's generation. For the purposes of simplicity, today's generation will be referred as the Millennial generation for the remainder of this document.

Seven unique features of the Millennial generation. The seven features of the Millennial generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007) that set them apart from their predecessors are outlined below.

Special. From childhood, members of the Millennial generation are constantly reminded about their importance in the lives of their parents and the nation's progress (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007). Such an environment may encourage Millennials to base their views about themselves on these messages and promote preoccupation with self. There is some initial evidence that supports this hypothesis.

Twenge et al. (2008) used time-lag analysis to study changes in narcissism between 1979 and 2006. The authors compared 86 samples of self-reported scores of college students on the 40-item, forced-choice version of the Narcissistic Personality

Inventory (NPI). Time-lag analysis allowed researchers to compare the NPI scores of students attending college in 1986 versus 1996 versus 2006. Results found a moderate-to-large effect size increase in the narcissism levels endorsed by the students in 2006 compared to those in the 1980s. In fact, the narcissism levels in the current college student sample were closer to those endorsed by celebrities. Twenge and colleagues explained their findings based on trend in contemporary society of individualism and an increased tendency to focus on oneself versus others. However, other lifestyle factors (for example, high level of competition and high premium on achievement) may also account for Millennials' blinkered approach to life.

Some researchers (e.g, Donnellan et al., 2009; Trzesniewski et al., 2008) have criticized Twenge et al.'s (2008) findings. According to their critics, Twenge et al. did not appropriately choose their method of data analysis, which limited the investigation and made many of their findings questionable. For example, it is not clear if the rise in NPI scores across generations was global and across all subscales of the NPI or only found on a few of them. Further, Twenge et al.'s conclusions appear validated through other studies conducted by the first author; their study is correlational in nature and limits the applicability of the results; besides, some of their results were in the small-to-medium effect size range. Lastly, critics indicated that Twenge et al.'s results should be interpreted with caution because the study examined self-reported data, which may be susceptible to social desirability bias.

Trzesniewski et al. (2008) criticized Twenge et al.'s (2008) methodology as a significant flaw. Use of convenience samples of college students, who comprise a mere 20 percent of the total population sample of the country's 18 to 24-year -olds

(Trzesniewski et al.) greatly limits the applicability of Twenge et al.'s findings to a larger youth population. Therefore, existing literature presents an unclear picture about how Millennials view themselves and is a need for future research to refine this area.

Sheltered. The second characteristic elaborates on the protective nature of the upbringing of Millennials. The current generation has grown up under the close supervision of their parents, buffered by rules and regulations, and is at-ease with safety rules and devices. In fact, rules and regulations lend security and structure in the lives of Millennials. From an early age, Millennials tend to lead structured and overly organized lives under the scrutiny of their overprotective parents. The sheltered lifestyle also allows for the ready availability and passionate involvement of parents' in every step of their life.

There is data testifying to increased parental involvement. Forty-one percent of freshmen students indicated that their parents' approval in their final choice of their future college was "somewhat important" (HERI, 2007). In The HERI Freshman Survey for the 2008 entering class, close to one-third of freshmen indicated that proximity of their college to home was a "somewhat important" factor in deciding to attend that particular college. Close to 47 percent reported that they went home for the weekend.

Therefore, parents continue to maintain their active presence in the life of today's college student. This new trend in parenting has led to the term "helicopter parents" to describe parents who pay close attention to the needs and problems of their children while they are attending college. Fleschner (2008) labels the Millennial offspring-parent relationship as "inappropriate attachment." In order to keep pace with the increasing parental involvement, some universities have delegated special staff, created websites and

newsletters for parents of new students, offered special workshops, and invited parents to become actively involved with university activities (for example, North Carolina State University, University of Denver, Davidson College Claremont McKenna College).

A sheltered lifestyle experienced by Millennials may have some adverse repercussions. It may make Millennials more cautious, and reluctant to take risks (Howe & Strauss, 2007). First-year students reported that when potential benefits were involved, they proceeded to "frequently" take a risk only 40 percent of the time (HERI, 2008). A sheltered and structured lifestyle coupled with active involvement of parents may make Millennials more accustomed to continued presence of authority figures at home, school and beyond. Therefore, members of the contemporary generation are described as being authority-friendly. Interestingly, Millennials tend to trust and rely on authority figures (Howe & Strauss) as much as Generation X distrusted them. This has some positive consequences in terms of the Millennials' attitude towards seeking mental health services at university counseling centers.

It appears that Millennials are equally comfortable with authority and challenging them. In his book, "Growing up Digital," Tapscott (1998) noted the willingness of youngsters to challenge authority and openly assert their rights. The current generation's easy access to digital information empowers them and encourages ready expression of their thoughts and ideas.

Confident. From a young age, Millennials have witnessed authority figures such as parents, teachers, and coaches being their most dedicated and passionate cheerleaders and extolling their various qualities, achievements, and efforts. This, coupled with messages about their importance, has inculcated a high level of confidence in Millennials

(Howe & Strauss, 2007). Some data supports this self-perception. Students are indeed confident about their ability to succeed in the academic arena (Sax, 2003).

In the HERI data (2008), 42 percent of freshmen students rated themselves as "above average" to peers on various tasks (for example, negotiating controversial topics and openly discussing their views). Further, 51 percent of freshmen rated themselves as "above average" to their peers on academic ability, while 41 percent self-reported as being "above average" in intellectual self-confidence.

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press is a non-partisan research organization that conducts surveys to gauge public opinions and outlook on current socio-cultural trends. According to the Center's survey (2007), 74 percent of 18 to 25-year-olds were highly confident of predicting the "best possible life" for themselves within the next five years.

A likely source of self-confidence in Millennials is technological progress (Tapscott, 1998). The current generation is more comfortable with technology than previous generations. Technology and the vast amounts of accessible knowledge are partially responsible for the current generation's high comfort level in being proactive and making bold decisions. According to Tapscott, the internet and other technology-related experiences contribute towards the development of healthy self-image and positive self-esteem. However, he does not cite any relevant psychological data to support his argument.

Team-oriented. Millennials enjoy working in teams. Almost a third of freshmen students indicated that they had "frequently" studied with other students over the past year (HERI, 2008).

Achieving. This characteristic is increasingly becoming a source of stress for today's college students. This characteristic of the Millennial generation is manifested in lifestyle attitudes and higher education settings and fostered by significant persons in their lives.

Education. The Alfred P. Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development is a national longitudinal study conducted over five years across 7000 students. The study found an upsurge in the ambitions of American adolescents with a corresponding increase in the number of high school graduates seeking college education (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Greater than 90 percent of graduating high school students had plans to continue education and more than 70 percent planned to seek professional employment. In contrast, forty years ago, the percentages were a low 55 percent and 42 percent respectively.

The achievement-oriented mindset of today's college students is evident from how college freshmen rate themselves against their peers. Over one-third of college freshmen placed themselves in the "highest 10 percent" in comparison to their peers on their "drive to achieve." In addition, 43.5 percent of freshmen "agreed" that there is a strong competition among students for high grades (HERI, 2008).

Further, the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) Program, that offers college-level courses to high school students, saw increased student enrollment in high school AP courses. In 2007, 24 percent of total high school graduates took an AP course sometime during this high school career versus 18 percent in the class of 2002 (The College Board, 2008). The percentage of students earning a grade of three (on a scale of one to five) on one or more AP exams during high school has risen steadily from 11.7

percent in 2002 to 14.7 percent in 2006 to 15.2 percent in 2007. Around one-fourth of first-year college students reported "A-" as their average grade in high school.

Millennials have come to accept high grades as a reflection of their achievement (DeBard, 2004). However, it is unclear whether the high grades and rise in the achievement streak among today's college students represents their true potential. Sixty-three percent of the freshmen sample indicated that they had "occasionally" turned in work that was not representative of their best effort (HERI, 2008).

Schneider and Stevenson (1999) explain that the high grades, or grade inflation, are more likely due to leniency in the evaluation standards of teachers rather than students excelling at their work. On the other hand, Fleschner (2008) attributes grade inflation to the rising acceptability of mediocrity and a growing trend to reward even the most mundane achievement. Alsop (2008) argues that today's parents frequently praise even the dreariest accomplishment of their child to promote the development of healthy self-esteem. Therefore, children born in the Millennial generation are generously praised by their parents over small efforts undertaken by them, irrespective of the outcome, and mainly to avoid harming their confidence.

Achievement and perceived environmental threat. Twenge (2000) noted increased perceived environmental threat levels in today's society. Alsop (2008) observed that competition seems to be present even among peer relationships of today's college student. With ambitions higher than ever before, limited availability of resources, and a passionate drive to succeed, friends may compete with one another for the same jobs and positions, which may raise perceptions of threat within their immediate surroundings. The confusion and stress from the interpersonal world may overwhelm the already

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overburdened college student. Constantly under intense academic pressure and relationship concerns, stress and other psychological problems appear to be natural progression (Alsop) for the Millennial college student.

Materialism. In today's age of acquisition, there is a palpable rise in materialism among today's students (Astin, 2000). Today's generation is setting new limits on what constitutes basic amenities. Access to the internet is no longer considered a luxury and the laptop is as essential for the Millennial college student as the television was for homes in the 1980s.

The materialistic bent of mind is also evident from various public surveys. The Pew Research Center's survey of 1501 adults, including 579 people aged 18 to 25 years, indicated that "getting rich" was the primary goal of 64 percent of Generation Next (Pew Research Center, 2007). Other important life goals included fortune and fame (41 percent); 50 percent of Gen Nexters/Millennials believe that their fellow members place a high premium on fame. The survey does not elaborate on their findings. It is likely that the Millennials' emphasis on financial success may be due to the debt accrued for high educational costs. Interestingly, Twenge et al. (2008) linked the rise in materialism as one of the socio-cultural correlates of increased scores on the NPI among college students.

Parental role. Parents of the Millennial generation tend to encourage their adolescent children in their pursuit of higher education. The enthusiastic support extended along with a high degree of parental involvement and pressure may significantly shape Millennials' attitude towards achievement.

College admissions. The uniform rise in grades across the country has transformed college admissions into competitive admissions. Higher cut-off scores for

college entry make it challenging for qualified candidates to get admitted into colleges of their choice leading them to raise the bar higher with their high school and extracurricular performances.

Pressured. A particularly evident characteristic of the Millennial generation is the intense level of pressure experienced by them. Cutthroat academic competition adds a high level of pressure on the shoulders of emerging adults. Alsop (2008) notes that the pressure extends to non-academic areas such as sports, choice of hobbies, community work, and volunteer activities, all in a concentrated effort to create a unique portfolio for college admissions. Beginning in childhood, a high level of activity maintained through a steady stream of activities and busy schedules keeps Millennials in the high-pressure zone constantly.

Conventional. Millennials are more comfortable and welcoming of rules, structure, customs, and traditions than their parents. The current generation appears very open to these norms, hoping to shape them as per their needs, desires, and wants (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007).

In conclusion, the seven characteristics and other related findings portray the Millennials as ambitious, confident, and authority-dependent. However, this does not reflect the complete picture of the current generation.

Millennial generation and mental health. Investigating the "darker" side of the Millennial generation, Twenge (2000) found an increase in trait anxiety levels by one standard deviation from 1952 to 1993. She attributed the shift in anxiety scores to recent socio-cultural changes such as low social connectedness and high threat levels. According to Twenge, higher prevalence of individualism and greater emphasis on

autonomy leads people to drift away from one another resulting in lower social connectivity and higher anxiety levels.

Locus of control. Twenge et al. (2004) found an increase in the external locus of control among students attending college in 2002. On average, college students in 2002 leaned more towards externality than 80 percent of college students in the early 1960s. Twenge and colleagues speculated that a trend towards individualism and alienation from others could account for these findings. Nevertheless, given the relationship of higher externality to poorer health outcomes (such as depression, anxiety, inadequate stress management), Twenge et al.'s findings do not bode good news for the rising stars of the Millennial generation.

Additionally, Millennials' rising narcissism levels (Twenge et al., 2008), perpetuated by increased distancing from others, may foster a deeper focus on the self. An intense focus on the self could make people sensitive to their achievements and failures. Such scrutiny in a generation that places a high premium on accomplishments and success could increase members' vulnerability of developing internalized disorders. In 2004, Northwestern Mutual's survey of individuals in their early 20s indicated a sharp rise in anxiety levels (Alsop, 2008).

Mental health statistics and the Millennial generation. Contrary to recent statistics, Howe and Strauss (2007) believe that the prevalence of mental health problems is lower among Millennials compared to their predecessors. The authors argue that increased numbers of college students seeking help at counseling centers do not necessarily attest to higher prevalence of mental health concerns. Instead, the rising numbers at university counseling centers indicate the current generation's open attitude

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about addressing issues related to wellness and emotional health (Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003) Millennials' unique parenting environments render them more malleable to adult intervention and guidance. Once again, Howe and Strauss do not cite any relevant empirical data to support their arguments. Even so, the explanation resonates with an earlier observation of Tapscott's (1998) about Millennial generation's openness to broach uncomfortable topics.

Nonetheless, what remains unanswered is whether there is a legitimate rise in mental health concerns among today's contemporary population or do rising numbers reflect increased comfort about discussing what were previously considered taboo topics, or do both viewpoints match the experiences of the Millennial generation? Benton et al. (2003) investigated the significant changes in client problems from 1988 to 2001. Beginning 1994, they found a rise in the frequency of stress/anxiety problems reported by college students seeking services at university counseling centers. Another category of client problem areas that saw a steady and linear increase across the years was academic skills. The authors concluded that client problems were significantly more complex in recent times, including a two-fold increase in student depression and three-fold in student suicidal reports.

Summary

In conclusion, the literature review thus far provides initial evidence that the lifestyle of today's college generation is noticeably different from past generations. Current socio-cultural shifts are geared towards generating a more stressful and hyper-connected life, with little room for "switching-off." Nevertheless, it is important to have

moments to recharge, moments that help one to regain the physical and psychological energies expended during course of the day or week.

Given the omnipresent nature of stress in today's world, a stress-reduction program with psycho-education or skill-based focus may not suffice. Instead, a program that targets stress-related symptoms and provides a life philosophy that shapes one's outlook towards life may be more suited for the Millennial college student. Acquiring lifelong skills and philosophy to buffer one during stressful and calmer moments would appear to be a more robust option. Such a program may be more effective because it will help young adults to re-perceive and redefine their challenges and feel equipped to confront stressors within and beyond college life.

A more fitting approach for targeting stress-reduction goals for today's college students is mindfulness. Mindfulness practice has numerous benefits, one of which is personal growth and enhancement (Brown et al., 2007). Also, there is initial evidence about the positive effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on stress-related outcomes (Baer, 2003; Brown et al.) and are explored in the next part of the literature review.

Mindfulness and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Growing popularity of mindfulness. Mindfulness is a core concept in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program (MBSR) (Brown et al., 2007). Mindfulness-based interventions have attracted the attention of researchers and clinicians alike since its introduction to the field of psychology and clinical practice. While the Eastern parts of the world have long been privy to mindfulness, it is a concept that exponentially bloomed into western thought and consciousness after 1990 with the

mainstream release of Kabat-Zinn's book, Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness.

Today, it is quite common for clinical practitioners to assimilate mindfulness techniques in their treatment approaches with clients (Allen et al., 2006; Baer, 2003). The popularity of mindfulness is particularly evident from the ubiquity of term "mindful" in daily language vocabulary. In sum, mindfulness and mindfulness-based interventions are rousing great interest within the general population and in professional circles.

The legacy of MBSR. In 1979, when Kabat-Zinn and colleagues started an outpatient intervention that integrated Eastern philosophy into Western medicine, called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), little did they anticipate or predict the status and interest in mindfulness-based interventions as it stands today. The introduction of MBSR into Western psychology set into motion the evolutionary process for other mindfulness-based interventions, three of which will be briefly discussed here.

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1993), and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993) are part of a group of new-wave therapies or the "third wave of behavior therapies" that have emerged over the last few decades. All three interventions emphasize mindfulness (Brown et al., 2007) and fit under the current conceptualizations of mindfulness (Chiesa, Calati, & Serritti, 2010), albeit to varying degrees. In the MBSR and MBCT programs, mindfulness forms a large part of the focus; while, both ACT and DBT only partially include formal meditation training in their programs.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). Originally designed as an intervention for

para-suicidal behavior among individuals diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder

(BPD) (Linehan, 1993), DBT, today, is a manualized intervention consisting of weekly

individual therapy, group skills training, and telephone consultations. The typical

duration for the standard intervention is one year (Linehan, Armstrong, Suarez, Allmon,

& Heard, 1991). Mindfulness plays an important role in the group skills training module

of DBT. Through mindfulness exercises, group members experientially learn to ground

themselves in the present moment, regulate attention, and adopt a nonjudgmental attitude

towards their experiences.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Rooted in functional

contextualism (Biglan & Hayes, 1996; Hayes, 1993) and Relational Frame Theory, ACT

conceptualizes experiential avoidance, cognitive enmeshment, and behavioral rigidity as

fundamental psychological processes in perpetuating psychological suffering. The core

principles of ACT, such as cognitive defusion, acceptance, and staying in the present

moment, seek to mitigate the harmful effects of these processes. Using cognitive

defusion, ACT attenuates the role of human cognition, brings individuals closer to their

experiences (versus experiential avoidance), and fosters greater acceptance of self

("psychological acceptance"). Psychological flexibility is enhanced using formal

mindfulness practices assigned as homework. In sum, behavioral change is targeted

through a combination of mindfulness and acceptance processes and change and

commitment processes. Although ACT is a comprehensive and manualized intervention,

there is no standard length for the intervention; studies have utilized the intervention for

varying lengths, from 48 sessions over 16 weeks to 4 sessions over 3 weeks (Hayes,

Pankey, Gifford, Batten, & Quiñones, 2002).

   Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). MBCT, developed by Segal,

Williams, and Teasdale (2002), is a manualized intervention designed to prevent relapse

of clinical depression. Across eight weeks, individuals are taught formal mindfulness

practices to be used in recognizing the automaticity of the thought, emotions, and

behaviors underlying the symptomatology of the depressive episodes, and employ other

cognitive-behavioral strategies to break the habitual pattern.

   Defining mindfulness. Due to the scope of this dissertation, it is necessary to

explore a few pertinent questions related to mindfulness: First, what is mindfulness?

Second, what are the psychological mechanisms involved in mindfulness? What does

existing research evidence say about these interventions, particularly MBSR? Do they

benefit the practitioner and how?

   There is an apparent lack of consensus in current research about the definition of

mindfulness (Bishop 2002; Hayes & Shenk, 2004; Kostanski & Hassed, 2008; Singh,

Lancioni, Wahler, Winton, & Singh, 2008). Therefore, for the purpose of uniformity, this

dissertation adopts the definition proposed by Kabat-Zinn (1990) since the goal of the

current dissertation is more aligned with his definition than other existing ones (for

example, Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown et al., 2007).

   According to Kabat-Zinn (2003), mindfulness is "the awareness that emerges

through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the

unfolding of experience moment by moment" (p.145). Therefore, he conceptualizes

mindfulness as a deliberate and non-evaluative acknowledgement of one's internal and

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external experiences as they continue to unfold in the present moment. The core aspects highlighted in the definition such as awareness, non-judgmental attitude, and acceptance of one's experience are closely related to the mechanisms of mindfulness according to some researchers (Bishop et al., 2004; Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006).

Mechanisms behind mindfulness. Some researchers have explored the mechanisms of mindfulness and outlined models of mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004; Shapiro et al., 2006). Interestingly, there are points of convergence between the Bishop et al. and Shapiro et al.'s models and the core features discussed in Kabat-Zinn's definition (1990), such as awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of one's experience. An in-depth review of the current literature indicates that these features may foster some of the positive outcomes of mindfulness (for example, reduction in stress, increased empathy, and improved interpersonal relations).

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR).

Kabat-Zinn's program. The MBSR program was initially developed at the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in 1979 by Kabat-Zinn and colleagues. It was offered originally as a hospital outpatient program, and primarily catering to persons with chronic medical and psychological illnesses. Today, it is a manualized intervention widely applied to various clinical (for example, breast cancer, HIV) and non-clinical problems (such as, stress reduction among health professionals, students) (Carlson, Speca, Patel, & Goodey, 2003; Creswell, Myers, Cole, & Irwin, 2009; Kieviet-Stijnen, Visser, Garssen, & Hudig, 2008; Witek-Janusek et al., 2008; Rosenzweig, Reibel, Greeson, Brainard, & Hojat, 2003; Shapiro et al., 1998). Recent meta-analytic studies have found evidence for the benefits of mindfulness

(Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004) and mindfulness-based interventions (Baer, 2003) across a wide range of chronic illnesses and health problems.

The current dissertation endeavors to use the MBSR curriculum, outlined in *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) as a foundation for the proposed mindfulness group for the Millennial college student population. A substantial number of research studies have followed Kabat-Zinn's format (1990), in whole or in part (for example, Neff et al., 2007; Shapiro, Astin, Bishop, & Cordova, 2005; Shapiro et al., 1998). In fact, over the years, the names of MBSR and Kabat-Zinn have become synonymous.

Description of the MBSR program. The MBSR program has evolved since its inception in 1979; currently, it spans over eight weeks, each session two-and-a-half hours in duration, and a six-hour full-day class on a weekend during the sixth week. The total class time spent by participating members across eight weeks is estimated to be 26 hours (Carmody & Baer, 2009). During most of the eight classes, instructors introduce new meditative practices.

Practices in the MBSR program. The MBSR program emphasizes attending to the breath as a foundation for subsequent practices. Kabat-Zinn (1990) oftentimes refers to the breath as an "anchor," used to deepen focus and a base for redirection of attention. He succinctly captures the essence of the breath with the following statement: "As long as you are breathing, there is more right with you than wrong" (p. 145). Being mindful of the breath ultimately changes our relationship with it and regulation of the breath during distressing moments can help re-perceive the situation. Mindful breathing, as a stand-

alone practice, can be utilized for generating a calm attitude and sharpening awareness about one's physical surroundings, bodily sensations, and psychological states.

The meditative practices in MBSR are introduced in-class, generally by a trained instructor. The program generally begins with the body scan meditation, which involves bringing awareness to physical sensations in various parts and muscle groups of the body beginning from the toes continuing upward to the head; it lasts for 45 minutes. Another practice is the sitting meditation, which is a focal point of MBSR training. Here, participants generally assume a sitting stance and non-judgmentally observe the flow of their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. They are instructed to gently guide their attention to the breath when they recognize that their attention has wandered.

The program also includes hatha yoga exercises, introduced in two sequences, one session apart. The first set of exercises involves members assuming prone and supine positions, with the start and finish poses asking them to lie on their backs (the corpse pose); standing exercises are introduced during the second set of yoga exercises. Members also practice walking meditation, a meditative practice geared towards focusing members' attention on the art of walking. Attention is directed towards various body parts that are involved in walking, especially the lower body.

Midway in the program, members participate in a full-day session. The session, conducted on a weekend, involves six hours of silent practice of mindfulness through exercises introduced thus far. Members refrain from any verbal and non-verbal communication and practice the lovingkindness meditation. This meditative practice involves evoking feelings of kindness, compassion, love, and goodwill towards self and

others. In the last two sessions of the program, members work towards deepening their practice while independently guiding themselves through the practices.

The body scan, sitting meditation, and Hatha Yoga are considered the key components (Salmon, Lush, Jablonski, & Sephton, 2009) of the program, and all practices collectively work towards promoting and enhancing mindfulness (Bishop, 2002). Group members are encouraged to practice the formal meditation exercises outside class sessions for 45 minutes to an hour. Additionally, members are encouraged to extend practice of mindfulness into their daily activities (informal practice) such as washing dishes, brushing teeth. The program is rigorous on time and adherence.

Research on mindfulness and mindfulness-based interventions. A number of researchers have found favorable outcomes related to mindfulness meditation (for example, Arch & Craske, 2006; Beitel, Ferrer, & Cecero, 2005; Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan, & Orsillo, 2007; Chambers, Lo, & Allen, 2008; Coffey & Hartman, 2008; Dekeyser, Raes, Leijssen, Leysen, & Dewulf, 2008; Frewen, Evans, Maraj, Dozois, & Partridge, 2008; Hamilton, Kitzman, & Guyotte, 2006; Moore & Malinowski, 2009; Neff et al., 2007; Ortner, Kilner, & Zelazo, 2007; Ostafin, Chawla, Bowen, Dillworth, Witikiewitz, & Marlatt, 2006; Schreiner & Malcolm, 2008; Weinstein, Brown, & Ryan, 2009). The benefits associated with mindfulness meditation have been validated across diverse non-clinical populations including undergraduate students, parents, couples, healthcare professionals, novice meditators, and long-term mindfulness meditation practitioners.

In the studies reviewed below, researchers primarily employed two procedural methods during their studies – experiential versus self-report; some studies used both

methods. Some researchers collected data from participants after they underwent a mindfulness meditation or the MBSR program; others based their results from participants' self-report on standardized mindfulness questionnaires.

Mindfulness and mental health outcomes. Astin (1997) used a randomized wait-list controlled study design to explore the effects of mindfulness on students' psychological functioning. Twenty-eight undergraduate participants underwent the eight-week MBSR program and self-reported on the Hopkins Symptoms Checklist Revised (SCL-90-R) before and after completion of the program. Results revealed significant benefits for the experimental group over the control group. The treatment group evidenced positive changes in overall psychological functioning, maintained over a period of six-nine months following the completion of the program.

Treatment group participants of Astin's (1997) study reported changes in their overall sense of control and were more likely to develop an accepting attitude towards the level of control in their lives. This finding about mindfulness' relationship with satisfaction with level of control in life may have important ramifications for college students. Students often face uncontrollable barriers and frustrations during their college careers and social life, and today's college students are more inclined towards an external locus of control. Thus, feeling inadequate about the control in one's life may make the vulnerable college student susceptible to various psychological problems or disorders. Conversely, cultivating acceptance of life events may help stressed college students to perceive them differently and shape their reactions to them. Therefore, mindfulness practice may help with reducing stress levels, along with fostering personal growth and

enhancement (Brown et al., 2007) which may help the individual to sustain and

continually reap the benefits of MBSR for a longer time.

Objective data obtained from participants' responses on the SCL-90-R in Astin's

study (1997) further validated the beneficial effects of MBSR on psychological

symptoms. The treatment group's scores on the General Symptom Index (GSI) of the

SCL-90-R were significantly lower on subscales for depression, anxiety, obsessive-

compulsive symptoms, interpersonal sensitivity, psychoticism, and paranoid ideation than

the control group. Astin ascribed these changes to mechanisms of mindfulness of

cultivating an active awareness and detached observation of one's experience.

Negative emotions, psychological distress, and MBSR. Hamilton et al. (2006)

speculated that the mechanisms of mindfulness change the way in which individuals

process stressful and distressing situations. The authors suggested that mindfulness

practice shifts the information-processing patterns involved with difficult or negative

feeling states occurs, consequently engaging individuals to approach them differently.

There is empirical evidence that mindfulness changes the way individuals experience

their emotions (Teasdale, et al., 2002; Williams, Teasdale, Segal, & Soulsby, 2000) and

negative thoughts (Frewen et al., 2008).

Schreiner and Malcolm (2008) studied the effects of mindfulness on depression,

anxiety and stress in a community sample of 43 participants. The authors found a

reduction in participant levels of the above-stated affective states. They found that those

who experienced a higher intensity level of these symptoms benefitted greatly from the

program compared to those who reported a moderate intensity level. Schreiner and

Malcolm attributed the results to changes in participants' awareness of their experience

and a non-judgmental stance towards it, even when it consisted of distressing thoughts and feelings. In other words, the investigators noted that the two main components of mindfulness changed participant approach towards their overall experience and distress.

There is additional evidence for the negative relationship between mindfulness and psychological distress. In Carmody, Reed, Kristeller, and Merriam's (2008) study, participants were evaluated pre- and post-intervention on a variety of measures, including state and trait mindfulness and psychological distress. Following eight weeks of MBSR, 44 participants reported changes in their levels of psychological distress as measured through the SCL-90-R, especially on the GSI and the anxiety and depression subscales. This study's result is relevant to the student population even with differences between the study's sample and the general college student population. There are several common characteristics between the study's sample resemble the college demographic such as increased problem severity, and existence of prior mental health issues. Therefore, Carmody et al.'s study highlights mindfulness' immense potential as a viable mode of helping the current college population to cope with their high levels of stress, depression, and anxiety. Similarly, in Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, and Flinders' study (2008), MBSR reduced stress and augmented forgiveness in the experimental group versus the control group.

Mechanisms of mindfulness and emotion management. Coffey and Hartman (2008) used a general college student sample to examine what they conceptualized as the three mechanisms of mindfulness: emotion regulation, nonattachment, and reduced rumination. The authors hypothesized that developing mindfulness skills would control negative affect and enhance understanding about the independent relationship between

the state of happiness and external events (nonattachment). The investigators found

evidence for the direct associations between their three components of mindfulness. The

ability to regulate one's emotions enhanced the understanding that external forces do not

control one's happiness. A non-judgmental stance towards one's experience fosters

objective observation of it and the need not to label it. Such a stance helps with emotion

regulation, especially difficult emotions, and breaks the repetitive cycle of critical

thoughts (rumination). Information about the interconnection between nonattachment,

emotion management, and rumination may appeal to college students struggling with

negative feelings associated with their stressors.

Compassion and MBSR. Shapiro et al.'s (1998) results about an increase in

empathy following attendance in an MBSR program have been validated in other student

populations (for example, prehealth students, Jain, Shapiro, Swanick, Bell, & Schwartz,

2004; and health care professionals, Shapiro et al., 2005).

Shapiro et al. (2005) used a randomized controlled study design to examine the

positive effects (for example, self-compassion levels) of MBSR on indicators of well-

being (such as stress and burnout levels). The sample consisted of healthcare

professionals actively involved in clinical work. The researchers used the lovingkindness

meditation to foster participants' compassion towards self and others. As hypothesized,

the experimental group reported reduction of stress levels and enhanced self-compassion

compared to the control group.

Neff et al. (2007) empirically validated the benefits of self-compassion in a

sample of college undergraduates, and found links between self-compassion and positive

psychological functioning. Positive mental health and well-being was directly related to

engaging in self-compassion for a short period. The researchers enhanced their findings in a subsequent study (Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007). This time, using a sample of 177 college undergraduates, Neff et al. investigated the connection between self-compassion, personality dimensions, and psychological well-being. Based on results of their correlational study, the researchers concluded that self-compassion has a significant positive association to various self-reported measures such as happiness, optimism, positive affect, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Conversely, they found an inverse relationship between compassion and negative affect and neuroticism. Therefore, initial research seems to suggest that compassion plays a significant role in emotional well-being, and practices that foster the compassion sentiment may benefit the practitioner.

Exam stress and MBSR. Conceivably the ecological validity of MBSR is enhanced when its effects are measured during an on-going stressful event. From research discussed earlier, exams are a source of stress for college students (Abouserie, 1994; Dill & Henley, 1998; Frazier & Schauben, 1994). Using a randomized control trial format, Shapiro et al. (1998) investigated the short-term effects of MBSR on premedical and medical students. To test the robust nature of the program's effects, post-intervention measures were administered around the exam period of students. As per the study's results, mindfulness successfully passed the test.

Like Astin's study (1997), the experimental group of Shapiro et al. (1998) noted lower scores on the GSI of the SCL-90-R at post-intervention. There were statistically significant reductions in the treatment group's scores on the depression subscale and state anxiety compared to the control group (Shapiro et al.). Moreover, the student participants reported decreased levels of psychological distress and increased empathy levels.

Furthermore, the above noted changes continued during exam time and duplicated in the wait-list control group.

Healthy coping and mindfulness. Research discussed earlier in the present document indicated college students' susceptibility towards unhealthy and inappropriate coping mechanisms during stressful situations, especially freshmen.

Palmer and Rodger (2009) investigated the effect of mindfulness on coping styles and stress levels of first-year university students. There was a direct correlation between rational coping and mindfulness, and an indirect correlation between mindfulness and avoidant and emotional coping and perceived stress (Palmer & Rodger). The study's findings underscore the significance of mindfulness-based interventions for this segment of the college student population.

Similarly, Weinstein et al. (2009) found evidence for the increased likelihood of mindful college students adopting more appropriate coping techniques and a decreased frequency in their use of avoidant coping methods. Additionally, across three of the four studies conducted on a college student sample, the authors found consistent evidence for an inverse relationship between stress perception and mindfulness. When mindful, students were less likely to get overwhelmed due to stress. When confronted with demanding and stressful situations, mindful college students were more likely to engage in adaptive coping and reduced their use of avoidant coping strategies. Weinstein et al. also found that higher levels of mindfulness were negatively associated with avoidance coping during exam times. Therefore, mindfulness can help students to manage stress in healthier ways during exam times.

Interpersonal relationships and mindfulness. The significance of interpersonal stress faced by college students amidst the chaos of college life has been highlighted earlier in the literature review. Young adults may feel more capable of managing stress emanating from relationships when they have an awareness and knowledge about their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In other words, psychological mindedness and awareness of internal experiences may prove useful for college students in navigating interpersonal stressors. Beitel et al.'s study (2005) used an undergraduate sample of 103 students and discovered a connection between mindfulness and psychological mindedness.

The link between mindfulness and psychological mindedness is evident in Kabat-Zinn's (1990) definition - a moment-to-moment awareness of one's experience may raise one's knowledge about internal experiences and promote psychological mindedness. Augmentation of individuals' self-awareness through mindfulness can enrich interpersonal relationships. The intrapersonal-interpersonal connection was explored in Dekseyer et al.'s (2008) study.

Dekeyser et al. (2008) were interested in replicating and extending Beitel et al.'s (2005) results into the interpersonal domain. They explored the association between mindfulness and interpersonal relationships in a sample of college students and their parents. The researchers used various scales (for example, Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills, Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004; Toronto Alexithymia Scale, Bagby, Parker, & Taylor, 1994 a & b) for their data collection.

Like Beitel et al. (2005), Dekeyser et al. (2008) found that mindful individuals were better at managing distressing interpersonal situations. Moreover, such individuals

were less anxious in social situations and more perceptive towards their feelings. Block-Lerner et al. (2007) had found similar findings. The authors found evidence for the link between mindfulness skills and interpersonal relationships. Hence, cultivating the ability to stay focused combined with a detached awareness of the present moment can positively influence interactions with others.

The above findings about mindfulness skills and interpersonal behavior are noteworthy for the college student who is independently managing various interpersonal relationships. Cultivating mindfulness skills may provide the novice college student with tools for use during difficult interpersonal interactions.

Neurobiological and neuropsychological findings on mindfulness meditation. Researchers investigating the biological and clinical concomitants of mindfulness meditation have found increasing evidence about the short- and long-term changes occurring among mindfulness meditators (Cahn & Polich, 2006) and about clinical outcomes in healthy subjects, and physical, mental illnesses related to such practices (Bishop, 2002, Grossman et al. 2004, Coelho, Canter, & Ernst, 2007).

Chiesa and Serritti (2010) conducted a systematic review of extant research on the neurobiological modifications and clinical benefits related to mindfulness meditation practice in psychiatric and physical illnesses, and in healthy individuals. In their review, 52, English language, controlled and cross-sectional studies published up to 2008 were included.

In their review, Chiesa and Serritti (2010) found neurobiological findings that suggested that mindfulness meditation practices were associated with changes in the activation of specific brain areas. A large proportion of studies included in the review

focused on state changes in the brain; most notably, in the prefrontal (PFC) and the anterior cingulate cortex, and an increase in alpha and theta EEG activity, a pattern usually associated with both meditation and relaxation (Cahn & Polich, 2006).

There is some initial evidence on the benefits of practicing mindfulness meditation on a long-term basis (Chiesa & Serritti, 2010). Some studies have found an association between long-term meditation practice and an enhancement of cerebral areas related to attention.

Mindfulness and attention/cognitive processes. Apart from enhancing individuals' skills in managing distressing emotions and internal states, there is some research on the relationship between mindfulness-based interventions and attentional control (Anderson, Lau, Segal, & Bishop, 2007; Chambers et al., 2008; Jha, Krompinger, & Baime, 2007).

Chiesa et al. (2011) reviewed English language studies published up to 2010 to investigate the effects of mindfulness meditation practices on objective measures of cognitive functions, such as attention, memory and executive functions. In their review, they included eight controlled, seven randomized controlled, and eight case-control studies.

In their review, Chiesa et al. (2011) found preliminary support for their hypothesis that even an eight-week meditation program or a short-term intensive retreat could enhance sustained, and particularly selective and executive attention in addition to attention switching in novice meditators.

Chambers et al. (2008) compared a non-clinical group of 20 novice meditators on affective and cognitive outcomes. Data was collected prior to beginning a mindfulness

meditation program and seven to ten days after its conclusion. Participants experienced improvements in sustained attention and working memory capacity, in addition to a reduction in their depressive symptoms, rumination, and negative affect levels. Evidence of augmented cognitive skills following mindfulness meditation becomes important for college students' academic career. Essentially, Chambers et al.'s (2008) study points towards the short-term benefits involved for beginner meditators indicating that mindfulness' benefits accrues across various expertise levels.

In contrast, Anderson et al. (2007) found no relationship between mindfulness and basic attention measures. Instead, the researchers found an enhancement of the attention paid to the present moment, and suggests benefits for college students.

Further, Chiesa et al. (2010) proposed that differential benefits are associated with the early and later phases of mindfulness training. During the early phases of mindfulness training, there is an emphasis on the development of focused attention and significant improvements in selective and executive attention. The later stages, when practitioners focus on openly monitoring their internal and external stimuli, could be mainly associated with improved unfocused sustained attention abilities.

Long-term attentional effects of mindfulness meditation. There is a significant positive relationship between meditation experience, defined either as meditation minutes/day (for example, Chan & Woollacott, 2007) or as the total amount of meditation practice (for example, Valentine & Sweet, 1999), and enhanced cognitive abilities and brain structural changes (Pagnoni & Cekic, 2007). Reviewed studies showed that long-term practitioners of mindfulness meditation showed further improvements on attentional measures and developed unfocused sustained attention characterized by a more

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distributed attentional focus compared with the early stages of practice. Further, long-term meditators were found to have significantly higher attentional abilities as compared with matched controls on different domains of attention. Such findings provide preliminary evidence for the development of unfocused sustained attention because of long-term mindfulness/open monitoring training. Greater experience with mindfulness meditation could be related to higher ability of self-induced deep relaxation (Chiesa & Serritti, 2010).

Working memory. In their review, Chiesa et al. (2011) found preliminary evidence that suggests that mindfulness meditation practices could be associated with enhanced working memory capacity and prevent loss of working memory abilities prior to exposure to stressful stimuli.

Executive functioning. In their reviewed studies, Chiesa et al. (2011) found initial evidence on the effects of mindfulness meditation practice on executive functioning. Mindfulness training enhances executive functions, including verbal fluency and inhibition of cognitive responses, in addition to further cognitive measures, such as meta-awareness and emotional interference from distracting stimuli. However, such findings should be interpreted cautiously and merit further investigation.

ADHD and mindfulness. In their study, Zylowska et al. (2008) found that mindfulness meditation yielded significant psychological benefits and enhanced cognitive abilities in adults and adolescents with ADHD following mindfulness training, suggesting possible cognitive benefits deriving from mindfulness training in persons with impaired attention.

Combining various findings on enhancement of psychological and cognitive processes through mindfulness practice, it is likely that wakefulness to the present moment combined with greater inner awareness can help Millennial college students to implement appropriate coping mechanisms stemming from deeper knowledge about their internal experience and external surroundings.

Research on brief models of Kabat-Zinn's MBSR program. Some of the research highlighted in the previous section has used modified versions of Kabat-Zinn's (1990) program. Observing the high prevalence of published studies that have adapted MBSR, Carmody and Baer (2009) sought to explore the efficacy of briefer MBSR programs on various outcome measures of psychological distress. The authors analyzed published studies using MBSR and did not find any relationship between the number of class hours and effect sizes for measures of psychological distress. Neither did they find any evidence indicating that briefer versions were less effective than the standard version. Therefore, based on their conclusions, it appears that a change in duration of the MBSR program does not reduce its impact on participant distress variables.

"Group" effects of mindfulness-based interventions. While there is abundant outcome research on group-based mindfulness interventions, there is very limited research on the group's role or contribution to the outcomes. Within-group dependency, a methodological issue affecting group therapy research, refers to the correlation between observations of members belonging to the same group because of group members' influence on each other. While some argue that within-group dependency is evidence that group therapy is fulfilling one of its purposes, others view it as a Type I error; portraying significant differences in group therapy outcomes when none exist (Burlingame, 2010).

Does within-group dependency apply to mindfulness-based groups? How much of the outcomes of a mindfulness groups are an artifact of mindfulness training and how much is determined by "therapeutic factors" of group therapy (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 1). Imel, Baldwin, Bonus, and Maccoon (2008) attempted to answer some of these questions.

Imel et al. (2008) investigated the group's role in a effecting changes in members' psychological and medical symptoms. The authors used archival data consisting of 606 adults in 59 groups who attended the traditional 8-week mindfulness group. Interestingly, the researchers concluded that group was responsible for seven percent change in the psychological symptoms reported by members versus no change in medical symptoms. Imel et al. also speculated that the results evolved from being part of group, which facilitated member learning and practice of mindfulness techniques, and other factors directly unrelated to mindfulness but deeply tied to group psychotherapy such as group cohesion, instillation of hope; Yalom referred to these as "therapeutic factors" (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 1).

In group-based mindfulness interventions, it is likely that group participation is a significant contributor towards the outcomes. However, there is no significant supportive evidence available yet in this research area. Therefore, research needs to broaden the scope of inquiry on group-based mindfulness interventions to explore and harness legitimate treatment variables that may potentially benefit individual group members and the group as a whole.

Allied and potentially beneficial movement-based practices. Since the Hatha Yoga practices included in the handbook may not cater to all individuals depending on their health and ability status, other eastern practices have been included. See Appendix

for further details about these practices. The following brief section introduces Qigong and Tai chi, two allied and potentially beneficial practices, and discusses extant research related to their health benefits. Like Hatha Yoga, both practices are movement-based practices and actively emphasize the breath in their practice.

Qigong. An ancient Chinese practice, Qigong is a part of traditional Chinese medicine and involves movement, meditation, and visualization. Qi (pronounced as chi) stands for life force. Gong means "work" or "effort." Together, Qigong means to work, study, and cultivate Qi (Gilligan, 2010). Designed to "induce and guide" the Qi, the purpose of Qigong exercises is to eliminate blockages and restore equilibrium of Qi in the body (Jouper, Hassmen, & Johansson, 2006; Lee, Kang, Ryu, & Moon, 2004). When Qi's balance is restored, health and homeostasis prevails in the body and mind (Sancier & Holman, 2004). Compared to yoga and meditation, Qigong is more accessible to the practitioner and produces more "immediate" effects (Chrisman, Chambers, & Lichtenstein, 2009).

Research on Qigong. In a study of health benefits from a Qigong practice, Sancier and Holman (2004) identified stress reduction as one of the main outcomes. Chow and Tsang (2007) investigated the suitability of Qigong as an intervention for persons with anxiety disorder. Based on their review, the authors concluded Qigong practice enhances individual flexibility, stamina and strength along with quieting the mind and fostering spiritual growth. Similarly, the practice of Qigong can be beneficial in treating chronic fatigue (Craske, Turner, Zammit-Maempe, & Soo Lee, 2007).

Psychoneuroendocrinological research and Qigong. Substantial cross-sectional and epidemiological evidence exists on the benefits of brief and long-term Qigong

practice; both, single sessions of Qi-training and prolonged training over several months are known to produce positive and significant changes in the psychological, neuroendocrine, and immune systems (Lee, Kang, Ryu, & Moon, 2004; Ryu, Jun, Lee, Choi, Kim, & Chung, 1995). In addition, based on psycho-neuroendocrine–immune interactions, it is proposed that Qi-training produces good psychological health and a better immune system via the secretion of various neurohormones (Ryu, Lee, Jeong, Lee, Kang, Lee, & Chung, 2000; Lee & Ryu, 2004).

Results from rheoencephalography, a technique used to measure the blood flow to the brain, revealed that Qigong exercises increase blood flow to the brain (Liu, He, & Xie, 1993; Zhang, 1994).

Tai chi. Taijiquan (transliterated as tai chi chuan; Caldwell, Harrison, Adams, & Triplett, 2009), a specialized form of Qigong, was initially conceived as a marital art (Chrisman et al., 2009). In the western world, Tai chi (TC) is increasingly gaining ground as a form of aerobics exercise. Wang, Taylor, Pearl, and Chang (2004) describe it as a "moving form of yoga and meditation" (p. 454). TC is a low-impact, moderate-intensity aerobic exercise (Lan, Chou, Chen, Lai, & Wong, 2004). The exercises are generally performed in the standing posture and involve circular movements, breathing regulation, and mindfulness. The movements, also known as forms, seamlessly transition from one into another such that, to an observer, they appear graceful and dance-like. See Sandlund and Norlander (2000) for an explanation of the five basic principles of TC.

Mental health benefits of Tai chi. Research related to the effects of TC among college students is limited; most of the research has focused on the elderly (Wang, Taylor, Pearl, & Chang, 2004). In their study, Wang et al. investigated the effects of TC

on the physical and mental health perceptions of college students. The participants performed TC exercises for an hour on a weekly basis over three months. Prior to the intervention, students completed multidimensional physical and mental health assessments. Baseline scores were compared to post-intervention reports; the authors found improvements in physical health indicators such as bodily pain and general health. More importantly, mental health indicators, including general emotional health and vitality, saw significant enhancements among participants. The authors concluded that such a short-term program would benefit a college student population and advocated for similar programs to be implemented on university campuses.

Positive mental health benefits associated with Tai chi practice among different populations were found in a meta-analytic study conducted by Dechamps, Lafont, and Bourdel-Marchasson (2007). The authors reviewed studies investigating the effects of TC on different populations between 1990 and 2006, and found that TC enhanced general psychological health and self-efficacy in adults and healthy older adults.

Taking more of a comparison approach, Caldwell et al. (2009) studied the effects of TC and Pilates in healthy adults' on perceived self-efficacy, sleep quality, mood, strength and balance. Overall, while the Pilates group showed significant improvements on most outcome measures, the TC group showed trends of improvements in self-efficacy, sleep quality, and mood.

Cognition and Tai chi. Hernandez-Reif, Field, and Thimas (2001) studied the cognitive benefits of TC exercises in the adolescent population. The researchers conducted a five-week long TC intervention with thirteen adolescents (mean age 14.5 years) with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Students participated in

TC exercises twice a week. Teachers assessed participants' behaviors and mental health status prior, during, and two weeks following completion of the intervention. The teachers noted improvements on psychological outcomes measures such as reduced anxiety, and less inappropriate emotions, and behavioral measures such as lowered frequency of daydreaming, hyperactivity, improved conduct; participants independently sustained these changes during the two-week follow-up period. This study provides some initial research on the potential cognitive benefits related to TC that may be relevant for the college student population.

Conclusion

The research reviewed in the preceding sections highlight diverse benefits involved with mindfulness and MBSR across different psychological domains. The target group for the original MBSR program mainly consisted of medical patients. However, the current dissertation focuses on the college student population. Therefore, there is a need to develop a program that matches the lifestyle of the contemporary college student.

Idiosyncratic features of the lifestyle of Millennials make it necessary to propose modifications to the original MBSR program. Modifications may be introduced in the order and inclusion of practices. The goal for such changes would be to develop a program that matches with the needs and lifestyle of the stressed, yet hyperactive, Millennial student population.

The handbook proposes a flexible order of practices; the meditative practices do not follow a rigorous order of introduction. Another proposition involves introducing the Hatha yoga practices and walking meditation earlier in the program, possibly in the first half of the eight-week program. According to Salmon et al. (2009), Kabat-Zinn

introduced more "stiller" meditative practices (like the body-scan) prior to movement-based exercises because then participants' presenting issues mainly comprised of severe medical and physical complaints, such as chronic pain. Members, often inactive for long period prior to their participation in the program, were fearful of strenuous activity before they entered group. Exercises like the body-scan meditation exercise seemed a more appropriate intervention to re-introduce activity for such a population.

In contrast, Millennial college students are attuned to higher levels of activity – physical as well as cognitive. "Still" meditative practices, such as body-scan or sitting meditation, may not appeal to this population as introductory practices to mindfulness. A more suitable strategy would be to introduce such meditative practices during the latter half of the program. Other program changes include an emphasis on lovingkindness in most of the practices as a way to encourage self-compassion and compassion towards others.

With these goals in mind, the current dissertation proposes a new format for the contemporary college student population. A format that gives flexibility to the clinician to choose meditative practices that match with the needs of the group, engages the Millennial college population, and provides them with skills that will buffer them against the rigors of a hectic, stressful, and competitive life.

CHAPTER 3

Rationale for Handbook

The following handbook is designed for the Millennial college student generation. The literature review highlights how the current generation of college students is unique in their approach to life; they are more achievement-oriented and experience greater academic pressure than previous generations. Some of these characteristics make them more prone to stress-related illnesses. Statistics show an increase in enrollment of students with significant mental health history and higher prevalence of mental health issues among the current college generation. This handbook proposes that the philosophy and principles of mindfulness could act as a buffer for certain lifestyles and concomitant personality characteristics of the Millennial college student.

There is research to validate that a mindfulness-approach to life fortifies mind, body, and spirit of college students. The principles of mindfulness such as non-striving, acceptance, and beginner's mind could make significant contributions to the emotional well-being of college students. These and other principles can help restructure and re-perceive certain aspects of college life. Furthermore, mindfulness promotes stress hardiness due to its detached approach to various events that arise in one's experience.

The practices incorporated in this handbook have been specifically chosen for beginning meditators of the Millennial generation. The language in the handbook is crafted intentionally for the understanding of novice meditators. Therefore, facilitators may find it useful to share sections of the handbook with group members and other

clients. While there is no recommended order of practices, the clinician may benefit from certain observations. Within the meditation scripts, there is an emphasis on lovingkindness as a way to facilitate compassion and management of the Millennials' highly pressured lifestyle. In addition, leaders may attempt to introduce mindfulness to the college student population using movement-based exercises in the early stages of the group. Included in this handbook are recommended combinations of practices for specific presenting concerns. Even so, the clinician would most benefit by assessing the needs of the group members before choosing the practices. Also included in the handbook is a resource guide for clinicians and clients. To give clinicians a more objective picture of the changes that may take place during the course of group therapy, some mindfulness measures have been included.

CHAPTER 4

Clinician's handbook for leading mindfulness groups in college counseling centers

Handbook index

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    - o What is mindfulness?

    - o Principles of mindfulness

    - o Posture

- ❖ Screening & debriefing information

    - o Group screening for a mindfulness meditation group

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❖ Appendix

- o Allied mindfulness exercises

Introduction to mindfulness

      What is mindfulness? Mindfulness, as a concept, is hard to define. Mindfulness

has been described using different terminology and words, and each description would

still have the potential to hold true (Henepola Gunaratana, 1992). Simply introduced,

mindfulness is an English translation of the Pali word, *Sati*. Henepola Gunaratana

describes it as "bare attention." In empirical literature, there are a few popular definitions.

Kabat-Zinn (1990) operationalized mindfulness as *"paying attention in a particular way:*

on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally."

      Bishop et al. (2004) proposed a two-component model of mindfulness in an

attempt to define the concept. The existence of varying definitions of mindfulness

portrays an essential quality about the *person*al nature of the practice of mindfulness.

Although this section will highlight certain features of mindfulness, it is in no way an

attempt to categorize mindfulness rigidly; instead, it is an attempt to provide readers with

an initial flavor of mindfulness – readers should note that some of the concepts elaborated

here might appear paradoxical. These initial reactions are normal; accept them mindfully!

      Mindfulness and the Millennial generation

      The rationale for this handbook is rooted in the socio-cultural changes and

changes in the current mental health demographics of university students. At first glance,

the principles of mindfulness highlighted above may portray mindfulness as a

counterintuitive intervention for the Millennial generation. How can a generation that has

grown up on a steady diet of instant gratification and competition gravitate towards an

intervention that promotes patience and non-doing as its foundational concepts? Is it

possible for the Millennial generation and mindfulness to intersect? The Millennial generation is always on the move; will they want to meditate?

It should be noted that some of appeal of proposing mindfulness training for the present generation lies in the overt incongruity between the mindfulness philosophy and supposed psychological characteristics of the Millennial generation. Mindfulness does not seek to eliminate the so-called negative characteristics of the Millennial generation; instead, it will help these individuals to effectively and efficiently harness their full potential while keeping the adverse characteristics in check.

About mindfulness. Mindfulness involves bare awareness based in the present moment. We all engage in a level of awareness typically found when we are being mindful; however, it occurs very briefly and often times, below our level of conscious awareness. This flash-of-a-moment generally occurs before we have had the opportunity to crystallize our thoughts or perceptions. To describe it qualitatively, it is the awareness we experience before we label the information conveyed to us by our vision or perceptive systems. Therefore, mindfulness involves an awareness that is present before our senses absorb and react to a phenomena, that is, before we say to ourselves, "Oh, it's a car" or "The color is red." As soon as we label the object or feeling, learned information about the label, associated memories, emotions, judgments flood and influence our cognitions.

In some ways, mindfulness symbolizes a pure form of awareness; accepting things as they occur, without any preconceived notions. It involves taking in what our senses present to us without layering the messages with what we have learned about them in our worlds. In other words, it involves having a *beginner's mind*, a principle inherent in mindfulness.

Mindfulness and thinking. Beginning readers often get confused with some of the abstract concepts of mindfulness. A common question that arises in their minds is how is mindfulness different from thinking? To clarify the difference between mindfulness and thinking, it is helpful to start with an example related to memory. You are not grounded in the present if you are thinking of your fifth birthday party; instead, it is a memory (past). When you conceptualize what you were doing and acknowledge that you were remembering your birthday party, you were thinking. However, when you become aware of your process of thinking about your birthday party, then you are being mindful.

Some challenges as beginning meditators.

Beginner's mind. It is challenging to adopt a beginner's mind. As human beings, we have developed the mental habit of classifying objects, people, and events. For certain situations, it is definitely a time effective mechanism. Our impressions about object, people, and situations are tucked away in our mental cabinet and we readily access them when we need them. When we acknowledge how our cognitive systems operate, we are being mindful. Therefore, during mindfulness practice, it is common to struggle when we are asked to *simply* attend to our mental activity without any judgments. This posture poses a novel conundrum. We may feel uncomfortable; however, remember, these are all human reactions and universal in nature. Openly recognizing the humanity in the struggles with mindfulness involves self-compassion and kindness, necessary, yet, difficult sentiments to direct towards oneself.

Participant-observation. In mindfulness meditation, we are participant observers to our experiences. We may feel certain emotions, such as boredom, joy, frustration,

contentment and observe them at the same time. The dual action of feeling-observing is a difficult balance to strike and maintain for beginning meditators. We are more likely to be pulled toward focusing on or reacting to feeling, or may try to suppress or deny them. Once again, these are commonly experienced human struggles.

Such moments may bring up feelings of disillusionment or self-doubt. A recommended way for dealing with the unpleasant emotions is to observe them mindfully. If it helps, you may imagine your emotions as wind that washes over your body or clouds floating in the sky. During such moments, you can observe the kaleidoscope of your emotions, as they change or evolve moment-by-moment. You should be fully aware when responding to them.

When mindful, our actions become intentional. There are a number of ways, you could respond to your emotions when mindful of the gamut of emotions you are experiencing. You may choose to explore the emotion; be curious about why you are feeling a certain way. Perhaps, in the spirit of trusting yourself, you may choose to sink deeper into the emotion and see where it leads you. On the other hand, you may choose to respond to the emotion by ending the meditation. Keep in mind, regular and daily meditation practice is the antidote to unpleasant emotions that could arise during meditation; even *expert* meditators experience them. When faced with *unwanted* emotions, adopting a non-judgmental attitude will be extremely helpful. A non-judgmental attitude is one of the principles of mindfulness, discussed in detail in the next section.

Present moment awareness. An important characteristic of mindfulness is the emphasis on the present moment. During meditation, it is common practice to redirect

attention numerous times to the present moment. In meditative moments, there are active efforts to focus on what is happening *right now* versus the past or future. Keeping our minds from wandering is difficult due to our human tendency (mental habit) to relive the past or leap into the future. As a short exercise, count the number of times during a three to four-hour block when you start thinking of what lays ahead or past actions. Therefore, intentionally keeping the present in the foreground of our awareness is an expected challenge for beginning meditators.

   Detached awareness. Mindfulness also involves a detached level of awareness. Detachment in the mindfulness sense does not mean disconnecting from feeling; instead, it involves separating oneself from personalizing the experience. For instance, if you feel a tingling or discomfort in your legs when meditating, using mindfulness, one would recognize these sensations as sensations, instead of saying, "Oh, my leg is in pain or falling asleep." Similarly, if one feels sadness or disappointment, then using mindfulness, one would simply notice the existence of these emotions without triggering a cycle of acting on them or personalizing them as "I am a sad person" or "I am disappointed."

   Adopting a detached attitude prepares one to respond to unpleasant sensations mindfully. It highlights the participant-observer roles discussed earlier in this section. We become biased participants in our experience once we attach ourselves to these sensations. We tend to get influenced by them resulting in a narrower lens of our perception of our experience. Associated memories and judgments cloud our perceptions of these sensations and emotions. In its place, if we observe them as objective events without any precedents, our mental framework is better equipped to manage or acknowledge them.

On the other hand, if we intentionally keep our experiences in mind when responding to emotions, situations, and people, it would also constitute mindfulness. In other words, awareness is a key feature in mindfulness practice.

When meditating, it is helpful to keep a watchful eye on our experiences, silently observe them as they emerge, mature and fade, all during the span of meditation. Mindfulness involves keeping a watchful eye on the universe within ourselves, for in knowing ourselves (flaws, strengths, likes, dislikes) can we become stronger beings, and open ourselves fully to other individuals.

Principles of mindfulness

The principles of mindfulness can be conceived as different aspects of a meditative attitude. The following information can act as an initial guide on how to approach mindfulness meditation. The seven principles are as highlighted by Kabat-Zinn (1990) are discussed below. Due to focus of this dissertation, the mindfulness principles are discussed in light of the characteristics of the Millennial generation.

Non-doing. This principle of mindfulness is not to be confused with "doing nothing." An attitude of non-doing towards a particular task involves approaching the task without attachments to its outcome. The task is completed for the sake of performing the task itself. The performer relates to the task as it exists in the present moment, as it *is*, and watches it unfold, evolve moment-by-moment without regard to what is *will be* in the future.

For instance, as students, you are required to complete homework assignments or group projects. When working on your coursework, you may aim at getting the highest grade or praise from the instructor. Your sight is set on putting forth your best efforts and earning a good grade. Such future-oriented thinking shifts attention away from the task (assignment) to the outcome (grade). Thus, your actions are driven towards the accomplishment of the future goal. Information gathered for the homework assignment or the presentation of the project is guided with the purpose of impressing the instructors or colleagues. This constitutes *doing.* Alternatively, if you approach the presentation or assignment with an attitude of non-doing, you would solely focus on the project, as it unfolds moment-by-moment, completely absorbed by the task in its present state.

To clarify, non-doing does not mean that you are a passive participant in your environment or cannot dedicate yourself to the final product. Instead, it means that your primary association is with the project is as it lies before you, carefully directing your attention to each part in the present moment, instead of redirecting your thoughts and energy towards an outcome that has yet to come into existence. Such an approach leads to time and effort efficiency, and is especially advantageous when resources are sparse and during stressful circumstances such as exam preparation.

How does non-doing apply to mindfulness meditation? What role does it play during meditation? Let us take the example of you joining the mindfulness group or deciding to learn to meditate. Oftentimes, we begin meditation with a purpose in mind such as relaxation or self-care. It is important to be aware about why you decided to join group because your purpose (for example, stress reduction, self-growth) in joining the group could influence your approach towards your meditation practice. You may associate your meditation practice with these intended outcomes and unintentionally work towards them. Therefore, when you notice that you are unable to meet these expectations satisfactorily, you may experience unpleasant emotions or cease practice altogether. In other words, keeping your agenda in your foreground could result in losing sight of the immediate task at-hand, which is to meditate on whatever comes through your experience during practice.

If you attach yourself to a purpose, say, "I want to feel relaxed at the end of my practice," then you will try hard to achieve this future goal to the exclusion of other present-moment based experiences. You are no longer open to whatever rises in your experience moment-by-moment. Additionally, actions that do not directly lead you to this

goal may be judged or left unattended. In the end, you may find yourself becoming restless, bored with practice, or forcefully calming yourself and redirecting practice towards a particular path.

On the other hand, if you meditate each time with an intention to consciously not strive towards a particular goal, accepting whatever comes up for you, then it opens up more options about how you may feel at the end of the practice.

Trust in yourself. We spend most of our lives following guidance from external sources, whether it is our partner, close friends, family, workplace, or media. In some ways, it may appear as if we have abdicated control over our bodies and minds and become busy with following the advice of somebody else. For instance, when we find ourselves at the crossroad of a major decision, we turn to a person we trust to give us direction or seek reassurance about the decision we have made. In doing so, we may undermine our intuition and abilities. We may do this on such a regular basis that our inner voice drowns out or we stop listening to it.

Trusting yourself and mindfulness. For some of us, the practice of mindfulness is a novel experience. In uncertain moments during practice or when talking about practice, it is easy to look to the other person for direction or to compare your experience with another. In such moments, acknowledge your awareness of such thoughts or actions. Remember, in mindfulness, *you* are the base and you set the benchmark.

Practice of mindfulness is a personal journey. Mindfulness emphasizes giving voice to your intuition, emotions, and sensations. Most of the practices are self-directed through closely attending to your present-moment experiences. Therefore, if it feels right to *you*, then continue with it. If it feels wrong, change it! The emphasis during practice of

mindfulness is on creating the time and space to allow yourself to tune into whatever *you* are feeling and experiencing. In doing so, you are allowing yourself to trust yourself. In mindfulness, approach each practice as another opportunity to respect and listen to your body, your instinct, and above all, follow *your* lead!

Trust in yourself and the Millennial college student. Competition may propel individuals to closely observe their environments and assess their behaviors and performance against those of others. Developmentally, college students are more likely to imitate their peers. How well am I doing in comparison to my peers? In class? In sports? In dating? Students may ask themselves these questions numerous times during their college years. Such an outward lens and awareness of social benchmarks could impact trusting oneself and whether one uses one's performance, thoughts and ideas as the guiding force for behavior and performance. How do college students develop an internal compass when they are attending to what others are doing? Mindfulness training can help; mindfulness practices can foster self-trust in college students. Collectively, the practices can encourage students to respect and acknowledge experiences, as they unfold on a moment-to-moment basis.

Letting go. What happens when you try to hold sand or water in your hand? The tighter you clamp your fist, the more sand or water escapes from it! Now, picture holding sand in your hand; however, you do not close your fist. Instead, hold it lightly in your open palm - examining it, feeling its texture, bringing your attention to the color and size of the granules, focusing on sand granules lodged between your fingers, and feeling the roughness and smoothness of the sand, all at once!

Strangely, letting go helped you do what you may have originally set out to do – holding sand in your hand! Holding on and letting go are parallel analogies for the two scenarios; the moment we *let go* of our preconceived ideas and frameworks, we are free to experience and examine what lies in front of us.

Letting go involves surrendering preconceived thoughts and ideas that we have about people, places, and objects. Like holding sand in your hand, letting go involves opening up, being willing to examine our thought processes, without attachments and judgments. Like non-doing, letting go allows us to develop a meaningful relationship with what we are doing, with no strings attached to the outcome. Like patience, letting go allows us to attend to the process, not the outcome. By focusing more on *how* things are in the present moment versus *what* things should be, letting go helps us to see where and how we were stuck and how we can get "un-stuck". Letting go also means no longer expending our energies on directing things a certain way; it means we have more resources to examine things as they are, which leads to more opportunities for being open towards our lives in the present moment.

Non-judging. Our minds are constantly filtering vast amounts of information to direct our actions. Our mind is busy in giving us a number of directions - Do this, this is good! Eat this it is healthy! Avoid this it is not safe! We follow these directions without giving them a second thought. These mechanical actions are our moments of mindlessness. However, when we practice mindfulness, we strive to keep an unbiased stance towards whatever comes up, be it thoughts, feelings, moods, and judgments.

How can I practice non-judgment while meditating? Moments of non-judging can arise numerous times during a short duration of meditation. This attitude is mainly

cultivated by adopting an observer status towards your inner self. When meditating, do not judge things that are present in your field of awareness. Instead, take advantage of the awareness and clarity afforded in mindfulness and see things for what they are; do not try to change to what you would like them to be! Be accepting and non-judgmental of yourself if you find yourself judging your experience. When such awareness strikes you, acknowledge it and return to the breath. Know that the mind is active as long as it judges; activity and judgment are inherent to its nature. Do not try to judge, control, or change this quality; instead, be a witness to it.

Beginner's mind. Imagine visiting a new country, whose culture, language, and traditions are new to you. Perhaps, you are curious about how the native people live, earn their living, communicate with each other, celebrate or observe festivals. Nothing you witness is taken for granted; the experience is indeed new for you. Now, imagine yourself in your home culture, whether with family or in a familiar setting. Here, you are used to the way things are. You are familiar with how to communicate and relate to one another, cultural norms, traditions, and taboos.

In one way, familiarity with the rules and traditions helps you seamlessly navigate, perhaps even predict your cultural terrain. In other ways, the familiarity is taken for granted and your actions and thoughts are automatic. Nothing surprises you. You are on autopilot!

Let us take another example – think back to your first freshmen week at the university. Perhaps, everything seemed new to you; there was some curiosity about the campus and people for the first few weeks. You were exploring the campus, meeting new people and roommates. You asked questions, keenly observed people's behavior, and did

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not base all this on assumption. Now, back to the present year, when you have established a routine. The initial excitement of discovering a new place has faded – today, everything looks familiar, or does it?

Is it possible to see a place you have visited numerous times and still perceive it with a freshness that resembles the first time you encountered it? Is it possible to maintain a certain level of curiosity about people's behavior, no matter how long and in what capacity you have known them? Is it possible to see an object without associating a label to it, approaching it as if you were doing so for the first time in your life? When you adopt a beginner's mind, you temporarily suspend judgments and approach what lies ahead of you (object or event) as a novel experience, no matter how many times you may have encountered it in the past. In letting go of your pre-existing mental framework, the beginner's mind emerges.

How does beginner's mind relate to mindfulness? As an example, take the case of focusing on the breath. Mindful breathing is one of the first tasks that we will practice in the group. We have taken countless breaths since our very first one. Breathing is something we do, day-in and day-out, quite mindlessly. Even so, do we recognize that no two breaths are the same? So, when we endeavor to approach our breaths through a beginner's lens, we become aware of the nuances of each breath, the brief gaps between breaths, and the process of breathing. We become curios about the art of breathing.

A beginner's mind is relevant during other mindfulness practices, especially when you engage in the same meditation practice on a daily basis. For example, it will be very easy to consider your first experience (whether "good" or "bad") as the benchmark of subsequent experiences. If you had a pleasant experience with your first independent

practice, you may hope to have a similar experience during subsequent practices. However, when you approach meditation with such an attitude, you have already committed 50% of yourself to the past or committed yourself to something non-existent. This narrows your choices and limits the range of experiences you may feel after practice.

A beginner's mind, on the other hand, opens up a number of doors for you because you approach each situation with a fresh and inquisitive perspective. Everything intrigues you and nothing strikes you as unexpected!

Present moment focus, the Millennial college student, and beginner's mind. An important aspect of mindfulness is to stay aware of the present-moment experience. This has significance for some of the mental health disorders prevalent in the college student population such as depression and anxiety. One common characteristic of these two disorders is futuristic thinking; in anxiety, individuals dread the future, in depression, they view it as hopeless or non-existent. On a conceptual level, it is expected that mindfulness training can help college students ground themselves, stay in the present moment, and adopt a beginner's mind while non-judgmentally acknowledging their experience. These principles can help them re-perceive the situation and manage their stressors more effectively.

Patience. Patience is allowing things to unfold at their own pace. It is about not rushing forcing things, as you want them to be. Instead, it is seeing events and situations as they exist in the present moment. Patience is having the wisdom to let things take their natural course. Most of us, for a large part of our day and even our lives, focus our energies on the future and are constantly doing things to reach our destination. Our

future-oriented thinking leads us to form attachments to what has yet to exist. What happens when things do not go as we have planned them? We become impatient and frustrated, sad, angry even disappointed.

Patience can be construed as a lost cause in today's fast-paced world where there is an emphasis on being two steps ahead of your competition or colleagues. Assignments, meeting, targets are treated as if they were supposed to be done yesterday. Time is of essence and not keeping pace with the rest of the human race can only result in lagging behind. Patience, in the mindfulness realm, talks about staying in the present moment as it presents to us, and enduring it, trusting that the outcome will be right for us, whatever its nature. Patience is an important attitude of mindfulness practice and found in each of the practices outlined in the handbook.

What does patience look like during mindfulness practice? When we are mindful, we practice patience with how things are in the moment. We embrace our experiences, as they exist – whether we are bored, restless, or neutral. We accept things as they come to us, knowing that there is a larger meaning behind their existence in our present. During practice, if you find yourself struggling, patience entails acknowledging this struggle to yourself, breathing into it, and resuming your task because you trust yourself and believe that events will unfold in due course. In some ways, patience is inspired from faith and trust in ourselves.

Acceptance. This principle could be misconstrued as propagating a passive attitude towards our experiences. On the contrary, acceptance requires you to hold your experience within the field of awareness without wishing things to be different or judging them. Quite often, when things do not go the way we desire them to be, we have

difficulty coming to terms or accepting them. The difficulty may fuel our self-critical attitude, make us unhappy and/or deny the actual outcome. We try to find our faults, engage in "what-if" thinking, and constantly chide ourselves for not acting adequately when the opportunity presented itself.

Our preoccupation with how we want things to be overrides our focus on how they actually are. We may not recognize the true potential of the current situation because our energies are spent in veiling it from ourselves. Non-acceptance could perpetuate feelings of misery and failure.

How can you practice acceptance while meditating? Mindfulness involves keeping an open door to our experiences in the present moment. It involves meditating with a fresh, clean slate for every practice session (just like a beginner's mind). Some of the barriers to an attitude of acceptance are tied to our expectations.

For example, if we meditate to feel relaxed, noticing feelings of agitation after a particular meditation may elicit dissonance in us. We may have difficulty accepting or acknowledging such unpleasant feelings. Awareness of these feelings or states without open acknowledgement about them creates disharmony within us. Alternately, if we were to engage ourselves with an accepting attitude towards our experiences, then we are not confining ourselves to choices A, B, or C. Instead, we explore our worlds with an attitude of curiosity without boundaries or limitations to what we can or may feel after practice. That could be liberating! To see what it would feel like - for one day, accept things as they occur – whether you feel joy or disappointment, are late or early for class, score an A or B grade on a test.

Acceptance does not mean liking what you see or feel; instead, it involves viewing things clearly, as they stand. Remember, acceptance to how things are is the first step towards change because you cannot change something if you are not actively aware of its existence!

How can mindfulness meditation help to cultivate acceptance of my experience? During meditation practices, you will take some of your first steps towards acceptance. When meditating, you are encouraged to be accepting towards your experience, whether pleasant or unpleasant. During practice, if you realize that your attention has wandered, acceptance would involve recognizing the drifting nature of the human mind. Instead of getting frustrated or disappointed, re-direct your mind to your breath. You may repeat these actions as many times as it takes during a practice.

Have patience and accept. Socio-cultural characteristics such as hyper-connectivity, easy access to information, and being digitally wired from a young age adds to the fast pace of the present world. It lowers the threshold for delaying gratification and increases impatience. In contrast, patience in mindfulness, can teach college students to attend to the process as it unfolds without reacting to it or rushing to correct it.

Compassion and the Millennial college student. Universities, to some extent, are social microcosms. They are increasingly becoming competitive because of a shortage of resources available to students, such as jobs and scholarships. Such resource scarcity and competitiveness leads students to scrutinize their behavior and performance constantly and with a critical eye. While self-examination may be a healthy way to become aware of one's blind spots and for personal growth, it reaches an unhealthy level when such inspection raises threat and vigilance levels in individuals. Furthermore, high

expectations and a constant competition could promote a harsher view of self and others. This is even more disturbing for college students who are emerging into the real world, beginning to find and establish their identities, relationships, and careers. For them, the high degree of inspection and competition may not be the ideal environment or platform for growth and could prove detrimental to their self-esteem and identity development process.

Alternately, compassion could be linked with positive health changes and emotional well-being. Tools for developing self-love and kindness, such as mindfulness practices, can play an important role in identity development of the Millennial generation. Such an attitude could function as a catalyst for onset of mental health concerns especially for those students who report the onset of mental health disorders after joining college.

Experience whatever happens to you its fullest extent! Unleash your full attention to what rises in the present moment, welcoming it no matter its nature. It will be hard, but in doing so, you are empowering yourself to shape your future.

Posture

Many beginning meditators wonder about assuming a correct posture whilst meditating. While there are certain highly recommended postures, they are not enforced as strict rules. Most meditations describe sitting on the ground; however, if for some reason, sitting on the ground is not feasible for you, then choose a chair that has a firm seat and straight back and provides good support to the spine. Choose a chair of a comfortable height, one in which your feet are firmly planted on the ground beneath your feet.

If you choose to sit on the ground, whether or not the floor is carpeted. Depending on the surface that you are directly in touch with, you may choose to use a yoga mat. You could choose to use a cushion or sit directly on the mat. If you choose a cushion, it should be of sufficient height to support your spine in an erect posture and allow your feet to comfortably rest on the floor. Wherever and however you choose your posture, it is important to maintain a relaxed yet erect posture.

You determine the degree of erectness. Comfortably assume a posture that does not induce pain or discomfort. An erect posture helps to streamline your attention to what is happening in the moment and channels the breath quite smoothly from the nostrils to lungs and back. Before meditating, your mind may be active with thoughts and ideas. An erect physical posture signals to your mind that you are preparing yourself for meditation. It is a cue for your body and mind to remain open to experiences as they unfold without orchestrating or directing your mind in any particular direction and embodying the attitude of meditative awareness. In a way, you are preparing to enter the zone of meditation.

If it helps, you may facilitate your erectness by imagining that you are balancing a book on your head. Above everything, the posture should be comfortable to you. Imagine shoulders firmly balancing your head; each vertebra is in line with each other. Arms may be placed on the side or in your lap with hands cupped on top of each other, palms facing upwards.

There are varieties of positions that your legs may assume while engaging in any meditative practice. For those practices in a lying down posture, keep your legs shoulder length apart, parallel to each other. When in a sitting position, Henepola Gunaratana (1992) recommends four postures: Native American style; Burmese style; Half lotus; and Full lotus. In the Native American style, your foot is placed under the knee of the opposite leg. Your right foot is placed under the left knee and the left foot is inserted under the right knee. The Burmese style asks meditators to place both legs, from knee to foot, flat on the floor, parallel to each other. The half and full lotus postures are the traditional meditation postures in Asia; the full lotus posture is the most preferred. In the full lotus posture, the meditators' knees touch the floor, legs crossed at the calf. Feet rest on the thigh of the opposite leg; left foot lies on the right thigh and the right foot is on the left thigh. In the full lotus posture, both soles of the feet face upward. In contrast, the half lotus requires meditators to place one leg and foot flat along the calf of the opposite leg.

Whichever posture you choose, on ground or in a chair, remember to choose judiciously. The posture can serve as the medium through which you may channel your energy and attention during the meditation. It can help the body attain physical stillness and mental alertness.

Group screening for a mindfulness meditation group

Group screening is an important part of the group process. There is ample of research to suggest that group screening is positively linked to member attendance in-group and counteracts premature termination or group dropout (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Group screening can be advantageous for leaders and potential members. It helps to assess the suitability, needs, and goals of each group referral before they enter the mindfulness group. The meeting gives leaders and members an opportunity to discuss general and specific information about group process and requirements for the mindfulness group. A template for a handout outlining important points is a part of this section. The information listed on the handout can help members in forming better understanding of the process of group therapy and requirements and in their decisions about participating in the group. Moreover, there is a lot of information about mindfulness in popular media. The points discussed in the information sheet can help clarify concepts with which members may be vaguely familiar.

For some members, participating in group therapy is an anxiety-provoking situation. Meeting with clients before they officially start group is an opportunity for clients and group leaders to meet each other on an individual basis, address important concerns and troubleshooting questions.

How to handle in-group crisis. It is important that group leaders actively inquire and plan strategies for addressing crises or challenges that members may encounter in the midst of a meditative practice. For example, if a member reports respiratory problems, such as asthma or panic attacks, it is necessary that leaders spend time in assessing the

clients' control over the problem. Leaders may also caution members about certain practices and highlight ways in which the practice could be modified.

For instance, clients with respiratory issues may need a modified version of mindful breathing. Similarly, it is important to alert clients with a history of trauma or abuse that the mind may wander to such experiences during certain meditative practices. It would be prudent for leaders to ask members for ways in which they may address their struggles (such as difficulty breathing or flashbacks) when they occur in a group setting. Such a discussion would help members feel prepared and supported by the leaders, and may buffer them from any embarrassment that they may feel in front of other members.

Similar issues need to be discussed with members who present to group with social anxiety issues. With such members, it is important for leaders to discuss importance of group participation, the leaders' approach for encouraging members to participate, and inquiring about how members would like to be engaged in the group process.

Information handout. The following template includes a list of questions/steps that may be used during the group screening process. The list is not exhaustive; instead, it acts as a guideline to highlight areas that are necessary to explore during a pre-group meeting for a mindfulness group. It is also important that both group leaders are present for the meeting. If this were not possible, it would be prudent for the presenting leader to mention about the additional group leader. Generally, a screening session would be 20-30 minutes in duration.

Source and details of referral. How did you hear or know of the mindfulness group (through individual therapist, friend, and advertisement flyers)?

1. Reason for referral: Tell us (or me) about what you think is the reason you were referred to the group.

2. Assessing for suitability of referral: Please explain your struggles or symptoms that started this referral process.

3. Assessing preexisting knowledge about mindfulness: Are you familiar with mindfulness? What have you heard about it? Tell us (or me) about what you know or have heard about mindfulness.

4. Important areas for assessment/ assessing for potential crises:

   ▪ Suicidality/homicidality

   ▪ Substance use (duration, frequency, and intensity)

   ▪ Presence of ongoing crises and/or history of trauma or abuse

   ▪ Health concerns (for example, asthma) and additional mental health concerns (aside from reason for referral). Address duration, severity, frequency, coping mechanisms for these concerns.

5. Introduction of mindfulness and brief description of group process and format: In order to give each individual member a brief snapshot about the history and origins of mindfulness, you may say, "Mindfulness has its roots in Buddhism, and some of the principles are based on Buddhist psychology. However, in our group, we follow practices prescribed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn who started Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in the late 1970s. Briefly, Kabat-Zinn ran the original group in a medical hospital setting and it generally catered to individuals with chronic medical and physical illnesses. Although the group format run at XXX counseling center largely follows Kabat-Zinn's model, it is designed to address the needs and concerns of

today's generation of college students. We will discuss this in detail when we begin group.

The format of the group involves discussion and in-group practice. The in-group session time is divided between addressing challenges and questions by group members about their practice during the past week and introducing new practices. Participating in the mindfulness group also involves out-of-group work. Members are strongly encouraged to meditate regularly and independently between group sessions. Ideally, set aside at least 30 minutes each day for the outside group practice. Members are free to contact individual or both group leaders with questions or concerns. Do you have any questions?"

6. Discussing group member goals: After suitability of group members has been assessed and determined, the next step would be to collaborate with each member to develop goals. Leaders may say, "Based on what information you have provided us and what you now know about the group and its process, what would you hope to achieve from participating in this group?" Try to refine client goals as much as possible and set specific goals, in terms of behaviors and frequency. Specific goals can help clients to mark progress and see concrete changes. For instance, if the member states that they would like reduce anxiety attacks, leaders need to elicit information regarding current frequency and identify a stipulated (lower) number of attacks that the member would hope to achieve at the end of group therapy. It is also important to discuss in-group members' behaviors that can help members to accomplish their goals. Therefore, with the same example, leaders and members can discuss X number of times that members can participate (share their experiences,

answer or ask process questions, exchange information with other members) during the entire of course group therapy. Leaders may also use the miracle question to probe member expectations about group therapy.

7. Assessment: Group leaders may also choose to administer mindfulness measures before and after group therapy as another way to highlight progress or discuss needed changes in member behaviors. Administering a measure prior to beginning group can give leaders an objective baseline level of mindfulness for new clients. Clients may be asked to complete a mindfulness questionnaire (for example, Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale) at the end of the screening session. Administering a questionnaire during the mid-group check-in can provide useful information of what has changed and what steps leaders and members need to introduce to make progress.

8. Towards the end of the group screening, leaders may provide the following link to new members and may ask them to view it prior to first session. The link is http://rave.ohiolink.edu/dmc/video/6451820. Inform members that the video will be discussed during the first session and they need to be prepared to discuss their thoughts or questions.

The next section is a template for initial questions that members may have during the course of group screening or group therapy.

Q & A about mindfulness meditation

Dear group member,

Welcome to the mindfulness meditation group! You are taking your first few steps towards living life more mindfully. We wish you good luck.

We have compiled a few questions that may come up for you during the course of group therapy. Please feel free to contact group leaders with any further questions or concerns.

Q – How do I know that I am meditating correctly?

A – Beginning meditators frequently ask this question. In fact, wondering about the right way of meditating is a common experience for novice, and even experienced, meditators. However, there is no right way to practice mindfulness because mindfulness meditation emphasizes personalized practice and trusting yourself to carve out a practice that *feels right to you*. The principles talk about the practice of mindfulness being grounded in an open attitude about our experiences and cultivating a beginner's mind (taking each meditative session as if it was the first one).

Meditators are encouraged to trust their bodies and minds and actively determine their personal limits and boundaries when engaging in the practice. During each new practice, leaders guide the meditators and provide a verbal script for meditation; however, members are free to modify the script according to their level of comfort and readiness. Even then, if you find that your mind is troubled by thoughts about "doing it right," acknowledge them, and return to the breath.

Q – Am I supposed to feel relaxed at the end of my meditation session? What should I do if I do not feel happy after I meditate?

A – No, there are no guidelines on what or how you should feel after you finished with your meditation. You are not trying to reach an ideal state of mind in mindfulness. In mindfulness, practitioners are encouraged to keep a curious attitude towards the present moment experiences, whether it is unpleasant emotions, recurring thoughts or general boredom. Whatever the emotion or state of mind, there is one guideline during meditation: acknowledge it and return to the breath. Use the breath as an anchor and a grounding force in meditation. Let your attitude be one of openness, curiosity, and eagerness to explore your experience, whatever its nature in the present moment.

Q – I have heard from others that during meditation my mind needs to be blank. How do I do this?

A – This is a common misconception about meditation practice. There are various meditation practices, some of which are designed to help practitioners clear the mind of all its contents; mindfulness meditation does not fall in this category of meditation practices. Instead, the purpose of mindfulness is to cultivate an awareness about whatever comes up while meditating – thoughts, feelings, images. Mindfulness aims at attending to one's experience non-judgmentally and compassionately.

Q – When I meditated last time, I felt so relaxed. The next time, however, I did not have a similar experience. Why? What did I do wrong or do I need to change anything?

A – Sometimes, for beginning meditators, the initial experience is so powerful and positive, that it is human to crave for a similar experience. We strive to replicate the positive experience to the best of our abilities and become frustrated with failure. Remember, the purpose of mindfulness is to focus on the experiences that arise during practice. Mindfulness meditation does not identify with a specific goal for each practice

session. Instead, mindfulness involves being present in the moment – no matter what the moment presents to you. When you become aware of any frustration, breathe into it and resume your practice. If you have a certain goal in mind, try not to make it the focus of your meditative experience. Instead, spend the meditation time on practicing the principles of mindfulness on yourself.

Q – Will meditation help me become more in control with my emotions and problems?

A – Research has shown that mindfulness meditation is one of the ways that can help with management of difficult and unpleasant emotions. What may help additionally is group participation and practice. The techniques and principles of mindfulness combined with the readings and in-group discussions will provide a foundation for a different perspective and approach for your stressors and emotions. A helpful strategy to enhance the likelihood of benefitting from the group is to participate during each session. While as group leaders, we will not enforce member participation; however, participation during group may help clarify your questions and concerns, and learn from other members. Research has validated the effectiveness of daily practice and we strongly encourage you to practice outside of group during the week; keep aside at least 30 minutes daily for practice.

Q – Do I really need to practice outside of the group session? How much time do I need to allot for outside group practice?

A – Research has highlighted member benefits from outside group practice. Outside group practice is directly related to incremental benefits of mindfulness. Therefore, it is *highly recommended* that you engage in formal meditation practice for at least 20-30 minutes daily. Ordinarily, the new practice introduced during the session is prescribed for

outside group practice until the next session. This will help you become more familiar

with the practice. However, you do not need to restrict yourself to any particular

meditative practice. Also, know that it is not necessary to meditate in one session; you

may divide the time into smaller sections of time, if it is more convenient to your

schedule and motivates you. As the group moves forward, we will introduce the informal

ways to practice mindfulness, which may be supplemented with formal practice.

Q – I find that myself falling asleep during the body scan meditation. What should I do?

A – This is a common beginner experience. There are certain physical states to which our

bodies have developed automatic ways of responding. For example, the lying down

meditative posture cues the body for sleep especially during the initial stages of

meditating. Similarly, when we put food in our mouth, our jaw starts moving and teeth

start chewing. This is a sign of the physical conditioning of our bodies.

In mindfulness, we observe and slow down the cycle of being on autopilot. In doing so,

we raise our awareness of our actions and physical sensations. Furthermore, we attempt

to use our knowledge about our automatic behaviors in our decision to respond to

physical and emotional cues.

Therefore, when you find yourself falling asleep, return your attention to your

breath or you may mindfully choose to fall asleep. Perhaps, mindfully changing your

posture to a sitting posture may help to continue with the practice. You may want to

practice in this position initially until you are able to reprogram your body to stay awake

during the duration of a meditation. Try to fall awake, not fall asleep!

Q – How should I deal with the pain that intensifies during my meditation? It makes me

restless, frustrated and I feel like discontinuing my meditation.

A – A number of people who have pre-existing pain problems report that the problem intensifies or becomes more prevalent when the mind is still during meditation. It feels like the pain colors your entire experience of the meditative session.

In previous episodes, you may have deflected or suppressed acknowledgement of your pain because it can be very intense and powerful. Due to the demanding nature of pain, we pay greater attention to our internal experience, which makes it difficult to focus or concentrate on what is going on outside of us. At the same time, in an attempt to dull the pain by "doing" things, we become experts at distracting ourselves away from the pain.

However, from a mindfulness perspective, awareness about your strategy of dealing with your pain is the next step to addressing it. What do you do to stop the pain? Do you ignore it? Do you take medication? Do you isolate yourself from others? Do you become more irritable? Do you sleep more? Whatever it is that you do to deal with your pain, try to become aware of it. Next, see if you can approach your pain in a mindful way, which involves application of the principles of mindfulness.

From a mindfulness perspective, we would encourage you to bring awareness to the sources of your pain (internal and external). Engage some time in exploring your pain. We want to remind you of self-compassion and being gentle with yourself when you interact with your pain. The mindfulness perspective promotes respect for your body and listening to it; pain is one of them. Keep yourself open to whatever you discover when you are mindfully attending to your pain.

Debriefing questions

        The following are a list of questions/areas for use during the mid-group check-in point or at the time of termination of group.

1. State and revisit the goal that was explicitly and collaboratively determined at group screening.

2. Inquire about general impressions about course of treatment:

   - Describe your overall group experience in one-two word(s).

   - Tell us two things that you enjoyed about group.

   - Tell us two things that you would like to see changed or improved.

   - Compare and contrast your general feelings now with how you felt when entering group.

   - Would you consider returning to group in the future? If yes, then what would you like done differently?

3. Feedback about exercises and in-group work:

   - How would you rate the meditation exercises in terms of helping you achieve your goals? Which ones did you find helpful, and which were challenging?

   - Which part of in-group work did you find more helpful: exercises, psychoeducation, group discussions, none, or all of the above?

   - What are your thoughts on how the group sessions may be improved (in terms of group process, order of exercises, and so on)?

   - Any suggestions for change in the handouts distributed until now.

4. Outside group practice:

- On a scale of one (not at all difficult) to ten (very difficult), please rate your difficulty level in engaging in outside group practice.

- What were your top two challenges in completing outside group practice?

- How often did you engage in out-of-group practice? Did not note any changes in your symptoms because of the practice?

5. Progress towards goals:

- Keep client goals handy. The goals decided during the group screening can serve as an important baseline for determining client progress. Alternately, measures administered at screening, mid-point, and debriefing sessions can provide objective data about client progress.

- How would you rate your progress towards your goals on a scale of 1 (no movement) to 10 (goal achieved)?

- Please identify two factors related to the mindfulness group that contributed towards your progress.

Group handouts

Dear group leaders,

The following section consists of a series of handouts that you may choose to distribute to group members. You could also use the information to elicit in-group discussion.

The mind-body connection (stress).

Fight-or-flight. A key element in mobilizing the fight-or-flight stress response is our interpretation of the events we face. Perception of an event as a threat amplifies the physical reactions in our bodies. Similarly, if we interpret the event differently, the threat level diminishes significantly. Therefore, ordinary events may become "stressors" when the mind interprets them as such.

Interpreting a situation as threatening mobilizes resources in three major body systems: the autonomic nervous system, endocrine system, and the immune system. When faced with a dangerous situation, our bodies become activated and enter a state of arousal, which stimulates our defense mechanisms. The endocrine system releases hormones or catecholamines (adrenaline and noradrenaline) to bring about physical changes (for example, raise heart rate, constrict blood vessels). Along with these changes, there are psychological changes such as increased emotional reactivity and decreased logical reasoning. Our muscles, heart, and significant body organs and systems remain activated until the emergency is resolved. The body's systems go through cycles of activation and de-activation each time we face a stressful situation.

Chronic stress. In periods of chronic stress or vigilance states, there are different physical and psychological changes. There is increased alertness (sometimes manifested

as irritability), blood pressure, gastric acid, and fat storage. Distribution of fat tends to occur disproportionately when we are under high levels of duress. During times of prolonged stress, there is decreased immune function; we are easily susceptible to minor illnesses such as common cold. Our digestive and sexual functioning, sleep pattern is impacted by high stress levels, and cognitive functioning is compromised.

Our reasoning skills and ability to engage in higher-level thinking can be a double-edged sword. They can help us beat stress as much as be the source of stress. A likely consequence of continuously high stress levels is burnout. Chronic stress creates an imbalance within the autonomic nervous system. Under high stress levels, the body's threshold for stress tolerance changes, even the slightest provocation is enough to initiate a burnout or fatigue.

Fight-or-flight in today's world. A few centuries ago, the fight-or-flight model may have been a useful resource for our ancestors. However, our modern world is vastly different from the one in which our predecessors lived. Our fast-paced and hectic lives are filled with stressors we experience on a regular basis. We are more likely to find ourselves in chronic state of stress; our bodies and minds are constantly on alert and vigilant. We may feel like we are constantly on the go, without a rest stop. As students, being busy between managing academic, social, and personal aspects of your lives may feel like being in a state of flux, constantly in fight mode – fighting against time and it never stops! The body and mind experience wear and tear on a consistent basis. Similarly, with time shortages, our responses become automatic. We are comfortable being on autopilot and in how our bodies react and minds interpret events.

Mind-body relationship. We know that an important factor in determining our stress reactions is how we interpret our stressors. Stress perception plays an important role in determining stress reaction and triggering corresponding physical changes. Similarly, our interpretation of physiological signs and symptoms of stress also influence how we think of our stressors.

The mind-body connection is readily evident in how our bodies can influence our minds and vice-versa. Sometimes, the body acts as a mirror for our thoughts – if we feel rage, physically we may feel tension or tightness; if we experience fear, our hearts may beat faster, breathing becomes shallow. At other times, our minds trigger physical reactions - for example, feeling sadness may reduce our appetite and energy levels. In other words, our physical reactions (body) and psyche are deeply interconnected.

The meditative practices outlined in the handbook are useful resources for changing stress reactivity and introducing changes in how we interpret and manage stress. In general, the practices teach us to become aware of our stress reactions and triggers. The practices teach us to use the knowledge of the body to deepen our awareness, to approach stress with full awareness and intention, and use the breath as an anchor at all times. Finally, the information enclosed in the handbook presents the reader with multiple options of managing stress. No doubt, even with regular practice of mindfulness, there will be periods of upheaval and stress. However, including mindfulness in your stress management tool kit will help you re-perceive stressors as challenges and growth promoting.

Recommended combinations of meditation practices for specific disorders

Anxiety. Today's world is the Age of Anxiety; the "thinking disease" plagues us. *The mind has a mind of its own*. It runs on the fuel of rumination and very often, the passengers are catastrophic thoughts, what-if scenarios, and thoughts about things that have yet to come. Notice the nature of anxious thoughts and you will realize two salient features - anticipatory and calamitous.

Worry and anxiety are closely related. Often times, worry can become an outlet for stress. Worry gives us something to do. During stress-filled moments or when we feel helpless or powerless against what lays ahead of us, we worry. We are in the doing mode when we are worrying. Worrying makes us feel like we are *doing something* and yet it does not solve our problems.

For a change, try being mindful during a worrisome moment; watch the evolution of your worry and how it snowballs with each increasing moment. It would be akin to standing on the periphery of a tornado, gradually seeing how it draws in the things that lay in its path, slowly increasing in size and strength. Our worries feed and grow from our anxious thoughts; worry and anxiety feed off each other and mutually perpetuate each other's growth.

By being mindful in a worrisome moment, we are able to explore and understand the worry. We have an opportunity to raise our awareness about minute shifts in our process of worry. How quickly the themes of your worry change, you jump from one domain of worry to another. Worry has a fleeting nature and so do our anxious thoughts. Watching how our worries develop makes us sensitive to the lightning speed at which the foci of our worries change. Therefore, next time you catch yourself worrying, try not to

react to it. Instead of going down the rabbit hole of worry, observe it non-judgmentally. Take a step back and see if you can approach your worry mindfully.

Recommended below are some mindfulness practices that may be beneficial during anxiety and worry feeling states:

Body Scan. Scan the body for hotspots of anxiety. Where the anxiety or worry is most deeply experienced? Which part of the body? Once the part or area is identified, focus on it by breathing in and out of it. The practice may also be modified by giving the anxiety/worry qualitative features such as color, texture, smell, tactile. Describing these qualities to yourself can concretize it and make it an easier object of focus. With each in breath, imagine the part is suffused with new and positive energy. With each out breath, the body is freed from the anxiety and/or worry. Continue the breathing exercise until the anxiety settles or the mind feels calmer.

Mindful walking and/or Mindful Yoga. Movement-based practices are particularly helpful because they encourage an "external" focus. When we are anxious or worried, we are absorbed with our internal experience. This perpetuates the cycle of anxiety/worry because it narrows our focus and magnifies the content of our focus. By walking or yoga, we are reducing muscle tension that accompanies worry states. Also by attending to our walking or yoga exercises, we are stepping out of the picture (detaching ourselves).

Thoughts are just thoughts. This exercise aims at restricting our outlook towards the source of our anxiety. We learn to put distance between our thoughts and view them as mental events or creations of our minds versus personally identifying with them. If it helps, you might say to yourself, "I am not my thoughts...they are just *thoughts*. My thoughts are a product of my mind's activity." Like clouds in the sky, thoughts enter the

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mind. Gently take note of them as they traverse the mind's space, all the while grounding the self in the breath.

When deeply anxious about an event, simply recognizing thoughts that go enter the mind, noting them with detached awareness. This means do not personalize, overgeneralize or view the thoughts as defining your person.

Nature meditation. This meditation practice helps to maintain an "outer" focus. This meditation helps to remain in the present moment, broaden our thought horizons, and take inspiration from nature.

Lovingkindness meditation. This practice is particularly helpful when the source of anxiety or worry is you, or when you notice yourself being harsh with yourself for being anxious or worried.

Depression. How do we feel about sadness? Do we embrace it when we feel sadness? Alternatively, do we avoid with as much intensity as we avoid objects of our anxiety? More than likely, we find sadness is a difficult emotion to acknowledge to others and ourselves. Sometimes, we allow ourselves to experience sadness; at other times, we may not. Even when we acknowledge the sadness, there are varying ways in which we may choose to manage it. When we notice a tinge of sadness in our mood, we may distract ourselves from it. We may choose to mask it from others. Some people experience sadness with such intensity that they immerse themselves in it.

When we are depressed, our thoughts are directed towards negative and catastrophic thinking. The deep, dark depths of sadness frighten us and our analytical minds overpower us. The more we think, the more we sink into believing about the permanence and potent nature of our faults and follies. Highlighting the mind-body

connection, the emotion of sadness is reflected in how our bodies may feel - lethargic, low or excessive appetite, changes in our sleeping patterns, and poor concentration in our daily activities.

When we engage in mindfulness practice, we are taught to adopt a beginner's mind and non-judgmental acceptance of our sensations, thoughts, and feelings on a moment-to-moment basis. In the mindfulness realm, thoughts are considered as mental events and products of the mind. Thoughts are not regarded in a "person"al manner. Approaching our negative thoughts from a mindfulness perspective involves making a distinction between the person and the thoughts. The thought trap is generated when we blur boundaries between where "we" end and our thoughts begin. Mindfulness advocates that we are *not* our thoughts. Thoughts are not our reality; they are but a reflection of our perception of our surroundings.

Imagine watching a movie. Sometimes, we find ourselves deeply drawn to a particular character in the movie. When they are in pain, we cry with them, when they laugh, we feel their joy. Yet, we are different from them. Similarly, our thoughts are not us; they do no define us. Yes, they do originate from within us, and yes, we are the ones thinking them. However, they may not always capture the entire context or full reality. Instead, how we perceive a situation guides our thoughts. Think of perception as special glasses used to understand the world. Each one's glasses operate with a different set of rules and determines the how, why and what in our environment.

When we learn through mindfulness that our thoughts do not define us, we are able to separate perception from thoughts. Certain practices are especially suited to times when we find ourselves immersed in a sad feeling state:

Body Scan. As part of the exercise, scan the body for areas of sadness, breathing in and out of them. If you feel comfortable, visualize the sadness; it may help with identifying and in viewing it with a non-judgmental attitude.

Lovingkindness meditation. When we are sad, we can be easily harsh on ourselves. We feel hopeless and trapped. By association, it is not uncommon for other negative memories to flood our minds during these moments. Therefore, engaging in this practice allows us to extend compassion and tender loving feelings that we need the most during such moments.

Thoughts are just thoughts. This practice helps with detaching ourselves from the personal identification with our thoughts, which fuels our sadness.

Three-minute breathing space. This step-by-step mindful breathing exercise can help with management of unpleasant feelings. It helps in grounding ourselves with the present moment and re-perceiving reality as it exists in its true form with full acceptance.

Scripts for in-group exercises

      During the in-group exercises, it is important to caution group members about the contents of the exercise, lest they anticipate an adverse reaction towards it. During the visualization exercises, it would be prudent for leaders to give a short description of the exercise and allow members to engage in another practice during the course of the session if the visualization is not agreeable with the members.

Mindful breathing

Come, come, whoever you are.

Wonderer, worshipper, lover of leaving.

It doesn't matter.

Ours is not a caravan of despair.

Come, even if you have broken your vow

a thousand times

Come, yet again, come, come.

Rumi

Let's start this exercise by assuming a comfortable posture, whether you choose to lie down, sit or stand. You may close your eyes, if you feel comfortable doing so. After you get comfortable with your position, become aware of the various points of contact between your body and the surface that holds you, whether it's the ground beneath you, or the back of the chair or wall.

Let's start the next phase of this exercise by shifting your focus to your breath. Start off by becoming aware of the unique rhythm of your breath – gently as it weaves in and out of your body. Spend a couple of moments tasting your breath, becoming familiar with the action that sustains your body; become aware of the power of your breath. Focusing on the tiny spaces between each breath, experience each breath you draw in and out as unique.

If you feel ready to do so, shift your attention to your nostrils and the cool, new air entering your body through your nose. See if you can follow the path of your breath as it travels through your body (into your lungs and expands your abdomen). With each in-

breath, your belly rises or comes forward like a balloon that expands when filled with air, and falling back and contracting on an outbreath. If it helps, you may softly chant the word "in-breath" when beginning a new cycle of breathing. Or, it may help to place your hand on your abdomen area to keep pace with your breathing.

Imagine that with each in-breath, your body is replenished with positive energy, warmth, and joy. As warm air leaves your body when you exhale, your abdomen contracts; all negative energy, tension, stress leaves your body. It may help to softly chant the word "out breath" when you exhale. Do not try to force your pace of breathing; instead, observe your natural pattern. Approach your breathing with an attitude of curiosity; simply interested in noting what is already there as it exists.

If, during this exercise, you notice that your mind has wandered, recognize that your attention had left you, and gently bring it back to the breath. Our mind is used to being constantly active; this stillness is a novel experience and your mind may be trying to find ways to manage this level of stillness or "non-doing." Do not chide or criticize yourself when you notice that your mind has drifted. Instead, bring it back to where you had left off; come back to the breath – even if you have to do so a million times in one minute.

In breath-out breath, in breath-out breath, in breath-out breath. In the next few moments of silence, try this by on your own. Gently come back to the breath every time you notice your mind straying from your breath.

(After a minute silence) If you feel ready to do so, let's begin to transition out of this exercise. Shift the focus of your attention from your breath to your posture, briefly bringing your attention to various points of contact. Bring your awareness to any sounds

inside or outside of this room. If you chose to close your eyes during the exercise, begin by gently opening them and coming back to this room. Let's spend the next few moments talking about our experiences.

Questions for processing the exercise

How was your experience? Thoughts, reactions, questions?

Use one word to describe your experience.

What was your experience on focusing on your breath?

At any time, were you aware of your mind wandering? If yes, do you remember how you reacted?

Three-minute breathing space

This is a different brief breathing exercise and includes three clearly outlined steps. If meditators or leaders find it helpful, they may use this outline in place of the above-mentioned script.

Begin by finding a comfortable and erect posture, whether standing, sitting, or lying down. In the first step of this exercise, Awareness, be curious about your inner experiences, which may include thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations. Acknowledge the thoughts, perhaps by putting them into words and viewing them as an activity of the mind. If any unpleasant feelings rise to awareness, recognize their presence and breathe into them. Scan the body for any tension or tightness and with each breath, let go of it, sinking deeper into the meditation as you do so.

In the next step of Gathering, the focus is on the breath. Here, your attention is on the physical process of the breath. Learning to attend to how the body breathes, how each part of your body reacts to the entry and exit of the breath, and following the breath throughout the process. Paying close attention to the entry of the breath through the nostrils, feel the cool air enter; it passes through the throat, filling the lungs and your body with new energy. Watching closely, how other parts of the body signal the entry of the new breath, how the belly comes out on each in-breath and falls back on each out-breath. Spending a few moments with the breath, use it to gather and center the self in the present moment.

In the final step of this exercise, Expanding, the field of awareness widens to include other sensations. Tune into sensations within the body, the posture, and facial expressions. If you become aware of any unpleasantness during the expansion, breathe

into it, letting go of it with each out-breath and expanding further with each in-breath. With each expansion, you soften and open yourself to the various sensations within you. If you notice the mind wandering, do not admonish it; instead gently guide back to the breath. With each in-breath, warmth and kindness fill the body. The body is resting in an envelope of compassion as you continue to expand during the exercise. Meditate on this instruction for a while longer before transitioning out of the exercise.

Opening the thought door. Opening and walking through the thought door is like deciding to step out of the waterfall.

Standing under a waterfall may closely resemble our experiences when we caught up with our thoughts. We only feel the heavy force of the cold waterfall water hitting our bodies and nothing else. Similarly, we are not aware of our external surroundings when immersed in our thought cycle. However, if we were to step out of the waterfall, take a step or two behind, we would be able to admire the waterfall and appreciate how the waterfall works; we would be able to trace the origins and ending point (for example, a lake, pond) of the waterfall. Applying the same principle to our experience in the midst of unpleasant thoughts, taking a step behind would give us knowledge of how thoughts operate - where they come from, the triggers, the feelings and behaviors connected to them. Approaching the knowledge with a mindful attitude can help break out of the reactive cycle of stress, unpleasant thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

If, during the expanding stage of the breathing exercise, you become aware of unpleasant thoughts, then you may choose to shift the focus of your attention and walk through the thought door. However, when opening the thought door, it would be important to make a conscious decision to relate differently to whatever knowledge your

awareness brings to you. You have decided to observe the cascade of your thoughts from a distance and use the new knowledge to form a different relationship to them.

Start by recognizing the nature of the thoughts, while maintaining a non-judgmental attitude and with detached awareness. Watch the flow of your thoughts just as you observe the flow of the water in the waterfall. If it helps, note down the thoughts to understand better the triggers and the progression of the thoughts. Detached awareness involves recognizing that thoughts are mental events, and not facts. Try relating to the thoughts as you would to a physical sensations, such as an itch or sounds where our actions includes responding to the stimuli without qualifying it as "good" or "bad." If you are aware of personalizing or overgeneralizing your thoughts, acknowledge the awareness. Grounding yourself in kindness and compassion with gentle reminders that thoughts are not facts, mindfully approach them.

Hatha Yoga

The Sanskrit word *yoga* means "union" or "yoking." The type of yoga exercises included in this section is primarily *hatha yoga* exercises. Each of the exercises requires a different *asana*, or postures designed to enhance the union of mind, body, and spirit (Kirk & Boon, 2006). The word *yoga* signifies the union of the mind, body and actions, the word *hatha* is a Sanskrit combination of the word *ha* (sun) and *tha* (moon); qualities associated with the sun are heat, masculinity, and effort, and coolness, femininity and surrender are associated with the moon. Therefore, the word *hatha* stands for the union between opposites (Kirk & Boon). During the exercises, there is an emphasis on relating to the body as a whole, blurring the boundaries between body and mind. Mindfully, meeting the body as it stands in the present moment, accepting it as it is today, and surrendering to the body and the breath.

The yoga exercises will include various postures. When doing these exercises, listen to your body, and take responsibility for your body's actions. If a posture feels uncomfortable to you, change it mindfully, stay with the body as it does so. When done regularly, yoga helps to strengthen the body. However, let the initial purpose of the exercises in this section be to tune into your body and be one with it. If you experience any discomfort or pain, be mindful of it. While doing the exercises, and if it feels okay to you, challenge yourself to stay in difficult positions, using the breath to ground you. Be mindful of your boundaries, breathe into them, and allow yourself to explore them. Respecting the body and its limits, see if you can go beyond them with full awareness and intention.

Plan to use the time during yoga to deepen your bond with the body and use the breath as an anchor to help you gain a firm footing in your posture and sink further into the position.

Outlined below are descriptions of sequence of postures that, when combined, are Hatha yoga routines. During any of these postures, remember to breathe. If the mind wanders, gently guide it back to the breath. Explore your limits but do not challenge yourself beyond them without sufficient readiness and intention. Gradually and mindfully, expand your limits. Certain guidelines regarding the movements and use of the breath; *breathe out* when engaging in movements that contract the abdomen muscles and front side of the body; *breathe in* when you are expanding the front side of the body and contracting the back.

The exercises outlined in this section are a combination of standing, sitting, reclining, balancing, and backward- and forward-bending postures. Each exercise begins with assuming a particular posture and ends with counterpose, which helps in balancing the flow of energy and restoring equilibrium in the body. Standing postures are the foundation of yoga exercises designed to build strength in the legs and helps with digestion, circulation, mobility, and enhancing physical awareness of the body. Balancing postures help to build stamina, agility, and coordination between different parts of the body. Backward-bending postures are ideal for awakening and strengthening the body, and increasing spinal flexibility. Forward-bending postures help to enhance and exercise the back, release tension, and calm the nervous system. Twisting postures are relaxing after backbends and invigorating after forward bends. They help to restore homeostasis in

the body. Reclining postures, generally adopted at the end of practice, help the body to cope with exhaustion from preceding exercises.

Before discussing the yoga postures, it is important to consider two important issues related to the practice of movement-based exercises.

Readiness Assessment. Members and facilitators need to note that the meditation and yoga exercises are a means to an end; they enhance an understanding of the mindfulness principles and are practice opportunities for mindfulness skills. To this end, the exercises included in the curriculum are stand-alone exercises and do not need to be performed in any particular order with certain exceptions. For instance, while doing yoga, it is imperative to start and end with the starting and resting poses and also perform counterposes as specified; the remaining postures do not adhere to a rigid sequence. Because no definite sequence of exercises is established, there is no set standard for assessing members' readiness to move to the next (set of) exercise(s). Therefore, facilitators are encouraged to discuss openly members' comfort and readiness to engage in new practices before introducing them to the group.

Health and ability level. The exercises scripts in this, and other sections, are provided as guidelines. Depending on the health status and ability level of the practitioner, some exercises may be difficult to perform while adhering to the handbook script, while some may be easy. Members should be encouraged to consult with their health professional about the suitability of the exercises before engaging in them. Facilitators are also advised to thoroughly assess for members' health and ability related issues during the group screening.

In general, members would benefit from being reminded to attend to their personal experience while performing the exercises. Whatever the experience, approach it with a mindful attitude; keep in mind the principles of mindfulness, especially, trusting the self and acceptance. For instance, if the instructions require a standing posture for a duration that is longer than what is comfortable for some members, facilitators may issues directives to acknowledge this message from the body and modify the exercise accordingly. Similarly, while bending or stretching, if a comfortable position is reached early, acknowledge and respect this boundary established by the body in the moment. Most of the movements can be performed in standing or seated postures. Facilitators and the group as a whole may benefit from establishing an atmosphere mimicking the principles of mindfulness, such as acceptance, self-compassion, non-judgmental attitude.

More than anything, the exercises are designed to improve health and well-being and renew relationship with the body and the mind. Therefore, messages such as pain or discomfort could be signs that the body is in a difficult position – gently recognize it, accept it, and attend to it. At the same time, members may assess their personal readiness to explore the territory beyond body's limits and act accordingly. Therefore, if the body and mind is ready and willing, members may attempt to extend the stretch or bend beyond the earlier stopping point. Overall, attend to the instructions, check-in with the body, and apply the instructions mindfully and respectfully to the body.

With regular practice, members may note a change in the body's limits; they may be able to hold a difficult pose for a second longer or stretch an inch more than the previous time. This may be true for some, not others. Whatever the experience, attend to the personal experience and perform the exercises with an attitude of non-doing. As

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counterintuitive as it may sound, directing energy towards the process or performance of a task, instead of the goal, will ultimately contribute towards the outcome. In attending to the process, we shape the result.

Finally, facilitators are encouraged to share information related to potentially beneficial, allied mindfulness practices such as Qigong and Tai chi (see Appendix), especially as an auxiliary for yoga postures that may be challenging for some members due to health and ability issues.

Hatha Yoga exercises.

Corpse posture. This is a reclining and relaxation posture generally adopted at the close of the exercise. Start by sitting on the ground, legs extended and arms on the side. Recline on the floor using the hands for support. Lie flat on the back. Place the arms comfortably on the side probably 12-15 inches away from the body, palms open and facing the ceiling if that feels okay to you, heels and toes falling apart. If it suits you, you can place a cushion under your knees to support the lower back. You can find more information about this pose on http://www.santosha.com/shava.html

The stretch. Breathing in, lift the arms up and over the head until they are parallel to the floor, gently pressing the shoulders and back down into the mat. Focus on the body, stretched from both sides; like an elastic band, the arms pulled in the upward direction and the heels and legs stretching in the downward direction. Remember to breathe and feel the stretch, deepening it with each breath. Become aware of the various muscles that help you stay in this position. When ready, start to bring the arms down, slow, gently, staying with them, aware of the various sensations as you do so. Remember to breathe and tune into the sensations present when they first touch the mat.

Pelvic tilt. Bring the feet up to the buttocks, soles placed flat on the mat, knees facing upward, feet shoulder width apart and arms outstretched on either side. On the next out breath, gently lift the pelvis upward, pressing the back into the mat. Breathe and become aware of the muscles in the back and hips that steady your position; breathe into the posture a few times before descending onto the mat. On the next in breath, reverse these movements; rock and tilt the pelvis underneath you and gently arch the back towards the ceiling so that there is an opening between the back and mat. Mindfully coordinate the movements with the breath. When the exercise is complete, take a few moments to tune into the body, notice what it feels like after the stretch. See image of this pose on http://yoga.about.com/od/yogaandbackpain/ss/pelvictilts.htm

Knees-to-chest. This is a reclining and relaxation posture. Find more about this pose on http://www.yogabloomington.com/Poses.html. Lie on the back, legs extended and arms placed on the sides. Exhale, bend and bring legs towards the chest, linking the arms around the legs, either behind or in front of the knees. With each out breath, and if it feels okay, attempt to bring the knees closer to the chest. Curled up like a ball, gently roll from side-to-side, massaging the muscles in the back. You may lift the head and bring the chin to meet the knees, stretching from the neck upwards. Inhale, release from the stretch. Stay with the body as it does so. Complete the exercise with counterpose (corpse position). See more information on this pose on http://www.the-yoga-place.com/kneestochest.html

For the next exercise, lie on the back, legs extended and arms placed on the sides. Exhale, bend and bring the right leg forward, left leg outstretched on the mat. Exhale and lift the head and bring the chin to meet the knee, feeling the stretch in the neck. Hold

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position for a few breaths. Release and repeat with other side. Complete the exercise with counterpose (corpse position).

   Cat-cow. This is a backward-bending posture. More information on the cow pose is available on http://www.yogajournal.com/poses/2467. See more about the cat pose on http://www.yogajournal.com/poses/2468. Support the body on your four limbs, arms perpendicular to the floor and legs bent at the knees, feet facing out. Inhale and stretch your torso, stay with the breath as you steady the body in this position. Exhale and gently arch the back upward, dropping the head down between your arms. Inhale and reverse positions, gently arch the back downward towards the mat and let the head come up, maintaining an even curvature in the spine. Keep the arms straight and repeat the positions for five to ten breaths. End exercise with counterpose (child's pose).

   Child's pose. Start the pose by sitting on your heels, bow forward and gently place the chest on your thighs. You may choose to extend the arms forward, keeping the head in contact with the ground. Get more information about this pose on http://www.santosha.com/bala.html.

   The bridge. This is a backward-bending posture. Lie on the back. Bend the legs at the knees, hand placed on either side. Keep the legs hip-width apart. Inhale; pressing down on your feet, raise your hips. You may choose to extend the arms up and over the head, hold them under your back, or keep them on the side, a few inches away from the body. Remember to breathe as you hold the position. Draw your shoulder blades more towards your back. If you feel comfortable on the next in breath, lift the hips higher, gently exploring the limits of the stretch. When ready, release from the stretch, bringing the hips back in contact with the mat. Complete the exercise with counterpose (knees-to-

chest). See additional information of this pose on http://www.yogajournal.com/poses/472 or http://www.myyogaonline.com/poses/back-bends/bridge-pose-or-spinal-lift-pose-setu-bandhasana

Reclined spinal twist. This is a twisting posture. Lie on the back with legs extended. Bend and bring the knees into the chest, wrap the arms around the legs. When ready, release the arms and stretch them outward. Alternately, you may choose to fold the arms at the elbows and place them under the head. Inhale and rotate the knees towards the left and turn the head towards the right. Hold for a few breaths. Inhale and bring knees and head back to the center. Repeat with other side. Complete the exercise with counterpose (knees-to-chest). See images on http://www.myyogaonline.com/poses/lying/two-knee-spinal-twist-pose

Lay on the back, bend the legs at the knees. Exhale and bring the right leg up, first by bringing it into the chest and extending it upwards, keeping the foot flexed forward and pointing towards the ceiling. Hold the position for a few breaths, feeling the tension in the right leg and the pull of gravity. Tune into the left side of the body as you continue to hold the right leg upright. On the next out breath, extend both arms towards the upright leg and wrap hands behind the right knee. With each breath out, sink deeper into the stretch, bringing the leg further towards the body. If it feels okay, lift the head and bring up the forehand to meet the right kneecap. Remember to breathe as you hold position. Feel the stretch in the right leg, the arms, and the neck. Tune into the left side of the body and the flow of energy between the two sides. Release while staying with the body as it emerges from the stretch. Feel the change as symmetry is restored. Complete the exercise by repeating for the other side and the counterpose (knees-to-chest).

Start this next exercise by assuming the corpse position. Rest on the right side of the body, the left side parallel to the floor. Support the head with the right hand and the left hand placed in front of the body. Exhale and extend the left leg up, holding the leg at a 45-degree angle and deepening the stretch with each out breath. Explore the limits of the body during the stretch; do not extend beyond your boundaries. Complete the exercise by repeating for the other side and counterpose (corpse position).

Lie on your stomach, hands placed on either side with feet pointing out. Lift the head to face forward. Inhale, and extend the right leg up in the air. Hold position, feel the tension in the right leg and tune into the body as it stays in the position for a few breaths. When ready, bring the leg down. Repeat with left leg and complete the exercise with counterpose of assuming corpse position.

Cobra. This is a backward-bending posture. Lie on your stomach, hands placed on either side with feet pointing out. Lift the head, bending the elbows and keeping the arms perpendicular, exhale, and press down on the palms to lift the upper body off the mat. Press the feet down and continue to breathe as you keep the upper torso in an upright, forward-facing direction. Press down on the palms and draw the shoulders into the back, lift the chest out. Inhale and stretch from the waistline to the armpits. Exhale; curl the neck to look up. Hold position for a few breaths. Exhale and release, come back to original position. Complete exercise with counterpose (lying on belly). End with assuming corpse position. Find more information about this pose on http://www.santosha.com/naga.html

Mountain posture. This is a standing posture. Stand with the feet parallel, knees facing ahead. Take the shoulders back and bring the shoulder blades in, towards the neck.

Breathe in and push the top parts of the thighs back so it feels like the buttocks are facing out. See information on this pose on

http://www.myyogaonline.com/poses/standing/mountain-pose-tadasana

Staying the mountain posture, exhale, and lift the arms up and over the head, keeping the feet firmly placed on the ground. With each breath out, expand the stretch, gently and if it feels okay to you. Tune into the parts of the body that are involved in this posture. When ready, on the next breath in, bring the arms back down to neck level and stretch them out to the sides. With each out breath, expand the stretch. On the next breath out, gently guide the left arm to the side and stretch the right arm in the upward direction. Breathe out and expand the stretch. When ready to do so, bring the arm back to your side and complete the exercise with the left arm upward stretch. After you finish the exercise, tune into what the body feels like after the stretch.

Side sway. For the next exercise, breathe out and bring both arms up and over the head. First, sway the body to the right side, waist upwards. Deepen the stretch in the left side of the body with each breath out, come back to the center and complete the exercise with swaying to the left side of the body. Remember to breath and tune into the body after completing the stretch. See an image of this pose on

http://www.yogabloomington.com/Poses.html

Shoulder and neck rolls. Assume the mountain posture. Relax. Using the breath, raise the shoulders to bring them closer to the neck, point them forward and arrange to do roll them. First, rotate them forward, come back to original position and switch to do the rolls backwards. For the next exercise, raise the shoulders, breathe out and squeeze the shoulders in the front of the body, come back to original position and squeeze the

shoulders in the back. Remember to breathe and tune into the body as it moves.

Switching focus to the neck area, arrange to do neck rolls, starting with the right side.

Standing extended-leg stretch. This is a balancing posture. Assume the mountain posture. Firmly place the feet on the ground. Exhale, and gently rotate the right leg away from the body sideways, lifting it upward, balancing the body on your left leg. Explore the limits of the body as you continue to raise the leg until you reach a comfortable stop. Perhaps it is only a few inches off the ground, perhaps it closer to hip level, whatever the position of the leg, attempt to deepen the stretch by lifting the leg higher with each out breath. Tune into the left side of the body, feeling the pressure in maintaining the balance. Perhaps, you need to find it challenging to stay in this position for more than a few seconds at a time. It is okay to bring the leg back down for a brief rest; however, see if you can lengthen the time between these rests with each breath. Keep both arms outstretched to the sides. Hold the position for a few breaths. Gradually start the release and come back down to the mountain posture, starting with the leg. Reverse and complete the exercise with the left leg. Assume the counterpose (mountain) before moving ahead.

Side-twists. This is a twisting posture. Assume the counterpose (mountain). Start the next exercise by placing the arms on the waist, breathe out and turn to the right side. Twist the body, waist upwards to the right side, following the gaze in the same direction. Breathe and feel the stretch in the left side of the body. Hold position for a few breaths before coming back to original position. Reverse and complete the exercise with the left side.

Standing forward bend. This is a forward-bending posture. Assume the counterpose (mountain). Inhale and stretch the arms up, keeping feet firmly on the

ground. Maintaining the length, exhale, bend forward and touch the floor. It is okay if you are unable to unable to go the full length in the first attempt; bend as much as you are comfortable. As a gentle variation, use a block to support your arms as it reaches towards the ground. If you like and it feels comfortable for you, with each out breath, try to sink into the stretch, moving the fingertips closer to the floor. Become aware of your present posture and explore the territory within your limits. Attempt to keep the leg muscles stretched and the hip joints directly above the ankles. If you are able to do so, hold the toes, keeping the length of the stretch. Inhale, and draw the sides of the waist up, exhale and fold the torso forward. Hold position for a few moments, breathing and tuning into the body. Exhale; mindfully bring the right arm up to shoulder level, the left arm still in contact with the floor or the left foot. Explore and breathe into the body's limits during the stretch. Breathe in, bring the right arm to original position, and switch arms to complete the exercise. Finally, release the body from the posture, staying with it as it gently assumes mountain posture. See information about this pose on http://www.myyogaonline.com/poses/forward-bends/standing-forward-bend-uttanasana

Chair. This is a standing posture. Assume mountain posture. Exhale and bend the knees slightly or to 90 degrees, whichever feels comfortable to you. With arms loosely hanging on both sides, arrange to stretch them towards the ground, bringing the fingertips in contact with the floor or as far as they can stretch downward. Inhale and lift the arms up, holding them perpendicular to the body, parallel to the ground, or at a vertical angle as far as they can go. Keep the thighs parallel to the ground. As a gentle variation, bend the knees only slightly. Breathe into the posture. Stay with the body as it holds the position; explore the body's limits with the breath. Assume counterpose by doing the

standing forward bend. See images of this pose on

http://www.myyogaonline.com/poses/standing/chair-pose-utkatasana

Tree posture. This is a balancing posture. Begin with mountain posture. Feet

firmly placed on the floor, inhale and keep the legs together. Choose a point of focus

during the exercise to help with maintaining balance. Inhale and bend the right leg,

pointing the knee outward, place the foot on the left inner thigh. As a gentle variation,

bring the leg up to the ankle or at a height that is comfortable for you. Fold the arms at

the elbows and bring them together in the center of the chest area. Hold position for a few

moments; explore the limits of the balancing posture. Inhale and extend the arms over the

head, keeping the sides close to your ears, almost hugging them if this feels comfortable.

You may vary this posture by intertwining the fingers instead of joining them over the

head. Remember to breathe as you focus and maintain balance. Release the posture by

bringing arms and legs down at the same time. Repeat for other side. Tune into what the

body feels like after the stretch. Complete exercise with counterpose by doing the

standing forward bend. See more on http://www.santosha.com/vriksha.html or

http://www.myyogaonline.com/poses/standing/tree-pose-vrksasana

Assume a comfortable position and bring the soles of your feet together; let the

knees fall to the side. If it feels okay to you, you may wrap your fingers around your feet

to hold position. Breathe and feel the tension in the hip muscles as they help the body

maintain position. Hold for a few breaths, release and complete counterpose (corpse

position or the ball posture).

Head-to-knee forward bend. This is a forward-bending posture. Find a

comfortable spot to sit, preferably directly on the mat, legs extended and hand placed on

either side. Bend your right knee and place the right foot on the inner left thigh, while the left leg is outstretched on the mat and foot facing upward. Breathe into the posture before moving forward. Turn the torso to face the left leg, extend both arms forward to warp the fingers around the left foot, the big toe extending forward against the resistance of the fingers. Feel the tension in the arms and left knee and leg as you hold position. Keep steady with this position for a few moments. Exhale and move forward, bending from waist up towards the left leg, keeping the arms straight and in contact with the left foot. If it feels okay, you may reach your hands around the foot. If you are able to do so, sink into the stretch further by allowing the head to meet the upper shin. Remember to breathe, keep the left leg stretched out and hands in contact with the foot. Stay in this position for a few moments, tuning into the tension in the arms, legs, and feeling the stretch in the spine and the neck. Release and repeat on other side. Complete the exercise with counterpose (ball posture). End with corpse position. See information about this pose on http://www.myyogaonline.com/poses/forward-bends/head-to-knee-pose-janu-sirsasana

Walking meditation

Keep walking, though there's no place to get to.

Rumi

The following practice focuses on raising our awareness about walking. Standing in an upright position, feet apart shoulder distance, close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so to focus on your standing posture. Bringing your attention to the breath, how it enters your body nourishing it with fresh, clean energy. With each breath out, exhaustion, anxiety and stress leave your body.

Shifting your attention to the soles of your feet, firmly planted on the ground. Focusing your attention and spending time on the various sensations experienced by the soles of your feet. Perhaps, the soles can differentiate between the individual fibers of the carpet or the rough surface of the wooden floor. No matter what the sensations are, staying with them for the next few moments. Bringing your attention back to the breath if your mind leaves you.

Next, bringing your attention to your balance, notice how your lower body seamlessly and fluently maintains equilibrium. If not aware of this earlier, noticing the synchronous way in which your body coordinates the act of standing. Noticing the balance act of your body during the standing posture, all is in harmony as you stand, right here, right now. The body does it so naturally, without you even giving a thought to the act of standing!

If your eyes were closes earlier, open them now. During this exercise, we are going to walk mindfully. Walking is an integral part of our daily lives, and yet one of the most mindless activities we do during the course of our day. We do not devote much

thought to the act of walking. Lifting our feet so mechanically and countless times during the day, we do not even pay a moment's attention to the process of walking. However, this is precisely what we are going to do when walking mindfully. During the exercise, we are going to attend to the *art, not act*, of walking.

Let us start by forming walking lanes. During this exercise, bring our awareness to the various parts of the lower body that help us to walk, starting from the feet, moving upward to the ankles, shin and calves, knees and finally the hip joints. Spending some time with each of these individual body parts and becoming more familiar with the various sensations going through them while walking.

Let us start walking. Start at your normal pace, raising your awareness about how walking. Try not to focus on walking slowly but walking mindfully, whatever your natural pace. Walking, become aware of the movements involved - the lifting one foot, pointing it forward, balancing your whole body on the foot that remains on the ground, bringing the uplifted foot down and in contact with the surface, and finally, shifting the weight of your body and raising the other foot.

Bringing a beginner's attention to this exercise, focus attention on each part of your body that does your walking – feet, ankles, shins and calves, and hips. Do not forget to breathe as you become absorbed with walking. Sharpen your attention to the brief spaces of time between executing each movement.

Shifting attention to individual parts, start by focusing your attention on the soles of your feet. When walking, alternate awareness between moments of contact and change, when the sole of your foot is on versus off the ground. Tune into the ankle, how effortlessly it twists when you lift your foot off the ground. When in contact with the

ground, attend to the sensations of the ground; when off the ground, embrace the experience of having the foot mid-air. During the lifting and if it is okay with you, slow down and closely attend to the interchange between your feet: when one foot is in mid-air and the other foot is carrying the weight of the entire body! If possible, stay in this for a moment or two, breathe into it as you draw out this moment, and become aware of how this ever-so-brief interim period demonstrates the strength of our bodies.

Continue walking at your pace, with each moment breathing into the each part of the lower body. Attending to the movement of your hips as you step forward, how the joints support the legs and help movement. Relaxing with each step and gaining a deeper understanding of walking. When you reach the end of your lane, mindfully turn around and walk back in the opposite direction. Today, walk for the sake of walking with no destination in mind, no deadline to keep, no one but yourself to be with. As you take each step forward, come forth and deepen the bond with yourself!

Continue walking, all the while expressing gratitude and kindness towards your feet, your ankles, your calves and shin, and your hips. When breathing in and out, thank them for their presence! Thank them for giving you the ability to walk. Taking some time to direct warmth and compassion towards them – your feet carry the weight of your body, they weather all kinds of climate; bear wear and tear and the confines of your shoes, all day, all year round. Your feet remain resilient whether you walk on grass, carpet, or hard surface. Thank you, dear feet for giving me company in all walks of my life. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you, dear feet!

Continuing to walk at a comfortable pace over the next few minutes, alternating between attending to the process of walking, sensations in various parts of your body, the

breath, and immersing your feet and legs with love and kindness. Experiment with the

pace of the walking. If particularly prone to fast pace of walking, slow down today and

see what it feels like. Alternately, if used to walking leisurely, fasten the pace to

experience a different walking rhythm. After a while, resume the normal pace of walking.

(After a few moments of silence) No matter the aspect of walking you are on, on the next

in-breath, shift your attention to the breath as we transition out of the exercise. Mindfully

change the direction of your walking towards your seat to begin processing our

experiences.

Lovingkindness meditation

Your task is not to

seek for love, but

merely to seek and

find all the barriers

within yourself that

you have built

against it.

Rumi

Perhaps it is we who, for all our wealth, are living in poverty.

Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever you go, there you are* (p.163)

Today's time will be spent on directing love and compassion towards yourself. Most of us go through life attending to the needs of others, often minimizing or suppressing our feelings to keep others happy. Oftentimes we second-guess ourselves or feel negatively about ourselves. We are readily patient and forgiving of others, and yet hesitantly extend similar compassion towards ourselves. Today's meditation is the lovingkindness meditation, which is about directing cultivating love and compassion towards oneself. In the exercise, we will be forming an image of ourselves. For some of us, this may be a challenging task. Remember to approach it with kindness and compassion using the breath as an anchor.

Taking a few moments to center yourself, find a comfortable posture, whether lying down, sitting or standing erect; attending to the breath, as it enters and leaves your body.

Let us start the exercise by creating an image of yourself and taking a few moments to form the image in your mind's eye. If struggling to form an image, it is okay, breathe into the struggle, renewing your effort with each breath in. Taking your time, without rushing the process. If there is frustration, acknowledge it, and breathe into it. If there is impatience, acknowledge it, and breathe! Whatever comes your way, keep yourself open to it. If it helps, imagining yourself lying here in this room, or imagining looking at your reflection in the mirror or perhaps bringing up a personal memory. There are no limits on the source of the image.

(After a few moments of silence) Forming the mental image, imagine yourself slowly saying the following words to your image. Perhaps, saying them aloud, softly, in this room, if it helps. While doing so, mindfully attend to the words, absorbing each word, each sentiment, feeling the impact of what you are saying:

May I be happy

May I be peaceful

May I be free from injury and harm

May I live with ease

May I live in peace.

While saying these words, imagining your image smiling at you. Allowing the words to sink in, savoring them, feeling them, experiencing them, right here, right now as you lie in this room. Mindfully directing the sentiments of love, compassion, and peacefulness towards yourself. Acknowledging and breathing into the presence of any resistance/avoidance while saying these words, telling yourself that it is okay to feel them. Breathing into the emotions; continuing to imagine the image smiling back at you.

With each breath in, allowing the body to sink into a peaceful state, imagining your image's smile deepening and broadening.

Attempting to respond to frustration or discomfort with a smile. Spending each moment, feeling the peacefulness that surrounds you and acknowledging the loving and joyful feelings within you. Imagining being flooded with feelings of kindness and compassion towards yourself. Thanking your body and mind for the positive sentiments: Thank you, dear self for being present with me, right here, right now. Thank you for all that you do for me and with me.

Expressing gratitude over the next few moments, and remembering to breathe, going deeper with each breath in. Noticing if your attention has drifted, recognizing this and bringing it back to the breath, resuming where you left off. Focusing on feelings of love, compassion and acceptance of whoever you are, whatever you are thinking and feeling, and above all, gratitude for your existence, right here, right now. Not trying to change any aspect of yourself; instead spending time acknowledging and respecting the person you are – complete with all your strengths and flaws because without either of them, you would not be *you*! Taking today's time to acknowledge your humanity, not being hard on yourself or criticizing yourself for your actions; instead, extending compassion towards your person in the present moment.

(After a few moments of silence) Make your way back into this room when you feel ready to do so.

Nature meditation

This brief meditation exercise can be done outdoors or indoors. During this exercise, make nature and your surroundings the focus of your attention. If you are unable to sit outdoors, try to access a view of the outdoors. However, if unable to do so, it is okay to practice this exercise within your current surroundings such as room or an open space indoors. Devote at least 20 minutes to the exercise.

Begin by focusing your attention on the breath. Staying with the breath for a few moments to help center yourself and attain physical stillness. When ready, shift attention to your surroundings. If you are outside, start by focusing on the surface on which you sit and the physical sensations from it, whether you are sitting on the ground, grass, or a bench. Next, shift your attention to nature that surrounds you – whether you are on a beach, in a garden, or on the porch – take in the various aspects that are part of your environment. If you are on the beach, pay attention to the sound of the waves, the sand you sit on, the people that are walking by, the breeze that touches you. Take in the smells and sights of the beach. If you are in a garden, pay close attention to the trees and shrubbery, the leaves, flowers and fruit, the insects that buzz, the earth that nourishes the greenery. Do the same for whatever you are looking at from your porch.

If you are doing this meditation indoors, begin by attending to the room, its location, size, shape, the walls, floor, carpet – all the things that make up the room. Then shift your focus to the various sights and sounds of the room. Attend to the air that may be circulating around the room and the sounds outside of the room. Shift your attention to the sights within the room – take in all the furniture that is part of the room, closely attend to each of them (their color, shape, size, and so forth). Maintain a curious attitude

all the while, as if you are observing these objects for the first time.   Take all that is part of your visual field without any judgments.

If your mind wanders during the exercise, gently guide it back to the breath. When you are ready to transition out of the exercise, shift the attention to the breath and use it as a guide to come back.

After you have completed the exercise, take a few moments to note your experiences.

Mountain meditation

During the following exercise, guidance will be provided for a visualization exercise. During the exercise, you will be instructed to form a visual image of a mountain, breath into the image and allow the image to become a part of you. If, however, you are not comfortable with the image, you are not obligated to join in the exercise. Instead, you may choose to engage in another meditative practice or practice mindful breathing. If, during any part of the exercise, you experience an emergency, please alert the leaders about this. Are there any questions or comments before we begin the exercise?

Spend a couple of moments finding a comfortable posture, letting your body sink into your position. Whenever you are ready to do so, start by bringing your awareness to the breath. Gently trying following the breath as it enters and leaves your body; experiencing it for the next few moments.

(After a minute of silence) Let us start the next phase of this exercise by imagining a mountain. Over the next few moments, seeing where the mind takes you. Perhaps no image may come to you immediately or you may struggle with forming an image, which is okay. Try breathing into the struggle; rejuvenating your effort with each breath; focusing on the breath as you wait for the image to form. It does not have to be a well-defined image or nature-ly correct. Let the image come to you as it is.

This mountain image may be something that you are familiar with and have seen or it may be a creation of your imagination. Whatever are the origins of the image as it forms in your mind's eye, stay with it. If you feel like refining the image, you can do so; however, try going with the image as it first appears to you.

When you feel ready to move on, spend the next few moments focusing on your mountain's image. Thinking about the physical features of your mountain - start by bringing your attention to its overall shape, and how it rises from the foundations of the earth. Picturing it in your mind's eye, perhaps it is standing tall above the surrounding plants and trees, appearing majestic and dazzling in all its beauty! Perhaps, there are trees and plants that grow on the mountain. They draw nourishment from it while giving it strength. Your mountain stands tall during all kinds of weather. Whether stormy rains, warm sunshine, or cold nights of winter, it witnesses with calm strength. Remaining unmoving and tranquil, no matter how unsteady its surroundings! It *is* the epitome of peaceful strength in the face of adversity! Perhaps, your mountain has different or additional features. Whatever your mountain's qualities are, take a couple of moments to be with them. Spend some time breathing and being with this image.

(After a few moments of silence)Whenever you feel ready, let us transition to the next phase - taking the mountain image into ourselves. If you are sitting, imagining your head and upper trunk area as the top part of the mountain, your buttocks as the base of the mountain. Like the mountain, you are in touch with the earth, springing from it, drawing nourishment from it. If you are standing, then imagining your lower body as the base of the mountain, feet firmly planted on the ground, like your mountain. If lying down, then the side closest to the ground is the base. Spending the next few moments breathing, bringing the mountain image into your body.

With each breath in, the mountain becomes you, slowly, gradually, breathing in the qualities of the mountain. Like the mountain, you are strong. Breathing in its unwavering strength, its calm demeanor in the presence of strife, and gradually gaining

strength to face your life's changes. Like the transient nature of weather, realizing that the change *is* temporary. Similar to the mountain standing peacefully amongst the storms of nature, feeling energized to face the emotional storms in your life. Allowing the strength of the mountain to flow through and fill your body with each breath. Gradually, yet assuredly, you become the mountain! Breathing into the image – the mountain as you, you as the mountain, both as one. Staying with this image for a few moments.

(After a few minutes of silence) Knowing that the mountain is a part of you and you can draw on its strength whenever you need it. With each in breath, you grow stronger! Trusting yourself to call upon the calm strength, peace and courage of the mountain whenever needed.

If you feel ready to do so, let us begin our transition out of the exercise. Gradually, with each breath, the mountain's image fades. (After a minute of mindful breathing) When you feel ready to do so, open your eyes and come back to the room.

Questions for processing the exercise

What was your experience? Use a few words to describe your experience.

What was it like to form an image of the mountain? How was the experience?

What challenges did you face during the exercise? How did you resolve them?

What did you like about the exercise?

How did you "take in" the mountain? Any thoughts, reactions to this part of the exercise?

Lake meditation

Don't wait any longer. Dive in the ocean, leave and let the sea be you.

Rumi

During the following exercise, guidance will be provided for a visualization exercise. During the exercise, you will be instructed to form a visual image of a lake, breath into the image and allow the image to become a part of you. If, for any reason, you are not comfortable with the image, you are not obligated to join in the exercise. Instead, you may choose to use a different part of nature for the image, engage in another meditative practice, or practice mindful breathing. If, during any part of the exercise, you experience an emergency, please alert the leaders about this. Any questions or comments before we begin the exercise?

Let us spend the first few moments with centering ourselves through the breath. When ready to transition, start by forming an image of a lake in the mind's eye. Over the next few moments, seeing where the mind takes you. Perhaps no image may come to you immediately or you may struggle with forming an image, which is okay. Try breathing into the struggle; rejuvenating your effort with each breath; focusing on the breath as you wait for the image to form. It does not have to be a well-defined image or nature-ly correct. Let the image come to you as it is. When the image is complete, spend a few moments closely observing it. The image may be something that you are familiar with and have seen or it may be a creation of your imagination. Whatever are the origins of the image as it forms in your mind's eye, stay with it.

(After a few moments of silence) Whenever ready to transition, bring your attention to the water level in your lake's image. We will spend the next few moments

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talking about water. Water is an important natural element. It is extremely receptive and open to whatever comes its way. It is an integral part of our lives and our bodies, and can conquer even the most robust elements in nature. It can bring down mountains; it can nourish soil, and yet be the very force that can erode soil. Water is fluid, flexible – expands when space is available and contracts when required. Imagine these inherent qualities of water in the image of your lake. With each breath in, imagine your mind taking in the qualities of water – open, calm, strong yet flexible in adversity.

Notice the surface of the lake. Is it still or moving? During moments of the stillness, become aware of the translucent surface of the lake surface. Attending to the surface and how reflects its surroundings, whatever their nature. Although the surface of the lake may resemble chaos during bad weather conditions, it remains unmoving on the inside. Even during severe weather, the inner core of the lake is quiet and tranquil, yet strong. Now, focusing on the strength of the lake, imagine that you have the inherent power to conquer the challenging terrain of your thoughts and emotions. With each breath you take in, the strength of the lake becomes a force within you.

Next, try shifting your attention to joining with the lake. Like the lake's surface, imagining your mind becoming transparent about what it is thinking. Grounding yourself in the breath as you make your thoughts and feelings clear to yourself. Taking your time and not rushing yourself to do so, breathing into any struggles you may find along the way. Observing your thoughts and being open to them. Like the ground holds the water in the lake, using the breath to hold your fears, joys, and insecurities. Your thoughts or emotions are similar to the ripples in the lake – they create energy and tension in the mind, but very soon, the mind settles back. The ripples of our minds are like the ripples

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of the lake – temporary reactions to what happens in our environment. If, during the exercise, you notice that your lake is in a state of turmoil, acknowledge it and breathe into it. Keep breathing until your mind settles, trying not to react to the image. Try practicing acceptance and a non-judgmental attitude. If it gets uncomfortable for you, please listen to your body and trust yourself to choose an appropriate action.

While lying here, imagine taking in the power inherent in the lake – gradually becoming your lake! The part of your body in contact with the earth and ground is the floor of the lake. The part of your body facing the ceiling represents the surface of the lake. With each in breath, imagine taking in a small part of the lake, with each out breath, you sink deeper into the lake. Breathe in, breathe out; breathe in, breathe out. Follow your breath for the next few moments, sinking in and merging with lake with each breath. (After a minute of silence) Know that the lake is a part of you; you may call upon them at any time. Locate it when you wish to invoke its strength. Meditate on this for the next few moments.

When you feel ready to do so, gently prepare for your transition out of this exercise. With each breath in, the image of the lake fades and becomes you. With each breath out, you become more aware of the surroundings in the room. Focus on your breath; follow it as you come back to this room.

Body Scan

Lie down and rest,

now that you've found a friend to be with.

Rumi

In this exercise, we will be connecting with our bodies, moment-to-moment. The body scan is an important mindfulness practice because of the deep connection between the mind and body. What affects the body affects the mind and vice versa.

Typically, most of us spend little time listening to our bodies. In today's cerebral world, our thoughts and ideas (our mind) demand more of our attention. In fact, the only time we pay attention to our bodies is during moments of pain, discomfort, or exhaustion; these unpleasant feeling states demand our attention. However, these states also keep us from connecting with our bodies fully, genuinely, and lovingly. In today's exercise, experience the body; spend time with it, as it is. Thinking of the body as your home, as a container for your senses, your organs, your movements, your thoughts, your feelings. Spending a few moments, lying still, right here, right now and renewing the connection with the body, listening to what it has to say.

Choosing a posture, whether lying down or in an upright position, start by getting comfortable in it. Although many choose to lie down for this exercise, it is not mandatory to do so. Choose whatever posture you find comfortable, trusting yourself to know what is right for you in the present moment. Once settled, ground yourself in the breath; spending a few moments tasting the breath as it enters and leaves your body.

During the exercise, you may choose to close your eyes. However, if you are in a lying down position, it is a common experience to find yourself falling asleep, at least for

the first few times that you engage in this meditation. Mindfully respond to this realization; you may choose to continue to fall asleep or change your position or open your eyes to keep awake.

Typically, the body scan begins with a focus on the left side of the body and then travels upwards towards the head. During this exercise, we will meditate on sections of the body, breathing into them, restoring their energy, wishing them well, and finally, letting them fade away while we move to the next body part. You may choose to scan your body with this guideline, if this feels right for you.

Alternately, you may choose to focus on a particular part of the body, trusting yourself for whatever reason you choose that part. Perhaps it is a part that you take pride in or you choose it because you closely identify with or this body part gives you the most distress – whatever the reason for choosing it, trust in your body's wisdom to guide you and proceed further.

Take a couple of moments to let an image of that part form in your mind's eye. (If starting with the left foot and sequentially proceeding upward, then instruct the group to form an image of the left foot). This does not have to be an anatomically correct or artistically beautiful image. Let the image come to you. If an image does not come easily, breathe into the struggle and renewing your effort.

Feeling ready to move on, on the next in-breath, imagine oxygen infusing the body and directing it to the focused body part. The oxygen is enriching the body part with new, clean energy; with this energy, are your care and compassion, love and concern for that part. Breathing out, any negative energy, tension that was present, leaves that part.

Continuing to do this over the next couple of breaths, imagine the body part growing healthier and stronger.

Smiling to your image of the body part, imagine your smile infusing it with new energy; imagining that it is smiling back at you. Continuing to stay with the breath and continuing to enrich the part with each breath. This next part may be difficult to do, especially if the chosen part is a source of pain or distress. Breathe into the struggle as you continue with the exercise. Saying a few words of thanks as you continue to breathe into your body part; expressing your gratitude for the various movements or actions that are possible because of its presence and its energy. Whatever the appearance of the body part, it is a part of you. Recognizing the chosen part makes you different from others. Thank you, dear (insert body part name) for being a part of me! Take a few moments to think of what you are able to do because of the chosen part. Trying to acknowledge the strengths of the chosen part, express your gratitude. Thank you, dear (insert body part name) for allowing me to (insert specific action)! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! May you continue to grow in health and strength.

May nourishment and energy always reach you.

May you be filled with energy and hope.

Saying these words to the chosen part, breathing in these sentiments, continue to breathe out any signs of struggles or frustrations. Anytime you recognize that your mind has wandered, come back to the breath. Acknowledging that your mind had drifted away, gently guide it back to the breath. If you find yourself bored or unable to connect with the exercise, recognize this and stay with the breath.

(After a few moments of silence) When you feel ready, begin transitioning out of the exercise. Ground yourself in the breath before you emerge from the exercise and come back to this room. When you feel ready to do so, assume a sitting posture for us to process our experiences during the exercise.

Level of training

There is research to indicate that practicing mindfulness has significant effects on the personal and professional development of graduate students training to be mental health professionals (Aggs & Bambling, 2010; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008; Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009; Shin & Jin, 2010). This section briefly explores the need for group leaders of mindfulness groups to engage in personal practice. Another part of this section discusses the level of professional training necessary for leaders who intend to facilitate mindfulness groups.

Personal practice. Clinicians interested in facilitating mindfulness groups would benefit from developing their personal practice of mindfulness. Leaders could easily to lose touch with some of the frustrating components of meditation (such as boredom, indifference) if practice occurs only in the context of a training workshop and not in one's personal space (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Personal wisdom and knowledge about the mindfulness process gained through personal practice helps facilitators develop a unique appreciation of the members' struggles and experiences. It may help leaders to truly connect with the personal experiences of members and convey their understanding from a more informed perspective. Leaders' may be able to express their understanding of group members' feedback about boredom or frustration during a body scan from a more *human* and empathetic stance when group leaders are engaged in their personal practice. Leaders' participation when members share their practice feedback may help to highlight the universality of struggles inherent in meditation practice and foster a deeper bond between leaders and group.

Kabat-Zinn (2003) indicates that practice does not have to embody mastery. In mindfulness, there is a freshness associated with approaching each moment – even if they are "old" patterns or feelings. Leaders can communicate this lesson genuinely through their words and actions when they are actively engaging in meditation practice along with group members. Therefore, according to him, authenticity is the driving force behind emphasizing personal practice for group facilitators.

Leader's daily experiences with mindfulness principles such as beginner's mind, non-striving, acceptance through personal practice can help fully integrate these concepts in their personal experiences, and therapeutic relationships (Schure et al., 2008).

Professional training. An equally important area of training necessary for group facilitators of a mindfulness group is professional training. Leaders need to be familiar with the concepts of group process and the techniques used in group therapy. It is also imperative for leaders to familiarize themselves about mindfulness through personal practice and research literature, available in the next section. To this end, minimum educational qualifications for facilitators of a mindfulness group include a Masters level of training, past experiential training in facilitating groups, and beginning knowledge of mindfulness. Clinical supervision is an integral part of running a successful group, and it is preferable that the clinical supervisor is familiar with literature associated with mindfulness and its practice to better address unique issues related to facilitating a mindfulness group.

Resources

This section outlines helpful resources for clients and clinicians. The resources are a mixture of books and audio-visual materials.

Clients.

Borysenko, J. & Rothstein, L. (2007). *Minding the body, mending the mind.* New York, NY: Da CapoLifelong.

Henepola Gunaratana, B. (2002). Mindfulness in plain English. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: How to cope with stress, pain, and illness using mindfulness meditation.* New York, NY: Piatkus Books.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (Speaker) (2002). *Guided mindfulness meditation* [Audio CD]. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life.* New York, NY: Hyperion.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, NY: Hyperion.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (Speaker) (2006). *Mindfulness for beginners* [Audio CD]. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2007). *Arriving at your own door: 108 lessons in mindfulness*. New York, NY: Hyperion.

Nhat Hanh, T. (1992). *Peace is every step: The path of mindfulness in everyday life.* New York, NY: Bantam.

Siegel, R. D. (2010). *The mindfulness solution: Everyday practices for everyday problems.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Clinicians.

Baer, R. A. (Ed.). (2006). *Mindfulness-based treatment approaches: Clinician's guide to evidence base and applications*. San Diego, CA: Elsevier Academic Press.

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Chen, K. (2007). Qigong therapy for stress management. In P. M. Lehrer, R. L. Woolfolk, & Sime, W. E. (Eds.), *Principles and practice of stress management (3rd ed.)*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Cohen, K. S. (1997). The way of the QiGong: The art and science of Chinese energy healing. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

Didonna, F. (Ed.) (2009). *Clinical handbook of mindfulness.* New York, NY: Springer Science.

Germer, C. K. (2009). *The mindful path to self-compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Forsyth, J. P. (2007) & Eifert, G. H. *The mindfulness & acceptance workbook for anxiety: a guide to breaking free from anxiety, phobias, & worry using acceptance & commitment therapy.* Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications

Goleman, D. (1996). *The meditative mind: The varieties of meditative experience*. London: Thorsons.

Goleman, D. (1997). *Healing emotions: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on mindfulness, emotions, and health*. Boston: Shambhala.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: How to cope with stress, pain, and illness using mindfulness meditation.* New York, NY: Piatkus Books.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life.* New York, NY: Hyperion.

Kirk, M., Boon, B., & DiTuro, D. (2006). *Hatha Yoga illustrated.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

NurrieStearns, M., & NurrieStearns, R. (2010). Yoga for anxiety: Meditations and practices for calming the body and mind. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Qu, L. L. (2004). The simple art of Tai Chi. New York, NY: Sterling Publications.

Shapiro, D. H., & Walsh, R. N. (Eds.) (1984). *Meditation, classic and contemporary perspectives*. New York, NY: Aldine.

Shapiro, S. L., & Carlson, L. E. (2009). *The art and science of mindfulness: Integrating mindfulness into psychology and the helping professions*: Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Siegel, R. D. (2010). *The mindfulness solution: Everyday practices for everyday problems.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Stahl, B. (2010). *A mindfulness-based stress reduction workbook.* Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Mindfulness measures.

The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). The MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003) is a 15-item instrument with a six-point Likert-type scale (*almost always* to *almost never*) yields a single total score. The scale measures respondents' frequency of experiences of acting on automatic pilot, being preoccupied, and not maintaining a present-moment focus. Items include, "I find myself doing things without paying attention" and "I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past." It takes ten minutes or less to complete.

The MAAS shows strong psychometric properties. It was significantly positively correlated with openness to experience, emotional intelligence, and well-being; negatively correlated with rumination and social anxiety; and unrelated to self-monitoring.

The Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI). The FMI (Buchheld, Grossman, & Walach, 2001) is a 30-item instrument with a four-point Likert-type scale (*rarely* to *almost always*) and yields a single total score. Respondents rate the frequency of their experiences related to nonjudgmental awareness and openness to unpleasant experiences. Items include, "I am open to the experience of the present moment," "I accept unpleasant experiences," and "I am friendly to myself when things go wrong."

The Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS). The KIMS (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004) is a 39-item instrument self-report inventory measuring four mindfulness skills: observing, describing, acting with awareness, and accepting without judgment. Respondents rate the frequency with which they perform each of these behaviors on a five-point Likert-type scale (*never or very rarely true* to *always or almost always true*).

Items include, "When I do things, my mind wanders off and I'm easily distracted," "I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions," "I notice the smell and aromas of things," and "My natural tendency is to put my experiences into words." The scale is largely based on the Dialectical Behavior Therapy conceptualization of mindfulness. It is suitable for administrating to novice meditators.

The Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R). The CAMS-R (Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, & Laurenceau, 2007) consists of 12 items and measures respondents' attention, awareness, present-focus, and acceptance/nonjudgmental attitude of their thoughts and feelings. Items, rated on a four-point Likert-type scale (*rarely/not at all* to *almost always*), yield a single total score. The CAMS-R was positively correlated with the FMI and MAAS, well-being, adaptive emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, problem analysis, and plan rehearsal and negatively correlated with symptoms of distress, worry, rumination, brooding, thought suppression, experiential avoidance, and stagnant deliberation.

Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale (PMS). The PMS (Cardaciotto, Herbert, Forman, Moitra, & Farrow, 2008) is a 20-item instrument consisting of two sub-scales (acceptance and present-moment awareness) that are scored separately. Items are rated on a five-point Likert-type scale (*never* to *very often*). Items include, "When talking with other people, I am aware of the emotions I am experiencing" and "I tell myself that I shouldn't have certain thoughts." Good internal consistency has been demonstrated across clinical and non-clinical samples.

The Mindfulness Questionnaire (MQ). The MQ (Chadwick, Hember, Mead,

Lilley, & Dagnan, 2005) is a 16-item instrument and assesses for the presence of a mindful approach to distressing thoughts and images. According to the authors, the items represent the four aspects of mindfulness: mindful observation, letting go, nonaversion, and nonjudgment. Items are scored on a seven-point Likert-type scale (*agree totally* to *disagree totally*) and yield a single total score. The statements generally start with, "Usually, when I have distressing thoughts or images" followed by a mindfulness-based response, such as "I am able to accept the experience."

Appendix

Allied mindfulness exercises

This section includes a set of exercises that may be "substituted" for certain Hatha yoga postures.

Tai chi and Qigong exercises. Like Hatha Yoga, Tai chi and Qigong are movement-based but involve more "gentler" practices. Unlike the yoga exercises, Tai chi and Qigong exercises require the practitioner to maintain flow and continuity between the movements. Listed below are various popular Tai chi and Qigong practices; the yoga postures are identified in parenthesis. Additional information about these practices can be gleaned by consulting the Resources section.

Tai chi. Exercises mentioned in this section are derived from the Beijing 24 form. These Tai chi exercises are deemed suitable for beginners. Each of the 24 forms continues from the preceding form; however, in this section they are described as independent exercises. There are variations in the names of the postures and the ways in which they are performed depending on the Tai chi family style. For further information on how these exercises look in action, go to http://learning-tai-chi.info/24-posture-short-form-tai-chi.html

Opening Posture; Form 1 (Chair). Begin by facing forward, heels together, shoulders relaxed, and arms resting on either side of the body. Inhaling, bend the knees before lifting the left heel and shifting the weight of the body to the right leg. Place the left foot on the ground, shoulder-width distance from the right foot. Exhale and move the whole body to the center of this distance. Inhaling, lift the arms with palms facing the ground. Continue to raise them until they reach shoulder level. Breathing out, bend the knees slightly while pressing the palms downward. Continue to drop the elbows till it

reaches waist level. Remember to keep the torso erect and spine straight as you hold this posture. As you feel the tension in the knees, relax the waist and hips and keep your shoulders and elbows down.

Kick with Right Heel; Form 13 (Standing extended-leg stretch). Begin by lifting the left leg, knee slightly bent and placing the left toes on the floor. The right hand is raised to shoulder level and the left hand is by the waist, palm up. Start to turn to the right, lifting the left hand up and away from the chest. Inhaling, lift the left leg from the floor. At the same time, engage the arms in a circular motion. Start with the left arm, palm up crossing the chest and passing over the right arm as the right arm is drawn in towards the chest, palm facing you. Begin contact of the left foot with the ground by first placing the left heel down. Circle the arms upward and outward. Move the weight of the body to the left foot, and bringing the arms down to waist level. Gently raise the right foot, heel first, and place it alongside the left. Raising and balancing the body on the right leg, keep the thigh parallel to the ground; exhaling, cross the right wrist over the outside of the left wrist. Inhaling immediately, look in the direction in which you will be kicking. Open out the arms with palms facing forward. Exhaling, extend the right leg outward, stretch out the hands, keeping a slight bend on each elbow. Keep the fingers on the right hand open and look forward through the opening. The kicking movement should be performed slowly; focus on lifting the leg fluidly instead of jerky movements. Repeat movement with the left side.

Snake Creeps Down, Golden Rooster Stands on Left Leg; Form 16 (Tree). The initial postures in this movement can be used in place of the Hatha yoga posture. Therefore, this movement is not described in full here. Begin this posture from the

previous position (kick with left heel). Start with the left leg extended outward, arms outstretched and slightly bent at the elbows. Breathing in, pull your left foot towards you, toes pointing to the ground , hold it at shin level, and maintain the horizontal position of the thigh. While balancing the body on the right leg, make a hook with the right arm; hold out the arm in a horizontal direction, relax the fingers, and bring them together mimicking the movement of picking up an object. While doing this, bring the left arm across the face. Keep arms at head level on the right side. Exhaling, bring the left foot in contact with the ground and bring the feet together. Repeat this for the opposite side of the body.

While the remaining postures in the Beijing 24 form are not described here, they can be included in the movement-based section of the group's curriculum. The Tai chi exercises can be used as a supplement or in lieu of the yoga exercises.

Qigong. Some Qigong exercises are a good starting point for those who find it difficult to maintain a standing posture for prolonged periods. Like Tai chi exercises, Qigong exercises are known by different names and there are variations in the ways they are performed. Some of the materials listed in the resources can provide visual information about these exercises.

Eight Pieces of Brocade. This set of exercises is gentle stretching exercises, help to improve flexibility and muscle strength, and can be performed standing or seated. Only those exercises that closely parallel the Hatha Yoga exercises are described in detail.

Two Hands Reach Skyward to Balance the Triple Burner (Stretch). Start with the Qigong posture; standing erect, keep the shoulders relaxed and chest open, and feet firmly placed on the ground. The fingers, knees and elbows are slightly bent. You feel

alert yet relaxed. Intertwine the fingers, inhale, and bring the arms overhead to form a circle around the head. The palms are facing down. Lift the heels off the ground to a level that is comfortable to you. Exhaling, bring the feet to ground level and rest the interlaced fingers on the crown of the head. Inhaling, stretch upward again and rise on your toes; this time, the palms are turned outward and facing the ceiling. Exhaling, come back down with the palms resting on your head. Repeat several times.

Reaching Down to Dissipate Disease (Standing forward bend). Stand with palms resting on the buttocks. Exhaling, let the hands slide down against the back of the legs, while bending as much as you feel comfortable. Inhaling, reverse the movement, bringing the hands back to starting position and resuming the erect stance. Once you are standing erect, continue with this stance and inhaling, lift the heels off the ground. Hold this posture before gently coming back down to the ground and repeating the movements.

Toe touching to Strengthen the Kidneys and Waist (Standing forward bend). Assess suitability of this movement depending on health and ability status. Begin with a shoulder-width stance. Exhaling, start bending, but go only as far as you feel comfortable. If you are able to touch your toes, try to deepen the stretch with each breath. When you stop bending, focus on breathing naturally in this posture for a few moments. Exhaling, return to the standing posture, gently and with full awareness of the changes in your spine and front of the body. Continue to breath in, gently bend backwards to notice how the spine is compressed and the front of the body is open. Bend backwards but only to the extent that is possible for you to do so. Hold this posture for a few moments. Exhaling, return to standing posture and continue to exhale as you bend forward. Repeat the movements.

Other Qigong exercises to consider. Group facilitators can also implement other Qigong exercises, not elaborated here but available through the Resources section. One such set of recommended exercises is the Five Animal Frolics, which one of the oldest existing exercises that are practiced till date. They are designed to improve well-being, balance and coordination, and strengthen the muscles and tendons. Like the Tai chi and yoga exercises, the breath plays an important role in holding the postures. The five animals that are included are the Crane (symbolizes meditative stillness and longevity); the Bear (represents strength, power, and healing wisdom); the Monkey (the silly animal); the Deer (these movements have expanded nobility), and the Tiger (represents speed is swiftness and power).

CHAPTER 5

Recommendations and future directions

The target group for the practices outlined in this dissertation is beginning meditators within a college student population. This section highlights certain caveats for facilitators of the mindfulness group.

Introduction of new practices

During group therapy, leaders need to assess the readiness of members before introducing new practices. If considered appropriate, leaders may re-introduce exercises to help members develop proficiency in a safe and stable environment. The current dissertation recommends flexibility towards introduction of practices. There are no prescribed numbers of meditative practices introduced within the lifetime of the group.

Additionally, leaders need to pay careful attention to how members react to silent periods during the exercises. In addition, leaders may vary the duration of silence within each exercise on a session-by-session basis. It would be important for the leaders to gauge members' readiness for the silence. Alternately, highlighting commonalities member thoughts behind silence or forewarning members about how the human mind typically deals with silence or non-activity may buffer members towards any anxiety they may face during such moments.

For practices that are not included in this dissertation but are part of the traditional Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, leaders would need to exercise clinical judgment

regarding the use of new practices (for example, readiness of members, group composition, and purpose of the group) prior to introducing them during group sessions.

Different clients

It would be prudent for group leaders to tailor the program when used with members with more meditation experience. For instance, leader may introduce more still meditation practices, such as the sitting meditation, to the group when considered appropriate.

Modifications are necessary for use of this dissertation's practices with college students with severe mental health concerns. Changes in the group screening process and group sessions are evident when members with more severe mental health concerns are part of the group. A greater severity or complexity of clients' presenting issue demands greater attention during group screening, especially on aspects of trauma and risk assessment depending on the nature of the presenting concern. Leaders also need to spend considerable amount of time in clinical supervision deciding on the appropriateness of including such members and its impact on group cohesion. Thorough review of video or audio-recordings of group sessions during clinical supervision would be necessary depending on the expertise of facilitators. Ethical practice would dictate that leaders elaborately discuss appropriate safety measures to prevent harm to clients and other members during group sessions.

Empirical support

Future researchers may empirically test the suitability of the practices included in this handbook for the Millennial college student population. Such data would help to

refine and make suggestions on healthy practices for the current generation of college

students in dealing with a stressful lifestyle.

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