

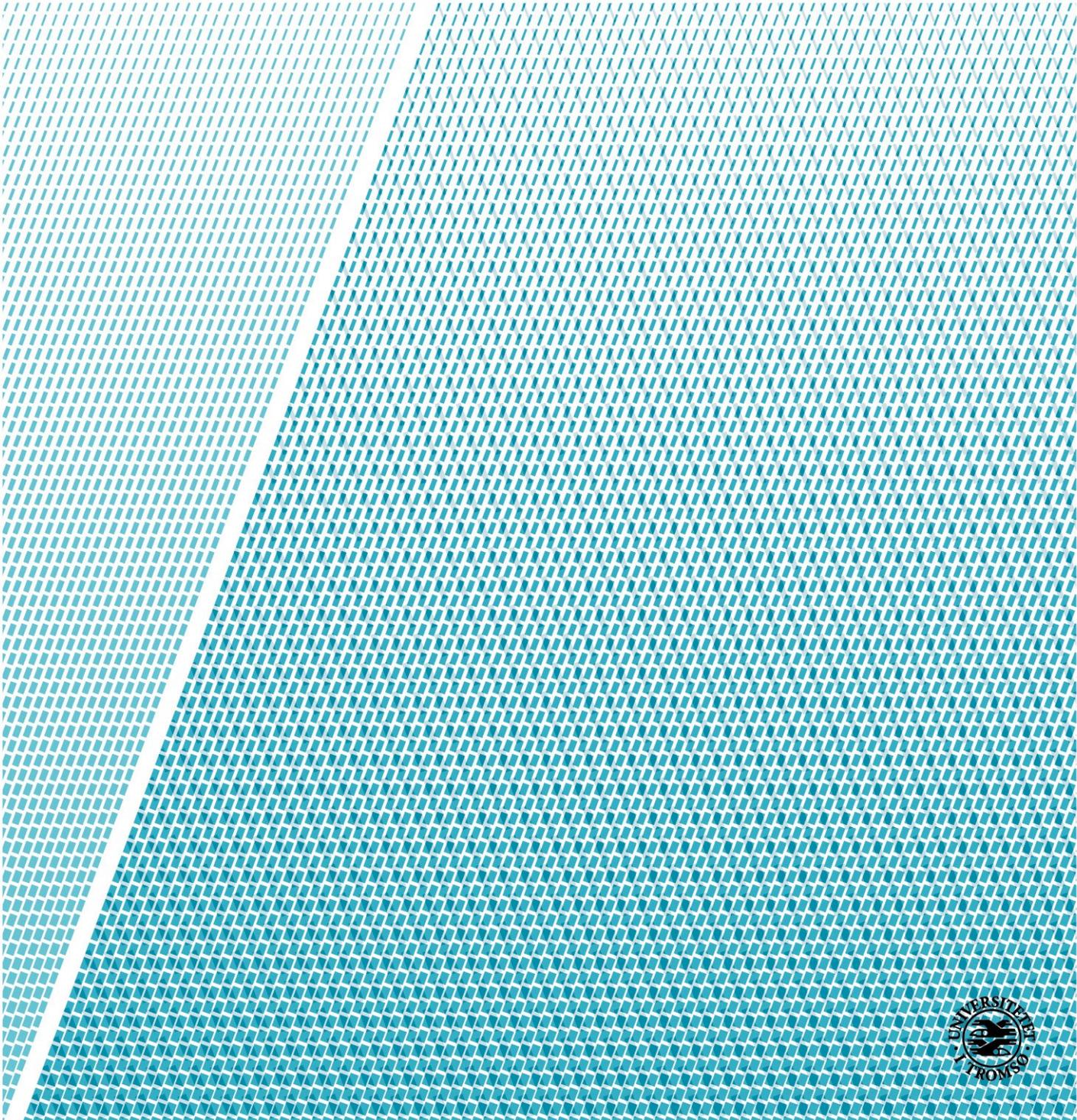
Subtle Nuances

Mindfulness

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore a new meditation concept referred to as 'self-clarity' inspired by the diversity in approaching or implementing mindfulness practices, besides variations in anticipated effects derived from the practice between the East and West. Moreover, recent trends in the West show a growing interest in developing tailored mindfulness-based intervention programmes, with themes for specific cohort groups, such as mindfulness-based mental fitness training, mindfulness-based childbirth and parenting and mindful leader training. It is against this backdrop the inspiration for this study was drawn.

The thesis begins with a theoretical account of mindfulness, given that it is rooted in Buddhism and is understood within clinical psychology and experience-based theory, upon which the self-clarity programme is based. The research employs a hermeneutic phenomenology approach wherein data were collected via interviews before, during and after training and through participants' journals. The design includes triangulation methodology.

The participants in the study were women, and their previous meditation experience ranged from none to extensive. Interviews and participants' written journals were analysed using thematic analysis and the hermeneutic circle. Subsequently, four overarching themes were identified: recognition of the state of being, growing clarity and breaking free from limitations, an elevated sense of being and the balancing process, and love and compassion.

This study's results suggest that, through the self-clarity programme, participants showed a deeper recognition of their own state of being, increased clarity over self, and a more balanced state of being with increased awareness, which seemed to empower them to break free from what they erroneously identified as limited beliefs and perspectives. The overall effect could be described as a sense of greater freedom, understanding and love.

The results also suggested that the effects the participants experienced were largely congruous with the purpose behind the mindfulness practice described primarily within Buddhism, the self-clarity experience-based theory, and finally within the framework of mindfulness in psychology. This is attributed to the active clarification process of stream-of-consciousness content included in both mindfulness from the Buddhist perspective and the self-clarity programme; however, mindfulness emphasises this approach less, as described in clinical psychology, centred primarily on observing content within a stream of consciousness non-judgmentally. My research findings suggest that a different focal point, accompanied by few detailed instructions during the course of meditation practice, can support the process of deepening one's awareness of their innate state of being.

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1 Mindfulness

This thesis explores a new meditation concept within the field of mindfulness. Being mindful is described as being attentive or observant. In general, mindfulness, and meditation are related to two key contours of consciousness: concentration and awareness (Mikulas, 2015). Brown, Ryan & Creswell phrase these two functions as ‘awareness’ and ‘attention’ (2007). Mindfulness practice can be described as bringing one’s attention to both internal and external experiences in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). A core objective of mindfulness practice is to increase one’s ability to be attentive and observant of their thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and surrounding environment. Accomplishing this goal involves different exercises that can be performed in different ways, such as sitting or lying down, or physical movements, such as walking or yoga (Baer, 2003). The term ‘mindfulness’, regardless of whether it is approached as a practice or heightened state of being, can be deemed a universal approach and experience that exists beyond the confinements of religion and secular viewpoints. However, many scholars have acknowledged that the roots of mindfulness owe their genesis to Buddhism (Baer, 2003; Brown et al., 2007; Shapiro et al, 2006).

Notably, mindfulness, as well as its philosophy and methods, have been interspersed in western clinical interventions (Baer, 2003; Bishop et al., 2004). Both Buddhism and psychology lack universal definitions of mindfulness, and their descriptions are often comprehensive, embracing varying states of mind, attitudes and actions (Brown et al., 2007; Gethin, 2011).

The many existing approaches to practicing mindfulness, and the backdrop upon which different models rest, illuminate a variety in understanding and personal needs on the way to arriving at an expected destination. These destinations also differ in terms of the secular versus religious viewpoints.

In Buddhist teachings, the central element is the attainment of nirvana by freeing oneself from root cause of suffering, which is called dukkha (Rahula, 1959/1974; Harvey, 1990). This requires one to step outside and eventually circumvent the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth (Bodhi, 2011).

Bodhi (2011) describes nirvana as a state of ‘transcendent bliss and peace’ (p.21).

Correspondingly, Rahula (1959/74) describes it as ‘the ultimate truth’ that ‘you can only see or realize’ (p.40). Meanwhile, the intended consequence of mindfulness in the field of clinical psychology varies by aiming to address the various ailments one suffers during the course of their lifetime (Brown et al., 2007; Baer, 2003). Against this backdrop, one endeavor is to

detach from mental reactions in order to lay down the foundation for effective problem solving (Segal et al., 2013).

1.1 Background

Mindfulness has been tested by several researchers to identify its impact in different empirical fields, such as stress reduction for medical students (Shapiro, Schwartz & Bonner, 1998), learning abilities in schools (Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz & Walach, 2014) and creative performance (Baas, Nevicka & Velden, 2014). While the effects of practicing mindfulness are unclear, studies have begun to reach a consensus on some common benefits against anxiety, depression and stress (Khoury et. al, 2013).

When practicing mindfulness, there exist variations in context, perspectives, and attitudes, from the standpoint of bridging the gap (in practice) between the East and West, including the expected effects of the practice. The recent trend in West underpins a strong interest towards developing and tailoring Mindfulness-based intervention programs with increasingly specific themes for narrow cohort groups such as Mindfulness-based Childbirth and Parenting, Mindfulness Based Eating, Mindfulness-Based Mental Fitness Training, Mindfulness- Based Art Therapy for Cancer (Cullen, 2011).

The effects of mindfulness in intervention studies illustrate the diversity of expected outcomes. Many papers extrapolate on the different effects of Mindfulness Based Interventions, such as chronic pain (Ussher et al., 2014), sleep disturbance (Kim et al., 2016), emotional regulation, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction (Hülshager, et al., 2013), relapse prevention (Segal et al., 2010; Teasdale et al., 2002), anxiety (Baer, 2003) and psoriasis (Bernhard, Kristeller, & Kabat-Zinn, 1998).

This study explores a new meditation concept called ‘self-clarity’ inspired by the diversity in approaching or implementing mindfulness practices, as well the variations in expected effects derived from the practice between the East and West. My co-worker Tuomo Viitajylhä developed a self-clarity programme through a process that I was involved in. Notably, this self-clarity programme does not seek specific effects or results beyond the potential increase in self-clarity, and does not target narrow groups of people. As such, this study examines the phenomenon of mindfulness from a wider perspective.

The self-clarity programme can be placed within a framework of health promotion, which signifies a secular and non-therapeutic context. It stems from values that promote human potential and proclaim/suggest that every individual can potentially gain greater clarity over themselves as well as their existence in this world. However, this does not mean that the programme views people as isolated individuals. Instead, the endeavour is to experience

heightened self-clarity and a greater understanding of the world and the people in it so as to deepen the level of recognition through a holistic prism. Unlike Mindfulness in Buddhism, and in western clinical psychology, the potential effects of this self-clarity programme are not defined beyond increased self - clarity. What this clarity may bring forth for individuals is not the focal point. Put simply, the programme is not aiming at a clear articulated end destination through the conduit of mindfulness.

1.2 Objectives

Based on my interests in the timeliness of mindfulness in both health promotion and prevention works, this study explores how mindfulness has evolved from both the secular perspective, and the broader spectrum of beliefs and anticipated effects that surround this type of training. I chose to study these phenomena from a broader perspective without focusing on; the expected effects or pre-determined destinations given the alignment of such an approach with the perspective of self-clarity program.

The format of this self-clarity programme does not differentiate between experienced meditators and those who are meditating for the first time. Therefore, the meditation experiences of participants range from none to extended ones.

Using a thesis as the first step towards encapsulating the experiences I hold and view them in a theoretical light provides me with initial information that may or may not shape a future version of the self-clarity programme. In addition, it paves the way for further research studies on this programme.

The research questions explored in this study are as follows:

What are the effects of participating in systematic self-clarity meditation training?

Second research question:

A secondary purpose was to investigate whether the program's different focal point, accompanied by a few detailed instructions, would be fruitful in honing an individual's ability to deepen the recognition of their own state of being.

In order to answer these questions satisfactorily, I employed the approach of hermeneutic phenomenology which is premised on an interest in lived experience (Van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology is purely descriptive in nature and becomes hermeneutic when its method is deemed as interpretive. The use of hermeneutic phenomenology facilitated the exploration of the participants' experiences, entailing further abstraction and interpretation based on my theoretical and personal knowledge on meditation training.

Owing to the fact that this self-clarity programme was new and untested, I opined that it would be important to be responsive to potential feedback from participants during the course of this programme. It is for this reason that I decided to implement the elements of action research, which is a method known to improve practice (Koshy, 2010). This is accomplished by using participation to derive knowledge that is helpful in everyday practice (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This decision accommodated the possibility of adding or adjusting elements in the programme based on potential feedback received during the course period, whilst gathering information about these possible adjustments in the post interview stages.

The design included the methodology of triangulation in order to gain a more holistic understanding of the phenomena, whilst developing an outside perspective on the information given by the participant with a view to external validity.

This means that data was collected through interviews and participants' written journal, something which provided a more holistic understanding of the phenomena. To strengthen external validity, data were collected from a third party, a silent observer who resided close to the participant (e.g., a spouse/cohabitant or partner); this step was undertaken to gain insights from an outside perspective on the information given by the participants.

1.3 Personal background

My previous professional experience was in the field of art as a choreographer and subsequently, as a director. I then extended my education in operational psychology and counselling (including aspects of mindfulness training) into the private sector where I studied both coaching and mindfulness.

My life and work experiences have allowed me to see how individuals work more optimally when given a sense of direction, in addition to being trusted to explore freely, regardless of whether it pertains to creativity, or a sense of personal self-clarity. It is these wide ranging experiences that led me to the aforementioned research objectives.

Tuomo Viitajylhä has a background in web design and software development, working one-on-one with business leaders to help clarify their ideas and visions. Viitajylhä's perspective in the field of meditation is premised on the notion of 'go and see for yourself', which means that one must question the suggestion made not just by others, but also by their own selves, which may pave the way for effortless self-clarity for the concerned individual.

The collaborative and shared work experiences between I and Tuomo Viitajylhä over the last 7 years have focused on clarifying content, pointers, and structures to empower people to increase their recognition of self. In fact, this work is the foundation of the self-clarity

programme. Some of this content has been previously presented in a one-on-one format and with smaller groups, both live and online. The participants intended to deepen their self-recognition and gain a sense of increased personal clarity.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized into eight chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 explore various theoretical perspectives in order to build an understanding of how mindfulness is perceived across different traditions and contexts. More specifically, Chapter 2 describes the phenomena of mindfulness from a religious, philosophical perspective and explores its description in Buddhist scriptures. This section aims to provide a deeper understanding of the origin of mindfulness practice and its purpose within Buddhism. Meanwhile Chapter 3.1 explains how mindfulness practice is understood and used in a secular context, particularly clinical psychology. This section aims at clarifying the key differences between religious, philosophical and secular understandings of this practice. In turn, this builds the foundation for better understanding the self-clarity programme. Section 3.2 meanwhile provides information about the self-clarity programme, including its context, perspective and characteristics. The third chapter also includes practical applications for mindfulness in clinical psychology and self-clarity. Chapter 4 examines the extant research on mindfulness, whereas Chapter 5 discusses methodological issues, which includes an exploration of hermeneutic phenomenology research and extrapolates on how the design of this study is aligned with this tradition. Meanwhile Chapter 6 analyses the empirical findings of this research. Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the results in light the three theories described in Chapter 2 and 3.

2 Mindfulness in Buddhism

This Chapter will elaborate on the Buddhist understanding of mindfulness. The context of practising mindfulness, its purpose, its expected effects and its execution will be clarified.

The religious understanding of mindfulness creates a theoretical foundation that sheds light on how mindfulness is understood in a secular context (described in Chapter 3). Understanding these two perspectives will provide a better foundation for placing the self-clarity programme in this field of practice, for discussing the results of this study and for understanding the self-clarity programs' framework and format.

2.1 A Religious Understanding of Mindfulness in Buddhism

Mindfulness is a concept taken from Buddhist teachings and represents the heart of Buddhist meditation practice (Bodhi, 2011; Rahula, 1959/1974). Buddhism philosophy is expansive, so I will present a summary of relevant Buddhist teachings to better understand mindfulness as described it, including the Buddhist perspective of being and existence, the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths and the discourse on the foundations of mindfulness.

Buddhism has two main schools, Theravada and Mahayana (Smith & Novak, 2003). A third school sometimes mentioned is Vajrayana, built upon the Mahayana philosophy (Smith & Novak, 2003). Each school has a different perspective, but both are founded on the same basic teachings of Buddha, who lived and taught in northeast India in the fifth century BC (Bodhi, 2011, p.19; Harvey, 1990, p.32).

2.1.1 The Teachings of Buddha

Gautama Buddha, also known as Siddhārtha Gautama, realised a path to end suffering and attain enlightenment or awakening (Harvey, 1990). The name Buddha means the awakened one.

Mahasaccaka Sutta explains that Buddha abandoned ascetic practices to find a so-called middle way that included practising deep meditation (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995/2015). This led him to insights of his past lives, the Four Noble Truths and the workings of karma and reincarnation (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995/2015).

A fundamental concept in Buddhist teachings is samsara, meaning wandering on. Samsara describes the beginningless process of birth, death and rebirth (Harvey, 1990, p.32). The highest goal in Buddhism is to step out of samsara and attain nirvana, a process explained in the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths—a conceptual framework Buddha presented after he

became awakened (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995/2015). The Four Noble Truths summarize the essence of Buddha's teachings (Bodhi, 2011; Rahula, 1959/1974).

To better comprehend the Four Noble Truths, where mindfulness has a prominent place (Bodhi, 2011), we must look at the central Buddhist concepts of being and existence with regard to **dependent origination** and **the three marks of existence**.

2.1.2 Dependent Origination and the Three Marks of Existence

Dependent origination (*paticca-samuppada*) holds that everything is interconnected. All things affect all other things. 'That being, this comes to be; from the rising of that, this arises; that being absent, this is not; from the cessation of that, this ceases' (Harvey, 1990, p.54). The principle of conditionality, according to this doctrine, is that all things, mental and physical, are formed by certain conditions and cease when these conditions are removed. Nothing except nirvana is independent (Harvey, 1990).

In Buddhism, the three marks of existence are characteristics of all beings and existence: impermanence (*anicca*), non-self (*anattā*) and unsatisfactoriness or suffering (*dukkha*).

Dependent origination explains the principle of conditionality as cause and effect.

Impermanence teaches that everything is temporary. All physical and mental events are metaphysically imaginary (Thera, 2006) they come into being and then dissolve.

Impermanence is closely connected with the teaching of non-self. The doctrine of non-self explains that a permanent self, an unchanging soul or essence, does not exist (Harvey, 1990).

When we fail to realise the true reality of being and existence—that everything is interconnected, that all is impermanent and nothing eternal and that a permanent, separate entity known as 'a self' does not exist—then we experience suffering (*dukkha*). Buddha reportedly said, 'The only thing I teach is *dukkha* and the cessation of *dukkha*.' Developing insight into the nature of suffering, how it arises, how it ceases and the path leading to its cessation, is a process explained by the Four Noble Truths (Bodhi, 2011; Rahula, 1959/1974). From a Buddhist perspective this means we are trapped in the endless cycle of death and rebirth.

2.1.3 The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths are often compared to a doctor's examination (Prebish & Keown 2006, p.44). The first truth, suffering, describes the symptoms. The second truth, how suffering arises, is the diagnosis. The third truth, cessation of suffering, is the prognosis. The fourth truth, the path leading to the cessation of suffering, is the prescription.

The first noble truth concerns suffering or *dukkha*. Although the word *dukkha* is often translated to suffering in English, the word does not adequately capture the depth of what *dukkha* means. Buddha defined three domains of *dukkha* (Rahula, 1959/1974, p. 29) which will help us better understand the full meaning of the term.

Dukkha as ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*). This relates to suffering we experience in our worldly life, including birth, illness, ageing and dying. It refers to emotional, physical and mental pain.

Dukkha as a result of change (*viparināma-dukkha*). We want things to last in our life but everything is impermanent. *Dukkha* as a result of change points to the fact that even joyful experiences are suffering because they also are subject to change. When we are happy, the happiness we experience will ultimately cease, and thus even happiness is *dukkha*.

Dukkha as a contingent condition (*saṅkhārā-dukkha*). According to dependent origination, everything is interconnected and so affects everything else. *Dukkha* as a contingent condition is, on one level, unsatisfactoriness —a feeling that nothing can satisfy. This level of *dukkha* is related to the five skandhas, also called heaps or aggregates, which form a sense of personality or ‘I’ (Harvey, 1990; Rahula, 1959/1974). The five aggregates are form, sensation, perception, consciousness and mental formation.

According to Rahula, a sense of personality is formed by “a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies (1959/74, p. 20). These energies are impermanent and in a constant state of flux. The skandhas theory complements the doctrine of non-self; the five aggregates are a form of attachment and are *dukkha*, according to Buddha (Rahula, 1959/74). But it is not the skandhas themselves that cause *dukkha*, rather the way we relate to them (Hanh, 1998; Rahula, 1959/74). We don't see the true reality, yet *dukkha* must be understood:

‘Now this, monks, is the Noble Truth of dukkha: Birth is dukkha, aging is dukkha, death is dukkha; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, & despair are dukkha; association with the unbeloved is dukkha; separation from the loved is dukkha; not getting what is wanted is dukkha. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are dukkha.’

— SN 56.11 (translated by Bhikkhu, 1993).

The second noble truth concerns the arising of *dukkha*, caused by craving, desire and ignorance. If everything is temporary, as impermanence teaches, then anything we try to cling to will cause *dukkha*.

Buddha identified three primary cravings: sensual pleasure, existence (craving for having a self) and non-existence (creating distance from unpleasant things, people or experiences) (Harvey, 1990, p. 53). Craving is a central cause of *dukkha*, but it is not the first or only cause. This part of the second truth is often explained in relation to dependent origination. Which means all things affect all other things, everything is interconnected. (Harvey, 1990). Craving always works within a complex series of links and is conditioned by ignorance (Harvey, 1990, pp.54-56).

The third noble truth concerns the cessation of *dukkha*. 'That is, when craving and related causes comes to an end, *dukkha* ceases' (Harvey, 1990, p.61).

Cessation of *dukkha* is often explained as 'blowing out a candle', cutting off the three flames of craving: sensual pleasure, existence and non-existence. When there is no more craving, no more karmic imprints are created, there are no more seeds to create a new existence (rebirth) and we step out from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth (*samsara*). Attainment of nirvana, only occurs through recognising the real nature of *skandhas* in relation to impermanence and non-self.

(Harvey, 1990). Nirvana is the 'cessation of *dukkha*' (Harvey, 1990, p.61). Theravada Buddhism holds that there is nothing after nirvana. 'The only thing you can do is to see it, realize it' (Rahula, 1959/74, p.28). Rahula underlines the difficulties in describing nirvana:

'Volumes have been written in reply to this quite natural and simple question; they have, more and more, only confused the issue rather than clarified it. The only reasonable reply to give to the question is that it can never be answered completely and satisfactorily in words, because human language is too poor to express the real nature of the Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality which is Nirvāṇa.' (Rahula, 1959/1974, p. 25).

Path Leading to the Cessation of Dukkha (*megga*)

Megga defines a practical method for realizing nirvana called the Noble Eightfold Path (Bodhi, 2013; Harvey, 1990). The Noble Eightfold Path defines eight factors which work in unison to heighten and perfect ethical conduct (*sila*), mental discipline (*samadhi*) and wisdom (*panna*) (Rahula, 1959/1974, p.32).

1. Right Understanding (*samma dittha*)
2. Right Thought (*samma sankappa*)

3. Right Speech (*samma vaca*)
4. Right Action (*samma kammanta*)
5. Right Livelihood (*samma ajiva*)
6. Right Effort (*samma vayama*)
7. Right Mindfulness (*samma sati*)
8. Right Concentration (*samma samadhi*)

In Buddhism, these components are intertwined and inseparable. Notice that mindfulness is the seventh component (Bodhi, 2011; Rahula 1959/1974), meaning it can only be accomplished in unison with the other seven factors.

2.1.4 Mindfulness Practice in Buddhism

Mindfulness is used both as a description of a meditation practice and as a heightened state of being (Bodhi, 2011). It is a tool to develop insight and wisdom and to ultimately attain nirvana (Bodhi, 2011).

Contemplating distinct objects is part of mindfulness practice, involving both objective observation and a subjective aspect, where the meditator interprets experiences based on a teaching.

This contemplation can be carried out in different ways, including walking, exercising or sitting cross-legged. A more experienced member of the community should provide support and guidance as the student moves forward in his or her practice (Harvey, 1990).

Although mindfulness is one element on the Noble Eightfold Path, Buddhist teachings lack a clear definition of it. Buddhist schools have no consensus on the definition but rather accentuate different features of it, both in theory and practice (Gethin, 2011).

Discussed here are key features of mindfulness relevant to understanding this practice and the result of this study. We will look at the mindfulness sutra, as well the concepts of **bare attention** and **clear comprehension**, which occur in the oldest text of the Pāli Canon, from which Theravada tradition draws its scriptural inspiration.

The Four Establishments of Mindfulness

Buddha described mindfulness as having Four Establishments.

'This, monks, is the one-way path for the purification of beings ... for the realization of nibbāna [nirvana], that is, the four establishments of mindfulness.' (Bodhi, 2011, p.21)

Buddha describes the Four Establishments of Mindfulness as a way to develop insight and wisdom which leads to attainment of nirvana (Bodhi, 2011).

'Here, a monk dwells contemplating the body in the body ... feelings in the feelings ... mind in the mind ... phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world.' (Bodhi, 2011, p.21).

Here, he explains how mindfulness should be cultivated, underlining the importance of sustained attention on a single object, a process 'that involves a close, repetitive observation of the object' (Bodhi, 2011, p.21). Sustained attention, according to Buddha, is ardent, relating to energy; mindful, describing lucid awareness of whatever presents itself in the process; and clearly comprehending, adding a cognitive element where the meditator not only observes what is present, but also relates to it through the context of Buddhist teaching (Bodhi, 2011).

In the oldest text of the Pāli Canon, two concepts are repeated, shedding further light upon the practice of mindfulness: **bare attention** and **clear comprehension** (Bodhi, 2011). These build a bridge from observation to insight.

2.1.5 Bare Attention and Clear Comprehension

Bare attention is 'the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens in us, at the successive moments of perception' (Thera 1973, p.30).

According to Bodhi, there are many ways of cultivating mindfulness, bare attention is only one (2011). The expression 'bare attention' is according to Bodhi only useful for a novice meditator in initial practice (2011). From a theoretical point of view, it is questionable whether any attention can be truly bare (Bodhi, 2011). Bodhi (2011) instead describes that a common thread of the many ways to cultivate mindfulness, including 'bare attention', 'is a quality of lucid awareness that allows the object to stand forth with a vivid and distinct presence' (p.27).

Placing sustained attention on the breath is an initial exercise of contemplating 'body in the body'. The meditator finds a silent place, sits in an upright position, and focuses on being with their body and breath:

‘Breathing in long, he knows, “I breathe in long”; or breathing out long, he knows, “I breathe out long.” Breathing in short, he knows, “I breathe in short”; or breathing out short, he knows, “I breathe out short.” “Experiencing the whole body, I shall breathe in,” “he trains himself; “experiencing the whole body, I shall breathe out,” he trains himself. “Calming the bodily formation, I shall breath in, “ he trains himself; “calming the bodily formation, I shall breath out,” he train himself.’
(translated by Nanamoli, 1972/2006, p.11).

Here the aim is to register observations without being coloured by self-reference. Mental reactions become the object of bare attention ‘and are neither repudiated nor pursued, but are dismissed, after a brief mental note has been made of them....’ (Thera, 1973, p. 30).

Clear comprehension is active observation and plays a primary role leading to deeper insight and wisdom (Bodhi, 2011). At this stage, the meditator has a greater awareness of the content arising in the experimental field - in the stream of consciousness. Clear comprehension means penetrating one’s experience to distinguish between the objective, selfless nature of things and the coloured, subjective self-reference of things. This initial exercise is related to the five hindrances: doubt, ill will, drowsiness, restlessness and sensual desire. The meditator must realize how a hinder ‘arises, how it is abandoned and how it can be prevented from arising again in the future’ (Bodhi, 2011, p. 33). A similar sequence (Bodhi, 2011) is found in the following exercises on both the five aggregates and the Four Noble Truths (Bodhi, 2011, p.33; Rahula, 1959/1974, p.74). According to Rahula, there are about 40 different subjects of meditations (1959/1974, p.75).

Mindfulness in Buddhism is thus not only an observation of what presents itself, but also an interpretation filtered through Buddhist teaching. The practitioner evaluates mental qualities, seeking clarity to distinguish wholesome qualities from unwholesome. Mindfulness is not devoid of discrimination, but discrimination should be suspended during practice, allowing the practitioner to simply observe and distinguish between the different qualities arising in the stream of consciousness. In this way, mindfulness practice can ‘lay a foundation for correct wisdom to arise and extirpate the roots of suffering’ (Bodhi, 2015, p.129). Right mindfulness occurs when one reflects Buddhist ethical conduct (Sila), mental discipline (Samadhi) and wisdom (Panna).

Right mindfulness is a path that, when cultivated, leads to the cessation of dukkha. Ignorance is cut off by wisdom. Right mindfulness frees one from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Practising it helps one achieve a direct experience that everything is interconnected (dependent origination), that nothing in reality is eternal (impermanence) and that the concept

of 'I' is an illusion (non-self). Right mindfulness reveals that dukkha is dukkha. Upon realising this, the practitioner does not create more dukkha nor experience dukkha at any level, because he or she will have recognized that there is nothing to cling to nor crave.

2.1.6 Essential Values in Buddhism

There are four virtues (*brahma-vihara*) that are central to Buddhist teachings and practice (Rahula, 1959/1974, p. 75). These virtues are loving kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), empathy (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekkha*) and are subjects in meditation practice (Rahula, 1959/1974, p. 75). Similar qualities are also described as attitudes in Western mindfulness practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Shapiro, Carlson, Aston & Freedman, 2006). In Buddhism, these qualities can be developed by practising meditation. They are states of mind revealed through what Hanh describes as our inherent Buddha nature (1998).

3 Mindfulness in the West

This chapter will elaborate on mindfulness practice in a secular context in the West.

This will be done by clarifying the contexts in which mindfulness is practiced, the purpose and expected effects of the practice, specifically in clinical psychology, and of the self-clarity concept.

3.1 The Western approach to mindfulness

As per Brown, Ryan and Creswell (2007), the realm of mindfulness shares a visceral relationship along with other ideas which have been postulated in the West. These are inclusive of myriad psychological and psychological traditions, such as phenomenology, ancient Greek philosophy, naturalism and existentialism within the context of Western European approach along with humanism and transcendentalism from an American perspective. However, several other scholars have acknowledged the fact that mindfulness owes its genesis to Buddhism and Buddhist practices (Brown et al., 2007; Shapiro et al., 2006).

3.1.1 The development of mindfulness in the West

Mindfulness practice, philosophy and methods have been integrated into Western clinical intervention (Brown et al., 2007; Shapiro et al., 2006). Jon Kabat-Zinn was one of the most influential pioneers in the field of mindfulness in the West. Educated in molecular biology, he is a professor of medicine emeritus and the founding executive director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and the founding director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts (University of Massachusetts, retrieval year 2018).

Kabat-Zinn (1990) acknowledged that mindfulness is rooted in Buddhism and Buddhist meditation; he also described mindfulness practice as universal in its essence, stating that 'mindfulness is basically just a particular way of paying attention. It is a way of looking deeply into oneself in the spirit of self-inquiry and self-understanding' (1990, p. 12). Kabat-Zinn introduced the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programme in 1979, which has since become the foundation of mindfulness interventions and practices in the field of clinical psychology (Bishop et al., 2004; Cullen, 2011).

According to Kabat-Zinn (2011), the intention behind MBSR is to place Buddhist philosophy within in the framework of Western science, specifically within psychological, psychiatric and somatic medicine. However, Kabat-Zinn (1990) was selective in regard to which elements he included in MSBR, omitting the broader perspectives of karma and samsara in

favour of focusing on everyday life in the here and now, and how we can free ourselves from pain, thereby increasing overall well-being.

3.1.2 The characteristics of mindfulness

In the West, the most frequently used definition of mindfulness is the one by Kabat-Zinn, who stated that ‘Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally’ (1994, p. 4).

Bishop et al. (2004) suggested a two-component model of mindfulness. The first component relates to the self-regulation of attention, the ability to consciously focus on internal and external experiences in the present moment (Bishop et al., 2004). It involves flexibility and the conscious ability to zoom in or out to shift one’s attention to immediate experience (Bishop et al., 2004). The consequence of such attention is a heightened sensitivity or awareness of psychological processes in the present moment (Bishop et al., 2004). The second component of mindfulness relates to how one views experiences from moment to moment, including the three attitudinal qualities of ‘curiosity, openness and acceptance’ (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 232).

Shapiro, Astman, Carlson and Freedman (2006) deconstructed Kabat-Zinn’s definition and proposed a mindfulness model consisting of three core components: intention, attention and attitude. All three components work simultaneously; they depend on and affect each other (Shapiro et al., 2006). This means that mindfulness is not composed of separate parts or stages; rather, it is a dynamic process that unfolds moment to moment. This process causes a change in perspective, which Shapiro et al. (2006) referred to as ‘reperceiving.’ It is a process of disentangling one’s thoughts, which allows for the more objective observation of one’s internal and external experiences (Shapiro et al., 2006). Shapiro et al. (2006) saw the act of reperceiving as an inherent human function. Relating it to mindfulness practice, they described reperceiving as a process that allows for deeper understanding of the mind and body; as such, practicing mindfulness accelerates this inherent human function.

Cultivating mindfulness deconstructs one’s view of the self. An improved ability for objective observation reveals previous identifications as an ever-changing stream of concepts, images and ideas (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999; Shapiro et al., 2006;). Thus, by developing the capacity to view oneself more objectively, one is no longer fully immersed in the self’s stream of consciousness, creating inner space and opportunities to relate to thoughts and emotions consciously rather than based on past memories or automatic behaviour patterns (Brown et al., 2007). This is aligned with Shapiro et al.’s (2006) descriptions of reperceiving, which they described as strengthening one’s ability to make conscious choices or responses to situations,

rather than acting automatically or unconsciously based on learned patterns, due to a radical shift in perspective, the result being ‘greater clarity, perspective, objectivity and ultimately equanimity’(p. 379).

Shapiro et al. (2006) suggested that the first core component of mindfulness is intention.

Intention is about bringing a particular intention to mindfulness practice (Shapiro et al., 2006), similar to what Kabat-Zinn (1990) described the personal vision that motivates the individual and is thus helpful in maintaining a mindfulness practice over time, despite difficulties.

Shapiro et al. (2006) emphasised that individual intention may change naturally over time, in line with the dynamic, moment-to-moment process that is mindfulness itself.

The second component of mindfulness is attention. Paying mindful attention can be described as viewing internal and external experiences non-judgmentally as they present themselves (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2006). This means refraining from labelling thoughts or images based on past memories or learned patterns. Instead, the aim is to take a step back and simply observe what enters awareness from moment to moment, without interpreting what presents itself. According to Brown and Ryan (2003), this process opens the mind to more options that may have been hidden due to automatic or conditional thinking.

The last component in Shapiro et al.’s (2006) model is attitude, which relates to the qualities we bring to our attention in mindfulness practice.

Kabat-Zinn (1990) listed seven attitudes as the major pillars of MBSR and indicated that they should be consciously cultivated during mindfulness practice. These attitudes—non-judgment, patience, beginner’s mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and letting go—are not disconnected from each other; rather, each relies on and influences the extent to which the meditator is able to cultivate the others. Together, these attitudes ‘constitute the foundation upon which you can build a strong meditation practice of your own’ (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 33).

According to Kabat-Zinn (1990) non-judgement refers to the case when you witness your own experiences and, at the same time, are aware of any judgement or reaction to these experiences. In addition, patience entails accepting that things take time to unfold. A beginner’s mind is an open mind that sees possibilities in every unique moment of life. Accordingly, an attitude of trust helps you listen to your intuition and feelings instead of always looking to others for guidance. On a similar note, non-striving points to the goal of meditation, that is, being yourself. It means refraining from setting a goal to be anything other than what you are at present. In this sense, acceptance is an attitude that involves

acknowledging the present moment, whatever it may hold in terms of experiences. On the other hand, letting go entails freeing your thoughts and feelings in the process of meditation, without trying to get rid of some or holding on to others (pp.33-40).

Furthermore, Shapiro et al. (2006) emphasised the importance of incorporating what they refer to as 'heart qualities' into mindfulness practice. They clarified that awareness can be critical or affectionate, and emphasises that attitudinal qualities such as kindness, compassion and curiosity are important during mindfulness practice. Bishop et al. (2004) also included the quality of acceptance, like Kabat-Zinn (1990), and the quality of curiosity, like Shapiro et al. (2006). However, they did not include attitudinal qualities such as 'patience, trust, compassion, nonreactivity and wisdom' in their operational definition (2004, p. 235). They argued that these qualities are a consequence of mindfulness practice and should therefore not be included in the building blocks that constitute mindfulness practice itself (Bishop et al., 2004).

Finally, Kabat-Zinn (1990) stated that qualities such as strong self-discipline and willingness to work with oneself are required to maintain regular mindfulness practice and develop a 'high degree of mindfulness' (1990, p. 41).

3.1.3 The purpose of mindfulness practice in the Western clinical psychology

In contrast to mindfulness practice in Buddhism, where the ultimately goal is the attainment of nirvana, mindfulness practice in the West serves a variety of needs. In clinical psychology, mindfulness practice such as MBSR is increasingly used to support treatment for wide range of psychological, somatic and interpersonal ills (Baer, 2003; Brown et al., 2007). The aim of MBSR is to provide patients with ways of responding to stress that make it possible to 'step out of those mental reactions that often worsen[ed] the stress and interfere[d] with effective problem solving' (Segal et al., 2013, p. 39). The intended consequence and outcome is to detach from mental reactions and, thus, lay the foundation for effective problem-solving.

Numerous mindfulness intervention programs stem from MBSR, including mindfulness-based childbirth and parenting, mindfulness-based emotional balance, mindfulness-based eating, mindfulness-based elder care, mindfulness-based mental fitness training, mindfulness-based art therapy for cancer patients, mindful leadership, mindful schools, mindfulness without borders, along with many other programs created for particular age groups (Cullen, 2011, p.188).

Segal et al., (2013) developed mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) during the 1990s. The programme is also based on MBSR and the work of Kabat-Zinn (2013). Other

approaches, such as acceptance and commitment therapy (Hayes et al., 1999), and dialectical behaviour therapy (Linehan, 1993a) followed. According to Segal et al. (2013), the ultimate aim of MBCT is ‘to help individuals to make a radical shift in their relationship to the thoughts, feelings and body sensations that contribute to depressive relapse’ (p. 64). An example of this process is practicing mindful awareness of negative emotional states instead of avoiding them. Through such practice, one learns through direct experience that negative emotions are not necessarily overwhelming or frightening; these sensations eventually dissolve or pass (Segal et al., 2013).

David (2014), however, questioned the use of mindfulness intervention as the first line of defence for people undergoing treatment. The process of detachment from negative thoughts also involves or causes detachment from motivational thoughts (2014). In response to David’s (2014) article, Gardner, Moore and Marks (2014) claimed that mindfulness does not lead to lethargy but rather self-regulation and healthy engagement with life.

In contrast to Kabat-Zinn (2011), who stated that MBSR emphasises non-attachment, ‘even to positive health outcomes’ (p. 292), Fennell and Segal (2011) clarified that MBCT has a clear goal to create particular changes for those who undertake it (pp. 125-142). Thus, this part of the MBCT programme holds a radically different perspective. It deviates from non-attachment and instead aims for particular changes to improve well-being. In other words, it is about executing a particular set of actions to alter one’s state of being rather than altering one’s responses to states of being themselves.

3.1.4 Guiding mindfulness practice in clinical psychology

Both Kabat-Zinn (2011) and Segal et al. (2013) emphasised the dependence between the instructor and participants in mindfulness practice, and how instructors can have powerful effects, both positive and negative, on participants. However, Kabat-Zinn also stated that ‘MBSR was grounded in a non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical perspective’ (2011, p. 292). Each instructor needs to have a mindfulness practice themselves, and participants are also encouraged to listen to their own intuition during mindfulness practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Still, Kabat-Zinn (2011) emphasised the need for instructors to guide participants, both in class and during mindfulness practice meditations, especially at the beginning of mindfulness practice (p. 292).

3.1.5 Summary

Although various attempts have been made in Western clinical psychology to define an operational definition of mindfulness, they differ primarily in the values and attitudes that one should bring to mindfulness practice. Brown et al. (2007) argued that this variation is understandable because different traditions target different challenges with different

treatments. Furthermore, mindfulness intervention in clinical psychology is shifting from non-attachment to inducing particular changes for the sake of well-being. Nevertheless, a common understanding of mindfulness practice in clinical psychology is that it includes non-judgmental awareness of present experiences.

3.2 The self-clarity concept

The self-clarity programme (SCP) was created by Tuomo Viitajylhä, with involvement from Hege Tvedt (see Chapter 1.3). This section will describe the ethos behind the creation of the programme, and will also clarify the terms state of being and the good feeling. It will then introduce and explain key elements that formed the structure and content of the programme. Finally, it will present practical applications of mindfulness practice in a secular context, specifically in the field of clinical psychology and in the context of the self-clarity concept.

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the self-clarity programme is inspired by the diverse ways in which one can approach mindfulness practice; the variations in context, perspectives, and attitudes that can be brought to the practice amongst and between East and West, including expected effects of the practice (see chapter sections 2.0 and 3.1); as well as the recent increased interest in the West in developing and tailoring mindfulness-based intervention programs with ever more limited and specific themes for narrow cohort groups (Cullen, 2011).

3.2.1 Context, purpose and perspective

The self-clarity programme is not based on a particular religious perspective or targeting cohort groups, nor does it seek a specific expected outcome. The results of the programme are not defined beyond possible increased self-clarity. What this clarity may produce or the results of the process for each individual are not focal points of the programme and cannot be predicted.

The self-clarity programme, as is the case with other mindfulness programs, is related to two major functions of consciousness: awareness and attention. It is an attempt to suggest key factors in and structures for meditation, metacognition and cognitive practice to provide essential guidance for building a stronger and deeper awareness of one's state of being.

The development of the programme is based on practical experience in order to clarify structures and pointers for increased self-clarity. The programme seeks to harness what the creators see as core triggers that increase an individual's self-clarity or recognition of the self and the potential for expanding one's ability to recognise this in oneself. All this suggests that each individual contains a particular focal point, and the programme has been imbued with a

structure and triggers that support, based on experience, one's ability to work with this focal point over time.

3.2.2 Direction towards the state of being

Mindfulness in Buddhism and the field of clinical psychology both indicate, though from different perspectives, that humans have untapped potential for increasing our state of well-being. The self-clarity programme is aligned with the idea that humans hold and have access to untapped potential for increased self-clarity. The programme points towards a specific direction, the goal of which is to recognise this potential more effortlessly. The programme prescribes as little as possible with regard to attitudes, settings and intertwined components that must be in place to accomplish what Buddhism calls *right* mindfulness (Bodhi, 2011) or what Kabat-zinn (1990) refers to as strong mindful practice. The reason for this is that the individual already has access to this potential consciousness; therefore, the creator of the programme consider simplicity and clarity as key for increased self-clarity. This means indicating the direction, and if the direction is precise enough, the individual will recognise it and be able to make any necessary adjustments. The self-clarity approach underlines the intent to maximise the probability that the creators of the self-clarity programme may limit users as little as possible with the perspective of the creators or facilitators.

The programme maintains one focal point: state of being. This means that the initial point of attention is distinct but is not first and foremost about contemplating different aspects of our being or objects during meditations. It directs attention towards connecting and progressively recognising the overall essential state of one's being in its various depths. This means that the practitioner only contemplates different aspects or objects if and when he or she recognises them as useful in his or her own process. The participant's own experience is the ultimate guide in the programme. They are, therefore, the main creator of their own process. The programme suggests only one aspect of attitude, which is 'let go'. Further, the programme is aligned with the concept of bare attention and clear comprehension as described in Buddhism (see chapter sections 2.1.6 and 2.1.7).

The self-clarity approach does not emphasise the present moment. Instead it states that a deeper recognition of our state of being will lead naturally to the ability to be more attentive to the immediate experience of inner and outer phenomena. It is the deepening recognition of one's state of being that is emphasised.

3.2.3 The term *state of being*

The self-clarity programme aims to direct attention to connecting, sensing and progressively recognising the state of being in its potential various depths. This section will clarify what is

meant by the term *state of being* as well as the perspective behind the chosen focal point during practice in the programme.

The state of being can be seen as the overall end result of all the activity of the mind and body at any given moment. We all recognise how good or bad we feel based on the state of our being. This might include examining our external situations and deriving a conclusion about how we feel based on those circumstances. This conclusion will likely ‘colour’ our state of being regarding our relation to the given conclusion.

Without conscious recognition of the state of being, one will ‘unconsciously control one’s state of being. Without recognition of the state of being with internal validation, one often feels good only if external circumstances indicate that one should. In other words, feeling good and a feeling of freedom, for example, are strongly determined by external factors, or in what way one relates to internal factors. This is why it is essential to recognise the state of being in itself for the sake of human welfare.

3.2.4 The quest for feeling good

The quest for feeling good is about the different expressions humans convey and undergo in order to feel good. A common way we see this is by securing our well-being through the actions we take; for example, securing comfortable living standards. To secure living standards can be seen first as fear-driven. In the case where people feel that they need to secure their income and resources, so their family will not suffer, it seems like fear is the motivation. However, through closer examination, we can see that this fear is in effect a need to secure a good state of being. The person in this example cannot see the possibility of feeling good if his or her family is suffering. The fear is created, therefore, to answer the threat to the person’s ‘state of being’.

The perspective of the programme is that a good state of being is a primary driving force of every human being, whether they are consciously aware of the state of being or not. When people are not conscious of their state of being, or they lack recognition of the present potential for the good feeling, they seek to feel good mainly through actions, expecting that the good feeling will occur as an end result. ‘I can be happy if I am financially free’; ‘I can be happy if I find a partner’; or ‘I can be happy if I complete this task’. Once they have such goals, people will often realise that the good feeling, once gained, was just momentary. They will then continue the search, eventually at more and more subtle levels. However, the same mechanism is often still in play; it only appears on a different scale. One will still continue to act in order to feel good, instead of consciously being aware of a state that ‘feels’ good and bringing this state of being into the activity one chooses to do. Doing the latter would mean

that our activities are driven to a lesser degree, or perhaps not at all, by the need to feel good. This is because we already feel good based on a deeper recognition of our state of being.

3.2.5 The good feeling is the sign of the state of being

The perspective of the self-clarity programme is that the good feeling is the sign of the state of being. It is easy to spot and, therefore, is used as a point of entry during meditations. The programme guides participants' attention to a specific 'visible' quality of the state of being, here called the good feeling. By doing this, it efficiently directs participants to establish a recognition through the experience of that quality, pointing to the realisation of the potential constant availability of this quality and the different depths to which it may be experienced.

From an experienced meditator's point of view, it may well be argued that it is too difficult for a novice meditator to recognise the good 'feeling' beyond a superficial level because of a possible stream of inner monologue. This is a valid argument. However, in Viitajylhä's and Tvedt's experience, it is not so difficult that it may be tempting to believe it is, at first glance. The way the guidance and framework of the self-clarity programme are structured can possibly support even the novice meditator to start working with the good 'feeling' as a focal point, thereby strengthening the recognition of this quality and its various depths.

In Viitajylhä's and Tvedt's practical experience, recognition of this quality awakens clarity more effortlessly. This increased clarity happens because the individual's overall state of being becomes more internally 'calmed' through the experience, and the recognition of the quality, which is the essence of an individual's current driving force, or motivator. This begins to remove the 'fuel' that feeds limitations and disturbances in the mind. A person adapts, step by step, to the awareness of his or her state of being – moving from the 'old' driving forces into a new and growing clarity. The following might help explain the radical shift a person goes through: 1) old – the good feeling is a rare reward for actions or circumstances; 2) new – the good feeling is one's birth right and a constant fact, not the carrot'. This shift causes the emergence of greater and increasing self-clarity. A person is motivated more and more through pure intelligence or understanding, wisdom and love.

3.2.6 Active observation and reminders

Additionally, the self-clarity programme guidelines emphasise that participants should actively question different ideas, based on direct experience, presented through the programme and in meditations. In this way, they trigger their own ability to understand and recognise the validity of subjects *for them*. With the aim of leading to deeper understanding of potential insights or flaws within the programme and to the unfolding or reduction of a participant's own potential limited beliefs. The programme also suggests that participants actively examine what is distracting them from a direct and deeper recognition of the good

feeling and overall state of being. The programme suggests that it is the individual's own level of recognition of his or her state of being that can reveal the most effortless and optimal route for increased self-clarity. This means that participants are reminded, continuously, consistently and repeatedly, of the need to turn to themselves.

3.2.7 Key aspects which are taken into account when structuring the programme

This section will present key principles taken into account when structuring the self-clarity programme.

The first aspect of the programme, as previously mentioned, is that a good state of being is a primary driving force of any individual human being, and the good feeling is the sign of the state of being. It is easy to spot and, therefore, is used as a point of entry, for example, during meditations.

The second aspect involves rescaling the meaning for ourselves. It is based on the idea that the experience of various depths of state of being and the good feeling are always relative to our previous experiences of the state of being. In that way, one always rescales a new experience in its intensity and its meaning for oneself.

The third aspect is balance. Balance becomes important as we examine how the overall balance of how good we feel gradually increases through a deeper recognition of our state of being. The principles concerning the first two points – feeling good and rescaling meaning – culminate this third aspect – balance – and in that way provide a definite and precise framework for understanding the progressively increasing balance point of the good state of being.

Only one more key aspect, or perspective, should be added to this. That is the vacillation-like nature of how our consciousness adapts to its new awareness. A metaphor for this vacillation process may be seen in how we can struggle to learn a new skill. Once we master the skill, however, performing it suddenly seems easy. The same happens when we are working towards a greater awareness within our 'own' consciousness. When these 'shifts to mastery' happen in the concept of awareness, we at first receive momentary glimpses through the new perspectives. In those new perspectives, it is so effortless or natural that we usually have a hard time even recognising when we first had a conscious experience of this new perspective. This is why we use the word 'vacillation' in connection with this new consciousness, because it balances out and gradually lifts the overall level through this vacillation, which is the result and working field of the self-clarity programme.

The self-clarity experience-based theory suggests that recognising the state of being is a progressive process. In the first phase of self-clarity meditations, for example, the person becomes more and more aware of the existence of the state of being within his or her own consciousness. If there is a deeper recognition of one's state of being, a person's average state of being is expected to be more stable (e.g., feeling good more often, feeling good most of the time, feeling good all the time). This means a person can grow in clarity and realisation of how effortless it is to control his or her own state of being and, therefore, can more and more effectively uplift or downgrade his or her own state of being at will.

3.3 Mindfulness programs, practical applications

In this section practical applications of mindfulness in a secular context will be described; specifically, mindfulness in clinical psychology. Following this will be a discussion of practical aspects of the self-clarity programme based on the self-clarity experienced-based theory.

3.3.1 Setting and types of mindfulness meditations in clinical psychology

Mindfulness enhancement signifies a crucial aspect of both MBCT and MBSR. In Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), it is considered as one of the many crucial aspects of treatment (Brown et al., 2007, p. 219).

MBSR and MBCT are group-based and they entail a fixed and short duration (eight to ten weeks) comprising of one class on a weekly basis for close to two hours. Between the classes, students generally undertake meditation practice for 40-45 minutes every day. These programs are also inclusive of a mindfulness practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). DBT meanwhile features individual therapy as well as group training; it is executed in different phases (Brown et al., 2007).

Mindfulness meditation in MBSR and MBCT is performed sitting, lying down in a horizontal position or in movement. The common factor is being present to what arises internally in the here and now with an attitude of acceptance or non-judgement. The central point in a sitting meditation in MBSR is placing attention on the breath. If the mind wanders away from the breath as a point of attention, the task is to accept and notice or acknowledge this, then direct the mind back to the breath as an anchor of attention. Sound and sight can also be used as points of attention (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

In a body-scan meditation, the meditator often lies down on the floor in a horizontal position. The meditator pays attention to each single part of the body, one part at a time. At other times, the meditators are encouraged to rest their attention on a specific bodily sensation or

challenging emotion, be with that sensation without judging it and observe what is unfolding moment by moment. In the very end of MBSR and MBCT, the meditators are introduced to a sitting meditation in which they are instructed to have choiceless awareness. This means that they do not focus on anything in particular but remain open to the present experience from moment to moment. Other mindfulness exercises include mindful walking practice or simple yoga exercises.

3.3.2 Setting and types of meditations of the self- clarity programme

Participants had access to a live weekly webinar over the course of the nine weeks.

Each session lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Content, meditations, tasks and tools were presented. The program's approach suggests that the participants should question statements or ideas presented.

Meditation length and form, pointers and attitude

The focal point in meditation was paying attention to the good feeling and opening up the various depth of this feeling. One attitude was underlined: let go. The suggested amount of time to perform meditation in the program was as follows:

Week 1: Eighteen minutes of meditation per day, plus transition period.

Weeks 2 through 9: Two meditations per day. One short sitting meditation of about five to ten minutes and one longer meditation in a sitting position of about twenty to thirty minutes, plus transition period.

From week 3, more meditations are introduced, with the suggestion that the majority be done in a sitting position, while other meditations are suggested to be done while walking and in movement. Still, none of the meditations are limited to a specific posture, and the participants are free to do them as they like.

Each morning throughout the programme, it is suggested that participants do an individual 'awareness' morning stretch for about ten to thirty seconds (though it is not limited to this length), engaging the whole body if possible.

All meditations have an initial part, a main part, a final part and a transition part.

The initial part directs the person's attention towards connecting to the state of being, the good feeling. It presents one attitude, which directs the person to let go of things that are distracting them from the good feeling. However, during week 1, the initial part is different from the other weeks. During week 1, the initial part does not contain any particular direction

or point of attention beyond lying down and relaxing. If the mind wanders, the participants can choose to follow it or not, consciously or not. The purpose of this initial part is to build recognition between a relaxed bodily state and a more wakeful state or one in which the participant is increasingly consciously aware of the state of being.

The main part is about letting go and connecting to the state of being through recognition of the good feeling and establishing an experience in which potentially shorter or longer glimpses of the various depth of the good feeling are 'visible' despite ruminations or other emotions or bodily sensations arising during the process. In this part, triggers follow a structure with the aim of gradually increasing expanded awareness of the state of being.

The final part of the meditation is about creating a mental reminder of what the current state of being feels like.

The transition part is about recognising any shifts in the state of being as the person gradually moves from meditation into his or her chosen daily activities.

While the participants are introduced to new meditations in the upcoming week, the key point of attention is the same, as well as the overall structure of the meditation, except the initial part from week one, which is removed from the meditation. In one meditation, it is replaced with an initial silent body scan, or guided body scan, lasting 5 minutes. Yet again, the consistent pointer is about connection and recognition of the good feeling. Other minor structural developments are included in the main part of the meditations during the program.

The amount of guidance in each meditation is kept to a minimum and follows a structure which aims to gradually increase expanded awareness of the state of being and the good feeling in the self. The guidance in the longer meditations consists of pointers, in the form of single words, including a couple of triggers in the form of sentences, which in essence are repeated in different variations and/or different progressively structural steps in different meditations. During the latter part of the programme, meditations are available with very few or no words at all. The guidance in meditations does not instruct the meditator to say words themselves or do any kind of chanting.

A recognition task is presented during each weekly session in the form of a single question as well as tools and pointers to test, question, sense, observe and clarify based on the individual's own experience. The aim here is to keep the meditation simple and focus on the very essence, state of being and good feeling in the self. The goal is not to be caught up in the urge to investigate every detail that may arise in the mind but rather to investigate the starting

point of details in general. Each person moves forward with what they recognise as meaningful in their own process.

Different recognition tasks are given daily attention during the weeks, but the recognition tasks are increasingly based on each person's own pointers, which may be useful as their potential self-clarity process unfolds.

Longer meditations are the two-series and three-series. The two-series includes the introduction meditations presented during weeks 1 and 2. The three-series meditations also includes shifting between open and closed eyes during meditations in longer durations. The series includes versions where the guidance consists of very few (one to ten) words or only an introduction and conclusion; otherwise, there is silence.

Shorter meditations and tools

The focal point is also the same in the shorter meditations and tools. But in certain stages during these meditations and tools, the wrapping and approach are different. This means the active reflections and observation are given space in the meditation guidance. Where other meditations do not specifically point to active observation during the main section, in these instances meditators go 'there' if they themselves recognise the need for it.

For further details about the self-clarity programme, see appendix IV.

4 Research into mindfulness

Research into mindfulness has increased in recent years. A database search of the word mindfulness showed that 469 peer-reviewed papers were published between 1977 and 1996, 27,031 between 1997 and 2016, and 20,266 between 2011 and 2016. As I have shown in Chapters 1.0 and 3.0, research in this field shows a broad spectrum of effects and much variation in mindfulness programmes. Research into mindfulness has, first and foremost, been directed towards specifically defined clinical disorders. This makes research more feasible within a Western scientific paradigm, as compared to the study of mindfulness in relation to more open constructs such as self-clarity. Arguing against the operationalisation of mindfulness through intervention studies, Kabat-Zinn articulated the risk that mindfulness, a complex phenomenon, would be reduced to “the next promising cognitive behavioural technique or exercise” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). This decontextualizes mindfulness, placing it within the behaviourist paradigm, the aim of which is to create specific changes, “or of fixing what is broken” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p.145).

Here follows an overview of published meta-analyses, reviews, and studies conducted with control groups and their conclusions. These studies all belong to the Western scientific paradigm and the field of behaviourism, and the studied effects must be seen in relation to this tradition. I will end this overview by showing how my study fits within this field research.

Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 39 studies that investigated the use of the mindfulness programmes MBSR and MBCT in adults with symptoms of anxiety and depression. They concluded that mindfulness-based therapy (MBT) may prove promising for treating the affective and cognitive processes that underlie multiple clinical issues. A comprehensive meta-analysis performed by Khoury et al. (2013) concluded that MBT was effective in treating various psychological problems, especially stress, anxiety, and depression. Goting et al. (2015) conducted a systematic review to assess evidence regarding the effectiveness of the standardised versions of MBSR and MBCT for different patient categories. The search included 23 reviews and 8,683 unique individuals. This review concluded that the use of MBSR and MBCT was effective in reducing mental and physical symptoms when used as an adjunctive treatment in cancer, chronic pain, depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular disease. These programmes also were found to be effective in the prevention of these symptoms in healthy adults and children.

Mindfulness programmes are increasingly being delivered online. Spijkerman, Pots, and Bohlmeijer (2016) conducted a review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials on the effectiveness of online mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in improving mental

health. The study included both guided and unguided online programmes. Its primary objective was to estimate the overall effect of online MBIs on stress, depression, anxiety, and well-being. MBSR, MBCT, and ACT, the most commonly used mindfulness programmes presented online (Spijkerman et al., 2016), were all concluded to be effective (Spijkerman et al., 2016). A secondary goal was to explore the effects of online MBIs on mindfulness as compared to wait list controls. The effect sizes for guided online MBIs were significantly higher for stress and mindfulness than for those that were unguided. The study concluded that online MBIs were significantly effective in improving mental health, with effect sizes ranging from small to moderate. However, further research is required to determine the moderators of online MBIs and the long-term effects of these programmes (Spijkerman et al., 2016).

These meta-analyses and reviews all show promising clinical effects of MBT on various symptoms. They also show that studied outcomes were predefined as stress, depression, anxiety, well-being, and physical functioning, among others. This list of outcomes draws on the fact that clinical studies like those described above have been conducted within a Western research paradigm in which the need to operationalise variables determines research objectives.

4.1 The self-clarity programme: The context of my study in the research field

The qualitative study on the self-clarity programme that will be presented in the next chapter differs from the aforementioned studies in two ways. First, the self-clarity programme is a new concept that has not been studied previously—unlike MBSR and MBCT programmes, which have been studied over the course of several years. Second, the focus of the self-clarity programme study is not a predefined outcome but, rather, an open view of all possible effects and experiences participants report in relation to their practice of the programme. This demonstrates a link between my study and the majority of studies in the field of clinical psychology.

In the previous chapters, I clarified the essential theoretical perspectives and practical aspects of mindfulness practice that are rooted in Buddhism. I also explained how mindfulness practice has been re-conceptualised within a secular (and, particularly, clinical) understanding of mindfulness practice, and I presented the self-clarity programme in a non-therapeutic and non-religious context. In Chapters 1.0 and 3.0, I showed that the field of mindfulness is dominated by a multitude of desired and studied effects. In the empirical part of this assignment, I will present the study on the self-clarity programme. The results of this study will demonstrate the effects of this programme in a non-therapeutic and non-religious context.

5 Method

The main purpose of this study was to explore the effect of systematic self-clarity meditation training among a group of eight participants with a range of meditation experience, from none to extensive previous experience. A secondary goal was to investigate whether the use of the program's different focal point during meditation with few detailed instructions was able to trigger a person's ability to deepen their recognition of their own state of being. In this chapter, I describe my plan of inquiry and methodological decisions, the study design and the interview and data collection procedures. I also explain the selection of participants and the study process and assess the quality of this research project using a triangulation approach.

5.1 Plan of inquiry and methodological choices

This thesis is based on qualitative research methodologies, including triangulation. I employed qualitative interviews as the main research method. Each participant was interviewed before, during and after the training process. I also analysed the participants' written journals, which they maintained as part of their participation in the programme, and employed a triangulation approach to combine data from different sources. I also enlisted the help of someone living with each participant (e.g., a cohabitant or partner) as additional volunteers to collect observations regarding each participant. This was intended to provide external perspective on the information provided by the participant. I spoke with each observer one-on-one to inform them about the task at hand, and I interviewed each of them individually about one week after the programme ended.

5.2 Study design

The following sections describe the theoretical foundations of the study, as well as the relationship between my theoretical and personal knowledge of meditation training, as my personal experience may affect the process of collecting and interpreting the data.

5.2.1 Research paradigm

To understand how the participants in this study experienced the self-clarity programme and to gain additional insight into its effects, I chose the interpretive paradigm as a suitable approach. The epistemology of such an approach assumes that reality is a social construct; the findings of the research process emerge from the interplay between the researcher and the participants through discussion and interpretation of the experience (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

5.2.2 Research methodology

Informed by the work of Van Manen (1997), I determined hermeneutic phenomenology to be an appropriate method for this research project. This approach is rooted in philosophy, and

thus researchers following this approach should be aware of the philosophical traditions underpinning both hermeneutics and phenomenology (Van Manen, 1997), some of which are described in Section 5.3. Phenomenology is primarily interested in lived experience (Van Manen, 1997), while the hermeneutic phenomenology approach attempts to develop a rich or 'thick' description of the investigated phenomena, or lived experience, within a specific context (Van Manen, 1997). The central focus in phenomenology is using pre-reflective experience to capture the essence of a phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), in this case, the participants' experiences of and their reflections on their participation in a self-clarity meditation training programme. Employing hermeneutic phenomenology enabled me to explore the participants' experiences via interviews, followed by additional abstraction and interpretation based on my theoretical and personal knowledge of meditation training.

5.2.3 Qualitative methods

The debate concerning quantitative and qualitative approaches to research was initially based on conflicting epistemological and philosophical standpoints. Today, the debate has shifted and is now centred on research practices and the clarification of which method is more suitable under specific circumstances (Flick, 2009/2011, p.32). Below, I first explain the key differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches; then, I account for why a qualitative method was suitable for this research project.

Quantitative approaches use empirical measurements and statistical techniques to test a hypothesis. A large sample of cases may be selected at random, and data is mostly coded using numerical values that are not interpreted until the end of the research process (Silverman, 1997/2011, p. 4). By contrast, qualitative research features fewer cases, and the researcher interprets the data continuously throughout the research process, which may be influenced by the specific model or theory used by the researcher (Silverman, 1997/2011, p. 4). Qualitative approaches are often used to achieve an understanding of social phenomena (Thagaard, 2011, p.11). Frequently taking an interview approach, this method seeks to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world as they experience it, prior to seeking scientific explanations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A qualitative approach was suitable for this study because it permitted in-depth exploration of the individual effect of systematic self-clarity meditation training. Using interviews, combined with the low number of participants, set the stage for detailed and unique data collection and deep interpretation of the data.

5.2.4 Elements of action research

Action research is a method to improve practice (Koshy, 2010, p. 6) by using participation to produce knowledge that is helpful to everyday practice (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). The

action researcher plays a dual role, both contributing together with those he/she is researching and providing theory and terms, as well as holding a distance and maintaining an observer role. The method is used in a variety of fields, such as education, health and organisational studies (Koshy et al., 2010). It often uses a series of actions, evaluation of the actions, and critical reflection to devise changes that may be implemented in practice (Koshy, 2010). Action research may be carried out in different ways, and the chosen model may be adapted to particular contexts (Koshy, 2010, p. 6) with the end goal of improving practice in the specific area of investigation. Because this was a new and untested programme, I found it important to be responsive to potential feedback from participants during the programme. A crucial distinction is made between a participant's process of clarifying and feedback from participants about their needs with regard to the training or suggestions for alterations to the programme. Such information could result in further reflections and insights that could be incorporated in a future version of the programme.

5.3 Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The following subsections return to hermeneutic phenomenology and provide a brief overview of the underlying philosophies and their relevance to this study.

5.3.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach developed by Edmund Husserl early in the 20th century (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Its starting point is ontology; it concentrates on the study of phenomena as they appear through consciousness (Laverty, 2003) with the aim of apprehending phenomena in their natural form as they are experienced, before the addition of layers of cognitive construction, explanations or opinions about their origin (Laverty, 2003). Van Manen observed that phenomenology provides a systematic method of exploring the internal structures and meanings of everyday lived experiences (1997). In the attempt to capture the essence of experience, which includes intentionality, Husserl found it crucial to set aside presuppositions. He introduced a method of 'bracketing' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27), whereby the researcher identifies, then sets aside, both common-sense and scientific presuppositions to pave the way for an unprejudiced description of the essence of the lived phenomena.

5.4 Hermeneutics

The modern meaning of the Greek word *hermeneutike* is 'interpretation of text' (Kvale, 1996), where 'text' may include a variety of communication forms, such as visual art and music as well as written and verbal communication. While Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) is acknowledged as one of the intellectual sources of modern hermeneutics, Hans Georg-Gadamer (1900–2002), who was mentored by Heidegger, clarified hermeneutic philosophy on

the basis of his commitment to practical hermeneutics (Annells, 1996). Three key aspects of hermeneutical interpretation include pre-understanding, the fusion of horizons and the hermeneutic circle. The following explanation of this interpretive process clarifies its relevance to this study.

5.4.1 Pre-understanding

Like phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on lived experiences (Lavery, 2003). However, hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the notion of pre-understanding. Heidegger used the term pre-understanding (*fore-conception*) to convey the idea that when we enter the world, it already contains culture, languages and practices, before we ourselves begin to understand it (Koch, 1995). Each person inevitably brings previous life experiences, constructed from cultural and historical perceptions, into every situation. Thus, social researchers must relate to a world that has already been interpreted by their informants (Gilje & Grimen, 1993) while also bringing their own experiences and understandings into the research process. Gadamer affirms that ‘to try to escape from one’s own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible but manifestly absurd’ (1975/2004, p. 398). In other words, we understand phenomena based on our own life experiences, and our present understanding is based on prejudices, as Gadamer widely argued (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 45).

5.4.2 The fusion of horizons

Gadamer introduced the notion of interpretation as a ‘fusion of horizons’ (Annells, 1996); horizons refers to the ‘range of vision that can be seen from a particular vantage point’ (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 269). Both interpreter and text possess a unique horizon, ‘and every moment of understanding represents a fusion of these horizons’ (Gadamer, 2006, p.45)

New knowledge and understandings are formed when prejudice merges with information from other perspectives, intertwining understanding and interpretation in what Gadamer (1975/2004) described as an ‘indissoluble’ relationship. Moreover, when seeking new, more refined understanding, we must broaden our perspective. We need to look beyond what is close at hand – not to turn away from it, but rather to see it within its actual context and in better proportion (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 304); in this way, we will see understanding more clearly.

5.4.3 The hermeneutic circle

An important aspect of understanding and interpreting texts is the hermeneutic circle, which is built on the principle that our understanding of a whole text is based on reference to its individual parts and that our understanding of each individual part makes reference to the whole (Thagaard, 2011). To illustrate the principle, we can consider an interview session:

when a participant answers a question during an interview, the answer may be more precisely and completely understood when viewed against the backdrop of the whole interview. In addition, the meaning of the whole interview can be more deeply understood in relation to each individual part, each answer to each specific question. We can better understand the meaning of a participants' experiences of specific situations of social interaction if we have an overall understanding of their lives and perspectives towards social interaction in general. This information can, in turn, be obtained by looking at how they relate to social interaction in the initial interview and how they respond to it in the final interview.

The process of interpretation shows us that researchers bring their pre-understandings and perspectives into the research process, but there is also an interplay between their pre-understandings and the new experiences they encounter in understanding the text and between the text as a whole and its individual parts. Gadamer (1975/2004) underlined the importance of asking questions, which is crucial to developing new horizons and understandings, while staying open to the meaning of the text or person with whom we are interacting during the research process. This does not mean that we have to neutralize ourselves to understand texts; rather, we must be consciously aware of our own biases so that we do not limit our ability to grasp the text 'in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings' (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 307–308).

5.5 From preparation to final interview

The research project was registered with Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD; see appendix); with its requirements for authorisation and notification before starting the project (NESH, 2009).

5.5.1 Selection of participants

In keeping with the intention of hermeneutic phenomenology to develop a rich description of the phenomena under investigation, three criteria were kept in mind in the selection of participants:

1. The participant population should include informants with a range of meditation experience, from no experience to extensive training;
2. Participants must be willing to share their experience of participating in the program and provide feedback to the researcher; and
3. Participants should not be undergoing any medical treatment at the time of the study.

Additionally, each participant was asked if they were willing and could provide an outside observer who lived close to them, for instance, a spouse or partner. Participants were selected based on meeting these criteria.

The first requirement of including participants with a range of previous meditation experience, from complete inexperience to extensive training, was intended to shed light on how different groups respond to the course experience, ensuring rich data and multiple perspectives. The second criterion, willingness to share their experiences and offer feedback on various elements of the programme was also self-evidently essential to addressing both the main and secondary research questions. From professional experience, I know that feedback from participants is crucial when it comes to adjusting any programme. Meaningful feedback, in turn, requires a level of rapport between the participants and the course leader. The third criterion reflects the ethical necessity for the researcher to maintain awareness of the well-being of study participants. As this new meditation programme was experimental, and thus the potential effects of the programme were not fully understood, I did not want to include people who might be particularly vulnerable, either mentally or physically. Likewise, participants were informed that they could leave the programme at any time.

Selected participants had previously been exposed to similar procedures as part of a previous programme and had proven willing to raise critical questions, sharing experiences and feedback. With regard to the previously mentioned vulnerability, if a participant were to have a difficult experience while taking part in this study, the rapport developed during this earlier programme might make it easier for the participant to share their experience, and likewise I could respond more appropriately. However, our previous shared experience could represent a possible disadvantage in that it might inhibit participants from freely sharing accurate feedback within this new, more formal (research) setting. Regardless, for this initial research study wherein the research questions were centred on both participants' experience of the programme and potential feedback by which it could be improved, I found that this study population held more advantages than disadvantages.

A formal e-mail was sent out to previous programme participants announcing the study, starting with the most recent cohort that had enrolled in an online programme conducted over a year previously. Six out of nine recipients of the initial email expressed interest in participating. The three who declined cited reasons of lack of time or a feeling that a nine-week programme was 'too much' for them at that particular time.

Simultaneously, I was contacted by two other persons who had learned about the research project from recipients of the formal e-mail announcing the research project. After an initial

conversation with each of them, it was clear that they met the three research criteria and were enthusiastic to take part in the research project. These additional subjects increased the diversity of the final participant population: one of them had extensive experience in meditation, while the other had none. All eight informants were women, and none were undergoing medical treatment at the time of the programme. Four participants had no or very little experience with meditation training. Two had been meditating daily/weekly for at least one year (but less than 10), while another two had engaged intermittently in meditation for between 10 and 30 years. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 65 years and represented both strong academic backgrounds and more experiential education. Occupations included health care, education, recreation and customer service.

Qualitative research presents the dilemma of striking a balance between adequate depth and range of variation. The sampling should be small enough to delve deeply into the material yet large enough collect all relevant information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I selected an intensive design; thus, to prevent the data from becoming unmanageable, I settled on these eight participants as potentially providing ‘saturation’ – that is, the point at which elements in the data collected from the selected group begin to repeat themselves (Kvale, 1996).

5.6 Data collection

Data was collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews, written journals and third-party observations.

5.6.1 The qualitative interview

Based on the focus of hermeneutic phenomenology on lived experiences, interviews for this study aimed to explore the lived experience of participants. The format of the interview was intended to develop a fusion of horizons with participants through dialogue, allowing the meaning of their experiences to be more clearly understood through sharing their stories in their own words. In addition, qualitative research using interviews is aligned with an interpretative paradigm, which typically paves the way to a more holistic understanding of the phenomena under investigation than can be achieved using other approaches (Grønmo, 2004).

The interviews in this study followed a semi-structured procedure, combining aspects of structured (predetermined questions in a set order) and unstructured (everyday conversation) interview procedures (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). An interview template was used to keep the interviews on track and to focus on relevant information. The degree of openness offered by this semi-structured approach encouraged the emergence of new, unexpected themes that could then be explored during the interviews. Each response to a question could be followed up with new questions, tailored to the specific information provided in the previous answer.

This structure facilitated the sharing of detailed information from each participant's perspective, encompassing their pre-understanding, experience and challenges they faced before, during and after the programme.

5.6.2 Preparation for and conducting of interviews

Before both the initial and final interviews, I conducted an informal practice session with a person outside the research project. This was useful preparation, as it raised my awareness of how to articulate the planned questions and encouraged me to adjust the wording.

I began each interview sequence by interviewing two participants and immediately transcribing those interviews to evaluate their quality. I also received feedback from an experienced researcher (my tutor at UIT) who read these four transcripts. This strategy proved useful as I fine-tuned my approach for the remaining interviews, and it made me aware of certain nuances concerning follow-up questions in a research setting. Overall, I found that these steps strengthened my craftsmanship as an interview researcher and thus enhanced the quality of data collected.

The *initial interview* in this project served as a starting point to develop rapport with participants, gain insights into their current perspectives, modes of expression and general state of being, and to identify possible life challenges and their intention behind their participation in the programme. The *mid-programme interview* offered an opportunity to check in with the informants and ask a few key questions. What was their experience of the programme so far? Did they have particular needs, feedback or additional information to share? This interview started with one prepared open-ended question, followed up with relevant questions in the context of each individual participant. The style of interaction was conversational, encouraging participants to elaborate on the information they wished to provide. Feedback at this stage was noted and was used to inform possible changes to the programme at this point. The final interview included also individual follow-up questions tailored to each participant based on what they had shared in previous interviews.

This sequence of interviews allowed a more effective dialogue and the development of a mutual understanding between the researcher and participants. This led to more accurate and deeper interpretation of the text.

Information given to participants and observers before and during interviews

The participants and observers were each informed in advance of the interview format used. They were not required to answer all questions, and if they did not have an answer to or wish to answer a particular question, the interview moved to the next question. The participants

were likewise made aware that if any question seemed unclear, they should ask for it to be repeated or rephrased. I found it helpful to present this information to participants, as it seemed to relieve their worries and pre-empt possible misunderstandings during interviews, setting the stage for an open and fruitful interaction.

During the actual interviews, all subjects were notified when the interview was about to end and were asked if wanted to share, add or ask anything else at the end of the interview. This last question elicited more detailed or novel information from some participants. Finally, I thanked each interview subject for their willingness to share their experience and for their participation in the programme and the study. They were also informed about the opportunity to contact me after the interview with additional questions or information. They were asked if they were willing for me to contact them if something came to my mind after the interviews, and all participants agreed. In the course of the study, I contacted one participant with a follow-up question I missed during the interview; none of the participants contacted me.

The third-party observers in each participant's home took part in a one-on-one phone conversation with me before the programme started. They received information about the study and had the opportunity to offer reflections and ask questions. The observers were also informed about the format of the programme and its overall duration, including weekly webinars and daily meditation practice.

During the initial interview with the participants, I asked them to write down or mention three cues, to single out items that were especially important for them. I communicated these cues to their observers and asked the observers to be especially aware of these aspects when observing their partners. The reason behind informing the observers about the participants' three cues was to direct their observation towards relevant behaviours while still allowing for open observation. The observers were asked to take notes as needed during their observation process, which lasted about 10 to 12 weeks.

Participants' written journals

One element of the self-clarity programme required participants to write entries in a journal about what they became consciously aware of and experienced throughout the programme. Early on in the programme, three of the participants began to send in their journal entries by email. They were informed that they did not need to send journal entries to me but that, if they chose to do so, I would like permission to use the material in the study. During the programme, I received written material from seven of the eight participants. The final participant, who never sent in a journal, preferred verbal communication. I had a conversation

with this participant at the mid-point of the programme to review her experiences up to that point.

The journal offered additional details about the participants' process day by day and week by week, offering key words and expressions that helped illuminate their experiences during the programme.

5.6.3 Triangulation

In social science methodology, triangulation refers to combining methods within the same study to strengthen the conclusions derived from the data or to make the study more complete (Ryen, 2002, p. 201). This can be accomplished by combining quantitative and qualitative methods or combining different applications of qualitative (or quantitative) methods. However, while Silverman argues that triangulation can allow a more holistic understanding of the phenomena under investigation, he also argues that it should not be understood as strengthening the validity of study results (1993/2006). Meanwhile, Seale points out that, used cautiously, triangulation can enhance credibility in qualitative research (Seale, 1999). From a practical point of view, Hammersley clarifies that combining data of different types can enhance the quality of research and help the researcher to decide on the validity of competing interpretations, as well as illuminating divergent aspects of the phenomenon under study (2008).

In this study, triangulation was used to provide complementary information, combining repeated interviews, the participants' written journals, and third-party observations. Data gathered during interviews was compared with daily or weekly journal entries, prompting questions for further clarification during the final interviews when needed. The study was enhanced by the (unanticipated) use of written journal entries and by the input of the third-party observers throughout the 10 to 12 weeks of the project, strengthening the external validity of the project.

5.6.4 Procedures

The initial interviews were carried out over a five-day period and lasted about 60 minutes each. The mid-programme interviews were carried out over a ten-day period and were only 15 to 30 minutes long. Final interviews were from 60 to 80 minutes in duration. For six of the informants, these took place about one week after the programme ended, while interviews for the other two took place about two weeks later. This delay was due to poor internet connections, which interfered with these informants' participation in the last two webinars in the programme.

All the initial and final interviews with participants were conducted online using Skype or 'Gotomeeting' software. Interviews were recorded using either the recording option in Gotomeeting or with an additional tool (Audition from Adobe) in Skype. The recordings were stored on one computer and one memory stick and were password-protected. Every initial or final interview was recorded and immediately transcribed.

While mid-programme interviews were usually conducted by phone, they were not recorded. Rather, notes were taken during the sessions, which were written out more fully immediately after the session concluded.

Each observer participated in an interview two weeks after the end of the programme. Five of the eight interviews were recorded using either Gotomeeting or Adobe Audition, while two interviews were administered by telephone. After setting down the information initially given by these observers, I asked for them to wait with me on the line to write out my keywords and notes more thoroughly. When this was done, I read the notes back for these two observers to verify whether I had understood them correctly. I then followed up with additional questions and repeated the procedure. In the final case, the interview was done by e-mail because practical circumstances prevented this observer from scheduling a meeting within the desired timeframe. The responses received from this observer were brief but specific and clear.

I experienced both the participants and the observers as open, honest and willing to share their experiences, and they all appeared to answer as completely as they could during all interviews.

5.7 Analysis

Key principles from hermeneutics and phenomenology were used when collecting and analysing data for this study, while observing best practices identified in the literature with regard to systematically interpreting qualitative data. While the philosophical origins of these approaches do not necessarily support the identification of specific methods (Van Manen, 1997), the methods of analysis chosen for this specific study were supported by knowledge and previous experiences documented in the interpretive research literature.

5.7.1 Transcribing the interviews

Transcription is an interpretive process 'where the differences between oral speech and written texts give rise to a series of practical and principal issues' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.177).

The amount of speech transcribed and the form of the resulting transcript should be viewed in the context of the purpose of the study as well as the transcript's content (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.180).

Because the aim of this study was to understand the lived experience of the participants taking part in the self-clarity programme, I transcribed every interview in its entirety, including all follow-up questions, vocalisations such as 'eh' and 'hmm' and pauses. This principle of inclusion was helpful for later stages of analysis. Given individual idiosyncrasies, I chose not to formalise pauses based on a number of seconds. Rather, pauses were noted in the transcripts as short, medium or long in relation to the particular participant's general rhythm of speech. I also noted changes in tone, such as when participants ironically addressed themselves, so that these would not be lost or forgotten later in the analytical process. Transcribing all the interviews myself was a particularly useful first step to gain familiarity with the data. The number of pages of interviews transcribed was approximately 75000 words reflecting the inclusiveness of the procedure and the dual research questions.

5.7.2 Analysing the text

I will here give an account of how key principles were used to analyse the collective text comprising the various interviews and journals.

In this study, the phenomenological strategy, which seeks to understand the life world of the participants, made it possible to articulate the participants' interpretation of their experiences, clarifying their stories in their own words, and forming the first-order construct in the process of analysis. The hermeneutic circle and the fusion of horizons were key principles used during the interviews as well in the analytical process. These principles led to a deeper clarification of the participants' life world and produced a second construct using abstraction and interpretation generated through engagement with my own pre-given understanding, including my theoretical and personal knowledge of meditation training.

After the interviews were transcribed, the next phase of the process was to construct an overview and initial understanding of the whole text. This meant both the overall composite text, as well as each participant's process on an individual scale from initial interview through journal entries and mid-programme interview to the final interview. This synthesis involved a continuous process of reading, asking and answering questions, and writing. I highlighted sections of transcripts and journals, took additional notes and wrote commentary. I read all the interviews and journals slowly, repeatedly, line by line, while also moving between different sections and different participants.

I used different colours to highlight various segments and named themes as they emerged within each interview. I also created an overview of key sections of each participant's material from the initial and final interview transcripts, enabling me gradually to understand more of each participant's personal understandings, experiences and overall process. As I continued to move between the text as a whole and different elements of the text, overall themes emerged; as they became clearer to me, I grouped content in separate documents for each theme. Throughout the analysis, I continued to ask and answer various questions in relation to the text, deepening my understanding and clarifying the meaning that emerged from the text. Reading, writing and re-writing was a continuous process.

The final phase was to review the initial themes I had produced, which consisted of some pre-planned themes as well as others that emerged from the collected material. I started to combine certain themes, specifically those grouped as Growing Clarity and Breaking free from limitations and Elevated sense of being and the balancing process. At this point in the process, the quotes were still long. I saw this as helpful when it came to never losing sight of the context in which the quotes were given. Working with this much text presented a challenge. However, the benefit was that the context of each quote was always clear, which helped me in the final selection process. I ended up with five overarching themes, including sub-themes representing each participant.

5.8 Ethics, trust and confidentiality

According to professional guidelines, the researcher's ethical responsibilities relate to principles such as *informed consent*, *trust and protection*, *privacy* and *confidentiality* (Ryen, 2004, pp. 231–236). These are addressed in the following subsections.

Informed consent

An important ethical rule governing research on humans is that prior to research, all participants must give their informed consent. Researchers must explain to potential participants what it means to take part in the specific research project; they have the right to know the nature of the study and that they are voluntarily participating in a research project, from which they can withdraw, at any time, without further explanation (Ryen, 2007).

All participants in this project were informed both in writing, and later verbally, about the research project, after which, they each signed an informed consent form electronically (a method verified by NSD). All participants acknowledged and accepted that the interviews were recorded and that I could retain their individual contact information for any subsequent requests regarding further research participation.

Trust

According to Ryen (2007), trust refers to the quality of the relationship between the researcher and study participants. It is important to build good relationships with participants and provide an inviting and trustworthy environment for each participant's reflections. This will create a better space to hear each participant's story and will avoid limiting participants during interview sessions. Trust is also significant to future research, so particular groups of potential participants are not reluctant to participate in future research projects based on previous bad experiences. To build trust and co-create meaningful relationships with my study participants, I drew upon my previous experiences working closely with people, my personal qualities, and my experience and knowledge about the topic under investigation.

Confidentiality

Researchers are duty-bound to protect the identities of study participants (Ryen, 2007). Data must be anonymous and treated confidentially. Both the participants themselves and those to which they refer during interviews, were assigned aliases in the analysis phase; additionally, specific geographical locations mentioned by participants have been removed or changed.

Due to the nature of the programme, each participant was able to share personal reflections during a webinar, should they choose to do so. Fully protecting the identities of those taking part in the study with respect to fellow participants or observers was therefore difficult, because reflections shared in webinars were sometimes brought up during interviews. To the best of my ability, I protected participants' identities from fellow participants without eroding the quality of interpretation or the analysis of the data. With this issue in mind, I also gave participants the opportunity to read through selected material derived from their individual interviews; all eight informants approved the inclusion of their material in the way I had presented it.

5.9 Elements of quality in research

Throughout the research project, precautions were taken in terms of reliability and validity. These terms originate from the tradition of quantitative research as criteria determining the quality of research. In a qualitative context, reliability relates to the consistency and trustworthiness of the research findings (Thagaard, 2003). In contrast to quantitative studies, it is difficult for findings to be reproduced by other researchers or with other informants in qualitative research, as the researcher and the participants collaborate in both the process and the interpretation of the data. Each situation is unique and impossible to replicate. At the same time, reliability can be enhanced through an open and detailed description of the study procedures and the choices made by the researcher (Thagaard, 2003). Various factors that

may affect data collection should be mentioned explicitly so the reader can understand the research process and interpret the findings.

In qualitative research, the discussion of validity refers primarily to the question of whether we are investigating the phenomenon we set out to investigate. The term validity also raises two additional questions: Are researchers sufficiently critical of their own interpretations, and can their findings be confirmed by other research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, validation is not only about the end result of research; according to Kvale and Brinkmann, it should function as quality control through all stages of knowledge production and be an integrated element throughout interview-based studies (2009, p. 249). An important part of the overall validity of a study therefore rests on the researchers' craftsmanship, as well as their personal characteristics and morals (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Quality control during interviews and analysis

During the interview sessions, I sometimes altered questions slightly to obtain the same key information based on the particular interview subject. I had learned, by this time, that certain participants understood specific words in different ways. This kind of customisation is important according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). I also repeated certain questions at a later point in the interview to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the information provided. These repetitions did not result in 'corrections' to previous answers, but sometimes more detailed information was collected. There is a necessary balance to strike in this area; an emphasis on precision may limit the search for depth during an interview. However, improvisation and 'drilling down' can limit respondents' precision under certain circumstances (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Despite following suggested best practices during the research process, I also encountered unique situations when interacting with the participants. I did not shy away from following up on hunches or changing my approach when it felt potentially fruitful. When returning to a topic during an interview session, I often paraphrased answers already provided by certain participants to ensure that I had captured a nuance precisely. In certain cases, participants could thus have been affected by my personal interpretations, but in such cases, respondents indicated that they did not agree with or were not certain of my interpretation, such as a word I used in my paraphrase, in which case they either offered further elaboration to clarify the issue or returned to their original answer. This method of clarifying both the responses of informants during interviews and my own interpretations allowed me to confirm, reject or adjust the data and its interpretation, which is an important criterion of quality in interview research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Interviews were conducted online, rather than in person, because participants in this study lived in various cities. While I had the option of utilizing video during interview sessions, based on my previous experience I chose to use audio only. As a communicator, I personally respond better to purely listening and interpreting the meaning rather than combining visual and auditory stimuli for interpretation. While the absence of a visual record of the participants limits my opportunity to pick up subtle changes in body language, the oral approach, without visual stimuli, allowed me to better recognise variations in tone of voice, change in vocal rhythm and qualities of emotional timbre from moment to moment. I also felt that some participants would be more open and share their personal experiences more freely without video.

Other challenges to the quality of interviews and the data collection process are the potential for unintentionally asking leading questions in the interviews and the potential for error in the process of transcription and analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). My awareness of these challenges during the process, as discussed above, gives evidence supporting the reliability of the data collected.

I drew upon my past experiences in how I asked questions, maintained my presence and listened carefully to the participants. To the best of my ability, I remained consciously aware of my own perspectives, experiences and understanding of the topic in order to more effectively recognise the perspectives of the informants and distinguish them from my own. This process of bracketing helped me to avoid drawing hasty or unfounded conclusions during the interview process and helped reduce the risk of unintentionally asking leading questions.

Pre-understandings and the role of the researcher

My personal and professional experiences with the subject matter of this study have been discussed above (see also Chapter 1.3); this is most clearly expressed in my choice of theme and research questions. My pre-understanding of this topic could have both positive and negative effects from the perspective of the study participants. My experience gave me the potential to understand the process experienced in this type of training programme, and I was experienced in conducting conversations with the kind of attention and the techniques required for this form of interview.

However, because the participants knew that I was involved in the creation of the self-clarity programme, they may have felt inhibited in sharing their experiences candidly or giving straightforward feedback. I took this possibility into account when outlining the criteria for

selecting participants, as well as when designing this study. In addition, I wrote down comments immediately after each interview to increase my awareness of my own role and viewpoint. This helped to continually remind me of how my pre-understanding could affect the interview process and the subsequent phases of analysis.

Fully understanding another person's experiences through observation and interviews is difficult. I found that my previous experience with this subject matter, together with a willingness to engage in critical self-reflection, helped distinguish between my pre-understanding and the understandings of the programme participants, thus strengthening the data-gathering process, including the quality of the follow-up questions, so that the resulting text possessed greater depth and relevance.

5.9.1 Research limitations

The primary potential limitation of this research is my role as the researcher. I was both involved in the designing of the programme and the person presenting the programme. I tried to compensate for this in my research design, particularly in the way the participants were chosen. Additionally, bringing in independent observers for each participant and the possibility of examining each participant's personal journal throughout the process, including while conducting the interviews, represent efforts to counteract my researcher bias.

Maintaining a critical position toward a programme when you yourself see the value of it and are also researching it inherently presents challenges. The process of writing this thesis is an opportunity to create distance between myself and the programme and to evaluate the findings more critically.

I chose to present the programme myself for a number of reasons, including to clarify the long-term research perspective as well as the primary intent of the initial research project. Because this is a new programme, still in flux and moving forward, it would have been difficult to determine the internal validity of the research at this stage if someone else had presented the programme. Additionally, if the programme, at this stage was handed over to other researchers, the initial first-hand experience of the meeting between each participant and someone with a deeper understanding of the choices upon which the programme is built would be lost. This would have limited the starting point for further critical thinking about the programme, as well as possible adjustments to the format of the programme.

The utilization of the elements of action research in this project was also guided by the fact that this is an initial research project. Elements of action research were primarily directed towards feedback from interviews. Based on my professional experience, it would not be appropriate to break down the form of the programme at this stage, although that would

provide a satisfying and more extended way to work with action research. In addition, if such a breakdown had been used, the research would have taken significantly more time, which would have posed a challenge given the confines of a master thesis. Thus, this analysis approaches the programme in a more holistic manner, consistent with the phenomenological basis presented above.

6 Analysis

The participants took part in an online self-clarity programme over the course of nine weeks. This programme is an attempt to suggest the key factors and structure in meditation, metacognition and cognitive practice so that the essential pointers for building a stronger and deeper awareness of one's state of being can be provided.

This chapter will provide a short description of each participant, including individual key information collected from the initial interview. I will also present an interpretation of the essential findings from the initial interview I had with each participant.

In the next part of the chapter, I will present the data gathered from the final interviews, the participants' written journals used during the programme and from each participant's silent observer.

6.1 Description of the participants

This section presents the key points that seem important for the participants during the pre-interview session, such as the direction they wanted to move towards in their life and their personal challenges or obstacles they were aware of at the current time. These pieces of information can provide some insights into each participant and therefore give a better understanding of the subsequent information gathered from the post-interviews and the participants' written journals.

The self-clarity programme applies an open approach, as described in self-clarity theory (see Chapter 3.2) without specific expected effects beyond potentially increased self-clarity. The self-clarity programme does not speculate what increased self-clarity may hold or mean for a participant. Information presented from the initial interview should not be read as specific goals that the participants were focusing on to accomplish during the program. Rather, such information represents points of awareness and perspectives that the participants individually held before joining the programme.

Information gathered from the participants in the initial interview

Each participant in this study is presented with a fictive name. The first letter of the fictive name indicates whether a participant has no or extended experience in practicing meditation.

Names starting with the letter A indicate none to little meditation experience.

Names starting with the letter B indicate some meditation experience.

Names starting with the letter C indicate extended meditation experience.

Aina, female, 25 years

Background: She is currently single and resides at her family home. She works in the service industry, describing it as a temporary job.

Key points: She would like to be less affected by the external world and instead hopes to achieve greater inner balance. She wishes she could develop a more positive mindset and a sense of increased joy in life.

Personal challenge: She discussed being depressed and unhappy, stating that she sought more meaning from her life. She was considering further education that she could undertake in the future.

Meditation experience: None

Observed by her mother

Ann, female, 59 years

Background: She is married, a mother of grown-up children and a nurse by profession. At present, she is involved in the family business, doing teamwork and customer service.

Key points: She would like to 'always be true in communication'. This means listening to herself and being true to herself and her own perspectives. She said, 'At times, I feel a little panic for that'.

Personal challenge: When sharing her opinions and faced with resistance, she feels she has lost herself, which results in her low self-worth, inner imbalance and a sense of holding back. She describes this experience as ‘it has always been like that’.

Meditation experience: None to little

Observed by a family member and friend

Anett, female, 55 years

Background: She works in the logistics and service industry. She has been studying complementary medicine.

Key points: She wants to change her perspective from ‘a lower ego perspective’ to one that holds no fear. She would like to act on what she feels is right.

Personal challenge: She feels she is holding back her true self. She said, ‘I hide myself in fear of doing something wrong, or for the fear that others will be angry [at me]. Lately, this fear has been strongly present. I can suddenly wake up in the middle of the night with the thought “I have done something wrong”, but I never know [what] I have done’.

Meditation experience: A couple of months in the past; she is currently not meditating.

Observed by a family member and friend

Betty, female, 49 years

Background: She is a mother of grown-up children, and she runs a small business which provides different forms of therapies.

Key points: She would like to develop more conscious responses instead of simply reacting automatically to situations. She would also like to alter her inner dialogue. She feels that her inner dialog runs on autopilot and often concerns planning ways to defend herself against criticism from others, if she were to receive to any.

Personal challenge: She lacked inner peace. She fears situations which reveal that others do not like the way she is, the way she acts or her opinions.

Meditation experience: None to little. She is currently meditating once a week.

Observed by her friend

Belle, female, aged 39 years

Background: She is married with children. She has an academic background, and her work currently involves health promotion techniques.

Key points: She wants to 'be true to herself', 'hold her own ground' and be 'able to respond more often in situations, instead of reacting to them'.

Personal challenge: Growing up, she described being exposed to strong emotional manipulation. She finds holding her own ground difficult when similar situations occur today. She stated, 'The more I can release those [adopted behaviour patterns], the more authentic me is present and the "stronger" I am'.

Meditation experience: 1 year with daily meditation practice

Observed by husband

Bailee, female, 53 years

Background: She is mother of grown-up children. She works with customers on a daily basis in the travel industry.

Key points: She wants to improve her self-esteem. She described a sense of emotional pain in her body consisting of 'bad feelings and thoughts', which she wanted to release.

Personal challenge: She is emotionally affected by people around her. She feels that something 'hinders' her from within, causing her to not express how she truly feels, what she wants to do and what she can do.

Meditation experience: Little, currently 1–2 times a week, now and then

Observed by her grown-up daughter

Cate, female, 42 years

Background: She is married and a mother of grown-up children. She is involved in the family business and work as a teacher.

Key points: She would like to carve some time for herself to do what she wants without feeling guilty about it. However, she feels she lacks control in her everyday life. She described it as a sense of being 'pulled in all directions' without any control. She would like to handle stressing situations differently.

Personal challenge: When helping and listening to other people's problems, she wants to be less emotionally affected. She feels drained of energy, as if she were carrying all their problems/emotions with her afterwards. She feared being misunderstood by others or unintentionally hurting them emotionally.

Meditation experience: 10 years +

Observed by her husband

Christin, female, 65 years

Background: She is married and a mother of a grown-up child. She currently stays at home and has an academic background and education in health-promoting techniques.

Key points: She wants to meet and be with people to a greater degree without a sense of fear. She wants to 'work on letting go of expectations of not being wanted'.

Personal challenge: She is lacking but seeking clarity '... in what way can I be and meet people without holding any fear whatsoever?' She said, 'I get stressed when I'm not understood when I want to convey something'.

Meditation experience: 30 years +

Observed by her friend

6.2 Empirical data based on the initial interviews

The participants shared different experiences and challenges from different perspectives. They described aspects in their lives or states of being that they were unhappy about, such as a sense of low self-worth and impulses that they felt they wanted to pursue but had to restrict themselves from. None of the participants described how they ought to go about things to actually change the situations they were concerned about.

6.2.1 Dependence and attachments

An interpretation of the participants' different stories shared during the pre-interview suggested that they essentially had fear of not being understood by others or of being misunderstood, a sense of holding back their true opinions for fear of what others might think of them and a sense of longing to stand their own ground or express what they truly feel or want to do. They described experiences of feeling affected by the world in a negative way, without knowing how they can instantly alter this experience. They shared experiences of lacking inner balance or peace, or the longing for more happiness and meaning in life, but, again, without the clarity to instantly accomplish this.

An interpretation of the data from the pre-interview suggested that a common experience for the participants, although articulated from different perspectives, was a sense of longing to feel free from limitations and to express what they currently consider was right for them in their life. In its very essence, the pre-interview revealed a subtle sense of longing—longing for freedom and longing to feel free.

6.3 Empirical data based on the participants' written journals and final interviews

This section presents data gathered from the written journals of the participants, the silent observations as well as the final interviews. The data are presented under four overarching themes. The first three overarching themes also have sub-themes, presented as follows:

Recognition of the state of being

Sub-themes:

Experiencing a state of being in relation to meditation

The good feeling in various depths

The experience of an expanded room within

Active observation for increased self-clarity

Attentiveness to immediate experiences

Growing Clarity and Breaking Free from Limitations

Sub-themes:

Dependence

Choices

Growing clarity, self-recognition and calmness

Elevated sense of being and the balancing process

Sub-themes:

More being as balancing process

Adjusting state of being as an act of will

Love and compassion

This section initially describes each overarching theme and its additional sub-themes. This is followed by quotes from the participants, indented, and an interpretation of each quote.

Each participant was observed by an individual living in close proximity to the participant (e.g., a spouse, cohabitant or partner). This step was taken to gain an external perspective on the information given by the participants. Accordingly, some of the quotes are followed by the phrase 'Confirmed by observer', in bold.

Some of the participants' quotes presented here include follow-up questions raised by the researcher during the dialog with the participants. These questions have been retained to keep

the text more reader-friendly and transparent. The researcher's questions are presented in bold and are indicated by the use of question marks.

6.4 Recognition of the state of being

The overarching theme *Recognition of the state of being* has five sub-themes which focus on the participants' experiences in relation to awareness and recognition of the state of being. I will present each of these sub-themes, the participants' quotes and an interpretation of these quotes.

6.4.1 Experiencing a state of being in relation to meditation

The participants were asked how they felt during and right after they had meditated.

This theme reflects the participants' experiences of the self and their ability to identify and connect to a good feeling. An additional expression used by the participants to describe the good feeling in oneself was 'deep well-being, freedom and peacefulness'.

I am not who I thought I was.

Christin described that her experience of the self was altered during meditation, and she shared the consequences of being in a state of deep well-being.

Christin described:

Mmm..., the strongest, the most profound experience I have had during meditation is well-being. And when the....and during meditation I was deep in a feeling of well-being and the deeper I experienced the sense of well-being, I was so deep in well-being sometimes that I, I felt like I dissolved. And the deeper I was immersed in well-being, it stayed stronger, and with me longer afterwards, without my having to do anything.

Christin described a different quality of the self when being in a state of deep well-being. What she normally identifies as *her self*, 'I', changed. It 'disintegrated/dissolved', and the deeper she entered the state of well-being in meditation, the stronger and longer the duration she experienced this state, which lasted 'by itself' after the meditation came to an end.

The feeling of freedom.

Bailee described how she felt during/after meditating:

I feel, I almost feel - liberated. It feels like there's nothing blocking me, nothing in my body, my head is completely clear, no thoughts. Yes. I feel free.

Bailee described the absence of limitations during and after meditation. Nothing blocked her anymore. She also described her own point of view towards her thoughts and sensations. These were something that made her feel blocked and unfree.

A sense of being 'reset' after meditating.

Aina, Ann and Cate also described an experience of being reset after meditating.

Cate described how she used the trigger 'let go' presented in the meditations, and how exploring this trigger affected her own perspective and state of being.

(...) I felt it ... the process of letting go, how it was expressed physically, and that it affects in a profound way your perspective and how you deal with the world in general. Such that, in a sense, I have often very much 'let go', and I'm talking about both physical tension in my body, and my attitude to things, my prejudices. Yes, it definitely helps me reset myself.

Cate described how the trigger 'let go' affected her whole being and her perspective towards the world, in general. She felt that this trigger helped her reset herself. She was able to adjust her state of being, and she did this by letting go of physical tension, her attitude towards things and her prejudices. Doing so gave her a new starting point, in which she had less physical tension and limited perspectives.

6.4.2 The good feeling in various depths

After the participants described how they felt during/after meditation, the follow-up question asked whether they noticed any changes in the feeling they described. All responded that the core sensation of the feeling described did not change. The difference was in its level of intensity and their own ability to recognise it and its increased duration as the program unfolded.

Belle responded:

Yes. Over time it became much stronger. Yes. More intense and deeper. In other words, initially it was more of a 'good feeling', an undefinable 'that was good' feeling, and it increased, helping me avoid conflict. And so gradually it just got more significant, it became deeper, more powerful and more immersive. And much easier to achieve, much more accessible then. And more familiar, perhaps, not so strange or unfamiliar.

Ann responded:

Well, no, not really the feeling - my feeling of 'being' hasn't really changed since the first time. I don't think it has, but what is different now is that I'm 'there'. I feel that much more. It's there more all the time. You can - such as when I sometimes sit to talk with someone, and you know that here there is a slight imbalance and then you can just take a little breath - being - and then the emotions come. And then you talk on a completely different level. You might say, and like I say 'maybe I should just be silent'.

Belle described a development in the meditation process during the program. In the initial phase, she experienced a sense of being centred, which helped her avoid conflicts. In this stage, the experience of the good feeling was vaguer, and it was not so easy to define. Then, the sense of the good feeling became progressively stronger. It expanded in intensity and depth, and it became more accessible, familiar and recognisable.

Furthermore, Ann experienced that the difference was not in the core feeling in itself but in the greater recognition of this state of being. She became progressively more aware of this state of being and was therefore experiencing it more consciously. She further expressed awareness of shifts in her being and how she was able to reconnect to a deeper state when she sensed imbalance, such as when interacting with people. By adjusting her state of being, she started to express herself from a different level of being. She emphasised the need to suppress speech at times, which indicated her awareness of her inner impulses and the perspective from which these were stemming. She expressed increased ability to differentiate between when to move forward with these impulses and when she should let them go and not act on them. As she said, 'maybe, I should just be silent'.

6.4.3 The experience of an expanded room within

In their journals (as well as in their final interviews), the participants described a change in their overall state of being during the programme. Six participants described this change as being like an expanded room within themselves. Aina described it as 'safe and calm.' Christin stated that it was 'a state where a feeling of a deep sense of well-being was present.'

Expressions from other participants included ‘increased inner calmness’ and ‘inner silence’ related to this change in their state of being.

This theme displays the participants’ experiences of an expanded inner room as well as some of the consequences that resulted from this change in their state of being. As Belle articulated, it has consequences that lead to further things. This is reflected in the other themes below.

A different type of silence and absence of limitations.

The initial question Ann was asked in the final interview was: Can you describe your experience of participating in the program?

Ann responded:

Yes, I’ll try my best. The first thing I would say by participating here, it is that I have reached a much bigger room within myself, both for myself and for others, and a quite different silence.

Can you elaborate on what you mean by ‘bigger room within you’?

Yes, let’s say in a conversation with others, instead of taking in more of what they’re saying, I also look for the silence and, from that silence, the ‘being’. So, I’m more in contact with the wider space—you can call it light or love. I have a completely different perspective about myself and others, where you are not filled with limitations. For example, the feeling of ‘God, this isn’t good enough’ has gone because, in the silence and in the room, there are no limitations. And so for me, the silence, and the silence in communication, takes place beyond me due to the silence I feel within.

She described an inner room that created more distance to her own thoughts and emotions. It was a state of being filled with silence where limitations did not exist.

She clarified how this experience changed her perspective—both towards herself and the people around her. It was a state of being that opened up a different way of communication beyond what she perceived (or was aware of due to the limitations constructed by her mind). She experienced the possibility to be more open to what was communicated to her. She found an inner space where she could truly meet the information given. Instead of only selecting bits

and parts and reacting, she took it in consciously, and she was responding with a silence from within, which she described as light and love.

What I am and what you actually are.

Ann and Belle emphasized an important consequence for them when they described the experience of their current inner silence and expanded inner room.

Ann described:

I'm more able now, so much more able, to distinguish between what I have to take on board, 'I have to take this on' 'I have to know a little more about this', while I know perfectly well that 'you know what - that bit isn't mine.' And I experience that because of the silence within me, that I've become, so, so tuned in.

Ann described that, due to an expanded inner room filled with silence, she experienced a heightened level of sensitivity. This enabled her to better decide what she should take to heart and sense or reflect over. She also recognized with clarity what parts were not hers to reflect over, or take to heart.

Belle expressed scenarios similar to those of Ann. In this quote, she underlines the importance of differentiating between what her experiences of her own state of being were and what it was that could confuse how she experienced her own state of being.

Belle described:

Actually, I don't experience that many emotions now. In truth, I'm pretty relaxed in that sense. And that's precisely what makes it easier to identify when others come, and you notice that it's different. And so, I have a larger space, and ask myself 'is this mine, or something I've picked up?' In other words, I think it's extremely important. -

Confirmed by observer

In this quote, Belle addresses that being in this world means being with everyone else in the world. This implies the possibility for confusion when it comes to recognizing our own feelings. What do we really sense or feel, and at what point do we confuse other people's feelings and moods swings with our own feelings? Belle described a state of being with few emotions. She sensed calmness in her being. Being calm made it easier, in her opinion, to be aware of and to differentiate between her own state of being and other variations in emotions

that did not originate within her (but entered from the outside by other people). She points to an expanded inner room where she had greater clarity for recognizing and differentiating this. She asked herself: 'Is this mine or is it something that I have picked up?' She has consciously experienced how easily we can be affected by the outer world, and how important she thinks it is to create clarity over these potential confusions. This is done by recognizing her own state of being, through her state of being.

6.4.4 Active observation for increased self-clarity

All the participants showed willingness to turn to themselves, during their individual self-clarity process. It seemed that they were triggering themselves to question (scrutinize) ideas or experiences and to pursue critical thinking/reflections for a clearer recognition of their being. This was in addition to what felt right as the next move in their process, or what felt more truthful for them at a given time.

Clarifying and fine-tuning the platform of the response.

In the initial interview, Ann shared a concern. The concern was about sharing her opinions with others and meeting unexpected resistance directed towards what she had said. She explained how she could easily lose touch with herself. The consequence was a sense of low self-worth, which caused her to hold back her true opinions.

In her journal, Ann wrote that she recognized at a point how she was yearning for confirmation from outside sources about her own value and self-worth. She described what she did with this realization and where it led her. She wrote:

Become stronger in terms of my own self-worth, which naturally has paid off. A very important observation, for me, was that when I came back to my hometown, I craved recognition of my self-worth from outside, which fortunately I didn't get. I had to turn inward and further refine my self-worth. The refinement of my self-worth put me more and more in touch with being and how being feels to me. - Journal Week 7 –

Confirmed by observer

In her journal, Ann describes the inner shifts between trusting herself and not trusting herself. She felt stronger in her self-worth, yet she saw that this sense of stronger self-worth could slip. She found herself seeking confirmation from the outside world. She articulated a sense of relief that no one actually responded to her cravings for recognition. Instead of withdrawing, she expressed willingness to work actively with herself and within herself. During this

process, she experienced being ‘more and more’ connected to her being and further deepening the recognition of her own state of being.

6.4.5 Being attentive to inner and outer experiences

All participants expressed being more attentive in everyday situations, either saying so by themselves or when asked during the interview. By themselves, they articulated an awareness of how being more present affected their lives, and they highlighted links between being present and other qualities, such as an increased joy for life, creativity and calmness, a less egocentric or selfish state of being, and nuanced attentiveness.

Anett and Belle highlighted the relation to being more present and being in a less egocentric or selfish state of being. Belle described:

Yeah, it's a little strange, because it's just like I'm present on another level. I feel somewhat distanced from the here and now. What we perhaps consider 'being present' there and then. It's there now, it's quite small, what shall I call it, not flexible, but not much happens. It's somewhat static, yes, static. I know more or less how it is. But the levels I experience being present now, are levels that are much more active and movable, and which require me to be actively present. To pick it up.

If I understand you correctly, what you're saying now, that you're able to pick up more?

Mmm, yes. The ability to pick up more [from my surroundings] because I'm just not so self-centred. I have a completely different trust in my own existence, I think. I'm not so focused on others having to nurture it, and yes ... then it's like, a completely—it's a different layer, which then becomes irrelevant. You stop being focused on it.

And how does it affect your quality of life or joy in your life?

Life just becomes very simple. The very big things somehow aren't so important in a way. I get real pleasure just from sitting in the garden and hearing the trees, feeling the sun. Spending time in the garden, keeping the garden tidy. I really enjoy that. It's not really like work. But I haven't gone to the town centre. I haven't gone into a shop I try to avoid it; I try to avoid going into shops.

Belle described being present at a different level than before. However, there was something she found a bit odd. When comparing the two different levels, she described the previous level as being more predictable. Less happened there; it was a level that appeared to be more static to her. The new levels of being she now experienced were different. These levels

demanded more of her attentiveness to be able to register what presented itself there. She described these new levels as being more active and being in constant flux. As she was able to see more detailed in her surroundings. She related the ability to sense and capture what was unfolding there back to being in a less selfish state of being. She believed that this was about how she had a completely different level of trust in her own existence. This trust in her own existence removed the need to be confirmed by the outside, or nurtured by other people's opinions about her. She described it as being a big irrelevant layer that she now no longer needed to focus on. This overall shift affected her life quality. Life became simple; there was more being, such as viewing the details in the world (like a flower in the garden).

She insisted that garden work, which she previously thought of as a hassle, now felt like a great pleasure. It seemed that it suddenly was the so-called small things in life that became the center of her attention.

6.5 Growing Clarity and Breaking Free from Limitations

This overarching theme describes how the participants have broken through, empowered by new perspectives and personal insights, old layers of limitations, and growing clarity in relation to self.

6.5.1 Dependence

In her detailed written journal, Christin described how she experienced increased inner peace, numerous 'aha' moments, and was being inspired by her own personal progress. - **Confirmed by observer**

At the end of week six a shift happened, which she described as an experience of 'overwhelming sorrow,' she wrote in her journal:

Comments:

Those I love, I give the freedom - with all my heart - to come and go.

At the same time, this is a trigger for the sorrow within me. I recognise this as my fear of giving myself the same freedom. If I come and go as I like, I might be abandoned.

(...) I will no longer tie myself and others with promises I have made to avoid feeling the pain of loss, the pain of experiencing being abandoned by love.

(...)

In parallel with being-meditation and exercises in [deeper] being, my actions from now on include: Giving others and myself the freedom to come and go as they wish.

And be willing to acknowledge the pain this brings in me. For me, this insight, and this action, is just as important as being-meditation, and an awareness of just “being”. - Journal week 7 Day 1.

Christin explained that she wanted to give the people she loved the freedom to come and go in life. The challenge of living from this perspective was that it also triggered her own fear of being abandoned. Christin identified that she was being dependent, and she saw this dependency as based on a fear of being abandoned by love. She described this as self-constructed rules and laws and felt that she was holding both herself and people she loved to these rules. They were constructions of the mind that she had built and had been holding on to so she could avoid facing the pain of a potential scenario; being left alone. Ultimately, “being left by love itself.” She realized that she needed to let these ideas go and be willing to face the pain this process would cause. She described this insight and her willingness to act on it as important. Her direction and course of action were clear to her: It was about freeing herself from the limited ideas she had been clinging to; breaking through her emotions of pain or sorrow. These stood as a hurdle between living from a perspective where she and the people she loved could come and go, and remaining limited by the idea that she was dependent.

In the final interview, Christin shared how she experienced this process and where it all led her.

There is one thing, the focus on simply being - where you are, and the situation you are in, whatever that might be. This has enabled me to be able to be resilient in the face of the enormous—what shall I call it—spiritual pain, I have been through. I just let it be there, and when it became sufficiently strong, then I experienced that outside meditation I did not experience any reduction in it. It was just there. So, you can say that to just let, what I call “spiritual pain” just be there in me, led to a breakthrough whereby I really felt my sense of transformation as a spirit. It was an unbelievably strong experience. I have no doubt about my transformation. An experience of total openness, total understanding, total compassion, everything. And...., my view then, I don’t know whether the being-meditation brought it out, because it was a familiar pain. It was just more pronounced, much stronger. So strong that I had no way of avoiding it at all. So, there’s no way I can know whether it was provoked by the being-meditation, but I’m quite sure it was the training in just being. Being in a state of just being (væren), enabled me to be with it (...) For me, it was perhaps one of the most important elements of the entire programme.

I followed up with a question to confirm/disconfirm if this spiritual revelation had an impact on her perspective of herself and the world around her.

Christin responded:

Yes. It has, actually. Because a significant part of my perspective was that I'm not wanted, I'm not really loved. And it may be that I'm not in the reality I see now, but it doesn't have the same meaning anymore. Because I know now that initially I was wanted and loved completely. So now I'm comfortable standing in that perspective instead.

Christin is addressing what she has recognised within herself. Namely, that she is loved and that she has always been loved, though it never felt like that before. Her view of the reality we are living in may not show this greater love in a concrete way. However, that in itself is not important, because she has now recognised within that the love is there and has always been there.

This alters her perspective, and she states that due to that recognition of always being loved, she is no longer affected by the form of reality unfolding around her. She sees more than that.

When Ann was asked if she had faced challenges during the self-clarity programme she responded:

Yes. Yes, I've definitely met with a few challenges. Especially when we started on, in the middle of the programme, on this thing about potential. So you started to be aware of your potential and acknowledge it. You wanted to bring it forward, to show the world – well, not showing the world, but starting to use your potential. You started to do other things. And that's when I got resistance, because that was not my place. And then I had to have a heart-to-heart talk.

Resistance from whom?

I got resistance from my husband. And then I had to have a – first I had a talk with myself, and when I had made it quite clear to myself about this potential thing, “I have to use my potential, I simply have to be able to use this aspect [communication with employees and her intuitive aspect] in order to live. And so I took it further and told him, “if I cannot do this my life will be without joy, and I don't want that (...). And I got resistance at that point, but I said it even more clearly, “but this is what I want”, and I was very clear. And I knew that if I can't do this, then, then, I have the

possibility of – of simply moving out. I can manage. Especially this thing that you are not dependent.

I felt completely independent. Absolutely and totally. But then after just one or two days – the whole thing just went smoothly. - Confirmed by observer

Ann recognises more of her potential, and specifically which states of being (a state filled with life joy) and actions that she wants to express and which feel truthful for her. Through this recognition, will was created and a sense of strength. Old limitations were replaced with greater clarity and the strength to put them in motion. However, when she did that, she was faced with a second layer of resistance. In this example, she experienced her husband's resistance to adapting to her new type of being and actions.

She explained how she again turned to herself within, went consciously through her recognition, and again realised that she was precise, and this was what she wanted to do. By holding this clarity, she confronted her husband again. In this process of interaction with her husband and feeling his resistance, she described how she realised that she was independent. Independent of outside opinions, limitations or resistance, and other people's viewpoints. Nothing could shake her realisation, and the actions and expressions she felt were accurate, and so she could move forward with them.

If that meant she had to move, in order to express what was truthful for her, she would have, she said. She stated, “I felt totally independent.” The second layer of resistance she experienced when interacting with her husband ceased to exist, and “after two days everything went fine.” The outside reality just needed time to adapt to her changes. She described how the overall outcome worked very well.

6.5.2 Choices

This theme describes insights about actually having a choice in the first place. Five of the participants pointed out in their journal or in the final interview that the option to actually choose in certain situations presented a possibility of which they were previously not consciously aware.

I can choose, and this is my focal point.

Anett wrote in her journal about realising that she always has a choice, as well as stating what she has decided to focus on:

What I have become aware of:

That I always have a choice, so I have chosen to focus on being and observing when I am within limitations. [It is] the same with a sense of unease[,] in itself it is harmless, so I can put it into what I want or not add anything to it. Enjoyed the writing assignment after meditation. —Journal week 5

Anett describes what she has become aware of. She is the one who holds the option to control where she places her attention, as well as how she chooses to do so. Placing her attention on being is what she chose to do. When she found herself in a state of being where she sensed limitations, she chose to adjust and take instead a position as observer. She realised that being in a state of unease also provides options. She recognized that a feeling of unease in itself is harmless, and she identified the existence of two different options to choose from in such situations. She could either construct additional layers based on the initial feeling of unease or choose not to construct additional layers. It was up to her. She was the one that could choose.

It is possible to change things, and it is not only others that can do it.

I asked the participants what they felt more consciously aware of.

Aina stated:

That I—I can change things maybe. Or that I too can change things.

Bailee stated:

You become aware of what you can change and what you want to change. Much more aware that you too can change it.

Aina expressed, with a slight surprise, the realisation that she could be in charge of her desired changes, but she also underlined, for herself, that this was a real possibility for her. Bailee clarified a distinction between what she experienced she could change and what she wanted to change, as well as her increased awareness that the option to change actually exists.

6.5.3 Growing clarity, self-recognition and calmness

Anett articulates in her journal in week 6 a sense of increased clarity and calmness:

I feel greater clarity and calmness.

When I am being with what feels uncomfortable - not turning away, there is no attack and irritation, only peacefulness. —Journal week 6 – Confirmed by observer

Anett is experience a state of greater clarity and calmness. She clarifies how facing unpleasant feelings, instead of turning away from them, reveals a shift in the initial felt emotions. When facing what she initially feels as an unpleasant feeling it cease to exist, and what present it self is peacefulness.

Betty described how, in the latter part of the programme period, she had revealed that her focus was to point out flaws within herself or the world around her. In her discovery of this, she elaborated on how it made her feel. She described a sense of emotional soreness; however, she saw these experiences as very positive.

I asked her: Can you describe why you see them as something positive?

Betty responded:

There is something that is holding me back, that I have become aware of. Something - like I change an old [behavioural] pattern. There is something that is about to be uncovered, in such a way that I get greater freedom when I am able to let go of that part [behavioural pattern]. And in there [the process] laves the frustration, the annoyance and the soreness yes. All these – and if I did not participate in the programme and completed more or less all the meditations this would not have occurred, I think (she laughs) "In this way right now".

Betty had found herself in a process that had shed light upon how she viewed herself and the world around her. What she realized, she did not like. Yet, she saw that it was a necessary part in the process to experience greater freedom for herself. She saw this experience as inevitable: it was not because of the programme; rather, the programme became one trigger to bring this issue up to the surface right now, and in the way that it did.

6.6 Elevated sense of being and the balancing process

This overarching theme suggests that all the participants experienced a more overall balanced state of being in their everyday life. This was reflected as an increased sense of mental balance, emotional balance and physical balance.

This theme also displays how the participants were vacillating between different point of balance/states of being before more firmly establishing an improved and more stable point of

inner balance. This was a state in which they had space/room to be in a more optimal state of being, such as peacefulness, even though, as they themselves expressed, other emotions/beliefs/processes were entering/passing their awareness.

6.6.1 More being as a balancing process From negative thoughts to a neutral relation to self and then ...

Aina expressed that she had negative thoughts about herself in the initial-interview. I asked her how she saw herself now. She answered:

Now, I don't really have any particular negative thoughts. But I don't feel like I have that many positive ones either. I'm sort of a little neutral to myself. Perhaps. Is that possible?

Yes, it's possible. Do you think it's a good thing, or a bad one?

Something that could develop into a good thing.

Because it has changed from negative to neutral, so I'm well on the way to something positive then, perhaps [?]

Are there any other experiences you can share that you have experienced along the way in the program?

Things that I notice a difference with?

Yes, for example.

Um, I haven't been angry. And I haven't been unhappy. And I haven't been depressed.

So (she laughs briefly and somewhat surprised/cheerful, (and I laugh with her).

What do you think about it?

It's very good. Yes.

But I haven't exactly been ecstatic either. Yes.

Is what we're getting at that you're talking about a neutral feeling?

Yes. I think so. - Confirmed by observer

Aina also stated:

I've noticed two more things that have been a big change. And it's that I've always had really bad PMS [premenstrual syndrome]. And I don't now [for two periods]. And grumpiness in the morning, I'm very grumpy in the mornings, but I haven't noticed that. Yes. - Confirmed by observer

Aina described how she moved from a negative to a more neutral relation to herself during the programme. She articulated, with a little uncertainty, that the next stage might hold more positive emotions. She further described the absence of previously felt emotions such as anger, sadness and a depressed mood. She stated that this experience is 'very good.' Yet she also underlined that a state of deeper felt happiness is not present. She seems to have established a recognition of a state of being that holds more balance in the sense that strong emotions are less intensely experienced. Overall, she seems to hold an increased balance, physically, mentally and emotionally.

6.6.2 Adjusting state of being as an act of will

This theme describes how the participants elevated their state of being as an act of will. This means they either were letting go of habitual ways of thinking they had recognised were no longer useful, or shedding emotions that did not resonate with their current perspective. The 1-2-3 meditation (see appendix IV) was one approach which was used to recognizing their state of being.

My state of being can affect the people around me.

Cate described how she often used 1-2-3 meditation to let go of the stress she experienced before entering situations she considered might be challenging. She exemplified this by sharing two concrete situations that involved interaction with children and authority figures at work. When interacting with children at work as a substitute teacher, she described her reactions like this:

Yes. I've done some locum work at the school, and there some kids there who can be very challenging. And it's easy to become a little distracted, which is very stressful. And then you just stir up the kids more and more. And what I've managed to do, in a way, is just to take a breath and think 'let it go', to being present, and that's had an enormous effect to be honest. You (meaning 'I') see that maybe they're trying it on a little, but they're unable, in a way, to 'put more wood on the fire'. So, they stop doing it too. So, it's easier to supervise; situations are more rapidly resolved in a way, and in a positive direction. - Confirmed by observer

She altered her state of being deliberately by letting go of stress, and she consciously reconnected with the present situation. She recognises that this has a ‘enormous effect.’ She expressed that change in her state of being also affected the children's state of being. Her state of being had a calming effect on the children. This she experiences as a shortcut, since it became easier to guide and swiftly clarify situations, thus setting again/anew a positive direction and a moving forward for both her and the children.

6.7 Love and compassion

This overarching theme describes the way the participants experienced a change in their social interaction and communication with others. It reflects greater clarity in communication, as well a shift in their tone/state of being when communicating, which is now expressed with increased compassion and/or more calmness.

Being in touch with a state of love.

Ann described being in touch with a state of love, and how that was manifested through her actions.

She wrote in her journal:

My faith is an integral part of my being, and I understand what it means for me to love. I give from the heart and received the same in return. I have achieved a balance, which fills me with peace and the joy of giving, openness and wisdom. —Journal week 7 – Confirmed by observer

Ann described a new point of balance in her being. She seemed to hold and express more compassion for the world around her, giving more freely with joy without necessarily expecting something back. She shared a sense of understanding of what being in touch with a state of love meant for her.

In the final interview, Ann shared how she considered it important to maintain awareness of her state of being and to continue meditating. She described it as a continuous process, because her more elevated state of being could easily slip away if she did not pay attention or remain consciously aware it. It just wasn't easy all the time ...

From reacting to more often responding.

Bailee described how she felt a change in her state of being in her everyday life:

*(...), for example, with my kids. That I'm calmer when I talk with them. I'm calmer when I answer them. My daughter says herself that she notices that I've got better, for instance by answering her in a different way. Not - ah, in a way that I attack her, as she has said previously. Yes, answer snappily. A bit mean sometimes when I answer her. I'm not any more, or I can be of course if I have a bad day, but anyway, she has felt that it's become much better. And that's really good. - **Confirmed by observer***

Bailee described that the way she interacted with people had changed. She shared being more calm. Not reacting in situations like she had done before. It seemed that she responded more from a different state of being. But when she was tired, she could still feel old habits reappear. Yet she seemed at ease with that, it was a process. Her process. One step of the time. Still, she was pleased and happy that her daughter had noticed a change in her way of communicating.

Clarity and compassion.

When Belle was asked how she now experienced holding her own ground and freely expressing what she truly felt, something she shared during the pre-interview as being difficult, she described how she felt it at home with her husband and child:

I haven't tested it on many people, but these are the two people I spend most time with, and there I feel that things are a lot easier.

In what way is your expression easier?

*It's much more accessible; I don't have to struggle to find the words, and then say them. They're just there. So, when I got up on Saturday and came into the lounge, I said 'Here are my two favourite people!' And I knew when I said it, and decided to say it, that it is not what I would normally say. It's a long way from what I've said actually - a kind of spontaneity in a way - love. But it wasn't difficult to say it - it was quite natural. Completely natural. And of course, that cheered them up (she laughs/I laugh) instead of my coming up with something cross and tired. So, I think so, it's much easier to choose to say that kind of thing than before. Before it was much easier to say, 'It's very messy here.' And it is still messy. He's just as messy as before, but instead of choosing to say something about it, I choose instead to say 'Oh, he's a love' or something like that (I laugh/she laughs). It's just as messy, but it's much more pleasant (we laugh). - **Confirmed by observer***

Belle said that it was easier for her to give her opinion, and she didn't need to struggle to find the words. It was as if the words came more intuitively; some situations seemed to involve less mental thinking. She saw things differently, and she chose to respond to situations in a different manner. Where before she only saw the mess, now she saw beyond it.

6.8 Freedom

This theme shows experiences of increased personal freedom in the participants everyday life from different perspectives. Similar experiences are also shown under other themes that have been presented in this chapter.

In the first round of interviews, Betty was concerned about having to automatically plan defence mechanisms against possible criticism from others. In the final interview, Betty shared:

Ah, no. I have found a greater acceptance and - I haven't been so preoccupied with what others think about me, for example. This has settled somewhat I feel.

Do you have a concrete example of how this has been shown?

Yes. I've had the freedom to walk along a beach in a bikini, for example. Otherwise, I've done something I never would have imagined doing before, I didn't wear shorts, but rolled my trousers up to my knees. I think it's the first time in my life, since I was a child, that I've shown my legs in front of strangers.

When asked how that made her feel, she responded:

It was liberating, more freedom - ah, it gave me a greater sense of freedom.

And maybe that was just what it was, liberating.

7 Result

The main purpose of this study has been to explore the effects of systematic, self-clarity meditation training in a selected group of eight participants using an alternative concept called the self-clarity programme. Its secondary purpose was to investigate whether providing a different focal point, with few detailed instructions, is helpful to trigger a deepened recognition of the participant's state of being.

This chapter will discuss the empirical evidence of this study and how it can provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants. The findings are organised by the main themes presented in Chapter 6. I will discuss how these findings compare with mindfulness theory in Buddhism, clinical psychology and the self-clarity experience-based theory, as presented in Chapters 2 and 3. I will also discuss the potential implications of these findings in light of the self-clarity programme. Core findings are illustrated with quotes from the participants, indented and written in italics.

Buddhism, clinical psychology and the self-clarity concept consider mindfulness practice as a dynamic process. Bearing this in mind, the findings are presented here under the first theme: recognition of state of being.

7.1 Recognition of State of Being

The overall findings in this theme suggest that, through meditation, pointers and tools, participants experienced a deeper recognition of their state of being. They shared feelings of well-being, which progressively expanded in intensity and length during the program. This well-being became more familiar and therefore easier to consciously reconnect to when participants were distracted. Participants reported feelings of an 'expanded inner room' of peacefulness or silence, an increased ability to be present over longer periods of time and a willingness to question and clarify their own streams of consciousness.

7.1.1 The Sense of Being Reset

During and after meditation, participants described changes in their sense of self. What they previously identified as 'I' dissolved, and some expressed feelings of being 'reset'. This sense of being reset was identified by participants as a state of being that held fewer internal blockages or limitations – more peacefulness and freedom.

Bailee described it as follows:

It feels like there's nothing blocking me, nothing in my body, my head is completely clear, no thoughts. Yes. I feel free.

Cate described how exploring the meditation trigger 'let go' affected her state of being. She linked her feeling of being reset to the trigger and described how she used it beyond the meditation:

(...) I felt it ... the process of letting go, how it was expressed physically, and that it affects in a profound way your perspective and how you deal with the world in general, such that, in a sense, I have often very much 'let go', and I'm talking about both physical tension in my body and my attitude to things, my prejudices. Yes, it definitely helps me reset myself.

The feeling of being reset seemed to occur in two ways. The first was an experience of an altered self, where the self seemed to dissolve and cease to exist. The second was an awareness of a different state of being. By letting go, for example, Cate returned to a default mood that she had felt before. These findings indicate that the participants were reminded of, or discovered the possibility of, feeling good by paying attention to their own state of being. The realisation that there might be a constant source of well-being to draw from can build a stronger foundation from which to build our own state of being to reveal a sense of the good feeling, as opposed to performing actions with the hope of a good feeling as reward. This can alter both the quality of our actions and potentially which actions we choose.

Self-clarity theory explains that one's experience of self will change in relation to a deeper recognition of our state of being. This is reminiscent of how Buddhism explains the self, though Buddhism is more particular in its description. According to Rahula, what forms the sense of personality or 'I' is 'only a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies' (1959/74p. 20). These energies are impermanent, in a constant state of flux as they are constantly arising and ceasing. In other words, there is no fixed identity, or a permanent self in a person, according to Buddhism (Harvey, 1990). Clinical psychology, on the other hand, has historically been more concerned with the content of consciousness rather than consciousness itself (Brown et al., 2007). The idea that the self can dissolve, pointing to a state of being that holds no separate identity, is not emphasised. Instead, clinical psychology emphasises mindfulness practices which can help to establish a healthy experience of one's self and improved well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Segal et al., 2013). However, clinical psychology also notes that cultivating mindfulness causes a deconstruction in one's view of oneself, and the improved ability to observe more objectively reveals that those things one previously identified with are an ever changing stream of concepts, images and ideas (Shapiro et al., 2006; Hayes et al., 1999).

7.1.2 The Good Feeling at Various Depths

The essential findings here were that the core feeling participants experienced during meditation remained the same, differing only in intensity, duration and their own ability to recognise and consciously reconnect to the various depth of this ‘feeling as the programme continued. This aligns with the theory of self-clarity, which states that paying attention to good feelings can be a point of entry to a deeper recognition of one’s state of being during meditation. This means increased realisation of the potentially constant availability of this quality and the different depths to which it might be experienced. The participants learned this feeling through experience and opened up various depths to become consciously aware of it and easily reconnect to it when distracted.

Buddhism teaches that all humans have an inherent Buddha nature which can be revealed through mindfulness practice (Hanh, 1998). Clinical psychology suggests that humans have inner resources which can be called upon to improve our well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Shapiro et al., 2006). But there is a difference in how each theory defines the process for accessing these qualities and what the ultimate purpose of that access is. The purpose in Buddhism is attainment of nirvana. The processes of attaining it are particular to each person, and are linked to the four noble truths (Bodhi, 2011).

Clinical psychology expounds a different perspective, presenting several purposes for practicing mindfulness, all relating to concrete improvements in well-being, here and now. However, Kabat-Zinn has argued that one should not strive for pre-decided changes, but rather should approach mindfulness with a perspective of non-attachment (2011).

In contrast to clinical psychology, the self-clarity theory only suggests possible improved self-clarity as a consequence of the practice. What this potential increased self-clarity may hold for each participant is not a focus. Compared with the other theories, the self-clarity process maintains a different initial focus point during meditation, and the meditations are structured in a slightly different manner than in mindfulness practice in clinical psychology.

7.1.3 The Experience of an Expanded Room Within

Participants all described a change in their overall state of being. This was often described as an ‘expanded inner room’ where a deep sense of well-being was present. The participants expressed increased inner calmness and silence. The self-clarity theory explains that by experiencing and holding conscious recognition of this feeling, it will start to remove the ‘fuel’ that feeds feelings of limitations and disturbances in the mind. The practitioner has increased clarity because he or she is calmer within. Buddhism describes this calming effect as mindfulness practice. Paying attention to one’s breathing is an initial exercise in Buddhist mindfulness practice. The mindfulness sutra states: ‘I shall breathe out,’ he trains himself.

“Calming the bodily formation, I shall breath in, “ he trains himself; “calming the bodily formation”” (translated by Nanamoli, 1972/2006, p.11). Mindfulness practice in clinical psychology also uses breathing as a point of attention (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). All mindfulness theories show the importance of calming our inner state of being, which again can be seen as leading to the experience of an expanded inner room. These theories vary in their practical approaches during the initial phase of the practice: calming the body by paying attention to breathing, as in Buddhism and clinical psychology, or paying attention to the good feeling as a point of entry to its various depths, as in the self-clarity programme.

7.1.4 The Difference Between My Own and Other People's Emotions or Moods

Two of the participants underlined an additional important effect related to the sense of an expanded inner room. They described feeling increased clarity, affording them the ability to differentiate, with greater precision and effortlessness, between *their* feelings and thoughts versus feelings and thoughts they had adopted from others. This is something that had earlier confused them, as they believed every emotion had originated within them. When they were not conscious about this difference, feelings from others had affected their state of being to a stronger degree.

7.1.5 Being Present Without a Need for Outside Confirmation

All participants experienced states of increased presence in their daily lives. This means they reported being more attentive to immediate experiences. They articulated feelings of increased joy, creativity and less egocentric focus.

Buddhism, clinical psychology and self-clarity all view the present moment as key, but they vary in perspective and in what being present actually means. Buddhism stresses the importance of being attentive to the here and now (Bodhi, 2011). Hanh has written, ‘Don't run after your thoughts. Find joy and peace in this moment’ (1998, p. 36). Being present is one of the components described in Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness, and the experience of being present is linked to improved quality of life in clinical psychology (1990).

In self-clarity theory, being present is not emphasised as a definition or focal point in itself, in contrast with mindfulness in clinical psychology. Being more present, or being present over a longer period of time, is instead defined in self-clarity theory as a natural consequence of a deeper recognition of one's state of being. It is the process of deepening this recognition that is the focal point of the self-clarity programme.

With regard to being more attentive to immediate experiences, participants reported increased trust in their own existence and less need for external confirmation.

Belle described it as follows:

Mmm, yes. The ability to pick up more [of my surroundings] because I'm just not so self-centred. I have a completely different trust in my own existence, I think. I'm not so focussed on others having to nurture it, and yes ... then it's like, a completely – it's a different layer, which then becomes irrelevant. You stop being focussed on it.

Participant responses suggest that, when trusting one's own existence, there is less need for good feelings based on external sources. Being less selfish creates room to see beyond ourselves and move through this world with greater awareness of others.

Buddhist theory explains that an increased understanding of being and existing requires letting go of attachments (Bodhi, 2011). This agrees with the self-clarity theory, which states that a natural consequence of a deeper recognition of state of being is a more present being. Trusting one's own being again stems from a deeper recognition of being. Shapiro et al describe a change in perspective, or 're-perceiving', to explain the shift from a subjective view to a more objective view of oneself (2006). Relating it to mindfulness practice, they explain re-perceiving as a process which allows for a deeper understanding of the mind and the body. A common attitude present in all three theories is the practice of letting go. This practice can be described as the ability to self-regulate, placing attention on different aspects of self by choice, as well as letting go of beliefs one no longer sees as useful, or which no longer resonate with a perspective one may hold. This will be further addressed in the next section.

7.1.6 Adjusting State of Being Through Will

The findings suggest that participants were adjusting their state of being through will. This means they were letting go of habitual ways of thinking which they recognised were no longer needed or emotions which did not resonate with their new perspectives.

Mindfulness in psychology highlights self-regulation of attention (Bishop et al, 2004). Through meditation, the practitioner cultivates the ability to be flexible when it comes to paying attention to different things. This aligns with the self-clarity theory, which suggests that a person can more easily change his or her state of being through an act of will.

The Buddhist concept of clear comprehension describes how one adjusts by letting go of mind-sets that are not aligned with Buddhist teaching or wisdom (Bodhi, 2011). The attitude of letting go is clearly present in all three approaches. What a person chooses to let go of is based on that person's level of recognition, though within Buddhism the meditator uses a

more complex framework with which to clarify his or her level of recognition on a given subject.

7.1.7 The Process of Active Clarification

The findings clarified the ability and willingness of participants to turn inwards. They shared experiences of looking closely at what they identified as their own conditioned patterns, critically questioning and clarifying ideas in their stream of consciousness and how these ideas arise. This can be compared to clear comprehension in Buddhism, which is explained as a process leading to deeper insight and wisdom (Bodhi, 2011). Mindfulness practice in clinical psychology emphasises stream-of-consciousness content more than the questioning and clarification process. It is instead centred around observing the stream of consciousness without holding an opinion about what presents itself – to simply accept what is in a non-judgemental manner (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). The act of observation is also present in Buddhist mindfulness, defined as bare attention, and in the self-clarity theory. Both theories underline the importance of the dynamic between bare attention and clear comprehension. The difference is the background or suggested filter used to view things more clearly. In Buddhism the process is guided by the teachings of Buddha (Bodhi, 2011). In the self-clarity theory, beyond a few selected pointers, the process is mainly guided by the users themselves in their self-clarity processes.

The self-clarity approach and Buddhist mindfulness agree when it comes to questioning ideas. Clinical psychology does not necessarily disagree, but this aspect is not emphasised in the mindfulness training. However, cognitive clarification is addressed, though the perspectives are different. MBCT uses the act of clarification separate from the mindfulness meditations, the purpose of which is first and foremost to create specific changes (Fennell and Segal, 2011, pp.131-134). This is not aligned with Kabat-Zinn's perspective, who argued that a perspective including non-attachment, even with a positive outcome, was intended from the beginning of the MBSR programme (2011).

A deeper recognition of one's state of being seems to open new challenges and opportunities. These findings will be discussed in the next section.

7.2 Growing Clarity and Breaking Free from Limitations

Participants reported experiences of breaking through old layers of limitations, moving from a state of dependence to increased independence. This seemed inspired by new perspectives and personal insights. Dependence was described by participants as a construction of the mind or of their limitations. It hindered them from expressing themselves freely.

7.2.1 Dependence

The Four Noble Truths hold that we are dependent due to ignorance. Dukkha-dukkha is suffering we experience in our worldly lives because we become attached to things, as well as the painful process of letting go while still being ignorant of our own being. Cultivating mindfulness is suggested as a tool for gradually replacing ignorance with wisdom. This involves practices such as contemplating feelings in feelings, as described in the Four Establishments of Mindfulness (Bodhi, 2011, p. 21). This is described in all three theories. Additionally, Shapiro et al. have argued that deeper understanding of our mind and body leads a person to better recognise his or her own and more truthful needs and values (2006).

Christin described how she was confronted with painful emotions in the process of letting go of what she identified as an old, limited belief:

I don't know whether the being-meditation brought it out, because it was a familiar pain. It was just more pronounced, much stronger, so strong that I had no way of avoiding it at all. So there's no way I can know whether it was provoked by the being-meditation, but I'm quite sure it was the training in just being. Being in a state of just being enabled me to be with it. (...) For me, it was perhaps one of the most important elements of the entire programme.

A deeper recognition of state of being seemed to strengthen participants' ability to be present with what is, without being distracted by new actions to adjust, cover or overcome a present painful state. Instead, this recognition revealed ways to regulate one's own state of being. A stronger recognition of one's own state of being provided increased clarity over what is truly important: one's own needs and what one feels is right for him or her. This insight seemed to support a shift from being dependent to being more independent – acting more freely and being less concerned about the opinions of others, which before seemed to have challenged participants' own states of well-being.

Ann described it as follows:

I got resistance from my husband. And then I had to have a – first I had a talk with myself, and when I had made it quite clear to myself about this potential thing, 'I have to use my potential, I simply have to be able to use this aspect [communication with employees and her intuitive aspect] in order to live'. And so I took it further and told him, 'If I cannot do this my life will be without joy, and I don't want that'. And I got resistance at that point, but I said it even more clearly. 'But this is what I want'. And I was very clear. And I knew that if I can't do this, then, then, I have the possibility of – of simply moving out. I can manage. Especially this thing that you are not dependent.

I felt completely independent. Absolutely and totally. But then after just one or two days, the whole thing just went smoothly.

7.2.2 Growing Clarity, Self-Recognition and Calmness

Participants experienced a growing clarity and deeper understanding of their own senses of self, their behavioural patterns and what they currently saw as important, as well as an increased sense of calm. Mindfulness in psychology describes the process of disentanglement as cognitive content that is thought to allow one to ultimately view things more clearly (Shapiro et al., 2006). Growing clarity is also part of the theory of self-clarity, and it can be explained as cultivating bare attention and clear comprehension in Buddhism. This point is related to observations made in previous sections, that when letting go of attachments, one can view inner or outer phenomena or experiences more objectively or clearly. There is less disturbance in mind, and the already mentioned expanded inner room allows for increased inner calmness.

Another finding in this theme which can be explained by all three theories is the experience of having new choices and a new perspective on reality, something reported by all participants.

7.2.3 Reality with More Options

Five of the participants reported that they realised they had options they had not recognised before or that they thought would be impossible to achieve.

Bailee described it as follows:

You become aware of what you can change and what you want to change. Much more aware that you too can change it.

And Aina said this:

That I—I can change things maybe. Or that I too can change things.

These findings suggest that, where before participants felt limitations or held more narrow perspectives, they now felt greater clarity. They recognised that what seemed like impossible situations were not necessarily so; options were available, and they could actually choose how to solve or overcome difficult situations. This engendered hope stemming from their own empowerment to change things, as opposed to the hope that ‘someone else will solve this, because only then can I feel better’. Revealing more options than one thought possible can suggest directions and generate new clarity about what to do, how to do it and what we actually *want* to do.

The findings under the theme *growing clarity* and *breaking free from limitations* indicated that a deeper recognition of one's state of being can result in a gradual shift from dependence to independence, empowered by a greater understanding of oneself. Growing clarity about oneself and increased inner calm seem to support a more balanced state of being, or at least a new stage in the overall balancing process. This will be addressed in the next section.

7.3 Elevated sense of being and the balancing process

In this area, findings suggested that all participants experienced more balance and well-being in their everyday lives. They reported a sense of increased mental balance, emotional balance and even physical balance.

7.3.1 Being Neutral

Participants also reported feeling more neutral about situations, experiencing less intense emotions. Experiences the participants reported can be explained as one step in the process of attaining a state of equanimity. In Buddhist teaching equanimity is described as 'a perfect, unshakable balance of mind, rooted in insight' (Thera, 1994, p. 258). Equanimity is also mentioned by Shapiro et al as a consequence of re-perceiving (2006), whereas a balancing process of state of being to a more stable or elevated state of being is described in the self-clarity theory.

Belle described:

Actually, I don't experience that many emotions now. In truth, I'm pretty relaxed in that sense. And that's precisely what makes it easier to identify when others come, and you notice that it's different. And so, I have a larger space, and ask myself, 'Is this mine, or something I've picked up?' In other words, I think it's extremely important.

A more elevated state of being, with less intensity at an emotional level, suggests increased awareness and clarity when interacting with the world. I will address this in the next section.

7.4 Love and Compassion

Findings in this area suggest a change in the way participants interact with the world.

Participants reported greater clarity and freedom in expressing themselves in social interactions. They reported increased ability to respond to situations or people, as opposed to reacting to them in an automatic manner. This seems to stem from their experiences of a now more balanced or calmer state of being, which was addressed in the previous section: 'Elevated sense of being and the balancing process'. Furthermore, participants reported being more compassionate or expressing more love, both towards themselves and in interactions with others.

Qualities such as compassion, love and kindness are emphasised in Buddhism. According to Buddhist teaching, the four virtues (*brahma-vihara*) are states of mind gradually revealed by practice (Rahula, 1959/1974, p. 75). This agrees with self-clarity theory, which states that a person adapts, step by step, to the awareness of his or her state of being. They step away from the old driving forces where feeling good is a reward for actions, to a deeper recognition of state of being. This shift leads to greater freedom. The person is motivated by a deeper recognition through understanding and love. Kabat-Zinn explains the mindfulness process as 'a journey of self-development, self-discovery, learning, and healing' (1990, p. 1).

There are different views about bringing heart qualities to mindfulness practice in clinical psychology. Shapiro et al. add the importance of bringing qualities such as compassion and kindness into the practice of mindfulness (2006). Bishop et al. (2004) disagree about this.

Mindfulness practice in Buddhism and in the self-clarity theory also disagree. Instead they frame these qualities as consequences of the practice or, as the self-clarity theory states, a consequence of deeper recognition of one's state of being.

7.5 Freedom

Participants reported a heightened sense of freedom pointing towards their overall experience of increased personal freedom. This point needs to be reiterated because freedom from the endless state of life and death, and from debilitating long-held psychological patterns that prevent one from attaining their potential or even living a normal life, is the underlying and most important facets of Buddhism, and clinical psychology, respectively. Within the context of the self-clarity programme, the freedom of feeling good about one's own state of wellbeing cannot be overemphasized. Against this backdrop, participants reported greater clarity and freedom in expressing themselves in social interactions. This is inclusive of the freedom to access a deeper recognition of self, coupled with the ability to act more freely, based on what they recognised as being truer to themselves, which then allowed them to interact with other more freely. It also points at freedom from limitations that hold them back.

This sense of increased freedom to act more freely and freedom from the limitations that were either imposed by their own self or others seem to be supported by experiences of a deeper recognition of their state of being, where they experienced fewer limitations or where they felt they ceased to exist and felt free.

In this regard, the experiences the participants reported, relating to increased sense of personal freedom from limiting and unfruitful behavioral patterns can be explained by the four noble truths, mindfulness in clinical psychology and is one of the self-clarity experience-based theories.

7.6 A different focal point

A **secondary goal** of the self-clarity programme was to investigate whether the programme's different focal point during meditation, with few detailed instructions, would be fruitful in triggering a person's ability to deepen the recognition of his or her own state of being.

The findings suggest that participants were able to relate to and utilize the sense of feeling good as a point of entry to the various depths of this 'feeling', thus deepening the recognition of their own states of being. On a cautionary note, if we use the element of feeling good, as suggested in self-clarity meditations, to strengthen our recognition of our state of being, we might end up with a superficial version of feeling good — a feeling which is still heavily based on outer circumstances or which is viewed as a reward for our actions. This again may motivate a person to act based on a limited or less clarified perspective. In contrast, the purpose of mindfulness practice is to look within to seek solution to life problems with an enhanced sense of awareness about not just our mind, but also our response to the exogenous circumstances. As Ann pointed out in her individual process of revealing more of her potential, this limitation will be recognised during the self-clarity process and can be adjusted for accordingly:

And I felt I wanted to dance around a little, my ego - you feel that this is really not good. You just know. It's okay to feel it a bit, but not to extremes.

7.7 A possible conclusion

In this thesis, I attempt to address the diversity of approaches towards mindfulness practice, underpinning the variations in context, perspectives and attitudes brought to the practice, including the expected effects of mindfulness practice in the context of both Buddhism and clinical psychology. A secondary research question involves proposing an alternative concept to mindfulness practice, known as self-clarity. I also briefly explain the recent trends in the West.

The main purpose of this study was to explore the effects of systematic self-clarity meditation training in a selected group of eight participants. This thesis is based on qualitative research methodologies, including triangulation and involving a series of interviews and participants' written journals.

The results of the study demonstrate that the effects experienced by participants largely corresponded to the purposes of mindfulness practice, as described within the purview of Buddhism and, experience-based theory of the self-clarity programme. This meanwhile does not correspond as much to the mindfulness approach undertaken in clinical psychology because the active clarification process of streams-of-consciousness content finds mention

and application in both mindfulness - in Buddhism and in the self-clarity programme. However, this approach is far less emphasized in mindfulness, as described in clinical psychology, centering primarily around the idea of observing content within a stream of consciousness while refraining from acting upon the tendency to look at the events in a judgemental manner. Importantly, the implementation of active clarification is undertaken from a different standpoint in psychology with an aim to seek and enforce specific changes (Segal and Segal, 2011). More specifically, it is not predicated on tangible outcomes or even on non-attachment.

In an attempt to answer the main research question, this group of participants reportedly experienced a sense of greater freedom, understanding and love. A secondary goal was to investigate whether the use of the program's different focal point during meditation, with few yet detailed instructions, would help trigger a person's ability to deepen the recognition of their own state of being.

In answering the second research question, this group of participants was able to relate to and use the good feeling as a point of entry to the various depths of 'feeling good', thus deepening recognition of their own states of being.

What follows is a short illustration of selected principles and perspectives of mindfulness practice in Buddhism, the field of clinical psychology and self-clarity experience-based theories.

Simplified illustration of the key differences between the three theories presented here

	Buddhism	Clinical psychology	SC Programme
The perspective	We all hold an inner Buddha nature, which can be revealed through the practice of mindfulness.	That we all hold inner resources that can be drawn upon for improved well-being.	That we all hold untapped inner resources for increased self-clarity about our being and existence.
The expected destination	The attainment of nirvana by freeing oneself from root cause of suffering.	Varies by aiming to address the various ailments one suffers during the course of their lifetime.	Does not seek specific effects or results beyond potential increase in self-clarity.
The initial point of attention	Paying attention to the breath.	Paying attention to the breath.	The good feeling.
Primary points of attention	Several	Several	One
Practical method	Bare attention. Clear comprehension.	Bare attention.	Bare attention. Active observation/ clear comprehension.
Values or attitudes	Values Revealed by practice. There are four virtues (brahma-vihara) that are central to Buddhist teachings and practice. These virtues are loving kindness (metta), compassion (karuna), empathy (mudita) and equanimity (upekkha) and are subjects in meditation practice.	Attitudes Added into practice. Kindness, compassion, patience, trust, compassion, non-reactivity and wisdom. Kabat-Zinn suggested the following attitudinal qualities beyond that of being of non-judgmental: patience, a beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and letting go (1990).	Attitude Central attitude is letting go.

To begin with, the self-clarity concept supports the overall direction of mindfulness practice in both Buddhism and in clinical psychology; this concept pertains to paying attention to one's own state of being. The self-clarity concept is also congruous with mindfulness in Buddhism by underlining the importance of penetrating through, or questioning, content

appearing in one's stream of consciousness. However, mindfulness in clinical psychology is mostly centred on observing content in a non-judgemental manner during meditation.

However, the different focal points and structure in meditation, proposed by the self-clarity concept, does challenge the current complexity in the practice of mindfulness. It does so with a simplistic approach, suggesting one focal point of the state of being, implying that this point of entry is denoted by feeling good and the attitude of "let go." More crucially, it underpins the fact that users have direct access to discovering their own optimal way of moving forward by letting go of negative, limiting and debilitating psychological patterns. The self-clarity approach also stresses on the importance of questioning ideas and, hence, validates whether or not they are important, whilst moving forward in the individual's self-clarity process.

The self-clarity programme was inspired by the diversity of approaches towards mindfulness practice —variations in context, perspectives and attitudes to bring to the practice, including the expected effects of mindfulness practice in both Buddhism and clinical psychology. Recent trends in the West show an increasing interest in developing and tailoring mindfulness-based intervention programs, with increasingly narrowed themes for specific groups.

Of course, one may ask whether it is possible that these different approaches within the field of mindfulness themselves become additional distractions, originating from the same aggregates or attachments that which they were intended to free us from? How can we avoid possible distractions originating from these attachments?

It is important to bear in mind that every human has direct access to their own state of being, though sometimes it seems that everything else distracts us from this point of recognition. There is, of course, nothing wrong with distractions per se; they are both useful and necessary in the vacillating process toward a more stable and elevated state of being. However, holding on to an understanding of the purpose of distractions, coupled with a wandering mind in a world already filled with stimuli, might pose a significant challenge in the absence of direct access to self-clarity.

Today is different from yesterday. In the midst of a changing world and condition-based thinking and expectations — in the midst of dukkha — the self-clarity approach considers simplicity to be key.

Depending on the perspective from which it is viewed, the current self-clarity concept can be seen as a subtle, nuanced alteration of mindfulness practice. Maybe it is not important; maybe it is. Either way, when someone changes something subtle and nuanced when it comes to the

direction being taken, which—in this context—is towards our state of being, it affects our mindfulness. By suggesting a different and single primary focal point in meditation and simultaneously reducing the suggested attitudinal quality to bring to mindfulness practice, the central quality of which is to ‘let go’, we encourage practitioners to further explore and adjust their self-clarity processes.

One thing is likely to happen based on this alteration: The journey will inevitably change. We may all even end up healthier and happier (based on a clinical psychology perspective), attain nirvana (from a Buddhist perspective) or be able to view things with self-clarity (from a self-clarity perspective).

While there does exist a diversity of approaches towards mindfulness practice, there also exists a common understanding. For example, both Buddhism and clinical psychology agree that each of us holds inherent resources that can be drawn upon for improved well-being. The way to access these resources is by deepening our recognition of our own state of being – something that is exclusively focused on and attempted to accentuate under the self-clarity programme - by focusing on ‘feeling good’ and considering it as a key element of this recognition of the state of being. In other words, feeling good can be deemed as a focal point of the state of being because it plays a pivotal role in improving our wellbeing. Another common understanding is that we as humans can easily cling to concepts or ideas and not see the true nature of things or view them objectively. These factors might distract us from recognising our inherent resources for improved well-being and attaining more clarity about our lives.

Ultimately, the key aspect is about precision of direction, putting forward a structure that is aligned with consciousness itself and reminds each one of us about the core message of Buddhism and clinical psychology: There are resources that can be used by every human being by harnessing their latent potential. The dilemma is that we sometimes forget this or because we do not know how to best utilize it.

When we simplify things, we keep things open, not limited – therein lies the potential to well-being and freedom, something that was discussed above. When we simplify things, we are placing trust in the individual by pointing in a precise direction—as we clearly and consistently remind participants to test, explore, and validate. This does not mean that we are forbidden to state opinions, but it is clear that what we state is just an opinion. We are no longer teaching about a helpful tool; we are opening up the greater clarity of the tool and potentially the individual’s optimal tool. This is done by supporting the wisdom and self-clarity inherent in each individual.

Even a more simplistic format of practicing mindfulness supports a person's process of deepening their recognition of their state of being. This indicates that it is relevant to further investigate what the governing structure of the mindfulness programme holds. In what way can they better support the intended process, and in what way might they lead to detours?

One might consider taking a step back and following the statement of Buddha: 'you must go and see for yourself'. With this in mind, a question arises concerning how we can best see for ourselves. How should mindfulness training be structured?

7.8 Suggestions for Further Research

The results of my research suggest that a different focal point, accompanied by few detailed instructions in meditation practice, can support the process of deepening one's awareness of one's state of being.

This study was limited to how this group of people experienced the self-clarity programme. What this study did not address was how the experiences in the self-clarity process were compared to experiences when undertaking a different mindfulness programme with a secular approach, such as in clinical psychology, or in Buddhism.

However, the results of this study show that it is necessary to further investigate how to structure this type of training. The structure relates to the amount of instructional details presented and the overarching format to support the cultivation of mindfulness practice both as a whole and during meditations, and to strengthen the possibility of not leaving unintended limiting or stumbling blocks, for both instructors and participants involved in the process.

Additionally, based on the common understanding in the field today, each person holds inherent resources for improved-well-being. The chosen systematic approach to cultivate mindfulness can further be explored in a more direct format. We need to address how we can present systematic training and yet have a framework that allows for an intuitive approach, taking into consideration that each person holds the key for their optimal route. At the same time, we cannot lose sight of the precision and consistency in the direction toward our state of being.

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3 Appendix I

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet

”Mindfulness-based Self-Clarity”

Bakgrunn og formål

Formål

Formålet med prosjektet er å skape et Mindfulness-based Self-Clarity program, hvor hensikten er å avdekke hvilken effekt denne type trening kan gi deltagere.

Problemstilling

Hvilken effekt gir systematisk trening av Mindfulness-based Self-Clarity?

Hvordan kan systematisk trening av Mindfulness-based Self-Clarity bidra til skifte av perspektiv i møte med en selv og den ytre verden, og til forbedret livskvalitet?

Prosjektet er et mastergradsstudie ved Norges Artiske Universitet, UIT.

Utvalg

Utvalget er hentet fra to grupper voksne mennesker som ikke er i en behandlingssituasjon. Gruppe 1 består av personer som har praktisert formell meditasjon og gruppe 2 består av personer som ikke har praktisert formell meditasjon.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Deltagerne gjennomfører et felles nettbasert program ledet av en instruktør. Varighet av den nettbaserte treningen er på ca. 60-90 minutter 1 gang i uken, over en periode på åtte uker. Samtidig med den nettbaserte treningen gjennomfører deltagerne individuell egentrening seks ganger i uken. Varighet av egentreningen er på ca. 45-60 minutter hver gang. Egentreningen består av ulike meditasjoner og enkelte refleksjonsoppgaver. Deltagerne vil få tilgang til meditasjoner og refleksjonsoppgaver via en nettbasert medlemside.

Prosjektleder gjennomfører et individuelt intervju med deltagerne i forkant av program start. Det vil også bli gjennomført intervjuer underveis i programmet, rett etter programmet er ferdig, samt et postintervju fire måneder etter programmet er avsluttet. Tredjepart, slik som

ektefelle, venn, kollega eller lignende vil også bli intervjuet en gang før og en gang etter at deltager har gjennomført programmet.

Spørsmål

Spørsmål som blir stilt i intervjuet vil omhandle hvordan og i hvilken grad deltager opplever endring av perspektiv i møte med en selv og den ytre verden. Håndtering og eventuelt endring av følelser, tanker og fysiske fornemmelser, hendelser og generell livssituasjon.

Data blir registrert gjennom notater og lyd-fil.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Prosjektleder og veileder vil ha tilgang til opplysningene. Navneliste lagres adskilt fra øvrige data. Deltakerne vil bli anonymisert, slik at ingen opplysninger skal kunne føres tilbake til identifiserbare enkeltpersoner.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes 1. desember 2014

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn.

Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli anonymisert.

Dersom du har deltatt på tidligere treninger med instruktøren som gir kurset vil det ikke ha innvirkning på dette forholdet dersom du ikke vil delta i studien, eller på et tidspunkt ønsker å trekke deg.

Hvordan delta i studien?

Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med prosjektleder

Hege Tvedt på e#post: mentoring@hegetvedt.com / tlf: 99373097

eller ansvarlig veileder Nils Vidar Vambheim # tlf: 776 45249.

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta.

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Kryss av her

- Jeg samtykker til å delta i intervju

Samtykke til oppbevaring av kontaktinformasjon

Kryss av her

- Jeg samtykker til at student kan oppbevare min kontaktinformasjon i 5 år i tilfelle det gjennomføres et oppfølgingsstudie.

4 Appendix II

The interviews were conducted in Norwegian.

All quotes have been translated by professionally trained translators.

The interview guide evolved around asking questions about how they experienced the participation in the programme, how they felt physically, mentally and emotionally. What they became aware of during the process, if they were faced with challenges, what they liked while participating, and whether the participation had any impact in their life quality - if so – how? Further how they felt during and right after meditation.

Individual questions

Participants were also asked specific follow-up questions in the second interview, based on what they shared in the first interview.

Interview guide in Norwegian

Intervjuguide

Beskriv din opplevelse med å delta i programmet?

Underspørsmål som:

Kan du utdype hva du mener med ...? tydeliggjøre ...? være mer spesifikk...? etc.

Er det andre erfaringer eller opplevelser du kan si noe om?

Hvordan har du det fysisk? Mentalt? Emosjonelt?

Hva ble du bevisst om deg selv underveis i programmet?

Opplevde du utfordringer?

Hvordan har du det nå i forhold til når du startet programmet?

Hva var bra med å delta i programmet?

Har dette programmet hatt betydning for din livskvalitet? I tilfelle hvordan?

Individuelle spørsmål

Spesifikke spørsmål relatert til det deltagerne delte i det første intervjuet.

(Hensikten er å avdekke eventuelle endringer og nyanser i deres opplevelse rett etter programmet).

Meditasjoner og refleksjonsoppgaver

Hvordan følte du det rett etter en meditasjon?

Endret følelsen xxx seg rett etter meditasjon underveis i programmet?

Når du kunne velge meditasjoner, hvilke korte/lange meditasjoner gjorde du flest av?

Hvorfor?

Er det noen meditasjoner du foretrekker fremfor andre? I tilfelle hvilke og hvorfor?

Refleksjonsoppgaver

Kan du beskrive hvordan du opplevde refleksjonsoppgavene underveis i kurset?

Spørsmål om programmet i seg selv

Hvilke tanker har du om oppbygningen/strukturen i programmet?

Du kom med et innspill/spørsmål underveis i programmet som vi brukte siden. Hadde det noen virkning for deg? Om så, hvilken?

Dersom du kunne endre noe i programmet, hva ville det vært?

På hvilken måte kan programmet forbedres?

-Skriftlig materiale

-Web muntlig materiale

-Presentasjon av muntlig web materiale

-Meditasjoner

-Presentasjon av meditasjoner

Avslutning

Har du noe å tilføye?

Er det noe du lurer på?

Er det noe du sitter igjen med nå som du ikke har fått satt ord på?

Er det noe du vil spørre meg om?

5 Appendix III

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



Harald Hårfages gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
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nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org nr: 985 321 884

Nils Vidar Vambheim
Institutt for lærerutdanning og pedagogikk UiT Norges arktiske universitet
9006 TROMSØ

Vår dato: 11.03.2014

Vår ref: 37992 / 3 / AMS

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 05.03.2014. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

37992	<i>Mindful based Self-Clarity</i>
<i>Behandlingsansvarlig</i>	<i>UiT Norges arktiske universitet, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
<i>Daglig ansvarlig</i>	<i>Nils Vidar Vambheim</i>
<i>Student</i>	<i>Hege Tvedt</i>

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.12.2014, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Katrine Utaaker Segadal

Anne-Mette Somby

Kontaktperson: Anne-Mette Somby tlf: 55 58 24 10

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Kopi: Hege Tvedt mentoring@hegetvedt.com

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices

OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no
TRONDHEIM: NSD, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no
TROMSØ: NSD, SVF, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. nsdmaa@svt.uib.no



Formålet er å skape et Mindful Based Self-Clarity program, der hensikten er å avdekke hvilken effekt denne type trening kan gi deltagere.

Utvalget informeres skriftlig og muntlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse.

Informasjonsskriv og samtykkeerklæring er noe mangelfullt utformet. Vi ber derfor om at følgende slettes:

- At navneliste og koblingsnøkkel skal lagres hos NSD, samt påfølgende setning. Både informasjonsskriv og samtykkedel må revideres.

(Koblingsnøkkel kan lagres hos student i prosjektperioden så lenge den er atskilt fra øvrige data).

Revidert informasjonsskriv skal sendes til personvernombudet@nsd.uib.no før utvalget kontaktes.

Det behandles sensitive personopplysninger om politisk/filosofisk/religiøs oppfatning og helseforhold, .

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at forsker etterfølger UiT Norges arktiske universitet sine interne rutiner for datasikkerhet. Dersom personopplysninger skal sendes elektronisk eller lagres på privat pc/mobile enheter, bør opplysningene krypteres tilstrekkelig.

Forventet prosjektslutt er 01.12.2014. Ifølge prosjektmeldingen skal innsamlede opplysninger da anonymiseres. Anonymisering innebærer å bearbeide datamaterialet slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes. Det gjøres ved å slette direkte personopplysninger (som navn/koblingsnøkkel) og slette/omskrive indirekte personopplysninger (identifiserende sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger som f.eks. bosted/arbeidssted, alder og kjønn) samt slette lydopptak

BEKREFTELSE PÅ ENDRING

Hei, viser til epost registrert hos personvernombudet 20.11.2017.

Vi har nå registrert at dato for prosjektslutt er endret til 15.05.2018.

I tilfelle det skulle bli aktuelt med ytterligere forlengelse av prosjektslutt, vil vi gjøre oppmerksom på at forlengelse på mer enn ett år utover det informantene tidligere har blitt informert om (01.11.2017) ikke kan påregnes uten at det vurderes å gi informasjon til utvalget.

Personvernombudet forutsetter at prosjektopplegget for øvrig gjennomføres i tråd med det som tidligere er innmeldt, og personvernombudets tilbakemeldinger. Vi vil ta ny kontakt ved prosjektslutt.

Vennlig hilsen

6 Appendix IV

Meditations and tools in the self-clarity programme.

Longer meditations is named 2-series and 3-series.

The 2-series includes the introduction meditations presented during week 1 and 2.

The 3-series is a progression that includes more direct pointers, and shifting between open and closed eyes during meditations in longer durations. The series includes versions where the guidance consists of very few (1–10) words or only an intro and ending; otherwise, there is silence.

The focal point is also the same in the shorter meditations and tools. But in certain stages during these meditations and tools, the wrapping and approach are different. This means an extended active reflections and observation are given space in the meditation guidance. Where other meditations do not specifically point to extended active observation during the main section, rather the meditators go “there” if they themselves recognise the need for it.

Shorter meditations

The good feeling— recognition of the good feeling

A short version of the longer 3-series meditation.

Length: 5 min

Walking to the good feeling, movement

Being and moving at the same time.

Length: 20 min

Meditation in movement, balance and movement

Overall balance in the state of being, additionally explored through shift of weight, stretching, improvisation, ending in a physically balanced standing position, if possible.

Length: 15–20 min

Morning stretch, awareness of the whole being

Stretch as you feel, explore.

Length: 10–30 seconds or longer.

Tools

Clarify personal reminders

Pointers clarified by each person that are individually aligned with their present level of recognition.

1 2 3 meditation

An exercise to strengthen the ability to do a radical shift in the state of being, not by constructing a better state but by recognising more of the state of being itself. Let go, reconnect to the state of being and the good feeling in itself.

Length: 0–1 minute

The purpose of the 1 2 3 meditation is to guide the user in an initial phase in the process of recognising the various depths of the state of being, to make a quick and potentially radical shift in the state of being by letting go of distractions that pull the attention away from the state of being and, therefore, re-connecting to a deeper state of being, which may appear available in the given moment.

Reflection back in time

A reflecting meditation structured to potentially open up new perspectives and break limited beliefs by observing the past step by step in order (1 year ago, 5 years ago, 10 years ago, etc.) from the person's current perspective. This meditation starts with letting go and connecting to the good feeling.

Length:18 min

Direction of the day

Recognition of being, and possibly adjustment. Asking where your actions stem from: carrot or being?

Length: 3 min

Time is peace

Is time peace?

Length: 3 min

Pointers and questions to explore, scrutinise and test through direct experience

For example:

Where and how do you recognise limitations?

Describe which states of being hold more or less limitations.

Why is it so?

Are you sure? Double check through direct experience.

What do limitations consist of?

Observe your thoughts.

How do you observe thoughts and what happens in your mind when you observe?