

AN ADOLESCENT'S  
SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES  
OF MINDFULNESS

*Carey-Ann Dellbridge*

AN ADOLESCENT'S  
SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES  
OF MINDFULNESS

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Dissertation presented by

Carey-Ann Dellbridge

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SUPERVISOR: Dr Carien Lubbe-De Beer

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*This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Greg.*

*Thank you for your absolute love, dedication, and commitment to supporting me in every possible way.*

My very special and heartfelt thanks also go to:

◆ Dr Carien Lubbe-De Beer

*Thank you for your endless and inspirational warmth, positivity, patience, enthusiasm, and energy that you have shared with me throughout this journey. It has been a privilege to work with you.*

◆ Lia

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◆ Family and Friends

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◆ Jax

*Thanks for your energy and willingness to help.*

◆ Zac

*Last but not least, to my gorgeous son, for keeping me mindful every day!*

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# DECLARATION

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*I, Carey-Ann Dellbridge, hereby declare that this study is my original work, and that all resources that were consulted are included in the reference list.*

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Carey-Ann Dellbridge

March 2009

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# SUMMARY

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## *An Adolescent's Subjective Experiences of Mindfulness*

by

Carey-Ann Dellbridge

**SUPERVISOR :** Dr Carien Lubbe-De Beer  
**DEPARTMENT :** Educational Psychology  
**DEGREE :** MEd (Educational Psychology)

An adolescent's subjective experiences of mindfulness were explored in a single case study of a 17-year-old female. Data were created by means of "mindfulness sessions", unstructured interviews, creative expression, journals and field notes. The data were analysed and interpreted using a combination of typological and interpretive analysis strategies. Findings are presented within a conceptual framework of mindfulness derived by the author from the literature review. The conceptual framework includes the following five "dimensions" of mindfulness: 'present-centered attention and awareness', 'attitude and heart qualities', 'self-regulation', 'universalism of mindfulness', and 'mindlessness'.

The adolescent's subjective experiences of each dimension of mindfulness are presented in terms of the primary and secondary themes that emerged from the data. Emerging themes include being task-oriented, experiencing greater external than internal awareness, and enhanced sensory experiences, in terms of present-centered attention and awareness in mindfulness. In terms of the 'attitude and heart qualities' dimension of mindfulness, the

participant experienced the themes of perfectionism and “letting go”, and an increased intention to practice mindfulness. The study found that the participant experienced self-regulation of attention in mindfulness as interest-driven, needing silence, requiring effort, and improved with awareness. The participant experienced a greater awareness of mindlessness, as well as the themes of mindfulness being applicable to everyday life, and an initial conflict as to the place of mindfulness in the contexts of science and religion.

Overall findings suggest firstly that the participant subjectively experienced mindfulness as being predominantly task-oriented. Secondly, it appears that the participant experienced personal growth and development in terms of her understanding and practice of mindfulness. These findings could make a potential contribution towards qualitative research on mindfulness, and research on how mindfulness could possibly apply to an adolescent. Studies have shown mindfulness to be a potentially promising intervention and quality to be cultivated in the development of well-being. This study is thus significant in the context of positive psychology and a move towards more holistic health and well-being.

#### **KEYWORDS:**

- ◆ Mindfulness
- ◆ Adolescent
- ◆ Subjective experiences
- ◆ Case study
- ◆ Interpretivism
- ◆ Attention
- ◆ Awareness
- ◆ Present
- ◆ Attitude
- ◆ Self-regulation
- ◆ Universalism
- ◆ Mindlessness

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

---

1.1	INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE	1
1.2	PURPOSE	3
1.3	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	3
1.4	CONCEPT CLARIFICATION	4
	1.4.1 MINDFULNESS	4
	1.4.2 ADOLESCENT	6
	1.4.3 SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES	6
1.5	PARADIGM	7
1.6	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	8
	1.6.1 RESEARCH DESIGN	8
	1.6.2 DATA CREATION	9
	1.6.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	9
1.7	QUALITY CRITERIA AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	10
1.8	CONCLUSION	11

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

---

2.1	INTRODUCTION	12
2.2	GENERAL DEFINITION OF MINDFULNESS	13
2.3	MINDFULNESS IN CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY	15
2.4	DIMENSIONS OF MINDFULNESS	20
2.4.1	PRESENT-CENTERED ATTENTION AND AWARENESS	20
2.4.2	ATTITUDE AND HEART QUALITIES	24
2.4.3	SELF-REGULATION	26
2.4.4	UNIVERSALISM OF MINDFULNESS	29
2.4.5	MINDLESSNESS	33
2.5	EMPIRICAL RESEARCH	36
2.5.1	PHYSICAL CONDITIONS	36
2.5.2	PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS	38
2.5.3	NON-CLINICAL POPULATIONS	39
2.5.4	RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS	41
2.6	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	43
2.7	CONCLUSION	44



## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

---

3.1	INTRODUCTION	45
3.2	PARADIGM	46
3.3	RESEARCH DESIGN	48
3.3.1	CASE STUDY DESIGN	48
3.3.2	STRENGTHS OF THE CASE STUDY DESIGN	49
3.3.3	LIMITATIONS OF THE CASE STUDY DESIGN	50
3.3.4	SELECTION OF PARTICIPANT	51
3.4	DATA CREATION	53
3.4.1	MINDFULNESS SESSIONS	53
3.4.2	CREATIVE EXPRESSION	59
3.4.3	JOURNAL	59
3.4.4	INTERVIEWS	61
3.4.5	TRANSCRIPTS	62
3.4.6	FIELD NOTES	62
3.4.7	REFLECTIONS ON DATA CREATION	63
3.5	DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	67
3.5.1	STEP 1 – Getting a sense of the whole	67
3.5.2	STEP 2 – Getting a sense of each session	68
3.5.3	STEP 3 – Identifying typologies	68
3.5.4	STEP 4 – Analysing data according to typologies	69
3.5.5	STEP 5 – Creating typology files	69
3.5.6	STEP 6 – Reading typologies for a sense of the whole	69
3.5.7	STEP 7 – Looking for themes within typologies	70
3.5.8	STEP 8 – Coding	70
3.5.9	STEP 9 – Categorising themes	70
3.5.10	STEP 10 – Final review	71

3.5.11	STEP 11 – Member checking	71
3.6	REFLECTIONS ON DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	71
3.7	QUALITY CRITERIA	73
3.7.1	CREDIBILITY	73
3.7.2	TRANSFERABILITY	75
3.7.3	DEPENDABILITY	76
3.8	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	77
3.8.1	INFORMED CONSENT	77
3.8.2	SAFETY IN PARTICIPATION	77
3.8.3	TRUST	78
3.8.4	CONFIDENTIALITY	78
3.8.5	CREDIBILITY OF THE RESEARCHER	78
3.9	CONCLUSION	79

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

---

4.1	INTRODUCTION	80
4.2	PRIMARY THEMES	82
4.2.1	PRESENT-CENTERED ATTENTION AND AWARENESS	82
4.2.1.1	Task-Oriented	83
4.2.1.2	External vs. Internal Awareness	88
4.2.1.3	Enhanced Sensory Experience	94
4.2.2	ATTITUDE AND HEART QUALITIES	97
4.2.2.1	Intention	98
4.2.2.2	Heart Qualities	100
	(i) Perfectionism	100
	(ii) Letting Go	103
4.2.3	SELF-REGULATION	105
4.2.3.1	Interest-Driven	106
4.2.3.2	Needs Silence	109
4.2.3.3	Requires Effort	112
4.2.3.4	Improves with Awareness	114
4.3	SECONDARY THEMES	115
4.3.1	MINDLESSNESS	116
4.3.1.1	Awareness of Mindlessness	116
4.3.2	UNIVERSALISM OF MINDFULNESS	117
4.3.2.1	Everyday Life	118
4.3.2.2	Science and Religion	119
4.4	CONCLUSION	121

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

---

5.1	INTRODUCTION	123
5.2	OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS	123
5.3	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	125
5.3.1	PRIMARY THEMES	125
5.3.1.1	Present-Centered Attention and Awareness	125
5.3.1.2	Attitude and Heart Qualities	126
5.3.1.3	Self-Regulation	127
5.3.2	SECONDARY THEMES	127
5.3.2.1	Mindlessness	127
5.3.2.2	Universalism of Mindfulness	128
5.4	CONCLUSIONS	128
5.5	ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS	130
5.6	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	132
5.7	CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY	134
5.8	RECOMMENDATIONS	134
5.8.1	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING AND PRACTICE	134
5.8.2	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	136
5.9	CLOSING	137

APPENDICES	139
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---

REFERENCES	144
------------	-----

---

TEXTS CONSULTED	153
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# LIST OF FIGURES

<b>FIGURE 2.1</b>		
DIMENSIONS OF MINDFULNESS		17
<b>FIGURE 3.1</b>		
MINDFULNESS SESSION 1		54
<b>FIGURE 3.2</b>		
MINDFULNESS SESSION 2		55
<b>FIGURE 3.3</b>		
MINDFULNESS SESSION 3		56
<b>FIGURE 3.4</b>		
MINDFULNESS SESSION 4		57
<b>FIGURE 3.5</b>		
MINDFULNESS SESSION 5		58
<b>FIGURE 4.1</b>		
LIA'S SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF MINDFULNESS		81

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# LIST OF APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A

PERMISSION VIA E-MAIL FROM JON KABAT-ZINN 139

## APPENDIX B

ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE 142

## APPENDIX C

VISUAL DATA IN DIGITAL FORMAT 143

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

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The focus of this study is to describe an adolescent's subjective experiences of mindfulness. Mindfulness entails the mind entering "a state of being in which one's here-and-now experiences are sensed directly, accepted for what they are, and acknowledged with kindness and respect" (Siegel, 2007:16). Nairn (1998:30) describes mindfulness as "knowing what is happening while it is happening, no matter what it is". The concept of mindfulness has become prominent in the field of psychology in recent years, especially from a positive psychological framework (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Siegel, 2007). There is significant research on its potential efficacy for various medical and psychological conditions, including cancer, chronic pain, depression, anxiety and panic disorders, eating disorders and stress (Baer, 2003). Mindfulness has also been associated with various positive psychological constructs (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007).

In a review of empirical research on the utility of mindfulness-based interventions, Baer (2003) points out that despite some methodological flaws, most studies indicate that it is a feasible and promising intervention strategy, and has proven successful across a range of phenomena. However, psychological research in mindfulness has focused primarily on the effects of mindfulness training, usually as part of a clinical treatment package, and less so on understanding the meaning and expression of mindfulness itself (Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007). There is also a lack of



investigation as to how do clients *themselves* experience mindfulness as an intervention strategy or therapeutic technique, that is, a lack of qualitative investigations. Some researchers have identified this shortcoming and called for more qualitative studies on mindfulness to be conducted (Baer, 2003; Matchim & Armer, 2007). Most importantly, there is also a lack of research into the applicability of mindfulness to children, adolescents and the youth, as most studies have focused on adult populations.

Given its potential promise as identified across a range of contexts, mindfulness may be a valuable asset to be applied within these age groups. This is especially relevant from the context of the current international focus on positive psychology, which aims to “create a science of human strength whose mission will be to understand and learn how to foster these virtues in young people” (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). Furthermore, it appears that a holistic approach to “healing”, therapy, health and well-being, focusing on the integration of mind, body, and soul, is currently infiltrating the field of psychology. As Kabat-Zinn (1990, as cited in Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000:131) points out, “science is searching for more comprehensive models that are truer to our understanding of the interconnectedness of space and time, mass and energy, mind and body, even consciousness and the universe”. The concept of mindfulness is especially pertinent within this context, and shows potential promise as one such model. Gaining insight into how an adolescent experiences mindfulness may generate further understanding or research into the applicability of mindfulness to an important section of the population, within the context of current trends and movements towards a positive psychology and integrated holistic approaches to health and well-being.

## 1.2 PURPOSE

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The primary aim of this study is to generate a detailed understanding of an adolescent's *subjective* experiences of mindfulness. Secondly, this study aims to gain insight regarding how, and if, an adolescent might perceive mindfulness, make sense of it, conceptualise it, and possibly relate to it as a potential asset to be incorporated into her life, or not. A further aim is thus to establish whether mindfulness "makes sense" to an adolescent, given her specific developmental context, and whether or not she could possibly embrace it as a workable technique. It is envisaged that by building on these understandings, this study might generate insight into the possible applications of mindfulness within the specific age group of adolescence, which may have potential ramifications for the development of theory and practice.

## 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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In light of the rationale and purpose of this study as described above, the research question is posed as follows:

### ❖ PRIMARY QUESTION:

- *How does an adolescent subjectively experience mindfulness?*

In the attempt to generate an in-depth response to the primary research question of this study, the following secondary questions will be explored:

## ❖ SECONDARY QUESTIONS:

- How does an adolescent make sense of mindfulness?
- What meanings does an adolescent attach to mindfulness?
- How does an adolescent relate to the experience of mindfulness?
- What are the potential challenges of mindfulness practice for an adolescent?
- What are the potential benefits of mindfulness practice for an adolescent?

In order to address this study's research questions, it is necessary to clarify key concepts, as indicated below.

## **1.4 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION**

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In order to orientate the reader, the following section provides a brief summary of each concept contained in the primary research question of this study.

### **1.4.1 MINDFULNESS**

The following definition of mindfulness has been adopted for this study:

Mindfulness is *"the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment"* (Kabat-Zinn, 2003:145).

I have chosen this particular definition of mindfulness as I believe it offers the most comprehensive understanding of the concept. It seems to include all the factors that are apparently central to the concept of mindfulness. Firstly, mindfulness is fundamentally about consciousness. Consciousness encompasses both attention and awareness. Awareness is the “background radar” of consciousness; that is, our continual monitoring of the inner and outer environment. Attention is a form of focused awareness; it involves the process of focusing our awareness on a specific stimulus for a certain period of time (Brown & Ryan, 2003:822). Mindfulness includes both attention and awareness of one’s internal and external current experiences. Thus, a second factor central to the concept of mindfulness is that it occurs in the present moment. Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008:396) describe mindfulness as being fully in contact with what is taking place in the present moment, including the external world and one’s responses to it. The “present-centeredness” of mindfulness is perhaps one of the most crucial aspects of this construct. Mindfulness cannot occur in the past or future; to be mindful necessitates a fixation on present reality, as it unfolds, “moment-by-moment”.

Kabat-Zinn (2003) also refers to intention in his definition of mindfulness – “paying attention *on purpose*”. This is an additional feature of the mindfulness concept. Mindfulness requires an *intention* to focus one’s attention and awareness in the present moment. One has to begin with the objective to be mindful before one can practice mindfulness. Finally, the idea of non-judgment is included in the above definition. Mindfulness requires that one practice it with a specific attitude that includes the qualities of kindness, acceptance, compassion and love towards oneself and whatever one’s present experiences might contain, hence Nairn’s (1998) definition of mindfulness as “knowing what is happening, while it is happening, *no matter what it is*” (Nairn, 1998:30). Unpacking the above definition of mindfulness thus provides a basic summary of the concept. The literature review in Chapter Two provides a more in-depth analysis of mindfulness.

## **1.4.2 ADOLESCENT**

Adolescence is the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood, thus an adolescent is an individual who is currently in that specific stage of life. “Adolescence” comes from the Latin verb *adolescere*, which means “to grow up” or “to grow to adulthood” (Thom, 1991:377). Thom (1991) explains that due to individual and cultural differences, the age at which adolescence is thought to begin varies from 11 to 13 and the age at which it ends from 17 to 21. Western psychologists further distinguish the developmental phase of adolescence into two stages: early adolescence (age 10 to 15) and late adolescence (age 16 to 22) (Thom, 1991). In this study, the term “adolescent” refers specifically to an individual who is considered to be in the “late adolescence” developmental stage, as the participant was 17 years old for the duration of the research. Piaget’s theory of cognitive development indicates that the capacity for abstract thought develops during the adolescent stage of human development. During this “Formal Operations” period from age 11 to adulthood, the capacity for abstract reasoning develops and “thinking soars into the realm of the purely abstract and hypothetical” (Crain, 1992:119). Thus, in this study, “adolescent” further refers to an individual who is 17 years old, and is in the “Formal Operations” stage of cognitive development, implying that she has the metacognitive ability to think about her thinking and experiences.

## **1.4.3 SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES**

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2007) defines experience as “*the apprehension of an object, thought, or emotion through the senses or mind*”, and subjective as “*particular to a given person; personal*”. These definitions are adopted in this study and combined to form the concept of “subjective experiences”. In this study, subjective experiences therefore refer to the individual

participant's perceptions and understandings of objects, thoughts and emotions through her senses and/or her mind. Furthermore, these objects, thoughts and emotions relate to mindfulness specifically, hence "an adolescent's subjective experiences of mindfulness".

## **1.5 PARADIGM**

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The paradigm, or broad theoretical orientation, to which this study belongs, is interpretivism. An interpretivist stance towards reality implies that multiple realities are possible, as experienced by different individuals. Interpretivists believe that people actively interact with and interpret their worlds, thereby creating their own subjective experiences and meanings (Neuman, 2006). Interpretivism is closely linked to a constructionist paradigm, which assumes that people construct their own beliefs and meanings as they interact with their world. Individual experiences of reality are ultimately shaped by these same constructions (Neuman, 2006). I am guided as a researcher by the interpretivist paradigm to which I subscribe. It informs my views on the nature of reality, as well as the nature of knowledge within that reality. It has thus also informed the methodological approaches applied in this study – that of the qualitative tradition. Qualitative research methods enable the rich and detailed descriptions necessary to develop understanding of an individual's experiences. I believe that my chosen paradigm serves as the best platform from which to answer the research questions. An interpretivist paradigm has facilitated the process of generating an in-depth understanding of an adolescent's *subjective* experiences of mindfulness, as she has created and given them meaning within her personal reality.

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

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The research methodology of this study is presented in detail in Chapter Three. The following discussion, however, provides a brief overview in order to orientate the reader to the study.

### **1.6.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study was conducted using an intrinsic case study design. A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2002). In this study, the bounded system was a single case of an adolescent in her life context, within a specific time frame. The case was purposefully selected, and the design was intrinsic case study because the research aimed to develop the case's own particular interpretations and thick descriptions (Stake, 2005). Case studies facilitate the in-depth exploration required to develop a comprehensive understanding of people and contexts. This methodological choice thus correlates with the paradigm within which I place myself as a researcher.

The participant in this study was purposefully selected according to pre-determined criteria, which were based on the research topic. Selection criteria included the following aspects. The participant had to be an adolescent with the ability for metacognition and reflexive thought processes. Superior language ability was a criterion, as well as physical proximity to the researcher and availability. The purposeful sampling method was the most appropriate method as it allowed for the selection of a participant who could best facilitate a thorough exploration of the research topic.

## **1.6.2 DATA CREATION**

The data in this study were created through several avenues. “Mindfulness sessions” were conducted between the researcher and participant, by means of participant observation, where both took part in various mindfulness activities. Unstructured interviews were held, which facilitated the development of the in-depth understandings of the case, as required by the nature of the research. Data were also created from several forms of “creative expression” (i.e. artwork) that were created by the participant during the mindfulness sessions, as well as from the participant’s research journal. All interviews were transcribed, resulting in the transcriptions that formed a large part of this study’s data. Data also included field notes, which consisted of the researcher’s personal research journal and observations made during the study.

## **1.6.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

The data analysis and interpretation stage of this study involved a combination of typological and interpretive analysis. Typologies, or categories, were identified from the theoretical literature on mindfulness. All data were then classified according to the specified typologies, and separate typology files were created. At this stage the data were then interpreted in terms of themes emerging from each typology, and descriptive coding and categorising were employed to further identify apparent themes. Member checking also formed part of data analysis and interpretation, and the researcher and participant discussed all findings and interpretations in order to confirm accuracy.



## **1.7           QUALITY CRITERIA AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

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Adhering to certain quality criteria developed trustworthiness of this study. Credibility was established by defining the boundaries and parameters of the study. Furthermore, the qualitative methodological technique of crystallisation contributed towards credibility. The quality criteria of transferability and dependability were also addressed, and these are discussed in detail in Chapter Three. The ethical considerations of informed consent, safety in participation, trust, confidentiality, and credibility of the researcher were also taken into account during the duration of this study, and are included in the detailed discussion in Chapter Three. A large part of the data creation process of this study involved the use of a compact disc entitled “Mindfulness for Beginners” by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2006). Permission to make use of this material was obtained from the author prior to commencement of the study. (See Appendix A).

## **1.8 CONCLUSION**

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This chapter provides an overview of the study in order to orientate the reader. I discussed the rationale and purpose of the study, and defined the research questions and terms employed. I presented the paradigm within which I place myself as a researcher and within which this study can be located. I also briefly discussed the research design and methodology applied in the study, as well as quality criteria and ethical considerations taken into account. All of the above are reviewed in detail in Chapter Three. Firstly, however, Chapter Two presents the literature review of this study. I review the available literature pertaining to mindfulness, and examine the following: the phenomenon of mindfulness and its relation to contemporary psychology, empirical research on mindfulness, and the themes that emerge from the literature, which I present as my conceptual framework applied in this study.

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## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

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#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The following literature review attempts to generate insight into the construct of mindfulness, including how it is defined and understood within contemporary psychology. It is evident that there are various perspectives and approaches to this complex phenomenon, which appears to be, paradoxically, both an age-old and modern concept. Current literature is reviewed, however; most of which appears to describe mindfulness as predominantly a psychological process. Five themes relating to the phenomenon of mindfulness emerged from my literature review, which facilitate the construction of an in-depth understanding of mindfulness. I extracted these themes from my review, and discuss each in detail below. Furthermore, I have adopted these themes as my conceptual framework applied in this study, and refer to them as the “dimensions” of mindfulness. (See *Figure 2.1 on page 17*). In terms of empirical evidence for mindfulness, contemporary research is reviewed in an effort to determine what is “scientifically” known and established about mindfulness-based interventions within the field of psychology at this stage. Predominant themes appear to be that mindfulness has proven effective as an intervention strategy for various physical and psychological conditions amongst adult populations; indeed, it even appears that the lack of mindfulness often contributes towards psychological distress and pathology. Mindfulness has thus been shown to have several salutary effects, and is associated with a number of positive psychological constructs. It is also evident from the review that the adolescent age group seems to be unrepresented in the available literature. Furthermore, it appears that most of what we currently know

is based on quantitative evidence, with the more detailed and rich descriptions of this intricate, universal and “timeless” phenomenon apparently sorely missing.

## **2.2 GENERAL DEFINITION OF MINDFULNESS**

---

Germer (2005) distinguishes between three phenomena that the word *mindfulness* can be used to describe; namely, a *theoretical construct* (mindfulness), a *practice of cultivating mindfulness* (such as meditation), or a *psychological process* (being mindful). In examining mindfulness, this dissertation makes reference to all three terms as described, and these are used interchangeably, depending on the context of the discussion.

Mindfulness can be briefly described as a particular way of paying attention, the origins of which can mostly be traced to eastern meditation practices. It is evident, however, that the concept of mindfulness also exists within western psychological origins, particularly in the Gestalt approach. In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in the concept of mindfulness in western traditions, and it has gained momentum as a construct to be investigated and applied within the fields of psychology and mental health practices.

Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn could be regarded as one of the modern forerunners of this movement, with his development of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme in 1979. Kabat-Zinn (2003) explains that mindfulness is about particular qualities of attention and awareness, which can be cultivated through the practice of meditation. He describes an operational working definition of mindfulness as, “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003:145). Ideally, mindful behaviour implies that an individual is fully “in contact” with what is taking place in the present moment, including the external reality as well as his or her internal responses to it (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008).

Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) describe an example of how mindfulness could be ideally applied. For instance, if one were walking to school in a “mindful” way, one would be aware of physical sensations such as one’s feet hitting the floor and the weight of a school bag on one’s shoulder. One would also be aware of internal experiences; for example, the mild tension associated with approaching the school gates. One of the goals of mindfulness is that one would focus on this awareness, instead of giving attention to other phenomenon such as worrying about future exams, for example, or thinking about the party one attended the night before. If one’s mind did wander, however, one would observe the wandering with non-judgment, and gently bring one’s awareness back to the present moment.

Mindfulness has potential promise as a quality to be cultivated. It is a way of relating to all human experiences, whether positive or negative, which allows one to be less reactive and therefore less vulnerable to negative states. In this way, mindfulness reduces our overall suffering and a sense of well-being increases (Germer, 2005). A greater non-judgmental awareness of one’s own impulses and thought patterns thus results in decreased emotional reactivity and vulnerability. When individuals deliberately stay in the present moment, they are more able to respond to events with awareness of their automatic tendencies, and to make choices that are not necessarily negatively influenced by these (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008). Mindfulness is thus particularly relevant within the field of positive psychology, which focuses on human strengths and positive qualities that contribute towards the building and maintenance of mental health and optimal states.

## 2.3 MINDFULNESS IN CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY

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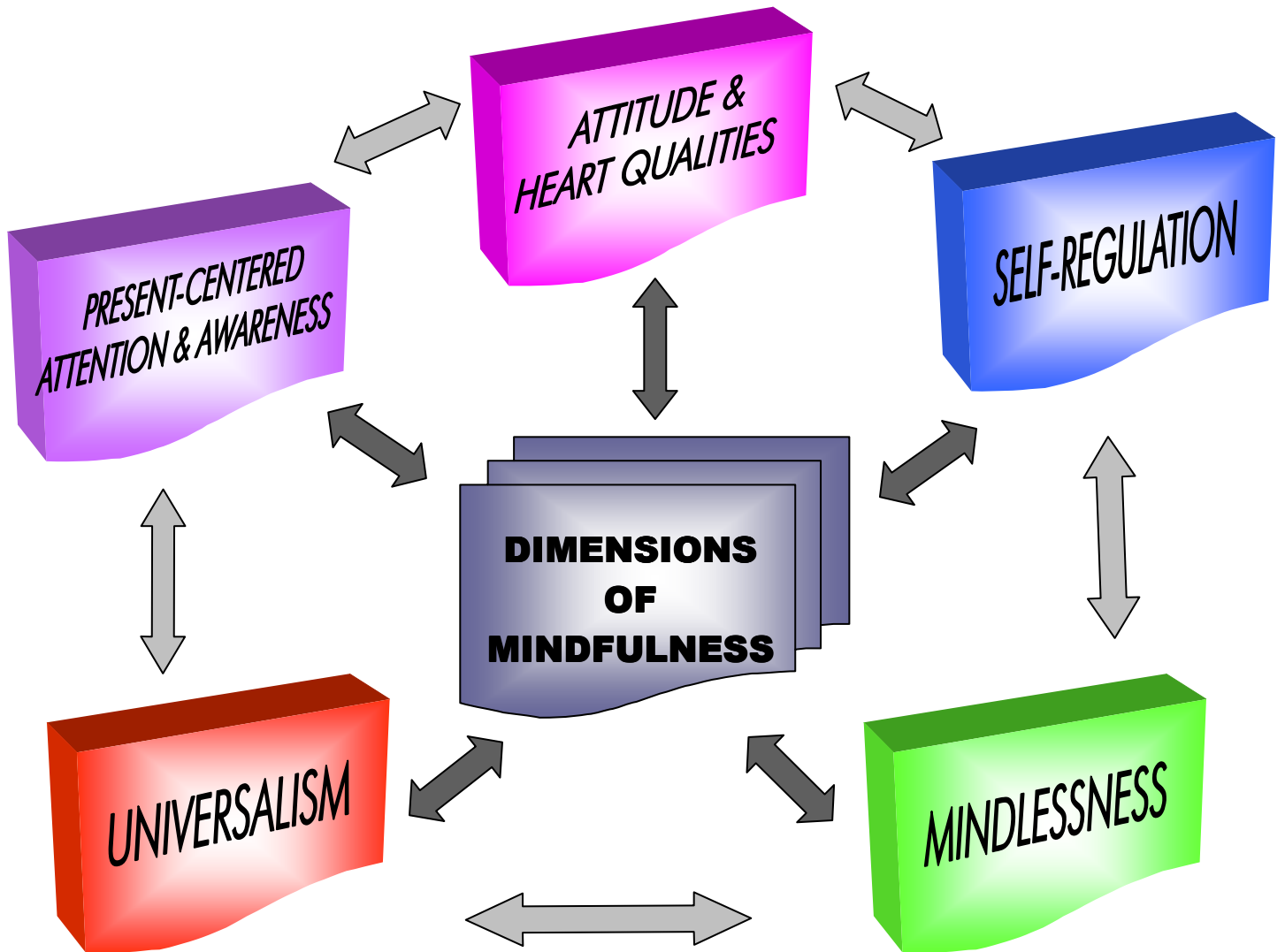
Following the escalating interest in mindfulness in contemporary western psychology, much research has been undertaken in the attempt to specify the core processes underlying mindfulness. In a broad conceptualization, Bishop et al. (2004:232) state that mindfulness has been described as “a kind of non-elaborative, non-judgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is.” They explain that in contemporary psychology, mindfulness has been used as an approach for increasing awareness and responding skillfully to mental processes that might otherwise contribute towards emotional distress and maladaptive behaviours.

In line with positive psychological approaches, training in various meditation techniques is employed to develop capacity for mindfulness skills, and the ability to apply them in order to enhance emotional well-being and mental health (Bishop et al., 2004). Bishop et al. (2004) maintain that within psychology, mindfulness is not viewed as simply “relaxation” or “mood management”; rather it is considered to be a style of *mental training* that is intended to reduce cognitive vulnerability to mental states that would usually heighten stress or emotional distress, or perpetuate psychopathology.

Siegel’s (2007) perspective on mindfulness is that it is a form of awareness that entails a healthy relationship with oneself. He refers to “attunement” to describe how an individual focuses attention on the internal world of another. Attunement creates changes in the brain, which may promote physical and psychological well-being. Through mindful awareness, we get to know the inner worlds of both others and ourselves, and we learn to embrace all with kindness and compassion. Mindfulness, then, is a form of *intrapersonal* attunement; a way of becoming “your own best friend” (Siegel, 2007”:14).

Following an in-depth analysis of the literature pertaining to mindfulness, several themes emerged that serve to illustrate the various layers of this complex phenomenon, which, on the surface appears deceptively simple. I extracted these themes from my literature review, and present them as the theoretical and conceptual framework applied in this study:

Figure 2.1: **DIMENSIONS OF MINDFULNESS**





I refer to the themes that emerged from my literature review as the “dimensions” of mindfulness that I identified. A dimension is “an aspect or facet of a situation, problem etc.” or “a measurable extent of any kind, as length, breadth, depth, area, and volume” (Reader’s Digest Oxford Complete Wordfinder, 1990). I chose this term because it refers to the different *features* of mindfulness that emerged from the literature review, and also because the word “dimension” implies a certain quality of depth. This aspect of the meaning of dimension is significant in that, as will be shown, the different aspects of mindfulness appear to come together in a dynamic interaction to create the whole experience. Therefore, mindfulness appears to be an in-depth and profound experience that should be viewed in its entirety. It almost seems too simplistic and “reductionist” to extract the dimensions and view them in isolation; however, this analysis is beneficial in that it helps to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of mindfulness. Furthermore, as apparent from the literature review, various analyses of the components of mindfulness have assisted the scientific community to conceptualise mindfulness, and to develop valid measures thereof (hence the term “dimension” again). This, in turn, serves the development of theory and practice, so that we might be able to harness the potential power of mindfulness in a variety of different contexts – a fitting aim given the current focus on positive psychology. The following sections therefore focus on the dimensions of mindfulness that I formulated from my literature review. I encourage the reader, however, to bear in mind the inter-connectedness of these dimensions and the wholeness of mindfulness as described.

## **2.4 DIMENSIONS OF MINDFULNESS**

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### **2.4.1 PRESENT-CENTERED ATTENTION AND AWARENESS**

The core of mindfulness relates to aspects of human consciousness, specifically, attention and awareness. Germer (2005) explains that the word *mindfulness* is an English translation of the word *sati*, which comes from the Pali language. Pali was the language used in what he refers to as Buddhist psychology, 2500 years ago, and mindfulness is the fundamental teaching of this tradition. The term *sati* implies awareness, attention and remembering (Germer, 2005). Kabat-Zinn (2003) also refers to attention and awareness as fundamental components of mindfulness, as do Brown and Ryan (2003; 2004) and Brown, Ryan and Creswell (2007). But what are attention and awareness? Brown and Ryan (2003) define attention and awareness as aspects of consciousness. Awareness is the “background radar” of consciousness, and attention is a process of focusing awareness to something specific. For example, we may drive a familiar road “on autopilot”, being vaguely aware of the road, but our attention could be focused on a child running across the road or perhaps an accident up ahead (Germer, 2005). Thus our attention continuously pulls “figures” out of the “ground” of awareness, and holds that focus for varied lengths of time. Mindfulness then, is a form of “enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality” (Brown & Ryan, 2003:822).

The most salient feature of attention and awareness in mindfulness is that they are focused in the present moment. Authors on mindfulness appear to unanimously agree that mindfulness entails a fixation on present experience. Kabat-Zinn (2003; 2006) frequently highlights the fact that mindfulness occurs in the present moment, and that one is paying attention to the “unfolding of experience, moment by moment”. Baer (2003:125) defines mindfulness as “the non-judgmental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise.” Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) support this perspective and focus on mindfulness as being fully engaged in the present. Teasdale, Segal and Williams (1995:33) also emphasise a focus on the present as they describe the essence of a mindfulness state as

“to be fully in the present moment, without judging or evaluating it, without reflecting backwards on past memories, without looking forward to anticipate the future...and without attempting to ‘problem-solve’ or otherwise avoid any unpleasant aspects of the immediate situation.” They explain mindfulness as a direct and immediate experience of the present, and explain that mindfulness thus does not include elaborative thoughts about the experience, its meaning, or related actions (Teasdale et al., 1995). Germer (2005) also emphasises that mindfulness is always in the present moment, and that thoughts *about* our experiences are one step removed from the actual present moment. To return to the Buddhist psychology term *sati* (attention, awareness and remembering) then, the remembering aspect of mindfulness means to remember to continuously reorientate one’s attention and awareness to the present moment and current experience (Germer, 2005).

Bishop et al. (2004) state that mindfulness begins by bringing awareness to the current moment, and observing one’s thoughts, feelings and sensations as they change from moment to moment. Langer (2000) refers to mindfulness as a flexible state of mind in which one is actively engaged in the present, noticing new things, and being sensitive to context. Her definition of mindfulness is comprised of the following components: openness to novelty; alertness to distinction; sensitivity to different contexts; awareness of multiple perspectives; and orientation in the present (Langer, 1997 as cited in Sternberg, 2000). In Shapiro, Carlson, Astin and Freedman’s (2006) proposed model of mindfulness, they explain that attention involves the observation of one’s moment-to-moment experiences, and the suspension of interpreting these present experiences. Shapiro et al. (2006) confer with Perls’ suggestion that “attention in and of itself is curative”, as well as the central tenet of the cognitive-behavioural tradition - the capacity to attend to one’s internal and external behaviours. Hence, this model posits attention as the core of Mindfulness.

As mentioned, aspects of mindfulness can also be found within western psychology. Gestalt therapy, as developed by Fritz Perls in the late 1940’s, in particular draws on key mindfulness components in its foundations. Thompson, Rudolph and Henderson (2004) explain that Gestalt theory is based on the assumption that normal, healthy people have the capacity for a full awareness of their present experiences – including thoughts and feelings as they occur

each moment. In terms of Gestalt therapy then, the most important focus is on the thoughts and feelings that people experience in the moment; Gestalt therapy aims to facilitate clients' awareness of the "now". Awareness is defined as "the capacity to focus, to attend, and to be in touch with the now" (Thompson et al., 2004:187).

Brown and Ryan (2003) make an important distinction between mindfulness and various forms of self-awareness that require thinking about aspects of the self. Whereas these forms of "reflexive consciousness" (Baumeister, 1999; Bermúdez, 1998, as cited in Brown & Ryan, 2003) generate mental accounts about the self - the self is an object of scrutiny or concern, mindfulness is more "neutral" and focused on the quality of consciousness itself. Brown et al. (2007) elaborate on the awareness component of mindfulness. They relate a Zen metaphor that likens the mindfulness state to that of a polished mirror; the mind simply reflects what passes before it, unbiased by conceptual thoughts about what is happening at the given moment. Bishop et al. (2004) state that mindfulness involves taking on a "de-centered" perspective as well as the process of developing insight into the nature of one's mind. Mindfulness is thus seen as incorporating a fundamental clarity of awareness. This awareness is further described as "nonconceptual" and "nondiscriminatory", as it does not compare, categorise or evaluate its contents; it does not interfere with the experience (Brown et al., 2007). Thus a certain perspective and emotional qualities are required along with present-centered attention and awareness, in order for one to achieve this type of "neutral observation" of one's internal and external experiences. An empirical stance towards reality is required, and an individual takes on an objective perspective that neutrally observes all the "facts" and defers judgments. Attitude thus emerges as a fundamental component of mindfulness, as elaborated in the following discussion.

The characteristic of being present-orientated and fully aware of what is taking place in the moment has been demonstrated as crucial to mindfulness (Brown et al., 2007). As mentioned, this aspect of mindfulness is one of the fundamental assumptions that ground other psychological theory, specifically Gestalt therapy. It can also be located within the Person-Centered approach to therapy developed by Carl Rogers. Rogers (1961, as cited in Brown et al., 2007) argued that, central to the process of therapeutic change was the

movement from “cognitive distance” to direct contact with and ownership of one’s experience. In the following quote, Rogers himself indirectly refers to qualities of mindfulness in the way that he describes appreciating a sunset, which, he believes, should be the way we appreciate others. “When I look at a sunset...I don’t find myself saying, ‘Soften the orange a little on the right hand corner, and put a bit more purple along the base, and use a little more pink in the cloud colour...’ I don’t try to control a sunset. I watch it with awe as it unfolds” (Rogers, 1994:189 as cited in Thompson et al., 2004:160). Rogers emphasises the present-centeredness of attention, and also makes reference to the attitude with which one should pay attention. Attitude emerges as an especially important feature necessary for the successful creation of true mindfulness. Attitude is therefore identified as another dimension of mindfulness, and unpacked in the following section.

## 2.4.2 ATTITUDE AND HEART QUALITIES

Attitude within the context of mindfulness relates to *how* one pays attention and the qualities therein. Kabat-Zinn (2003) emphasises the “heart” qualities essential to mindfulness, and notes that the words for heart and mind are the same in Asian languages. He states that mindfulness thus includes an “affectionate, compassionate quality within the attending, a sense of openhearted, friendly presence and interest” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003:145). Shapiro et al. (2006) also express that attention in mindfulness should incorporate the “heart” qualities of patience, compassion, acceptance, kindness and openness, in order to avoid potential judgment of experience. These same qualities are put forward by Siegel (2007:15), who describes mindfulness as, “approaching our here-and-now experience with curiosity, openness, acceptance and love” (COAL). Germer (2005:6) describes attitude within mindfulness as remembering to reorient our attention and awareness to current experience in a “wholehearted, receptive manner”, and explains that non-judgment fosters mindfulness, especially when we are faced with difficult physical or emotional states. By not judging our experience, we are more likely to see it as it is. He embraces the short definition of mindfulness as “awareness, of present experience, with acceptance” and emphasises non-judgment, because awareness cannot occur freely if we would prefer our experience to be different to what it really is (Germer, 2005:7).

These perspectives correlate with Bishop et al.’s (2004) operational definition of mindfulness that includes the attitudinal component *Orientation to Experience*, which involves the qualities of curiosity, non-striving and acceptance. Mindfulness requires a commitment to maintain an attitude of curiosity as well as acceptance towards whatever is being experienced at any given moment; thus, the openness and receptivity to experience. Bishop et al. (2004:234) thus define mindfulness in terms of their model, as “the process of regulating attention in order to bring a quality of nonelaborative awareness to current experience and a quality of relating to one’s experience within an orientation of curiosity, experiential openness, and acceptance.”

Although different authors use varying terms to address the attitudinal dimension of mindfulness, what remains clear is the central role attitude plays in the conceptualization and experience of mindfulness. Shapiro and Schwartz (2000) present twelve “mindfulness qualities”, which serve as a useful and comprehensive guide to the “heart” qualities related to mindfulness. Included therein are the following seven qualities originally defined by Kabat-Zinn (1990): acceptance, nonjudging, openness, trust, patience, nonstriving and letting go. Shapiro and Schwartz (2000) identify an additional five qualities as gratitude, gentleness, generosity, empathy and lovingkindness. Shapiro and Schwartz (2000) maintain that mindfulness necessitates an *intention* to incorporate these qualities into one’s practice, and to evoke them in one’s conscious attention and awareness. Intention therefore is included as part of the attitudinal dimension of mindfulness.

Bishop et al. (2004) also maintain that intention is a central component of mindfulness, and one that is often overlooked in contemporary definitions. Intention is the goal or personal vision that one brings to one’s mindfulness practice to begin with, which is often dynamic and evolves over time. Germer (2005:6) discusses intention as part of mindfulness practice as well. He explains that remembering to bring our attention back to the present in a wholehearted manner requires the *intention* to “disentangle from our reverie and fully experience the moment.” Intention is thus fundamental to mindfulness because mindfulness always includes an intention to direct attention somewhere. Intending to return attention to the present moment gives mindfulness continuity across time (Germer, 2005). Shapiro et al.’s (2006) model of mindfulness comprises three “axioms” of mindfulness - Intention, Attention and Attitude (IAA). These axioms of mindfulness (IAA) are not separate stages, but occur simultaneously, and are interwoven in a dynamic cyclical process. This again reinforces the idea that the dimensions of mindfulness as identified in my literature review are interactive, and should be viewed as interconnected. An additional aspect of mindfulness that emerged from the review is self-regulation.

### **2.4.3 SELF-REGULATION**

In my analysis of the literature on mindfulness, I identified self-regulation as an additional emerging theme. I therefore include self-regulation as a dimension of mindfulness in my conceptual framework. Self-regulation refers to “the many processes by which the human psyche exercises control over its functions, states, and inner processes” (Vohs & Baumeister, 2004:1, as cited in Rueda, Posner & Rothbart, 2005). Shapiro and Schwartz (2000:129) define self-regulation as “the process by which a system maintains both stability of functioning and adaptability to new circumstances”. Karoly (1993) indicates many varied terms that are used interchangeably to refer to the capacity for self-regulation. These include freedom, autonomy, agency, responsibility, maturity, ego-strength, will-power, self-control, choice, purposiveness, self-direction, voluntary action, self-sufficiency, morality, consciousness, free will, independence, conscientiousness, self-discipline, intentional action, self-intervention, intrinsic motivation, self-determination and volition. Self-regulation has also been described as “the conscious, intentional effort to control one’s thoughts, emotions, or behaviours” (Leary, Adams & Tate, 2006:1803). Within the context of mindfulness, however, I refer to self-regulation as it applies to an individual’s regulation of his or her attention and awareness. Thus for the purpose of this paper, self-regulation is defined as “the conscious, intentional effort to control one’s attention and awareness”.

Mindfulness necessitates the flexibility that is maintained between awareness and attention; one can be mindful of all that is currently occurring (awareness), or one can be mindful of something in particular (attention). Stability and continuity of this awareness and attention requires self-regulation (Bishop et al., 2004). Bishop et al. (2004) believe that mindfulness is a psychological process, or a metacognitive skill, that can be developed with practice, and their model of mindfulness reflects this. A major part of their model is the *Orientation to Experience*, as discussed above. Secondly, they describe the *Self-Regulation of Attention* as a crucial component of mindfulness. Mindfulness begins by bringing awareness to the current moment, and observing one’s thoughts, feelings and sensations as they change from moment to moment. Mindfulness thus requires the sustaining and switching of attention; hence the first



component of mindfulness is viewed as the *Self-Regulation of Attention* (Bishop et al., 2004). Brown and Ryan (2003) conducted research using the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) that provides evidence for the self-regulatory capacity of mindfulness. They indicate that mindfulness is linked to heightened self-knowledge, which is a key element of self-regulation, and provide evidence for the self-awareness aspect of self-regulation.

According to Schwartz (1984; 1990, as cited in Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000), self-regulation is based on positive and negative feedback loops, and it is *attention* that enhances this feedback process and the subsequent self-regulation. Cultivating conscious attention therefore leads to connection, which establishes self-regulation, and ultimately creates order and health (Schwartz, 1984, as cited in Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000). From this perspective, self-regulation and mindfulness appear to be linked in a causal relationship, where the latter creates the former. Gestalt therapy also echoes the self-regulation linked to mindfulness. The Gestalt approach maintains that with full awareness, a state of self-regulation develops and an individual is able to take control of meeting his or her needs and problem-solving, as various issues come into the focus of awareness. The healthy personality has a smoothly functioning figure-ground relationship, which is believed to develop a sense of personal responsibility and overall healthy adjustment (Thompson et al., 2004). That is, the individual is able to focus on one need (the figure) while relegating other needs to the background of awareness. Once the need is met and the “Gestalt” is completed, it then moves to the background and a new need comes into focus. This state requires the capacity for awareness, and self-regulation of attention – some of the basic components of mindfulness, as identified. It seems then that the self-regulation of attention and awareness in turn leads to increased self-regulation.

Shapiro et al.’s (2006) model of mindfulness illustrates that intentionally attending with openness and nonjudgment is believed to lead to a significant shift of perspective which they term *Reperceiving*. This ability to view present experience with greater clarity and objectivity then leads to four additional mechanisms that contribute towards potential positive changes: (1) self-regulation, (2) values clarification, (3) cognitive, emotional and behavioural flexibility, and (4) exposure. The latter entails improved coping mechanisms that develop by being able to increasingly attend to negative emotional states (Shapiro et al., 2006). Siegel (2007)

explains that self-regulation in mindfulness facilitates greater levels of well-being. The regulation of one's attention and attitude (heart qualities) in the present moment encourages greater awareness of one's reactions to present experiences. Automatic tendencies and behaviours thus begin to decrease, and one is increasingly able to consciously regulate one's behaviours. "The mind seems to be freed to acquire new levels of self-regulation" and one becomes more able to regulate one's emotions in order to be less disturbed by present experiences (Siegel, 2007:101).

Cognitive-Behavioural traditions also include a focus on the self-regulation of thoughts, emotions, and behaviours as essential to mental health (Thompson et al., 2004) and Rational-Emotive-Behaviour Therapy is grounded in the philosophy of "what disturbs men's minds is not events, but their judgment of events" (Thompson et al., 2004:206). Rational-Emotive-Behaviour Therapy thus places emphasis on present experiences, and how we react to them. Rational-Emotive-Behaviour Therapy acknowledges that human beings can think "crookedly", express emotions inappropriately, and behave in self-defeating manners, which contributes towards distress and pathology. The focus of therapy, then, is to let go of irrational belief systems, thereby exercising more choice and control over how we view our experiences and react to difficulties (Thompson et al., 2004). This approach thus appears to correlate with what mindfulness literature suggests, in terms of the relationship between mindfulness, self-regulation, and well-being.

The above discussion illustrates that a review of mindfulness literature reveals certain themes that are evident across various definitions and explorations of mindfulness. These themes are linked to the definition of mindfulness as a theoretical construct, practice, and psychological process, and include present-centered attention and awareness, attitude, and self-regulation. They are therefore presented as the first three dimensions of mindfulness in my conceptual framework. There are additional features of mindfulness that are common amongst many authors; comparing *mindfulness* to *mindlessness*, and the universalism of mindfulness are themes that emerged from this review, and make up the last two dimensions of my conceptual framework applied in this study.

#### **2.4.4 UNIVERSALISM OF MINDFULNESS**

The phenomenon of mindfulness often appears to be linked to the idea of “meditation”, possibly due to its origins in the “mindfulness meditation” of Buddhist traditions, as described by Kabat-Zinn (2003). In light of this, it is important to differentiate between mindfulness and meditation, and to consider the place of mindfulness in the context of science and religion. As the following discussion will demonstrate, mindfulness by its nature is essentially a universal phenomenon, thus it is not affiliated to any particular religion. It has been defined as a psychological process, which can be enhanced or achieved by meditation, as well as various other methods that have nothing at all to do with meditation. Mindfulness is universal. The universalism of mindfulness is presented as the fourth dimension in my conceptual framework.

Siegel (2007:13) explains that all of the major religions of the world have some way to help people focus their attention and develop awareness of the moment, from “prayer to meditation to yoga to tai’chi”. Although different religions adopt different approaches, they have a common goal, which is to direct awareness in such a way as to transform lives. Siegel (2007:13) therefore notes that “mindful awareness is a universal goal across human cultures”. Germer (2005) and Kabat-Zinn (2003) explain the origins of mindfulness as being located within Buddhism; however, they emphasise the universal nature of mindfulness as an inherent human capacity. “Mindfulness...being about attention, is also of necessity universal. There is nothing particularly Buddhist about it. We are all mindful to one degree or another, moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003:146). Germer (2005) explains that mindfulness is a naturally occurring event of everyday life, but that it requires practice in order to be maintained. “Mindfulness per se is not unusual; continuity of mindfulness is rare indeed” (Germer, 2005:9).

Brown and Ryan (2003) also emphasise the universal nature of mindfulness as “inherently a state of consciousness” which involves consciously attending to one’s moment-to-moment experiences. They maintain that almost everyone has the capacity to attend and to be aware, but that the capacity as well as willingness varies amongst individuals (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Brown et al. (2007) point out that although the concept of mindfulness is most firmly rooted in Buddhist origins, it correlates with concepts from various western philosophical and psychological traditions, including ancient Greek philosophy, phenomenology, existentialism, naturalism, transcendentalism and humanism. The fact that this phenomenon has been so widely described confirms that it is central to human experience, and that it is inherently of a universal nature (Brown et al., 2007).

Hayes and Wilson (2003) as cited in Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008:396) note that although mindfulness techniques originate in Buddhist traditions, the skills themselves are now taught without reference to their religious roots, and that, as can be seen, the field is considered a “legitimate target of western scientific and clinical enquiry”. Mindfulness is thus seen as more than meditation; meditation is simply a scaffolding technique employed to develop the state and skills of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008:404) note that although mindfulness techniques are sometimes referred to as meditation, the word “meditation” is not specific, and “does not specify precise techniques any more than the word “sport” indicates a particular pursuit”. Meditation may be used to describe mindfulness approaches, and it can also be used to describe practices such as transcendental meditation. Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) make an important distinction between these two approaches. Transcendental meditation is the explicit attempt to exclude mental distractions, and to become totally absorbed by the focus of the meditation, which usually includes a single stimulus such as a mantra. This complete absorption is said to create a sense of tranquillity and bliss. In contrast, mindfulness stipulates a general awareness of all elements of consciousness and the moment-to-moment flow of personal experiences, even if the content seems “off-task” (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008).

Germer’s (2005) discussion coincides with this distinction, although he refers to concentration meditation compared to mindfulness meditation. Concentration meditation can be likened to a laser light beam, which focuses on a particular object. Awareness can be directed to any object, internal or external. Internal objects of meditation might include words (a mantra), an image, a part of the body, or a kinesthetic feeling (such as the breath). A candle or an image could be examples of external objects of awareness. In concentration meditation, the mind is gently returned to the object of meditation when we notice that it has wandered (Germer, 2005). Mindfulness meditation, on the other hand, illuminates a much wider range of objects as they arise in awareness, one at a time, and can thus be compared to a searchlight, rather than a laser beam. The purpose is to notice whatever predominates in awareness from moment to moment. Mindfulness meditation is not about achieving a different state of mind; it is about “settling into our current experience in a relaxed, alert and openhearted way” (Germer, 2005:16).

Hayes and Shenk (2004) note the paradox of research in mindfulness, as they point out that modern science is evaluating techniques that originated before it (modern science) even existed. They note the confusion that has been created by mindfulness being presented both as a psychological process as well as a “technological method” (i.e. meditation) but maintain that, if mindfulness is defined as a psychological process, then any techniques that create that process can be considered mindfulness techniques. Hence, if meditation creates the psychological process of mindfulness, then it is a mindfulness technique.

A myriad of perspectives must exist relating to the issues of mindfulness, meditation, science and religion, depending on the contexts of different individuals. Within the scope of this dissertation, however, what it is clear is that mindfulness is a universal phenomenon. It has been defined as a psychological process, and is unavoidably universal due to its inherent nature involving the quality of consciousness. The specific techniques employed to achieve mindfulness, however, could be many and varied, and remain open to interpretation within the philosophical debate. The final theme that emerged from this literature review on mindfulness was the concept of mindlessness, as compared to mindfulness. This is the last dimension presented in my conceptual framework.

## **2.4.5 MINDLESSNESS**

A review of mindfulness literature indicates that in order to better understand this intricate concept, it is useful to compare mindfulness to “mindlessness”. A comparison also sheds light onto how mindfulness can be applied within a positive psychological framework, as it is often the lack of mindfulness and the unexamined activities of our thoughts and emotions that distorts our experiences, disconnects us from our bodies, and prevents us from deep, full and true experience of everything in the present (Kabat-Zinn, 2003:148). The assumptions behind mindfulness, cognitive science and most psychological therapies share the view that we are often unaware of our habitual behaviours and automatic responses, consequently living in a “mindless” way. Being unaware of the influences on our behaviours can contribute substantially to suffering in general, and specific clinical problems (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008).

Brown et al. (2007) explain that mindfulness involves the “conscious registration of stimuli”, including the senses and activities of the mind. When a stimulus becomes particularly strong, then attention is engaged as that stimulus is taken notice of. Usually, we have rapid cognitive and emotional reactions to various stimuli, which relate to our subjective experiences and functioning. Our processing can thus be discriminatory or influenced by past experience, with the result that sensory objects and events are hardly ever seen as they truly are, but rather through “the filters of self-centered thought and prior conditioning, thereby running the risk of furnishing superficial, incomplete, or distorted pictures of reality” (Brown et al., 2007:212). Brown and Ryan (2003) refer to “mindlessness” as the relative absence of mindfulness, which restricts consciousness in various ways. They contrast mindfulness with the mindless, less “awake” states of habitual or automatic functioning, which they maintain may be chronic for many individuals. Examples of mindlessness include rumination, absorption in the past, fantasies or anxieties, preoccupation, being occupied with multiple tasks, compulsive and automatic behaviours, and purposefully refusing to acknowledge or attend to something in one’s consciousness (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Germer (2005) refers to the same examples of

mindlessness, and points out that we are rarely truly mindful, but rather we are usually preoccupied with distracting thoughts or opinions about what is happening in the present, past or future – i.e. being mindless.

Mindfulness on the other hand, requires an individual to simply be present and observe experiences as they are, without processing it through the afore-mentioned filters. This encourages the development of clarity in consciousness, which allows for more flexible and objective psychological and behavioural responses (Brown et al., 2007). Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) concur that the ability to maintain a state of mindfulness on a daily basis is suggested to contribute towards more flexible and adaptive behaviour. Mindfulness may help to disengage people from the afore-mentioned automatic thoughts, and unhealthy behaviour patterns, and in so doing, facilitates self-regulation, which is linked to the enhancement of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000 as cited in Brown & Ryan, 2003; Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000), as described above.

It therefore seems that the employment of mindfulness techniques helps to avoid potential distress or pathology, and improves the development and maintenance of positive mental health. Kabat-Zinn's original vision and rationale in developing Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was to offer people experiencing stress, pain and illness an opportunity to train in potentially beneficial skills as a complement to their medical treatment. MBSR was intended to encourage participants to explore new methods of relieving suffering at the body and mind level, to understand the potential body-mind connection, and to increase responsibility and participation in their own movement towards greater health (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). By examining mindlessness and how it potentially affects our well-being, we gain a greater understanding of mindfulness, and its role in mental health and general well-being. Thus mindlessness is not a dimension of the mindfulness experience *per se*; however I believe its addition into my conceptual framework contributes to a more in-depth understanding of mindfulness, as the above-mentioned authors have also described.



The discussion in Chapter Two thus far has focused on a thorough exploration of the phenomenon of mindfulness, and the associated themes that emerged from this literature review. The themes that I extracted from the review have been presented as “dimensions of mindfulness” in the conceptual framework applied in this study. Each dimension has been discussed individually, although the reader is reminded that they come together to create mindfulness as a whole. I now turn to an examination of empirical studies relating to mindfulness-based interventions.

## **2.5           EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

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Since Kabat-Zinn's introduction of mindfulness into a clinical setting, the concept has gained increased interest and movement, and there has been significant research into its nature and its potential applications to a variety of psychological contexts (Shapiro et al., 2006). Studies done on the efficacy of the MBSR programme have considered its application for various medical as well as psychological disorders. Reviews of the empirical literature pertaining to mindfulness-based interventions for both mental health and physical well-being reveal that methodological adequacy is, at times, below optimal standards (Baer, 2003; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt & Walach, 2004). Nevertheless, there is enough empirical evidence to conclude that mindfulness may help a large range of individuals to cope with both clinical and non-clinical problems (Grossman et al., 2004).

### **2.5.1       PHYSICAL CONDITIONS**

Much of the scientific research on mindfulness-based interventions has focused on the results of applying this intervention to populations suffering from physical conditions, such as pain, cancer and fibromyalgia. The general findings are that patients with chronic medical conditions who participate in MBSR programmes are able to effect positive changes in both their physical and mental health (Bishop, 2002).

Studies that have examined the effects of MBSR on patients with chronic pain show significant results for the potential usefulness of mindfulness-based interventions in this context (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth & Burney, 1985; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, Burney & Sellers, 1987). Baer's (2003) review concludes that findings for chronic pain patients show statistically significant improvements in ratings of pain, other medical symptoms, and general psychological symptoms, following MBSR intervention, and that many of these changes were

maintained at follow-up evaluations. Improvements in a variety of symptoms of fibromyalgia were reported following MBSR interventions (Baer, 2003), and mindfulness was also found to influence the healing process of patients with psoriasis (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1998). Matchim and Armer (2007) conducted a literature review of seven studies published between 2000 and 2005 measuring the psychological impact of MBSR on health among patients with cancer. They conclude that there is minimal literature, however, preliminary findings indicate a potential positive impact of MBSR on the health and well-being of patients with cancer. It is evident that MBSR can contribute towards significant reductions in mood disturbance and stress levels (Specia, Carlson, Goodey & Angen, 2000), which were maintained over a period of six months (Carlson, Ursuliak, Goodey, Angen & Specia, 2001). Finally, MBSR programmes have been shown to effect behavioural, psychological and immunology improvements in adults with HIV (Robinson, Mathews & Witek-Janusek, 2003, as cited in Sibinga et al., 2008).

It is evident that most of the research on mindfulness-based interventions for physical conditions has been of a quantitative nature, focusing predominantly on adult populations. It has been recommended that future studies should include qualitative research, for example, including a daily diary so as to gain insight into how participants themselves perceive their psychological changes as a result of MBSR (Matchim & Armer, 2007). Some qualitative research conducted on the self-perceived effects of MBSR among cancer patients found the following themes emerged: opening to change; self-control; shared experience; personal growth; and spirituality (Mackenzie, Carlson, Munoz & Specia, 2007).

## **2.5.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS**

Research on MBSR has also focused on its applicability to various psychological disorders, including anxiety, depression and eating disorders; again, this appears to be predominantly quantitative research on adult populations. Mindfulness-based interventions do, however, demonstrate efficacy with populations experiencing generalised anxiety and panic disorders (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992), as well as recurrent depression (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Teasdale, Segal & Williams, 1995; Teasdale et al., 2000) and eating disorders (Kristellar & Hallett, 1999; Baer, Fischer & Huss, 2005, 2006).

Teasdale et al. (1995, 2000) have done significant work with mindfulness as an intervention to prevent relapse of recurrent depression, and they developed Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) in this regard. They found that MBCT significantly reduced the risk of relapse/recurrence of major depression for participants who had experienced three or more previous episodes of depression, and conclude that MBCT offers a promising cost-efficient approach for the prevention of relapse in recovered recurrently depressed patients (Teasdale et al., 2000). MBCT combines elements of Kabat-Zinn's programme with aspects of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in a group-based skills training approach, in order to train recovered participants in mindfulness skills that offer some degree of protection from relapse into depression (Mason & Hargreaves, 2001).

Brown et al. (2007) provide an overview of the quantitative research on the salutary effects of mindfulness, and indicate that it has proven to be effective in enhancing aspects from the following categories: mental health and psychological well-being, physical health, behavioural regulation, as well as the quality of relationships and social interactions.

### **2.5.3 NON-CLINICAL POPULATIONS**

There has also been some research investigating the use of mindfulness with non-clinical populations. Results point to the alleviation of stress and psychological symptoms in various contexts. Research conducted in the workplace environment suggests that MBSR training can lead to better immune functioning and brain changes consistent with more effective handling of negative emotion under stress (Davidson et al., 2003). Community volunteers who completed MBSR to reduce their stress levels found significant improvements in medical and psychological symptoms, and students reported significant effects on psychological symptoms, empathy ratings and spiritual experiences (Baer, 2003).

Brown and Ryan (2003) conducted research using the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), the outcomes of which indicate that mindfulness is associated with greater well-being. The MAAS was associated with higher levels of pleasant affect, life satisfaction, self-esteem, optimism, autonomy, competence, relatedness, and self-actualisation. Conversely, it was also linked to lower levels of neuroticism, anxiety, depression, unpleasant affect and negative affectivity (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness was thus shown to relate to and predict more positive well-being and less cognitive and emotional disturbance. The MAAS was indicated as valid and reliable for use in college student and general adult populations (Brown & Ryan, 2003). As yet, there appears to be no studies done on these aspects of mindfulness as applied to other, especially younger, age groups, or investigations of a more qualitative nature. From their quantitative research, Brown and Ryan (2003:844) conclude that mindfulness is “a reliably and validly measured characteristic that has a significant role to play in a variety of aspects of mental health”.

Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) maintain that mindfulness techniques can potentially teach greater self-awareness, greater impulse control, and lessened emotional reactivity to difficult events. They note that evidence from research with adult populations suggests that all of these desirable effects can be attained in the long term, after a relatively short training time. For this reason, mindfulness may be particularly valuable for children and adolescents who still have numerous developmental challenges to overcome. Thus mindfulness shows great clinical promise for young people; however, the research within child and adolescent populations is still in its beginning stages (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008). Semple, Lee and Miller (2006:164) concur that, although “early indications are that mindfulness in children is acceptable and feasible”, research in this area has “barely begun”. Semple, Reid and Miller (2005) maintain that, despite the promise of mindfulness training in adult psychotherapies, there have been no studies to indicate an extension of these findings to children. Wall (2008) agrees that the literature on the effects of MBSR practices with children and teenagers is limited, presumably due to the level of attention and concentration that is required.

## **2.5.4 RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS**

Despite the large gap in the literature pertaining to mindfulness-based interventions with children and adolescents, there are a few studies to indicate its use within these populations. Most research points to the potential beneficial results that young people can attain from participating in mindfulness techniques, for example, increased positive psychological states and traits that result from mindfulness practice, and reductions in negative states such as anxiety and aggression.

It has been suggested that mindfulness practices are essentially attention-enhancing techniques, therefore, since impaired attention is a core symptom of anxiety, enhancing self-management of attention would reduce anxiety in children (Semple et al., 2005). Research suggests that mindfulness can be taught to children, and that it is potentially helpful as an intervention for anxiety symptoms in children (Semple et al., 2005). Semple et al. (2005) mention limited studies with children who were not clinically referred, which reported reductions in test anxiety, increased attention and relaxation, enhanced attention regulation, and reductions in non-attending behaviours (Linden, 1973; Murdock, 1978; Rani & Rao, 1996; Redfering & Bowman, 1981, all as cited in Semple et al., 2005). It is significant to note that some of this research was conducted over thirty years ago and thus can be considered as relatively out-of-date.

Mindfulness has also been found to modulate aggression in adolescents. Singh, Wahler, Adkins, Myers and The Mindfulness Research Group (2003) developed “Meditation on the Soles of the Feet” – a mindfulness technique that teaches a person to shift attention from an emotionally arousing thought, event or situation to an emotionally neutral part of the body. Singh et al. (2007:57) list the benefits of this technique: it is simple to learn; can be applied in all settings, including negative and high-arousal situations, and it has been proven effective in the self-control of aggressive behaviour. Research indicates that adolescents were able to

learn the mindfulness technique, and could successfully apply it in situations that had previously triggered aggressive responses (Singh et al., 2007).

With regards to the positive outcomes of mindfulness practice by children, it has been suggested that children participating in a five-week programme combining Tai Chi with MBSR experienced a range of benefits; including well-being, calmness, relaxation, improved sleep, less reactivity, greater self-care, self-awareness, and a sense of interconnection or interdependence with nature (Wall, 2005). Wall (2005) suggests that the modalities of Tai Chi and MBSR can sustain the interest of middle school-aged children, and offer potential benefit as transformational tools for children in various settings. Adolescents who had received treatment for substance abuse have also indicated improved sleep as a result of participation in a treatment programme including MBSR as one of its components (Bootzin & Stevens, 2005).

The Garrison Institute is a non-profit organisation that investigated the use of mindfulness with children from the age of five to eighteen years (Kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> Grade). They collected data from mostly within the USA, finding over eighteen schools and community centres with established mindfulness programmes, and many more which used aspects of mindfulness within a larger social or educational programme (Schoeberlein & Koffler, 2005). Although no empirical data is available from these centres, the report indicates general outcomes including increases in self-awareness, self-reflection, emotional intelligence and social skills (Schoeberlein & Koffler, 2005). Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) thus assert that, despite the lack of empirical evidence in this domain, there is considerable alternative evidence that mindfulness is potentially teachable and beneficial to child and adolescent populations. This is the identified gap where my study potentially fits in. It is envisaged that by developing in-depth understandings of an adolescent's subjective experiences of mindfulness, this may ultimately contribute towards our insight into how mindfulness can be applied within this population group.



## **2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

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The conceptual framework (See *Figure 2.1 on page 14*) applied throughout this study is based on the theoretical knowledge of mindfulness, as described in the literature. As illustrated above, several themes pertaining to the nature of mindfulness emerged from my literature review. I extracted these themes and present them as the “dimensions” of mindfulness. The five dimensions identified are: ‘present-centered attention and awareness’, ‘attitude and heart qualities’, ‘self-regulation’, ‘universalism of mindfulness’ and ‘mindlessness’. These five dimensions are inter-connected, and their dynamic interaction appears to create the full experience of mindfulness. As indicated, my conceptual framework emerged from the literature review, and has been explained in detail above in this chapter (Chapter Two). The results and findings of this study are discussed according to the conceptual framework in Chapter Four. Once again, each dimension of mindfulness is presented, although Chapter Four focuses on the findings of the study in light of these dimensions. An adolescent’s subjective experiences of mindfulness are therefore presented and discussed according to the themes that emerged within each dimension. The conceptual framework was thus applied as a lens with which to analyse and interpret the data in this study. This process is explained in more detail in the following chapter (Chapter Three), which addresses the research methodology of this study.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

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This chapter contains the literature review of this study. A general definition of mindfulness was given, as well as an overview of mindfulness as it relates to contemporary psychology. I then presented a detailed discussion of each dimension of mindfulness that I extracted from the literature review. The dimensions are ‘present-centered attention and awareness’, ‘attitude and heart qualities’, ‘self-regulation’, ‘universalism of mindfulness’, and ‘mindlessness’. These were also presented as the conceptual framework applied in this study. Empirical literature pertaining to mindfulness was reviewed, including studies on mindfulness-based interventions that relate to physical and psychological conditions, non-clinical populations, and children and adolescents. In the next chapter, I present a detailed account of the research methodology applied in this study.

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## **Chapter 3**

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Research is a “process through which we attempt to achieve systematically and with the support of data the answer to a question, the resolution of a problem, or a greater understanding of a phenomenon” (Leedy, 1997, as cited in Adams, Collair, Oswald & Perold, 2004:354). This chapter presents the methodology of my study; that is, the exact methods used to create this systematic approach to answering the primary research question – “What are an adolescent’s subjective experiences of mindfulness?” - as well as the methods applied to generate a greater understanding of the same phenomenon. In presenting my methodological approaches, I discuss the following topics: i) the interpretivist paradigm within which I place myself as a researcher, ii) the research design (the case study), including its strengths and limitations, iii) the participant in the study and how she was selected, iv) my data creation, analysis and interpretation methods, and my personal reflections thereof, as well as quality criteria pertaining to the trustworthiness of the study, and finally v) the ethical considerations taken into account during the research process. Metaphorically, I view these matters as the “nuts and bolts” of this study – the strong, practical foundational components that have both guided the research and “held it all together”.

## **3.2 PARADIGM**

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A paradigm is a fundamental orientation, perspective or world-view that serves as a frame of reference within which to look at life and understand reality (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005). Hatch (2002:11) explains that in order for any particular paradigm to come into existence, it must have generated answers to the following questions: “What are the fundamental entities of which the universe is composed? How do these interact with each other and with the senses? What questions can legitimately be asked about such entities and what techniques employed in seeking solutions?” Once these questions have been answered, fundamental sets of assumptions become apparent, which differentiate belief systems about how the world is ordered, what we may know about it, and how we may know it (Hatch, 2002). The paradigm within which I place myself as a researcher includes my ontological assumptions about the nature of reality, epistemological views about how knowledge is acquired and communicated within this reality, as well as my methodological views about how I gain knowledge about the world. I agree with Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000) who suggest that ontological assumptions lead to epistemological assumptions, which in turn give rise to methodological approaches.

As such, I subscribe to an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism maintains that no universal objective truths exist, but rather, that there are multiple realities as experienced subjectively by individuals. Human beings actively make choices, interact with, and interpret their world. Life is seen as fluid and dynamic, and social life exists as people experience it for themselves and give it meaning (Neuman, 2006). It correlates with the Social Constructivist perspective that people construct, create, and build their own knowledge and meaning as they interact with the world around them. A constructionist orientation towards reality assumes that the beliefs and meanings people use and create fundamentally shape what reality is for them, and how they experience their world to be (Neuman, 2006). People thus have an internally experienced sense of reality, based on their own constructions of meaning. Hence, multiple interpretations of human experience, or realities, are possible. In this study, therefore, it is

assumed that an individual adolescent will create her own subjective meanings and experiences of mindfulness, based on her unique interaction with reality, as she perceives it. The interpretivist paradigm implies that not everyone constructs or experiences reality in the same way, and that the experiences of individuals are unique and valued. I believe that placing myself as a researcher within the interpretivist paradigm has facilitated the in-depth exploration of an adolescent's subjective experiences of mindfulness. It has enabled the process of "stepping into someone else's shoes" to gain a deep understanding and appreciation of how she experiences aspects of her world.

This study has been conducted from a qualitative methodological tradition. This approach to research is based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of Interpretivism and Social Constructivism. Qualitative research studies phenomena in their natural settings and seeks answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning. It emphasises the socially constructed nature of reality, and the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative methodology is concerned with generating rich and detailed descriptions, in the attempt to get closer to the individual's point of view. I have thus chosen a qualitative methodological approach based on my paradigm and the nature of my research question, as I believe it has offered the most appropriate vehicle from which to conduct this study.

### **3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

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A research design can be explained as a flexible set of guidelines relating to research strategies and methodologies, of which the aim is to gather empirical data. Research design brings a paradigm into perspective with regards to the above (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). In this study I employed a case study research design.

#### **3.3.1 CASE STUDY DESIGN**

A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2002). In this instance, the bounded system is comprised of an individual adolescent in her life context, within a specific time frame. Yin (2003) explains that the need for case studies arises from a desire to understand complex social phenomena, and that a case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. This correlates with the interpretivist and social constructivist paradigm, which seeks to understand the subjective experience of the individual, as one constructs it within one's world. Stake (2005) further argues that a case study is not defined by the specific methodologies adopted, but rather by interest in the individual case. "Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (Stake, 2005:443). This serves to clarify my position in this research; I have specifically chosen to study a "bounded system" that is of interest to me as a researcher, thus my methodological approach has flowed from this initial intention to explore the experiences of a single individual with regard to mindfulness.

My research design can be further defined in that it is an *intrinsic* case study - the study has been undertaken because, primarily, I would like to generate a better understanding of this particular case. This case does not necessarily represent any other cases or illustrate a particular trait or problem. Instead, “in all its particularity *and* ordinariness, the case itself is of interest.” (Stake, 2005:445). As Stake (2005:450) explains, intrinsic design aims to develop the case’s own issues, contexts and interpretations – its “thick description”.

### **3.3.2 STRENGTHS OF THE CASE STUDY DESIGN**

There are several advantages of the case study design in my research. It has focused on studying a unique example of a real life person and situation, and her subjective experiences. It has facilitated an in-depth investigation that appreciates the “wholeness” of a person and situations, and it allows for rich descriptions. Case study design is seen to support the three tenets of the qualitative method: describing, understanding, and explaining (Cohen et al., 2000). These advantages are consistent with the interpretivist paradigm from which I have worked as a researcher, and the study has enabled me to generate these types of detailed, full descriptions and understandings necessary to answer the research question. The case study design allows readers to develop more in-depth understandings, and it is more accessible to wider audiences. I believe this is particularly useful in my study, as from the literature review it can be seen that detailed and in-depth understandings of peoples’ experiences of mindfulness appear to be few and far between. Case studies give a voice to the voiceless – in this instance the adolescent population has been identified as “voiceless” when it comes to mindfulness experiences. Additional advantages as indicated by Cohen et al. (2000) are that a case study can determine cause and effect, and recognizes the role of context therein. It provides a chronological narrative of unfolding events, and is able to take into account unforeseen events and uncontrolled variables. A case study design is able to tie together theory and practice. This, I believe, is a particular strength of my study, as it has examined an adolescent’s subjective experiences of mindfulness within the context of theory. The case study has allowed me to understand how the theory of mindfulness might relate to an adolescent in

real life practice. Furthermore, a case study can provide insight into other similar situations, and it is possible that the generalization of results can be made to theory – advantages consistent with aspects of the purpose and rationale of this study. A single researcher can carry out a case study design, which has been a practical consideration in this case.

### **3.3.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE CASE STUDY DESIGN**

Along with the advantages and strengths of a particular research design come, of course, the limitations and challenges to be taken into account. As my study has focused on the single case of one unique adolescent's experiences, it cannot provide a complete generalizing conclusion to all other adolescents. It is, however, not the intention of interpretivism to make such conclusions, given the view of reality and the understanding that each individual constructs their own unique and subjective interpretation of their world and their experiences in it. Major challenges of the case study design are that it can be subjective, selective, personal and prone to observer bias (Cohen et al., 2000). In the attempt to safeguard against these challenges, I have applied strategies described by Yin (2003) that can assist with the problems of establishing reliability and validity (credibility, transferability and dependability in qualitative terms – as discussed below) in case study research. One such strategy was to use several different techniques to explore the individual adolescent's experiences of mindfulness. Yin (2003:98) explains that any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information. Even so, it is important to note that, although different techniques were used, these still remain open to the subjective "judgment" of the researcher. By creating a database of my research journal, observations, interviews, transcripts, and the participant's journal and creative expressions, I have a collection of "raw data" that is available for independent inspection, which helps to counter some of the disadvantages as mentioned above. Additionally, I have engaged in member checking, that is, checking the accuracy of my data analysis with the participant (Creswell, 2002) in the effort to avoid observer subjectivity and bias.



### **3.3.4 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANT**

This study has utilised the non-probability, purposive or purposeful sampling method, which entails a sample being specifically selected based on the judgement of the researcher (De Vos et al., 2005). Creswell (2002) explains that purposeful sampling is most often employed in qualitative research, as it allows for the selection of people who can best help us to understand the phenomenon being investigated. Through purposeful sampling I have thus been able to develop a detailed understanding of the case, which might provide useful information, help people to learn about the phenomenon, or give a voice to an individual belonging to a group who may not be heard (Creswell, 2002).

In order to achieve the overall objectives of the study, I purposefully selected a participant according to the following selection criteria. First and foremost, an adolescent participant was selected. The major reasons for the selection of an adolescent in this study were twofold: firstly, as discussed, adolescents appear to be a “silent” population group in terms of the current available literature pertaining to mindfulness. Secondly, due to the nature of the research design, it was important that the participant had the metacognitive ability to think about their thinking and their experiences. Piaget’s theory of cognitive development indicates that this capacity for abstract thought develops during the adolescent stage of human development. During this “Formal Operations” period from age 11 to adulthood, the capacity for abstract reasoning develops and “thinking soars into the realm of the purely abstract and hypothetical” (Crain, 1992:119). The participant was thus selected based on their current developmental stage and capacity for abstract and reflexive thought, and I believed that a person in the “late adolescence” stage would be most suitable with regards to this criterion.

Further selection criteria included language and language ability. The participant's mother tongue had to be English - the same as that of the researcher – in order to avoid any potential language barriers and to facilitate in-depth interactions and understandings as far as possible. A participant with superior language ability was selected to further these aims. Language ability was informally evaluated by means of observation of speech, school assessments and written work. Accessibility had to be taken into account during sampling; it was important that the researcher and the participant had easy access to each other in creating contact sessions. Location and physical proximity was thus taken into account, and I selected a participant whose residence was within walking distance of my own. The accessibility criterion also referred to the participant's availability, thus a participant who did not have too many extra-curricular demands was selected. Gender was not a selection criterion and no distinction was made between potential male or female participants. I was able to find a voluntary participant who fulfilled all the selection criteria for my study purely by word-of-mouth. From here on, I will refer to the participant of my study as *Lia* (pseudonym used to protect confidentiality).

## **3.4 DATA CREATION**

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The data in my study were created predominantly from five “mindfulness sessions”, which included the methods of the sessions themselves, artwork, journals, observations and interviews. Below I describe each method in more detail.

### **3.4.1 “MINDFULNESS SESSIONS”**

Five “mindfulness sessions” were conducted with Lia and myself over a period of ten weeks. During these sessions, I employed both direct and indirect mindfulness training techniques with Lia. Direct techniques included an initial explanation of what mindfulness is in theory, as well as including some of my own interpretations and experiences of mindfulness during our discussions. More indirectly from my perspective, I enlisted the help of one of the renowned experts in the field of mindfulness – Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn – in the form of an audio CD. In his CD “Mindfulness for Beginners”, Jon Kabat-Zinn discusses the principles of mindfulness, and guides the listener through several meditations, which form the basis of his MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) programme.

The tables below indicate an outline of the five mindfulness sessions that made up the core of this study. They indicate the basic session plans, including examples of questions asked during unstructured interviews.

**Figure 3.1: SESSION 1**

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCING MINDFULNESS</b>
<b>EXPERIENCES</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. INTERVIEW <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Unstructured discussion</i></li> <li>- <i>What is mindfulness?</i></li> <li>- <i>Initial ideas</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>2. EXPLAINING MINDFULNESS</li> <li>3. "MINDFULNESS FOR BEGINNERS" CD 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>In her own time at home</i></li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<b>EXPRESSIONS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. JOURNAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>After each track on the CD</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>2. INTERVIEW <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Unstructured discussion</i></li> <li>- <i>How did you experience listening to the CD?</i></li> <li>- <i>What are your initial impressions of mindfulness?</i></li> </ul> </li> </ol>

**Figure 3.2: SESSION 2**

<b>2</b>	<b>MINDFUL EATING</b>
<b>EXPERIENCES</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. EATING MINDFULLY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lemons, goji berries &amp; chocolate</li> <li>- Participant and researcher together</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<b>EXPRESSIONS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. INTERVIEW <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unstructured discussion</li> <li>- How did you experience the eating meditation?</li> <li>- How did this experience compare with how you usually eat?</li> <li>- What have you learnt from this experience?</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. DRAWING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participant draws a picture of her mindful eating experience</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. DISCUSSION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What does the drawing represent?</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. JOURNAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participant writes independently in journal after each session, and in-between sessions if desired</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

**Figure 3.3: SESSION 3**

<b>3</b>	<b>MINDFUL BREATHING</b>
<b>EXPERIENCES</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. BREATHING MEDITATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Participant and researcher together</i></li> <li>- <i>Track # 3</i></li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<b>EXPRESSIONS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. INTERVIEW <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Unstructured discussion</i></li> <li>- <i>How did you experience the breathing meditation?</i></li> <li>- <i>What was happening to you during the meditation?</i></li> <li>- <i>How did this experience compare with how you usually breathe?</i></li> <li>- <i>What have you learnt from this experience?</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>2. PAINTING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Participant paints a picture of her mindful breathing experience</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>3. DISCUSSION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>What does the painting represent?</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>4. JOURNAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Participant writes independently in journal after each session, and in-between sessions if desired</i></li> </ul> </li> </ol>

**Figure 3.4: SESSION 4**

<b>4</b>	<b>MINDFULNESS OF THE BODY</b>
<b>EXPERIENCES</b>	1. BODY AWARENESS MEDITATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Participant and researcher together</i></li> <li>- <i>Track # 4</i></li> </ul>
<b>EXPRESSIONS</b>	1. INTERVIEW <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Unstructured discussion</i></li> <li>- <i>How did you experience the body awareness meditation?</i></li> <li>- <i>What was happening to you during the meditation?</i></li> <li>- <i>How did your body feel during the meditation?</i></li> <li>- <i>What did you become aware of about your body?</i></li> <li>- <i>What sensations did you feel?</i></li> </ul> 2. BODY MAP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Researcher helps participant to draw an outline of her body on large paper, which she designs to illustrate her experiences of the body awareness meditation</i></li> </ul> 3. DISCUSSION  4. JOURNAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Participant writes independently in journal after each session, and in-between sessions if desired</i></li> </ul>

**Figure 3.5: SESSION 5**

<b>5</b>	<b>ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS</b>
<b>EXPRESSIONS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. INTERVIEW <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Unstructured discussion</i></li> <li>- <i>How did you experience the mindfulness sessions?</i></li> <li>- <i>How did you feel during the research?</i></li> <li>- <i>How was it for you to keep a journal?</i></li> <li>- <i>What does mindfulness mean to you?</i></li> <li>- <i>What are the differences between your initial impressions of mindfulness and what you think about it now?</i></li> <li>- <i>How has it influenced you?</i></li> <li>- <i>How has it affected your life?</i></li> <li>- <i>How would you explain mindfulness to a “beginner”?</i></li> <li>- <i>Any other issues that arise...</i></li> </ul> </li>   <li>2. WRAPPING UP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>The researcher will consult with the participant during the data analysis and interpretation process</i></li> <li>- <i>The researcher is available should any other issues arise</i></li> </ul> </li> </ol>



### **3.4.2 CREATIVE EXPRESSION**

After each mindfulness session Lia engaged in a form of creative expression in order to further express her experiences of the activity in the session. This was conducted in my presence, in order for me to gain a more detailed understanding of how she went about the expression activities, and to allow for discussion thereof afterwards.

Mason (2002) reminds one that decisions about these types of data must be made in the context of “grounded critical judgements” about what each can offer to the research and its context and what the limitations might be, and to maintain a “healthy scepticism” regarding objectivity of these methods. She also mentions, however, that non-textual presentations have a greater capacity to evoke the senses and to generate knowledge and understanding on different levels. Tilley (2001, as cited in Mason, 2002:117) elaborates with the following quote: “We cannot adequately capture or express the powers of things in texts...this is why experimentation with other ways of telling, in particular with exploiting media that can more accurately convey the synaesthetic qualities of things, in particular the use of imagery and film, must become of increasing importance...” I concur with this statement, and elaborate on my experiences of using alternative media in research, in my reflections below.

### **3.4.3 JOURNAL**

Lia was asked to keep a written journal of her experiences, both within and outside the context of the mindfulness sessions. The process of writing things down encourages individuals to process and reflect on experiences in ways that differ to those used when discussing or thinking about them (Johnstone, 1994, as cited in Hatch, 2002). Asking Lia to keep a reflective journal, therefore, provided a potentially powerful means of gaining additional insights on her subjective perspectives. Another advantage of a participant’s journal is that it

can provide a direct form of expression, thus coming from Lia directly, without being discussed with the researcher first. Some people are more comfortable expressing their personal thoughts and feelings in writing (Hatch, 2002), thus I hoped that the journal would provide this opportunity for Lia. Hatch (2002) describes additional advantages of journals; they are flexible (entries can be made at the participant's leisure) and can offer a way for the researcher to guide the research process. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) discuss the interpretation of "mute evidence" such as written text and artefacts or "material culture". A benefit of this type of evidence in comparison to "the spoken word" is that it is a physical object that continues to exist, thus it can be separated across space and time from its author. Thus in my analysis of the journal and creative expression pieces, I was able to re-visit them, thereby gaining fresh perspectives and greater insights. On the other hand, however, the voice of the author becomes absent and so it was important to view these alongside the correlating discussions with Lia, and to take careful consideration of the *context* in which they were created. The same principles were applied to the transcripts (discussed below), as they also constitute a form of written records.

The drawbacks of using journals in research include the time and effort required on the participant's behalf. Journals also require the individual to be comfortable and adept at expressing themselves in words. Hatch (2002) highlights the issue of writing *for* the researcher, indicating that some participants might feel obliged to write on something that they don't want to, or might shape their journal entries based on meeting the perceived expectations of the researcher. Thus the critical issue of truth and honesty emerges; it can be difficult to assess the level of honesty in a participant's journal entries. Furthermore, a journal enables the participant to write selectively; there is an element of choice about what to include or exclude from the entries. I address these advantages and disadvantages of using a participant's journal in my reflections on the data creation below.

### **3.4.4 INTERVIEWS**

A large amount of data was created from one-on-one interviews with Lia and myself. These took the form of unstructured interviews, with open-ended questions, in order to facilitate in-depth conversations and thus a deeper understanding of Lia's subjective experiences. All interviews and discussions were recorded on audiotape and transcribed.

Interviews are one of the most powerful ways in which to try and understand people, thus this technique has generated valuable in-depth understandings for the purpose of the case study. The unstructured interview style, in particular, can provide a greater depth of data than other interviewing types (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln (2003:75) describe the essence of unstructured interviewing as the establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to *understand* rather than to explain. This is a strong advantage of this data creation method as it relates to my study. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003:61) point out, however, the spoken or written word always has a "residue of ambiguity", no matter how carefully we word questions or report answers. One has to take note of the researcher's own influences in the interview process, especially with regards to final interpretations. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) remind researchers to be reflexive and "confessional", in order to take into account this potential pitfall of the interviewing technique. I address this issue in my reflection below.

### **3.4.5 TRANSCRIPTS**

Transcripts from all the interviews between Lia and myself constituted a major portion of the data from this study. Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005) explain transcription practices in terms of a continuum ranging from naturalism to denaturalism. Naturalised transcripts are a verbatim representation of speech, in which every utterance (e.g. pauses, stutters, non-verbals, accents, involuntary vocalizations) is recorded in as much detail as possible because the view is that language represents reality. These intricacies of the speech itself are studied in conversational analysis, for example (Peräkylä, 2005). Denaturalism, on the opposite end of the spectrum, does not include all these characteristics, although verbatim responses are still recorded as much as possible. A denaturalised transcription approach is more concerned with the informational content of the speech, specifically the meanings and perceptions created and shared during a conversation (Oliver et al., 2005). The transcription approach used in my study tends towards the denaturalised end of the continuum, which echoes my interpretivist paradigm and its focus on the subjective meanings that are constructed to create an individual's perception of reality.

### **3.4.6 FIELD NOTES**

The field notes from my study consist of my own personal reflections and observations made throughout the research process.

### **3.4.7 REFLECTIONS ON DATA CREATION**

Participant observation played a role in most of the data creation methods in this study. This is when researchers take part in activities in the settings that they observe (Creswell, 2002). Creswell (2002) maintains that a researcher becomes involved in activities at the site in order to truly learn about a situation, and that participant observation offers excellent opportunities to see experiences from the perspective of the participant. I agree with this viewpoint, and found that the method of participant observation helped to generate a much more in-depth understanding of Lia's experiences of mindfulness, and I was able to be directly involved as she constructed her own understandings and meanings related to mindfulness. I am certain that I gained a much more detailed and enhanced understanding of her experiences in this way. This form of data creation, however, required me to reach a level of comfort with my role as participant observer, and to establish the necessary boundaries. In my reflection journal I noted after the second session that I was intensely aware of where my boundaries were, in terms of my role as researcher. Due to my training thus far in Educational Psychology, going into "therapy mode" with a person in this type of situation almost comes naturally, so I had to remain conscious of the objectives of my research, and especially, my specific role in the process. That is, I had to refrain from entering into the role of a psychologist, and focus on being a researcher searching for understandings of the case.

I found using Jon Kabat-Zinn's compact disc (CD) during the data creation to be an interesting experience. Strengths of this technique included having an "expert" with all the solid foundational knowledge and expertise guiding us through part of the process. It also helped to maintain some distance between Lia and myself, which assisted in establishing my role as participant observer and to keep the boundaries firmly in place. On the other hand, use of the CD in some sessions seemed to limit the activity and experience to just the track that we were listening to, which could have impacted on the amount of data created during that session. I also found that I had to be flexible, in order to ensure that the goals of the study would be attained. For example, after the fourth session, Lia expressed that she did not

achieve the objective of the guided meditation, and she was thus unable to adequately complete the follow-up creative expression activity. In that instance, we decided to alter the initial plan for the session, and she re-did the meditation on her own at home, in a slightly different format, in order for her to engage in the intended activity.

The creative expression pieces from this study proved to be valuable sources of data. They were not analysed individually, but added an extra dimension to the process, and seemed to complete a more holistic picture of Lia's experiences. The visual data in this study played a supportive role in confirming themes and findings generated from other data. Lia responded well to these forms of expression, and I believe they made a valuable contribution to the quality and trustworthiness of the study.

Lia's journal was useful in data creation, although not as much as I initially anticipated. She did a lot of describing of the activities, however when she did include more of her own experiences, they were valuable in developing interpretations. One of the disadvantages of the journal as discussed above was its time-intensiveness. I believe this was applicable in Lia's case, as during the study she was busy with Grade 11 and 12 school demands, thus I perceived that the time involved became a barrier for her. She still did her best to complete the journal, however, I observed that Lia would probably have written more comprehensively, given more time.

I observed that Lia was skilled in writing; her schoolwork definitely reflected this, although it seemed that on a personal level, Lia struggled to identify and express internal thoughts and feelings. She expressed this directly to me during one of our sessions. This flowed through to her journal entries, in which she tended to summarise what was done during each session. Nevertheless, despite the described limitations of Lia's journal, overall I believe it still proved to be a valuable method that contributed to the data creation process as a whole. During the data creation phase of this study, I reflected at times that I questioned whether Lia was trying

to “please” me by expressing what she thought I may want to hear, or what she perceived to be the “right” answers. I worked hard at developing a safe and trusting relationship in order to support this possibility, and emphasised the irrelevance of whether Lia perceived her experiences as “good, bad, wrong, or right”. Although wanting to please the researcher may have been a possibility at times, a careful analysis of the data appears to confirm that by and large Lia was truthful about her experiences during the study.

As mentioned, creating data by interviewing is a powerful technique. Indeed, the sessions and our discussions therein formed the heart of my study. At times I felt more of a participant during the interviews, as Lia and I co-constructed meaning and experiences of the mindfulness activities. This helped to establish commonality and aided in developing my understanding of how it was to be “in her shoes”. Asking open-ended questions was sometimes effortless, and sometimes challenging. I believe my training in Educational Psychology assisted me in this important aspect of the unstructured interview, and it helped me to be a better listener as well. At times, however, I found that I had to be careful not to ask closed questions. This seemed to mostly occur when it appeared that Lia had expressed as much as she could about a particular topic.

As noted above, I was aware of the possibility of Lia wanting to “get it right” or please me in her responses, and I had to select my questions and tone carefully so as to continue to convey non-judgment about whatever she expressed. Interviewing is about language, and language is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, thus I believe it brings that depth and substance to the data. This is a major strength of this method of data creation. Its limitation, however, is that it can become open to one’s personal meanings and interpretations, and I found that I had to pay special attention to clarifying Lia’s own meanings attached to her language and choice of words.

I went through an enriching process with regards to the transcription part of the data creation. I initially began transcribing the interviews myself, although later decided to employ a professional to assist with this task. When I received the transcriptions back, they were incomplete and had copious “unclear” comments where the transcriber had been unable to distinguish what the participant or myself said. Furthermore, as I began to listen to the interviews along with the transcripts, I discovered many instances of words or parts of sentences omitted, as well as incorrect words used, and incorrect word order. I was horrified by the poor quality of the transcriptions, however I learned a valuable lesson and I believe that the end result was that this event actually served to increase the rigour of my research. I went back to transcribing the interviews myself, listening intently to all details of the conversations.

During this process I became alert to how the subtle differences in conversation can change meaning and understanding. I also developed a much more intense and in-depth knowledge and familiarity with the data, which increased my level of understanding and ultimately, resulted in a more comprehensive answer to my research question. Oliver et al. (2005:1273) argue that transcription is often a “behind-the-scenes” part of data management, but that actually, it is and should be a critical part of qualitative research. My experience resonates with their argument that “transcription can powerfully affect the way participants are understood, the information they share, and the conclusions drawn” (Oliver et al., 2005: 1273).



## **3.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

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In this section I outline the steps I followed and describe how I analysed and interpreted the data created in my study. This process involved a combination of both typological and interpretive analysis. Hatch (2002:181) maintains that interpretations are better grounded in the data if the researcher has first spent time transforming the data in descriptive and analytical ways. I believe that the combination of these different approaches in analysis and interpretation contributes towards the richness of my study.

### **3.5.1 STEP 1 – Getting a sense of the whole**

A preliminary exploratory analysis was conducted first (Creswell, 2002). This entailed carefully reading through all the transcripts to obtain a general sense of them, making notes of my initial comments and ideas, thinking about the organization of the data, and considering whether more data were needed (Creswell, 2002). At this point I decided that I had sufficient data to work with, but remained open to the possibility that further into the analysis this could change.

### **3.5.2 STEP 2 – Getting a sense of each session**

Next I focused on the transcript, journal entries and visual data from each session, in chronological order. This was also part of the first step – getting a sense of the whole – but in this case the whole was the session itself. I then created a mind map indicating the main topics covered during the session, as well as my impressions of emerging themes.

### **3.5.3 STEP 3 – Identifying typologies**

Typological analysis begins by dividing the data into groups or categories, based on predetermined typologies. The typologies are generated from theory, common sense, and/or research objectives (Hatch, 2002:152). The first key step in this process was to identify the typologies to be used in framing my initial analysis. Hatch (2002) maintains that if typological analysis is an appropriate data analysis strategy for a study, that these should be fairly obvious. The typologies to apply were obvious to me; they were the dimensions that emerged from my research into the theory on mindfulness, as described in Chapter Two. I therefore identified “present-centered awareness and attention”; “self-regulation”; “attitude and heart qualities”; “universalism”; and “mindlessness” as the five typologies to work with. These were predominantly drawn from theory, although I believe that common sense and research objectives also influenced the choice of these typologies, as I believed them to be a logical and appropriate framework for exploring the answer to the research question.

### **3.5.4 STEP 4 – Analysing data according to typologies**

The following step in my typological analysis was to read all the transcripts, field notes and journal entries, marking entries that related to each category. I focused on one typology at a time, and chose a particular colour to represent it. Thus I began with “present-centered attention and awareness” and, using a purple highlighter, highlighted every piece of data that I believed fitted into that category. I read all the data with that specific typology in mind, and the question I asked myself during this process was, “Does this information relate to my typology?” I then proceeded to the next typology, using a different colour, and repeated the process. This procedure was followed using all five typologies.

### **3.5.5 STEP 5 – Creating typology files**

After I analysed the data according to my typologies, I then created separate files for each typology. Thus I extracted all the data entries related to “self-regulation”, for instance, and put them together into one document. After this step I had all the original marked data, as well as five new files containing all the data entries related to individual typologies.

### **3.5.6 STEP 6 – Reading typologies for a sense of the whole**

Once again, I read for a sense of the whole, except this time the whole constituted all the data within each typology.

### **3.5.7 STEP 7 – Looking for themes within typologies**

At this point the interpretive aspect of my data analysis became more salient as I started to look for meaning within the data from each typology. I searched for underlying implications in the data and wrote notes in the margin regarding the emerging meanings. Hatch (2002:156) describes themes as integrating concepts, and as I examined the typology files I asked myself, “What broad statements can be made that meaningfully bring all these data together?” Once I had done this with the data in each typology, I examined my notes and clustered similar and reoccurring topics.

### **3.5.8 STEP 8 – Coding**

I then used coding - the ascription of a category label to a piece of data (Cohen et al., 2000). In this instance, the code was not predetermined, but devised according to my initial interpretations of the data and search for meanings. I developed a code for each topic that I had identified in the previous step, and then systematically went through the typology files, writing the descriptive codes next to each section of data that they matched. This process helped to develop and fine-tune the themes that emerged.

### **3.5.9 STEP 9 – Categorising themes**

By examining the coded data, I was able to confirm dominant themes. This included searching the data for examples that contradicted the identified themes. I then decided on an appropriate descriptive label for each theme, and created a mind map indicating the themes around each typology, as well as more detailed notes on my interpretations of the data within each theme.

### **3.5.10 STEP 10 – Final review**

The last independent step of my data analysis and interpretation was to review all the original transcripts, the typology files, journal, field notes and artwork, to ensure that the findings and themes were consistent with the data.

### **3.5.11 STEP 11 – Member checking**

Last but not least, I engaged in “member checking” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) – a vital part of data analysis and interpretation in qualitative research. This involved meeting with Lia to discuss and check my findings and interpretations with her.

## **3.6 REFLECTIONS ON DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

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Interpretation is about explaining and understanding, thus it is *in* interpretation that my personal thinking as a researcher becomes directly involved and the data become transformed into something meaningful. I realised that I interpreted data gathered along the way throughout my study – although perhaps more informally and with less awareness. When I embarked on my “formal” analysis and interpretation journey, I was initially quite lost. As a novice researcher, I was hoping for the “security” that a series of expert directions might bring. I discovered, of course, that these do not exist. I then realised how my own skills had to be combined with some theory and direction from others in order to create the powerful process of interpretation. The words of Hatch (2002:148) slowly began to make sense: “researchers always engage their own intellectual capacities to make sense of qualitative data...only the intelligence, creativity, and reflexivity of the human mind can bring meaning to those data”.

In the end, I found it was the data itself and the nature of my own study that guided me in the application of my intelligence, creativity and reflexivity in the interpretation process. Now I see that this was a far more enriching, genuine and comprehensive process, which enhanced these same qualities in my study. Hatch (2002) maintains that a qualitative analysis is never complete, and that the hard decision of when to stop should be based on whether the research question has been answered or not. I resonated with this perspective, and did experience the feeling that my data analysis could continue indefinitely. Nonetheless, I believe that my conceptual framework guided me in staying focused, answering the research question, and stopping at an appropriate time.

Engaging in member checking with Lia was an enriching experience, for Lia, for me as a researcher, as well as for the trustworthiness of the study. I was initially very careful to word my interpretations in a way that Lia could relate to, and in a way that remained open for her to make adjustments. Lia agreed with most of my interpretations, and was able to elaborate freely, thereby indicating that she was not trying to “please” me or say the “right” things. She offered meaningful personal opinions and insights, and seemed to appreciate that I had understood her correctly. The member checking process thus added to the depth of the interpretations generated by the study. Lia expressed that the member checking process was interesting and enriching for her, because she knew that the interpretations were correct, but would not have had the language or terminology to be able to express them in such a way before. It thus gave her a different perspective as she learnt a new way of viewing, understanding, and expressing aspects of herself. In light of this, Lia also commented on the conceptual framework and how she found it interesting that something so in-depth could be generated from our sessions. She expressed that she had wondered how I would write about her experiences, and assumed that I would describe the sessions. She seemed to appreciate the depth of the conceptual framework and interpretations, which had personal meaning for her and which she could relate to.

Again, I was happy to note that pleasing me did not seem to be a factor for Lia during member checking. She confidently made a few adjustments to the interpretations, and shared her opinions openly. Thus there did not seem to be any “power issues” between us during this stage of the study; if anything, it appeared that Lia enjoyed taking ownership of the data.

## **3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA**

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This section details the quality criteria adhered to, in order to establish the trustworthiness of the study.

### **3.7.1 CREDIBILITY**

Credibility (i.e. internal validity in quantitative terms) is the demonstration that the research was conducted in such a way so as to ensure the subject was accurately identified and described (De Vos et al., 2005). That is, did my study study what it intended to study?! De Vos et al. (2005:346) maintain that credibility is an inherent strength of qualitative research, which aims to explore or describe a setting or process, because “an in-depth description showing the complexities of variables and interactions will be so embedded with data derived from the setting that it cannot help but be valid. Within the parameters of that setting, population and theoretical framework, the research will be valid”. Thus, by placing boundaries around my study and adequately defining the parameters within which it took place, I have developed its credibility.

Crystallisation has also determined the credibility of my study. This approach to qualitative research methodology recognises that any phenomenon that may be studied is multi-faceted, and may be approached in a multitude of ways, from multiple angles. In crystallisation theory the metaphor of the crystal replaces that of the triangle in triangulation - the use of two or more methods of data collection (Cohen et al., 2000), as discussed in quantitative terms. Crystallisation entails the process of collecting, viewing, and reflecting on multiple data from multiple perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Richer data and a more in-depth analysis can thus be formulated. By creating several sources of data and exploring them from different angles (including mine and Lia's), the various pieces could come together to form a more complete, "whole" picture, thereby aiding the process of crystallisation. It allowed me to become truly immersed in the data, thereby adding to the rich and detailed descriptions I intended to generate.

Crystallisation also allowed me to employ intuition in the research process. Janesick (2004) views intuition and creativity as two key components of qualitative research that go hand in hand. She defines intuition as "immediate apprehension or cognition", and "a way of knowing about the world through insight and exercising one's imagination" (Janesick, 2004:112). I believe that applying my intuition and creativity (i.e. creating something new as opposed to imitating) to this study has contributed towards its credibility. Crystallisation has also enabled the realising of insights *during* the data creation process, and not necessarily only afterwards, allowing me to be guided in my process by the information emerging from it. Crystallisation has facilitated the establishment of credibility in this study, and the attempt to fully explain the richness and complexity of an adolescent's subjective experiences of mindfulness, by studying them from more than one perspective.



### 3.7.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose the term transferability as a qualitative alternative to external validity or generalisability. This implies applicability of the study to other settings or populations. De Vos et al. (2005) state that transferability can be problematic due to the very nature of qualitative research. This can be attributed to its focus on exploring and describing in detail *unique* situations from various perspectives. As discussed above, the case study design's strengths and limitations are paradoxical. This single case generates an in-depth understanding that echoes my interpretivist paradigm, however, it is limited to just one specific and individual context. On the other hand, case studies can provide insight into other similar situations. De Vos et al. (2005) state that by referring to the theoretical framework to show how concepts and models guide data creation and analysis, readers will be able to see how the study links to a body of theory, and other researchers who work within similar parameters will be able to determine transferability. This is clear from my discussion above, which describes the theoretical framework applied in my methodology. A possible limitation, however, is that the (dimensions) extracted from the theory was my own framework, although they were based on an extensive body of scientifically grounded theory on mindfulness. To conclude, I believe that researchers working from a similar theoretical base on mindfulness will be able to determine degrees of transferability of this study to their own contexts, especially related to the theoretical framework and the themes identified within it. The more intricate details of individual adolescent's subjective experiences of mindfulness, however, will remain exactly that – subjective. It remains to be seen what patterns may or may not be identified amongst this particular population in general.

### **3.7.3 DEPENDABILITY**

In quantitative research it is assumed that if the same methods are used with the same sample then the results should be the same, i.e., reliability would be achieved (Cohen et al., 2000). As Cohen et al. (2000) suggest, however, the nature of qualitative research is that it focuses on the uniqueness of situations and thus cannot be exactly replicated, which is a strength as opposed to a methodological weakness. Nonetheless, qualitative research can strive for replication in generating, refining, comparing and validating constructs (Cohen et al., 2000) – i.e. dependability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that dependability involves member checking, debriefing by peers, triangulation, prolonged engagement and persistent observations in the field, reflexive journals, and independent audits. This study made use of several of these techniques (as discussed above) in order to increase dependability. Nonetheless, I believe that, given the paradigm in which I situate myself as a researcher, the strength of this particular study is that it focuses on profound and comprehensive understandings of a unique context, and is thus not entirely dependable.

## **3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

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### **3.8.1 INFORMED CONSENT**

The ethic of informed consent was applied in this study. During our first meeting Lia received adequate information relating to the aim of the study, the procedures that would take place during the investigation, the possible advantages and disadvantages she could experience, as well as my credibility as a researcher. De Vos et al. (2005) outline these key principles of informed consent. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from both Lia and her parents prior to the commencement of the study; they had time to think about it, and they had the right to choose whether they wanted to participate in the research or not. Informed consent in my research also included the right to self-determination; that is, Lia knew that she was able to withdraw from the research at any stage, thus the principle of voluntary participation (Cohen et al., 2000) was adhered to.

### **3.8.2 SAFETY IN PARTICIPATION**

As a researcher I had the ethical responsibility to protect Lia, within reasonable limits, from any form of physical or emotional harm that might have emerged from the research project. All efforts were made to do so during the study, and to ensure that she felt safe, supported and respected at all times. For example, when a traumatic memory emerged for Lia during one of the activities, I made certain that I created a safe and supportive emotional context within which she could explore the memory as it pertained to her experiences of mindfulness. I also explained that should the need arise, alternative support could be arranged for Lia with regards to this experience.

### **3.8.3 TRUST**

The above issue also related to the ethical consideration of trust. Due to the nature of the research project, it was important to create a trusting and safe relationship between Lia and myself, so that she felt able to share personal thoughts and feelings. Every effort was made to ensure that a trusting relationship was established. I am confident that this was successfully realised during the study, given my experiences with Lia during the research process.

### **3.8.4 CONFIDENTIALITY**

This study protected Lia's right to confidentiality as far as possible. Anonymity was retained; real names and any information that may lead to the identification of the participant have not been made available. I discussed all findings with the participant, and she also had the right to decide whether she would like to withhold any of the data from being included in the publication of the study. All media has been handled confidentially. Lia gave her permission and informed consent for the visual data to be included in the final report.

### **3.8.5 CREDIBILITY OF THE RESEARCHER**

Part of my ethical obligation in carrying out this research was to ensure that I was adequately qualified to do so. My training and experience in Educational Psychology thus far contributed to this level of expertise to a large degree. Additionally, my research into mindfulness as well as my personal practice meant that I had a solid foundation in terms of the theoretical knowledge base before I embarked on the journey with Lia. Furthermore, before I began the sessions with Lia I attended an eight-week mindfulness-training course with a prominent South African psychiatrist specialising in this field. All of the above helped to establish my credibility as a researcher, and, I believe, contributed to the quality, trustworthiness and ethical grounding of my study.

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

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Chapter Three has focused on a detailed discussion of the research methodology applied in this study. I put forward the paradigm within which I place myself as a researcher (Interpretivism), and presented the research design (case study). The methods of data creation used in this study were discussed. These included mindfulness sessions, creative expression, journal, interviews, transcripts, and field notes. I also explained the steps taken in the data analysis and interpretation phase of this study, and include my personal reflections on this phase, as well as the data creation process. Credibility, transferability, and dependability were discussed in terms of the quality criteria of this study. Finally, this chapter takes into account the ethical considerations of this study; namely, informed consent, safety in participation, trust, confidentiality, and credibility of the researcher. As mentioned at the outset, I consider the factors presented in this chapter as part of the foundations for this study. Methodology can be seen as the “nuts and bolts” that hold this study together, guide me as a researcher, and ensure trustworthiness of the study. Without this “map” and these principles, this study would not be possible, and the purpose and rationale of the study as described in Chapter One would go unfulfilled. The next chapter (Chapter Four) presents the results and findings of this study, as interpreted within the applied conceptual framework.

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## **Chapter 4**

### **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

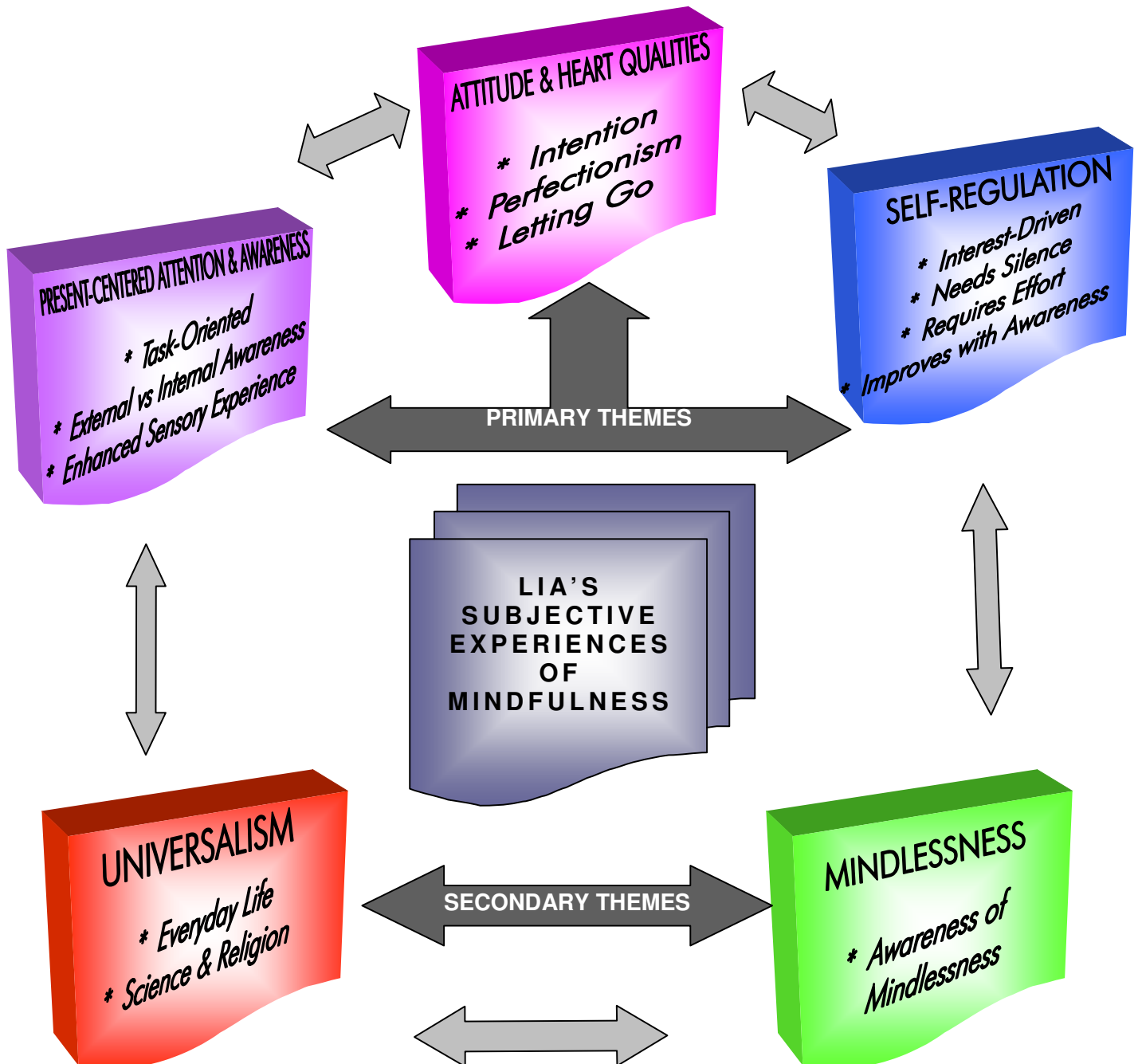
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#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this chapter I present the findings from my study, as I unravel the answer to the main research question – How does an adolescent subjectively experience mindfulness? As illustrated in Chapter Two, the phenomenon of mindfulness can be seen as comprised of five major components, each of which interacts dynamically with the others in order to create the whole. I refer to these aspects of mindfulness that I extracted from the literature review as dimensions of mindfulness. The dimensions I identified from the literature are ‘present-centered awareness and attention’; ‘attitude and heart qualities’; ‘self-regulation’; ‘universalism of mindfulness’; and ‘mindlessness’. These dimensions of mindfulness have been applied as a framework within which to explore Lia’s subjective experiences of mindfulness, as follows:

Figure 4.1: **DIMENSIONS OF MINDFULNESS FRAMEWORK**



As indicated in Chapter Three, within each dimension, several themes have emerged from the data that serve to illustrate the apparent nature and details of Lia's mindfulness experiences. These are presented in the following discussion. Each theme is discussed and illustrated using a direct quote from Lia, in order to emphasise her "voice" in this study and highlight how the themes emerged from her own words. The findings of this study are differentiated in terms of primary and secondary themes. It seems that Lia experienced primary themes within the first three dimensions of mindfulness ('present-centered attention and awareness', 'attitude and heart qualities', and 'self-regulation'), with the last two dimensions ('universalism of mindfulness' and 'mindlessness') indicating secondary themes experienced. I examine each dimension individually, and describe the themes that were identified within each during the data analysis and interpretation stage of this study. Although these are presented one at a time, as mentioned, it is important to note that the dimensions of mindfulness are closely interlinked, and come together in a dynamic relationship to create the full experience of mindfulness. I encourage the reader to examine these findings in light of this wholeness; indeed, the findings themselves appear to reflect this inherent inter-connectedness of the dimensions of mindfulness, reflecting once more the complexity of this deceptively simple phenomenon.

## **4.2 PRIMARY THEMES**

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### **4.2.1 PRESENT-CENTERED ATTENTION AND AWARENESS**

As illustrated in Chapter Two, present-centered attention and awareness is really at the core of mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is about human consciousness, and consciousness includes our awareness of various happenings in both our external and internal reality, as well as the more specific focused awareness (i.e. attention) that we are able to direct to any of these happenings (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown et al., 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness requires one's attention and awareness to be focused purely in the present moment. An analysis of the research data reveals three themes that Lia experienced in relation to the 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension of mindfulness. These include being



task-oriented, focusing her awareness more on external happenings than internal ones, and having enhanced sensory experiences when focused in the present moment.

#### **4.2.1.1 Task-Oriented**

##### ***What am I supposed to be doing?***

As Lia experienced mindfulness, her present-centered attention and awareness seemed predominantly task-oriented. That is, she usually asked herself the question “What am I supposed to be doing right now?” and attempted to direct her attention accordingly.

- ❖ *“I’m trying, I’m focusing on the conversation...but like we discussed previously, being aware of what’s around, externally and internally”*  
(Session 2:32)

In this instance, Lia perceived our conversation as the task to focus on. Thus she was directing her *attention* to the conversation, but also indicated her *awareness* of other external and internal experiences. I suggested that on an external level, she was aware of the details of our physical location, which she confirmed. She also added that she was aware of a past memory that was happening internally. Lia’s comment implied that she was aware of her attention being pulled towards the memory; however, her “task-orientedness” helped her to keep it focused on the conversation. During the sessions Lia referred to several life tasks that she felt she was supposed to be directing her present-centered attention to at various times; for example, studying, writing, listening, speaking, cooking and listening to music. In our work together, she perceived tasks like the above as concentrating on the activity at hand. In the following example taken from a mindfulness meditation of which the aim was to maintain present-centered attention and awareness on the physical body, Lia indicated her attempt to focus her attention on a specific activity or “task” that she had identified.

- ❖ *“I think that I was mindful, not as mindful, but I was mindful, but not with regards to the meditation, more personal mindfulness, so I couldn’t really focus on each body part so I wasn’t mindful in that sense, but like bringing my attention back and listening at least to the meditation.”*

*(Session 5:5)*

This example illustrates how Lia viewed the “tasks” of this mindfulness meditation. To her, the tasks were to listen to the guided meditation, as well as to focus her attention on each body part. Her comments indicate that she felt she was mindful because she was able to fulfil the task of maintaining present-centered attention on listening to the meditation, although she decided she was not mindful with regards to the second task of maintaining attention and awareness on each body part. By “personal mindfulness” Lia was referring to the fact that she was aware that her attention was slipping, and was able to re-focus it to listen to the meditation. This confirms Lia’s experience of mindfulness as being able to keep her attention focused on the task she was occupied with. Furthermore, in the following example the difference between attention and awareness is illustrated in that Lia’s awareness (of the external noises in this case) was present-centered, however, she was more concerned with focusing her *attention* in the present, on the specific task.

- ❖ *“I can hear the cars and the crickets and those children playing but I’m still trying to focus on what you’re saying.”*

*(Session 3:3)*

Thus it seems that Lia experienced the present-centered aspect of mindfulness as more related to attention as opposed to awareness; to her, attention to a particular task in the present moment was more of a priority than her general awareness of the present. It appeared that this was a conscious decision for Lia; she experienced mindfulness as purposefully deciding to maintain the focus of her attention on the identified task. This aspect of her experience is also related to *intention* in mindfulness, that is, the intention to stay focused on the task, which is discussed in more detail below where I address the ‘attitude and heart qualities’ dimension of mindfulness.

While focusing her attention on identified tasks, it seems as if Lia often engaged in thoughts *about* the tasks or her experiences of them, as opposed to the simple attention and awareness of her experiences alone. Her comments indicate that while attempting to maintain her present-centered attention and awareness on a task, her attention would become distracted by thoughts about her experiences of the task. For example,

- ❖ *“...with the lemon I knew what it was, with this I didn’t know at all so I was more focused I guess on trying to figure out what it was rather than tasting it more.”*  
(Session 2:20)

In this instance, the identified task was to focus present-centered attention and awareness on eating goji berries, which Lia had never tasted before. With hindsight she realised that her attention became distracted from the original task as thoughts about identifying the berries came forth. Thoughts *about* her experiences raised questions to answer, and answering the questions became a new task for Lia to re-direct her attention towards.

- ❖ *“I focused all my attention on my stomach but then I was like, ‘what is this feeling?’ ...almost like the second session with those berries, I was like, ‘what am I tasting?’ so I was quite confused but then I was like, “but it feels like butterflies, like when I’m nervous” so I just wrote it down.”*  
(Session 5:15)

As discussed in Chapter Two, the literature on mindfulness suggests that thoughts *about* our experiences are one step removed from the actual present moment (Germer, 2005). During Lia’s present-centered attention, she apparently became aware of thoughts about her experiences, which then became new tasks to re-direct her attention towards. So she was engaging in mindfulness in the sense that her attention was pulling “figures” out of the “ground” of her awareness. In this example she first focused attention on her stomach, then became aware of a feeling, and brought that feeling into focus with her attention. What is different to what the literature suggests however, is the next step she takes in terms of thinking about the feeling and trying to identify it.

The literature review indicated that authors in the field of mindfulness appear to unanimously agree that mindfulness is primarily concerned with a fixation on the present moment (Bishop et al., 2004; Germer, 2005; Kabta-Zinn, 2003; Langer, 2000; Shapiro et al., 2006; Teasdale et al., 1995; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008.) The focus is so strongly rooted in the present moment; it almost relates to pure consciousness alone, and thus excludes our interpretations of the unfolding experiences. It is solely an observation of one's thoughts, feelings and sensations as they change from moment to moment (Bishop et al., 2004), and one therefore has to suspend any interpretation of what is being, simply, noticed (Shapiro et al., 2006). Thus if Lia had experienced this aspect of mindfulness, she would have noticed the "feeling" in her stomach, but refrained from "stopping" to interpret and identify what it was. This specific example is linked to what Brown and Ryan (2003) refer to as a form of "reflexive consciousness", explained in Chapter Two. In this case, Lia became engaged in thinking about aspects of herself, as opposed to the more "pure" present-centered attention and awareness of mindfulness.

Lia's experience of 'present-centered attention and awareness' in mindfulness being predominantly task-oriented was a main theme throughout the research. On the whole, her specific experience in this regard appears to be unrelated to what the theoretical literature implies. This study suggests that Lia experienced mindfulness as directing her attention to a specific task in the present, as opposed to directing both attention and awareness to the general unfolding of experiences, as they occur in each moment. Lia's experience was to engage in interpretations of what was important to direct her attention towards, as well as interpretations of present experiences. It appears that for the most part, she did not experience mindfulness as more "neutral" and focused predominantly on the "quality of consciousness itself" (Brown & Ryan, 2003). By being task-oriented, Lia was concerned about what her attention should or shouldn't be focused on, and in this process, tended to favour present-centered attention over awareness.

In addition, her task-oriented attention appeared to interfere with a fundamental clarity of awareness, and possibly prevented her from experiencing mindfulness as a “polished mirror”, which simply reflects what passes before it, unbiased by conceptual thoughts about what is happening at the given moment (Brown et al., 2007). That is, Lia seemingly tended to involve her attention in more interpretations of her present experiences, instead of observation alone. This noted, however, it is crucial to point out the extreme difficulty of attaining this “perfect” state of mindful awareness. Nowhere in the literature is it implied that this is an easy state to achieve; rather, it is clear that mindfulness practice is exactly that – practice! As Jon Kabat-Zinn (2006) explains, even the masters of mindfulness meditation will claim that they know nothing about the subject after seemingly endless hours and years of mindfulness practice.

This brings to light one of the limitations of this study and something that must be kept in mind while examining the findings; the concept of mindfulness was completely new to Lia and she had never practiced it before. Furthermore, her exposure to mindfulness was limited to our discussions, which included my personal interpretations, Jon Kabat-Zinn’s CD, and her own “experimentation” with guided and non-guided mindfulness activities. Thus this study can almost be viewed as an initial “experimentation” with mindfulness for Lia, and her subjective experiences thereof are described, bearing in mind the identified limitations of this particular context. I have discussed the above in relation to Lia’s experiences within the first theme of being task-oriented in her ‘present-centered attention and awareness’; however, this limitation is significant for *all* results from the study discussed in this chapter. The second theme to emerge from the data relating to the ‘present-centered attention and awareness’ dimension of mindfulness is Lia’s experience of external versus internal awareness.

#### **4.2.1.2 External vs. Internal Awareness**

##### ***What's going on around me?***

The 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension of mindfulness includes an attention and awareness of present experiences as they unfold each moment in both our internal and external realities. Thus when we are being mindful, we are aware of experiences around us, such as sounds or other people, and we also observe our own internal thoughts, feelings or sensations as they occur (Bishop et al., 2004). In Lia's experiences of this dimension of mindfulness, the theme of being more focused on her external present experiences emerged. She expressed that, as she began to understand what mindfulness is, her awareness of external experiences in the present moment increased.

- ❖ *"I think it enhanced my understanding of what it is or what I'm doing - the things around me - a lot more...I wasn't aware of everything else previously...like for example when I was watching TV I wouldn't be aware of, oh there's children playing outside, or there's birds like chirping or whatever, or there's a wind blowing, I would just be watching TV and also not really grasping what I'm watching on TV. So now I'm aware of everything else as well."*  
(Session 4:11)

This example illustrates that Lia seemed to experience the 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension of mindfulness as becoming more aware of external happenings in her present moment. In this case, these were mostly sounds in her environment, which she would have been unaware of previously. This particular example further links to the theme of enhanced sensory experiences with mindfulness, which is discussed below. Lia expressed here that her sensory experience (the sense of hearing in this instance) became enhanced as she experienced more of the sounds around her at the time. It is also apparent that as Lia tended to be more aware of external occurrences in her present moments, she interpreted these as distracting her from maintaining her mindful attention in the present, on the task she had prioritised.

- ❖ *“...it was wandering (her mind) because you can still hear the distractions outside, so I found myself at times focusing more on that than I was with the meditation.”*  
(Session 4:18)

This once again highlights the relationship between attention and awareness in mindfulness practice. As discussed, mindfulness entails maintaining one’s attention and awareness in the present moment. These two phenomena are interlinked, in that attention is really a focused awareness; attention is conscious awareness focused on a particular thing for a certain amount of time. True mindfulness practice requires a flexible flow between attention and awareness in the present moment. In this example, Lia had identified the meditation as the task to focus her present-centered attention on. She demonstrated mindfulness in that she became aware of external sounds in the environment and then moved her focused attention to them. However, she interpreted these sounds as distractions that prevented her full attention on the meditation task. Once again, the interpretations Lia made of her present experiences illustrate the difference between her own experiences of mindfulness and those described in the literature, which emphasise refraining from interpretation or thoughts *about* the experiences, and focusing on pure present-centered attention and awareness itself (Germer, 2005).

The theme of external versus internal awareness also revealed that, at times, Lia found it easier to focus her present-centered attention and awareness on external as opposed to internal phenomena (which possibly explains why she was more distracted by external experiences).

- ❖ *“I can always figure out what’s happening around me but never what is happening inside me, well I find it easier that way...”*  
(Session 3:12)

This comment illustrates Lia's general preference for maintaining her present-centered attention and awareness on external happenings. There were three discernable occasions during the study when Lia indicated a focus on internal experiences. One was during a mindfulness activity that she performed alone – the body awareness meditation.

- ❖ *“...it was just like...I could feel it but not feel it, but internally I could feel it but externally I wouldn't feel everything rushing down, so I think it was mind over matter...I was like thinking about it but it wouldn't physically happen...just as soon as I closed my eyes, everything in me would like rush to that point, and it would slow down and then I would focus on it and what did I feel there, or how did it feel.”*

*(Session 5:10)*

Lia's description of how she went about her body awareness meditation illustrates that in this case she was acutely aware of her internal as opposed to external experiences. It appears she made a determined effort (it was “mind over matter”) to focus her attention and awareness internally. Lia furthermore described rich visual experiences of the sensations in her physical body, which she perceived by focusing her attention and awareness on each body part, in the present moments during this activity.

- ❖ *“...with my nose, I smelt flowers, like I was in a, for that one I was in a garden and then I was smelling flowers. With the lips, I didn't see myself eating the sweet but that's what it tasted like... and then in the ears I could hear bees, the buzzing of bees... my eyes, I drew chillies but it wasn't like hot, but the warmth of a chilli.”*

*(Session 5:19)*



Thus Lia did experience internal present-centered attention and awareness during this activity, in the form of perceiving her bodily sensations and the visual images that accompanied them. What is interesting to note, however, is that her experience focused predominantly on images associated with physical sensations; she did not express much relating to the type of internal experiences that include personal thoughts and emotions. These forms of internal experiences were expressed on the second two occasions when Lia focused her attention on strong memories of the past, as they arose from her awareness during our conversations as well as her listening to Jon Kabat-Zinn's discussions on mindfulness. Lia reported that her attention was instantly taken back to a past experience when she heard the words "state of mind" while listening to the compact disc. She described the past memory and her associated emotions; it was a traumatic experience for her. When we discussed it Lia was able to focus her attention on her internal experiences at the time, that is, the memories.

- ❖ *"...so that's what made me like, I don't know, scared I guess. Because you know usually what you see in movies isn't true, so seeing this and knowing that it actually could happen is scary...traumatic."*  
(Session 2:4)

When I discussed this interpretation with Lia, she confirmed that generally she was more aware of external experiences during her present-centered attention and awareness in mindfulness. She also agreed that she became more aware of internal experiences when they arose from past memories. She explained this as due to the fact that the memories contained more "concentrated feelings" (i.e. intense), and she had thought about them often, resulting in her improved ability to identify the emotions. She expressed that it was harder for her to "think on her feet".

Thus it seems that the familiarity of the memory content facilitated Lia's ability to focus on an internal experience. Similarly, during the "mindful eating" activity, Lia was initially focused on her external present experiences, until she became aware of a past memory in her internal reality. Her experience then changed as she switched the focus of her attention and awareness from external to internal phenomena related to the past.

- ❖ *“Before I tasted it, I noticed the textures and the colours, the smell, which took me back to my house in Durban...we had a lemon tree, so yeah, I used to eat a lot of them...I was about five I think... (what were you feeling, when the smell took you back to the lemon tree at your home?) ...mostly joy because I would always climb the tree, get a lemon and sit by myself to eat it, so ja, pleasure”*  
*(Session 2:11)*

In these instances, Lia was able to focus on her internal experiences as they related to the memories, however, this was obviously in direct contrast to what the literature indicates about full focus on the present moment alone, which is the fundamental nature of mindfulness. Teasdale et al. (1995:33) specifically emphasise one of the crucial aspects of mindfulness as being “fully in the present moment...without reflecting backwards on past memories...” What can be noted, however, is that Lia was mindful in that she became aware of the memory. It was only once she directed her *attention* to the memory that she disengaged from full experience of the *present* moment. In light of this, it is useful to again examine the relationship between attention and awareness. Although they are intertwined in a cyclical relationship, it seems that awareness exists before attention. That is, we must become aware of something’s existence before we can direct our attention, or focused awareness, to it.

To conclude the theme of external versus internal awareness in Lia's experience of the 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension of mindfulness, several points have been illustrated. Firstly, Lia experienced an increased awareness of her external environment both during and aside from her mindfulness practice. Additionally, she interpreted her awareness of external phenomena as distractions that hampered the maintenance of focused attention on a task. Finally, although Lia tended to favour external awareness, she experienced internal awareness as it related to strong past memories. Lia's subjective experience of mindfulness in this regard thus emphasises that her attention and awareness were focused more on external present experiences, rather than on internal ones. This theme is not evident in the theoretical literature, which describes mindfulness as including both elements of reality. If anything, in my interpretation, it appears that the literature almost subtly reinforces mindfulness of our internal world more than the external, which suggests that Lia had a contradictory experience in this respect. Lia's enhanced sensory experience as mentioned above, however, does correlate with what the literature describes as part of mindfulness.

### **4.2.1.3 Enhanced Sensory Experience**

#### ***Now I can really taste that!***

In terms of the ‘present-centered attention and awareness’ dimension of mindfulness, another theme that emerged as part of Lia’s experience was enhanced sensory experience. This was particularly evident during the “mindful eating” activities, but also during the breathing and body awareness meditation, as illustrated above. With her increased attention to the task at hand, Lia expressed that she experienced sensations much more intensely.

- ❖ *“I don’t really pay attention to the taste at school, just tastes like, ‘Oh it’s sweet’, and I like chocolate so I eat it, but now I can taste, I can actually hear myself eating, I could hear the crunch of the rice crispies, the coconut and again the sweetness of the chocolate... It was more, much more intense than when I ate this before, I think I enjoyed it now best, more than ever I guess, because I actually got to taste, no really taste it!”*  
(Session 2:27)

Langer (2000) describes mindfulness as being actively engaged in the present, noticing new things, and being sensitive to context. The above example illustrates this aspect of Lia’s mindful eating experience. Mindfulness entails being *fully* engaged in the present; it is a form of enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

- ❖ *“I guess now the taste is more enhanced, because I’m focusing 100% on it.”*

As Lia's comment demonstrates, it follows then, that with *full* attention and awareness, one would become aware of enhanced sensory experiences as they occur in the present moment. Siegel (2007) explains that being awake to our senses results in direct contact with our moment-to-moment experiences. He elaborates that the role of the senses in our daily lives is to "wake us up, to pull us away from automaticity, to sharpen the acuity of awareness so that life is both richer and more present in the moment" (Siegel, 2007:77). Lia demonstrates this increased awareness and richer sensory experience in the following remark:

- ❖ *"I think I'm using all of my senses being mindful, yeah."*  
(Session 4:12)

In light of the above, it is evident that Lia had experiences congruent to those described and expected from the theoretical perspectives on mindfulness, regarding a heightened sensory experience resulting from full attention and awareness in the present.

This first section of Chapter Four has discussed the first dimension of mindfulness I identified from the literature review – i.e. 'present-centered attention and awareness'. Three themes emerged from the data of this study that illustrate Lia's subjective experiences of this dimension, namely task-orientedness, external versus internal awareness, and enhanced sensory experience. Overall, it is apparent that Lia's subjective experiences of this mindfulness dimension differ largely to what the theoretical literature implies.

Lia's experiences indicated that she interpreted present-centered attention and awareness as prioritizing specific tasks to direct her *attention* towards in the present moment. This diverges from theoretical explanations of mindfulness as engaging both *attention and awareness* in present moment-to-moment experiences, regardless of what they may bring. As Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) point out, mindfulness entails a general awareness of all elements of consciousness and the flow of personal experiences, even if the content seems "off-task". Lia did experience this flow when she became aware of past memories, although she then shifted her attention to the past and lost the focus on the present that is so crucial to mindfulness practice. Analysis of the data further reveals Lia's experiences to include

*interpretations* of her thoughts and happenings in the current moment. This included interpreting thoughts about her identified tasks as well as her internal and external encounters, of which she tended to experience more of the latter. By engaging in interpretations, Lia's experience of the 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension of mindfulness became one or several steps removed from direct and full experience of the present moment alone, which is emphasised throughout mindfulness literature.

Having noted this however, I believe that at this point it is important to consider the paradoxical nature of what this study has attempted to capture. This research has relied on language in order to understand and describe Lia's experiences. The interview method applied in the study meant that Lia had no choice but to try to explain her mindfulness experiences in words. As soon as we engage in language, we are engaging in interpretations of our experiences. Thus the methodological implication of attempting to capture Lia's mindfulness experiences is that interpretation, in a way, cannot be avoided. This perspective should be kept in mind and used as a "backdrop" from which to view the findings of Lia's subjective experiences of mindfulness as described in this study.

Nonetheless, even with the inherent interpretation that accompanies use of language, it is evident that some aspects of Lia's experiences of the 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension of mindfulness are parallel to what the literature describes. These include her ability to combine both attention and awareness in the present moment, and the basic fact that she realised the salience of the present moment as fundamental to mindfulness, during her practice. Furthermore, the above discussion illustrates Lia's enhanced sensory experiences brought about by her present-centered attention and awareness - an element of mindfulness that is implied by the literature as well. Finally, it seems that further meaning can be drawn from the apparent relationship between the themes of Lia's experiences with the 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension of mindfulness. It could be that by remaining task-oriented, Lia experienced more external than internal awareness. She thus also interpreted external phenomena as distractions to the task she was focusing on, thereby possibly becoming more aware of external happenings than internal ones, as they distracted her task-oriented attention. By remaining task-oriented, Lia also had enhanced sensory

experiences, as she was focused on the task of experiencing whatever she was occupied with to the full. I now shift the focus to examine Lia's subjective experiences of mindfulness as viewed from within the 'attitude and heart qualities' dimension extracted from the literature review in this research.

#### **4.2.2 ATTITUDE AND HEART QUALITIES**

At the heart of mindfulness lie what Kabat-Zinn (2003) refers to as the *heart* qualities. Compassion, non-judgment, acceptance, gentleness, kindness, openness, and friendliness to oneself – these are essentials for true mindfulness. The heart qualities thus refer to the attitude with which one practices mindfulness. As illustrated in Chapter Two, the attitudinal dimension of mindfulness also includes the important aspect of intention, that is, the intention to be mindful in the first place. This attitudinal dimension of mindfulness forms part of the framework within which Lia's subjective experiences have been interpreted. It appears that Lia's intention to be mindful increased as her understanding of mindfulness grew, and the following themes emerge regarding her heart qualities; a sense of "perfectionism" and "letting go" of the negative aspects of perfectionism such as self-criticism and self-judgment. These are discussed as two themes, however, it is important to observe that they can actually be seen in terms of a continuum of experience. During the study, Lia initially experienced the theme of perfectionism but then progressed towards "letting it go", as illustrated below.

#### **4.2.2.1 Intention**

##### ***I intend to...***

A similar theme of development emerged for Lia with regards to the intention aspect of her mindfulness experience. As Bishop et al. (2004) point out; intention is a fundamental component of mindfulness that has often been overlooked in the theoretical literature. Intention is vital, however, and can be viewed as a platform for mindfulness, as mindfulness necessitates the intention to direct attention and awareness somewhere (Germer, 2005). It could be said that without intention, one could never begin mindfulness practice in the first place! In Lia's experience of this dimension of mindfulness, the theme of understanding mindfulness emerged, that is, as her awareness of what mindfulness is increased, so too did her intention to be mindful.

- ❖ *“The first session, your phone rang and my attention like immediately went there, but now I can hear the children playing but I'm not focusing on them. (So what are you saying to yourself about that?)...'Focus on what you're doing”, and like I'm not letting any distractions in while I'm talking to you, although I can hear them around me.”*  
(Session 3:4)
- ❖ *“Yesterday I tried to be mindful and I ate very little, surprisingly...so like with every bite I took, I tried to, not realise, but be aware of what I was eating, like each different part of the bite I just took...the flavours, ingredients...I was concentrating a lot more.”*  
(Session 3:6)
- ❖ *“...basic things like when I'm doing my homework or if I'm watching TV, not really letting anything get into, well, distract me or if I am distracted then bringing, focusing my attention again.”*  
(Session 4:6)



The data indicate that within the attitudinal dimension of mindfulness, Lia's experience was that her intention to be mindful in various situations increased as she developed her understanding of mindfulness and how it works, especially the fact that it requires an intention to be mindful to start out with. Bishop et al. (2004) maintain that intention is the goal or personal vision that one brings to one's mindfulness practice, and that intention is dynamic and evolves over time. These examples illustrate Lia's various goals, in terms of her own personal understandings of mindfulness. The first quote highlights Lia's goal of keeping her attention focused on our conversation. It also ties in to the theme of being task-oriented, as discussed above. Lia perceived mindfulness as maintaining her present-centered attention on the identified task. As she realised and understood this aspect of mindfulness, her intention to remain task-oriented increased. The same applies to the last example, which also illustrates Lia's intention to maintain attention on the task at hand, that is, doing homework or watching television. This comment includes Lia's intention to bring her mind back to the present when she finds it wandering.

Thus it seems that Lia's intention to be mindful (according to her personal understandings of mindfulness) increased as her awareness of what mindfulness entails, developed. Similarly, after she had experienced "mindful eating" in our second session, Lia brought her intention to be mindful to eating at home. This discussion describes the intention aspect of the attitudinal dimension in mindfulness. As discussed previously, the "heart qualities" of mindfulness also form an essential part of this dimension.

#### **4.2.2.2 Heart Qualities**

##### **(i) Perfectionism**

***I want do what is right and best...***

As themes of Lia's subjective experiences emerged during the data analysis process, I carefully deliberated over what to call this particular theme. The word "perfectionism" seemed negative and filled with ambiguous meanings, all of which could be differently interpreted by each individual. I eventually decided that, having worked closely with Lia, I had a fairly accurate idea of what her own understanding of perfectionism would be, and how she applied it to her experiences. She confidently confirmed this during the member checking discussions without evidence of sensitivity to the term. For Lia, perfectionism is about "getting it right". She strives to do things to the best of her ability in order to increase her self-confidence and pride, as well as to impress her best upon others. She has positive connotations of perfectionism and views it as a strength to aspire to. After our discussion however, Lia expressed her realization of the self-judgment and criticism that occurs with perfectionism, and that she also began to realise this during our previous sessions. This more subconscious aspect of perfectionism for Lia was what emerged from the data. Although she did experience a shift in attitude towards the end, during most of the study it was evident that Lia found it difficult to apply the heart qualities to her mindfulness practice. She initially approached the research process with a sense of pressure to do what was "right", along with the associated self-judgments, although later realised that she was quite "harsh" on herself.

- ❖ *"I think at first I was very harsh with myself, whereas now that I've learnt more about it I'm not at all, especially with my mind and it wandering."*  
(Session 5:20)

By saying she was quite harsh on herself, Lia was referring to the judgments she made about the quality of her mindfulness. For example,

- ❖ *“Now my attention wanders! ...so that wasn’t very mindful! ...because my attention went there straight away and I was focused on that, rather than, I’m supposed to be telling you what I think of it.”*

*(Session 1:21)*

This comment highlights the judgment that Lia made about her perceived lack of mindfulness. It also emphasises her task-orientedness as discussed above. Lia’s judgments indicate that she frequently did not fully experience the heart qualities of mindfulness. Part of the perfectionism theme includes a sense of pressure Lia experienced to do what was perceived as “right”, hence she often referred to what she was “supposed” to be doing. This again ties in with her task-orientedness; she perceived that the right thing to do was to focus her attention on the task set by herself or others.

- ❖ *“I felt like I had to focus on each part so I knew what I’m feeling but I couldn’t... (so you felt...)... like, under pressure I guess”*

*(Session 5:2)*

Underlying these comments seems to be a lack of compassion and acceptance, which accompanies the theme of perfectionism and indicates the lack of heart qualities experienced by Lia in her mindfulness practice. Interestingly, during the initial discussion she was able to understand the theory of compassion and non-judgment, and recognized the need for “self-acceptance” as she referred to it. For most of the research process, however, the theme indicates that she did not apply it easily.

- ❖ *“I also thought maybe I’m being stupid and just can’t think of what it is and maybe I have eaten it before...like why can’t I recognize this?!”*

*(Session 2:22)*

- ❖ *“I kept thinking, ‘Oh how horrible is this!’ and, ‘Who is going to look at it?’”*

*(Session 2:34)*

As illustrated, the theme of perfectionism emerged within the attitudinal dimension of Lia’s mindfulness experiences. This involved Lia’s personal sense of pressure to do what was “right” and to do her best at it. She was quite “harsh” on herself when she interpreted that she was not achieving this goal, and thereby appeared to demonstrate that she did not experience the heart qualities associated with mindfulness, as described in the literature. It appears that during the study, Lia’s self-criticism almost acted as a barrier preventing her from fully engaging in mindfulness. Her attention and awareness seemed to be frequently interrupted by her inner “voice”, which hampered her full involvement in the process.

This theme also links to the notion of “reflexive consciousness” (Brown & Ryan, 2003) as discussed earlier. Lia’s thinking about her thinking and interpretation of her experiences interfered with a full experience of mindfulness. On the other hand, it could be that part of this process was her attempt to reach a *better state* of mindfulness, which makes sense in terms of her own definition of what it means to be perfectionist. Even so, within the ‘attitude and heart qualities’ dimension of mindfulness, it seems that Lia experienced difficulty embracing the ideals of compassion, gentleness and non-judgment towards herself for a large part of the study. This theme is dynamic, however, and as mentioned, Lia appeared to make an attitudinal shift, when she realised that she could “let go” of the self-criticism and judgmental aspect of perfectionism. Thus further on in the study, she appeared to begin to embrace the idea of compassion and non-judgment towards herself, thereby experiencing more of the heart qualities so fundamental to true mindfulness practice.

**(ii) Letting Go**

***I don't have to do this...***

- ❖ *“I think now it's more relaxed and..... not as strict, so, well not strict at all, I guess, so I would just like, you know, ‘Oh my mind is wandering let me just bring it back.’”*  
(Session 5:4)

It seems that Lia's experience of the attitudinal dimension of mindfulness shifted from an initial perfectionism towards a realization that she did not need to be so “harsh” on herself in order to maintain her attention and to achieve the best possible experience of mindfulness. She seemed to realise that she could adopt a more accepting, compassionate and non-judgmental attitude towards herself and her mindfulness practice.

- ❖ *“...but sometimes I'm like quite harsh with myself but then I'm like, ‘I don't have to do this, you know, I could just bring my mind back, I don't have to tell myself to do it.’”*  
(Session 5:22)

Lia also demonstrated an awareness of her perfectionism to some degree, and indicated her realization that she didn't need to aspire to this all the time.

- ❖ *“I'm not getting angry at myself anymore - that ‘Why didn't I get this the first time she explained it?!’ kind of thing...(laughs)...I can be normal!”*  
(Session 4:14)

Siegel (2007:16) distinguishes between paying attention with COAL (curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love), and preconceived ideas that imprison the mind – e.g. “I shouldn’t have hit my foot, I’m so clumsy...what is wrong with me!” He states that these kinds of “shoulds and ought-to’s” prevent us from being kind to ourselves, and from living mindfully. COAL is a fundamental cornerstone of mindfulness practice; this is a major theme evident throughout the literature, albeit referred to in differing terms.

Lia’s initial experiences of the ‘attitude and heart qualities’ dimension of mindfulness were in direct contrast to what the literature describes; she seemed to engage in the self-critical and judging aspects of perfectionism. Nevertheless, what is certainly evident from this theme is that there was a shift in her experience – from being perfectionist in her attitude towards mindfulness practice initially, to beginning to embrace more of the fundamental heart qualities, or COAL, associated with true mindfulness. Thus her experiences of this mindfulness dimension indicated a fluid and dynamic process, with a move along a continuum of heart qualities, from being perfectionist towards embracing self-acceptance and love. The data indicate that at times, Lia “jumped back and forth” on this continuum, and was not necessarily consistent in her applications of heart qualities. This can possibly be explained in light of her “beginner status” as a practitioner of mindfulness. Indeed, it could even be explained in terms of her “humanness”; it is my opinion that as human beings we are constantly challenged to uphold the virtues of “heart qualities” and to apply them to others and ourselves. Shapiro and Schwartz (2000) describe that by using mindfulness qualities (the heart qualities), people focus attention on themselves (or others) in a nonjudgmental and gentle way, open to whatever they may find. This attention requires impartiality, letting go, patience, and a “willingness to just listen to and accept in lovingkindness all the parts of one’s whole” (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000:129). The heart qualities are thus brought to one’s mindfulness practice in the way that one pays attention. Mindfulness requires that one regulate one’s attention along with the adoption of these qualities. This dimension is thus closely linked to the third dimension of mindfulness as identified in Chapter Two – self-regulation.

### **4.2.3 SELF-REGULATION**

The concept of self-regulation was discussed in Chapter Two; it is typically conceptualized as the “conscious, intentional effort to control one’s thoughts, emotions, or behaviours” (Leary et al., 2006:1803). In the context of mindfulness, however, I have identified the dimension of self-regulation as it applies to attention and awareness. Shapiro and Schwartz (2000) explain that self-regulation is a process whereby stable functioning and adaptability to change are maintained in a system, and that this process is based on “feedback loops” that can be enhanced through attention. The development of attention, therefore, is involved in all self-regulation techniques (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000). Self-regulation in this regard is one of the cornerstones of mindfulness, as mindfulness practice requires various attention-regulating functions that must be performed in order to achieve a mindful state. These include regulating one’s conscious awareness, sustaining attention and awareness in the present moment, and switching focus between attention and awareness (Brown & Ryan, 2003). We are essentially self-regulating beings (Kabat-Zinn, 2006), and mindfulness would be unattainable if we were unable to regulate our own attention and awareness. An analysis of the data reveals several themes that Lia experienced with regards to the self-regulation dimension of mindfulness. These are that her capacity for self-regulation is generally interest-driven, and in mindfulness, needs quiet, requires effort and improves with awareness.

#### **4.2.3.1 Interest-Driven**

##### ***Mmm...this appeals to me!***

The first theme clearly identified from the data analysis is that Lia generally finds it easier to regulate, or maintain the focus of her attention when she finds the subject matter interesting or appealing. She referred to this theme throughout the research, indicating that a like or interest in something motivated a desire to learn and to pay better attention, but a dislike contributed to a lack of self-regulation to focus her attention. Sansone and Thoman (2005) suggest that interest is an important motivator of self-regulation. They explain that models of self-regulation typically include motivation in terms of goals; motivation to self-regulate fluctuates according to how much people value their goals and expect to attain them, however they assert that interest is also a powerful factor contributing to one's motivation for self-regulation. This assertion relates to self-regulation in general, and not to how it is applied to the practice of mindfulness. Nonetheless it serves to enhance an understanding of Lia's own experiences of self-regulation being interest-driven in general. There seems to be a gap in the literature regarding the role of interest in self-regulation of attention in mindfulness practice. What the literature does indicate, is that self-regulation of attention in mindfulness is linked to intention, which is discussed below. This further illustrates the inter-connectedness of the dimensions of mindfulness that I identified.

Lia referred to the theme of her self-regulation of attention being interest-driven in various contexts, including schoolwork, lessons, watching television, and learning to play a musical instrument, for example. The following comments illustrate this theme as it applies to different aspects of Lia's life. At this point in the research, Lia had not experienced any of the mindfulness activities yet, and was referring to paying attention in her various life contexts. These comments are located in context of the first session, when we discussed mindfulness as a concept and explored its meaning. Although these do not relate directly to Lia's experiences of the mindfulness activities, they indicate her perception of mindfulness as paying attention, and that self-regulating in order to pay attention is interest-driven for her.



- ❖ *“I pay a lot of attention because I want to learn a musical instrument.”*  
(Session 1:6)
  
- ❖ *“In Bio I take a great interest, so I know my work really well, and make sure I understand, but in Physics I don’t like it at all, so...”*  
(Session 1: 5)
  
- ❖ *“If I’m watching the TV and I don’t find the programme interesting then I lose interest completely and I don’t remember what happened...yeah, I would just be watching but not gaining anything from it.”*  
(Session 1:6)

This last comment goes further than simply illustrating that Lia’s self-regulation is interest-driven. She appears to realise that the lack of sustained attention detracts from the quality of her experience, resulting in her watching TV “mindlessly”. Lia referred to the theme of interest-driven self-regulation generally, however, the focus of this study is on Lia’s subjective experiences of self-regulation as they apply specifically to mindfulness. From this perspective, the theme of Lia’s self-regulation being interest-driven appeared to extend to her experiences of mindfulness.

- ❖ *“I think the more I like something the easier it is to apply mindfulness; like with Physics I told you it’s going quite well, but I think it’s the fact that I’m doing chemistry and I like chemistry that I’m focused more on what’s happening, what the teacher is explaining, what’s happening around me than I would with actual Physics.”*  
(Session 4:13)
  
- ❖ *“I think being so interested in it (mindfulness) made me want to learn it faster and apply it as well.”*  
(Session 4:15)

I asked Lia to try to identify more specifically what she found interesting about mindfulness that increased her ability to self-regulate her attention and awareness, however she was unable to pinpoint these details. At the time, I interpreted that when Lia referred to a lack of interest, it could possibly be due to her finding it difficult to process too much information at once. For example, she said “*after track 4 I got a bit bored, because each track got longer as it went on and he put a lot of information in each track, so it was a lot to take in...*” (Session 2:1). This was not, however, frequently mentioned.

In general, it appears that current literature does not refer to an interest component to self-regulation of attention and awareness in mindfulness. Self-regulation in mindfulness is viewed as a psychological process, or a metacognitive skill, that can be developed with practice (Bishop et al., 2004). Perhaps this is because ideal mindfulness practice does not allow one to “choose” what to be mindful of; self-regulation is simply the cognitive process that allows one to regulate attention and awareness to whatever internal and external experiences are unfolding each moment, regardless of whether they are desirable or not. It is also possible that by “interest”, Lia was referring to her degree of *motivation* to regulate her attention. In this case, she would be more motivated to self-regulate her attention if she were interested in the thing to direct her attention towards. This correlates with what Sansone and Thoman (2005) state, as described above, even though it is not specifically related to the function of self-regulation in mindfulness *per se*.

In light of the above discussion, an important factor to consider is the relationship between self-regulation and mindfulness. It appears that mindfulness necessitates self-regulation to begin with; one cannot be mindful if one is unable to regulate one’s attention and awareness in the present moment. Self-regulation then becomes a part of the mindfulness experience; as to be mindful requires the constant self-regulation of attention and awareness in the present moment.

#### **4.2.3.2 Needs Silence**

##### ***Sshhhhhhhh!***

Lia experienced the need for silence in order to effectively self-regulate her attention in mindfulness; this was an additional theme to emerge from the data analysis relating to the self-regulation dimension of mindfulness. Once more, however, the identified dimensions of mindfulness are interlinked, and this theme ties in with Lia's experiences of external noises distracting her present-centered attention and awareness, as discussed above. The following examples indicate her experience in this regard:

- ❖ *“I don't think I was being as mindful during that meditation because I think .., the background noises and stuff would catch my attention more easily than the meditation or the track would, even though it was louder, so ja, I wasn't really focused at all.”*  
(Session 5:1)
  
- ❖ *“I was just like hoping they would stop I guess, because I found it not hard, but harder to listen to what he was saying and focus completely on that and as well as breathing. So ja, I was just wanting to the noises to stop.”*  
(Session 3:20)
  
- ❖ *“...there were a few distractions, but I found it much easier because it was so silent around me, then I could just like, I could go open a door for someone and then come back, sit down on my bed and then do that whole thing again and it would be just as good as just opening my eyes and closing them again.”*  
(Session 5:9)

These comments indicate that Lia experienced difficulty in self-regulating her attention in mindfulness activities particularly when background noises served as distractions to her. As indicated, this theme links to that discussed previously of Lia being more aware of her external as opposed to internal experiences; she thus appeared to find it more challenging to focus her attention inwards. Despite this aspect of self-regulation being more difficult given external distractions, the theme of requiring silence in order to self-regulate attention in mindfulness generally, still emerged strongly from the data.

- ❖ *“During the activity, it was quiet, very quiet, so I could actually concentrate on what I was doing.”*

*(Session 3:2)*

- ❖ *“I feel so calm now, and like towards the end when it was quite silent, when he wasn’t saying much ..yeah I found it easier to focus...”*

*(Session 3:18)*

Mindfulness literature does not appear to clearly specify that the practice of mindfulness necessitate silence. It might, however, be that if one is engaging in mindfulness *meditation*, silence will assist in the focusing of attention and awareness in the here and now. In response to his own question, “Why silence?”, Siegel (2007:72) notes that silence creates a “rare opportunity to pause and drop into stillness, to become intimate with your own mind”. Becoming “intimate” with one’s mind is one of the goals of mindfulness, that is, to allow the contents of our minds to surface and flow freely; to become the observer. Siegel (2007) thus implies that silence facilitates the achievement of this objective. He further explains that stillness is not a lack of activity, but rather a “stabilizing strength” that allows us to observe the transient nature of our mind as opposed to the apparent permanent nature of thoughts and feelings (Siegel, 2007:73). Silence opens the doors for us to enter into a place of more mindfulness.

It is my interpretation that, being the “perfectionist” that she is, by referring to the need for silence Lia also implied her attempts to reach a “better” state of mindfulness. Lia confirmed this interpretation, explaining that having silence helped her apply effort into “getting it right”. Lia’s aim to attain a more mindful state adds another element to the theme of needing silence in order to effectively self-regulate her attention in mindfulness practice. Furthermore, it is linked to her experiences within both the ‘present-centered attention and awareness’ and ‘attitude and heart qualities’ dimensions of mindfulness, as discussed above. On the other hand, there were times during this study when the use of sound actually assisted Lia to self-regulate her attention. For example, the use of Jon Kabat-Zinn’s guided meditations on CD seemed to help Lia to achieve some degree of mindfulness. After participating in one of the meditations that was not as directive as the first, Lia said:

❖ *“...I did like manage to bring my mind back at times and try to focus but not as well as I would have if I was guided.”*

*(Session 5:2)*

Thus Lia did appear to experience specific types of sound as facilitating her self-regulation of attention in mindfulness. Some literature indicates such use of sound in mindfulness practice (for example, Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Nairn, 1998). Both these authors, however, also refer to sounds as they occur naturally in the environment as forming part of one’s mindful meditation. Nairn (1998) describes a type of meditation where one uses sound to actually support one’s focus of attention during the meditation – almost as an “anchor”. He explains that in this case, special sounds such as music are not created, but that one should allow surrounding sounds of the moment to provide the focus – the sound of “traffic, wind, voices... whatever is there will do” (Nairn, 1998:25). Although the usefulness of sound in regulating attention in mindfulness did form part of Lia’s experiences, it seems the predominant theme was that silence assisted her more in self-regulating her attention in mindfulness practice, especially in her efforts to reach a better quality of mindfulness. As mentioned, Lia applied a lot of effort during the study, and this at times also seemed to reflect the challenging aspect of self-regulation that she experienced.

### **4.2.3.3 Requires Effort**

#### ***I'm trying!***

Another theme that emerged within the self-regulation dimension of mindfulness for Lia was that it required great effort for her to sustain her attention and awareness in the present, on the specific task that she was focusing on. She frequently used the words, “I’m trying”, indicating her efforts to employ self-regulation.

- ❖ *“...mostly trying to recognize what it is, but I don’t really know, I’m trying to focus on it...”*

*(Session 2:19)*

- ❖ *“...I was...trying to relate that to what I was doing ..., so like when he said tasting the breath for example, I was trying to do what he was saying, to get a better understanding and experience.”*

*(Session 3:16)*

Once again, it seems that Lia’s efforts to self-regulate her attention in the mindfulness activities had the aim of being able to achieve a better state of mindfulness. Nonetheless, the idea of effort seemed to be a dominant theme during the study, and Lia confirmed these interpretations during member-checking. This finding comes as no surprise to me; nowhere in the literature have I seen it stated that mindfulness is an easy practice! If anything, much of the literature describes the great challenges of attaining mindfulness. As illustrated in Chapter Two, mindfulness is deceptive in that it appears outwardly simple and straightforward, yet an in-depth analysis reveals the intricacies and multiple layers of this challenging phenomenon. Siegel (2007:55) describes his personal experience of trying to maintain a mindfulness state during a meditation retreat: “After a few moments it seems I can barely make it through an entire breath without having my mind pulled toward different thoughts like a dog zig-zagging on a walk, drawn this way and that by enticing scents along the path.” Nairn (1998:22) confirms that, “the average human mind is in a constant state of distraction” and he describes

the arising difficulties in mindfulness and meditation, due to this nature of the mind. He then goes on to discuss strategies for working towards a state of mindfulness through meditation, in light of the distracted mind.

Kabat-Zinn (2003:148) also emphasises the overall complexity of mindfulness practice, “Mindfulness is not merely a good idea such that, upon hearing about it, one can immediately decide to live in the present moment, with the promise of reduced anxiety and depression and heightened performance and life satisfaction, and then instantly and reliably realise that state of being”. He compares it to an art form and way of being that can only be developed through ongoing effort and practice over time, stating that, “it takes personal commitment and perseverance in formal practice gradually to establish a degree of stability in one’s capacity to attend...” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003:150). Similarly then, it seems that self-regulation is by no means a simple task, especially for Lia. Bishop et al. (2004) maintain that the metacognitive skill of mindfulness can be developed with practice, and the aim of Gestalt therapy is to facilitate the development of clients’ self-regulation of attention to be fully present in the now. The literature thus suggests that mindfulness, and particularly the self-regulation component of mindfulness, is a skill that can be developed. This implies that it is not simple and straightforward, as Lia experienced, but that it can be improved upon with facilitation and practice. The data indicates that Lia did experience this developmental aspect of her self-regulation skills, as an additional theme is that they improved as her awareness increased.

#### **4.2.3.4 Improves with Awareness**

##### ***Now I realise what I'm doing!***

As highlighted by Kabat-Zinn (2003), mindfulness, and particularly application of self-regulation in mindfulness, can be developed through consistent effort and practice. The development of mindfulness for Lia appeared to be linked to her increased awareness of the processes she was involved in, and awareness of what mindfulness entails.

- ❖ *“Well I’ve realised what it actually is, so I guess like the better, the more sessions we have the better understanding I have of it and the more I can practice it.”*

*(Session 3:8)*

- ❖ *“I guess by more examples I understand it better, like the distractions that we’re having is actually like .., I learn from it, so yeah, it’s going well.*

*(Session 3:12)*

- ❖ *“Now I understand like much more about it – that it’s like... giving it like a lot of dedication, attention, but then also like, how do I say it, okay focusing, all of that kind of stuff which I did before but not realizing I did it...”*

*(Session 4:7)*

During the research process, Lia became increasingly aware of what mindfulness practice involves, and specifically, that she herself was regulating her own attention and awareness. Nairn (1998) explains that when there is no mindfulness, we are distracted but don’t realise it. Once we experience mindfulness, we realise that we were previously distracted, and so the process involves the increasing realisation, or awareness, that develops with mindfulness experience. As Lia began to realise what mindfulness is about, it seems her experiences of mindfulness, and the self-regulation aspect of it, became easier for her to manage. The realisation was aided by our discussions, her practice, and the facilitation of identifying what it was she was doing cognitively during mindfulness activities. Once she had experienced several of these “A-ha!” moments, her self-regulation skills as applied to mindfulness



appeared to improve. This theme correlates with what the literature suggests – i.e. that the metacognitive skill of mindfulness can be developed with practice, and that greater awareness and exposure contributes towards improved quality of mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Nairn, 1998).

### **4.3            SECONDARY THEMES**

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In Chapter Four thus far I have discussed the findings of this study, i.e. Lia’s subjective experiences of mindfulness, as interpreted within the framework of the dimensions of mindfulness extracted from the literature. The findings indicate that Lia experienced primary and secondary themes within the conceptual framework. The primary themes were identified within the ‘present-centered attention and awareness’, ‘attitude and heart qualities’ and ‘self-regulation’ dimensions of mindfulness. It seems that Lia experienced secondary themes within the last two dimensions of mindfulness – ‘universalism of mindfulness’ and ‘mindlessness’. I now present the findings of this study, in terms of the secondary themes that Lia experienced in relation to the final two dimensions of mindfulness.

### **4.3.1 MINDLESSNESS**

As discussed in Chapter Two, mindlessness is the “unawareness” of our habitual and automatic behaviours (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008; Brown & Ryan, 2003). By becoming aware of our mindlessness in various situations, we are able to fine-tune our mindfulness practice. This theme was identified in Lia’s experience of mindlessness; through mindfulness exposure and practice, she became aware of what mindlessness is, which in turn enhanced her mindfulness.

#### **4.3.1.1 Awareness of Mindlessness**

##### ***Now I know when I am mindless***

- ❖ *“Jon said that experiencing mindfulness for the first time and understanding it, you begin to realise how mindless you were before. So I was thinking about how mindless I was before this and before I knew about it at all.”*

*(Session 2:33)*

This comment indicates that Lia appeared to realise the meaning of mindlessness, although perhaps on a theoretical level in the beginning. As the study progressed and she experienced more, Lia seemed to be able to apply this awareness of mindfulness and mindlessness on a more practical level. It seemed that as Lia became aware of her own mindless behaviours, so her awareness of mindful behaviour increased, and as stated above, the inverse relationship applied as well.

- ❖ *“Today I wasn’t very mindful, I just wanted to eat because I was so hungry, so I just ate and I was watching TV... But yesterday I tried to be mindful and I ate very little, surprisingly... Usually I just stuff myself, like eating would be over.... Usually I just eat to get full! ”*

*(Session 3:6)*

This theme illustrates that Lia experienced an increase in her awareness of when she engages in mindless as opposed to mindful behaviour. This particular experience confirms what the literature describes about mindlessness. For instance, Brown and Ryan (2003) include being occupied with multiple tasks, and compulsive and automatic behaviours, as examples of mindlessness. In the above example, Lia realized that she was behaving mindlessly when she was eating in front of the television (multiple tasks), as well as when she was engaging in the automatic behaviour of “just eating to get full”. Lia thus seemed to realize the application of mindfulness and mindlessness in her everyday life. She furthermore seemed to express the above without self-judgment or criticism, thus indicating the development of her heart qualities in mindfulness, as discussed above. Interestingly, this theme also correlates with several of the themes discussed above; where it seems that an increased awareness plays a central role in the development of Lia’s mindfulness experiences. Lia also appeared to experience an increased awareness of the universalism element of mindfulness.

#### **4.3.2 UNIVERSALISM OF MINDFULNESS**

The universal nature of mindfulness is an important contributor to the aspects that make up mindfulness. The literature review established that mindfulness is inherently a state of consciousness, and thus by implication, it is universal. Almost every human being is able to attend and be aware (i.e. be mindful), although the degrees of awareness will vary between individuals (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness is therefore an event that occurs naturally in everyday life, although it requires practice to be maintained (Germer, 2005). Germer (2005:16) describes mindfulness as “*settling into our current experience in a relaxed, alert and openhearted way*”. This aspect of universalism in mindfulness thus implies that it is something that can be cultivated in everyday life. A similar theme of mindfulness being a way of life emerged in terms of Lia’s subjective experiences of this mindfulness dimension, during the latter part of the study.

#### **4.3.2.1 Everyday Life**

##### ***It's a way of life!***

During our discussion in the fourth session, Lia spontaneously referred to experiencing mindfulness as a way of life. It seemed that her personal experience was that she had come to this realisation and attributed this meaning to mindfulness; for her, she experienced mindfulness as applicable to everyday life, and she became more conscious of making it so.

- ❖ *“Okay, it’s not a study method, hee-hee... it’s, okay well what I know now, it’s a way of life! So, well I apply it every day, I think...”*  
(Session 4:11)

It seems that as Lia’s awareness and experiences of mindfulness developed, she realised that it could be a way of life. Germer (2005) maintains that moments of mindfulness occur naturally in everyday life, and Kabat-Zinn (2003) explains that we are all mindful in varying degrees, each moment of our lives. Although Lia’s experience does echo an aspect of the literature in that she realised that mindfulness can be applicable to daily life, there is a difference in this theme compared to what the literature suggests. That is, Lia seemed to interpret that mindfulness is a technique in itself that can be directly applied by *herself* to her life; there is a sense of agency within this theme. What the literature indicates, on the other hand, is that mindfulness exists naturally within daily life already; it is something to be developed from a natural occurrence. This difference initially appears subtle, however, on reflection I believe it is actually quite distinct. The literature emphasises that due to the nature of mindfulness as involving consciousness, it exists universally because we are conscious beings. It is therefore something to be recognised, practiced and developed upon in our daily lives. In contrast, Lia’s comments suggest that she viewed mindfulness as a technique to be mastered and then applied. She did not seem to think of it as something already in existence.

- ❖ *“I learn a lot every time and it’s quite hard to explain it in words,... so I know now it’s a way of life...because I’m applying it every day and I think that it could help whoever, whenever, wherever.”*

*(Session 5:23)*

This extract also highlights Lia’s experiences as discussed above. It furthermore confirms that Lia realised the universal nature of mindfulness in terms of its applicability to all people in all situations. This correlates to descriptions in the literature, as discussed in Chapter Two, of mindfulness as a phenomenon that exists and can be applied universally, across all human contexts. Although Lia established this meaning of mindfulness towards the end of the study, at one stage she did seem to experience an initial conflict about whether mindfulness is related to science or religion.

#### **4.3.2.2 Science & Religion**

##### ***Where does mindfulness fit in?***

The literature discusses the universalism of mindfulness in the context of its origins being traced to Buddhist traditions and psychology. Although this is the case, there is a strong argument indicating that mindfulness is not related to the religious tradition, but is clearly a universal phenomenon (Germer, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The conflict Lia appeared to experience in this regard stemmed from a past experience. She had once attended a religious ceremony where she witnessed somebody in a “trance-like” state, which was traumatic for her. Her father had explained that it was a strong form of meditation that had enabled that person to accept that “state of mind”. Lia explained that her family is not very religious, and her father in particular, believes in science over religion. When listening to the CD and hearing Kabat-Zinn explain mindfulness as a “state of mind”, Lia associated it with her past experience.

- ❖ *“Scared! Really scared, yeah, but like the way Jon explained it was very basic, and it didn’t seem as scary as what I saw, but yeah, basically the same concept.”*

*(Session 2:2)*

From our discussions around this issue I conclude that Lia seemed to initially experience confusion as to whether mindfulness is located within a “scary” religious context, or the more acceptable realm of science.

- ❖ *“He spoke about, I think, the mind being a sixth sense, that also stood out a lot... He said that,...okay back to my dad, he believes strongly in science, okay, and Jon spoke about scientists, as well as about like Buddhists I think, discovering that the mind is a sixth sense, so yeah, seeing it from both views stood out a lot. (So there was a combination of the science..) and religion.”*

*(Session 2:6)*

When Lia spoke of this in particular, she seemed more content with the realisation that mindfulness could have a religious connotation, but was also linked to science. As illustrated above, during the course of the study Lia seemed to make peace with this initial dilemma, and ultimately realised the universal nature of mindfulness. She realised that it was not necessarily the same practice as what she had witnessed at the religious gathering, but rather a technique that could be applied in her daily life, or by “whoever whenever wherever”.

## 4.4 CONCLUSION

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Chapter Four has presented the results and findings from this study, which have been interpreted using the conceptual framework as a lens with which to view Lia's subjective experiences of mindfulness. The discussion has therefore focused on each dimension of mindfulness, presenting the themes of Lia's subjective experiences within each dimension. This chapter has differentiated between primary and secondary themes. Primary themes emerged in terms of Lia's experiences of the 'present-centered attention and awareness', 'attitude and heart qualities' and 'self-regulation' dimensions of mindfulness. It appears that Lia experienced the 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension of mindfulness in terms of being task-oriented, involving external more than internal awareness, and including enhanced sensory experiences. There appears to be a causal relationship between these themes, as described above. Within the 'attitude and heart qualities' dimension, Lia experienced a development of her intention to practice mindfulness, as her awareness of mindfulness grew. She also demonstrated development from an initial perfectionism towards letting go of the negative aspects of perfectionism such as self-judgment and criticism in her mindfulness practice. The third dimension of mindfulness, 'self-regulation', indicated the primary themes of Lia's self-regulation in mindfulness being interest-driven, needing silence, requiring effort, and improving with awareness of what mindfulness entails.

Lia experienced secondary themes within the 'universalism of mindfulness' and the 'mindlessness' dimensions of mindfulness. The former dimension shows that Lia experienced a greater understanding of what mindlessness is, as her awareness of mindfulness developed, and vice versa. Within the 'universalism of mindfulness' dimension, Lia appeared to experience the realisation that mindfulness can be applied to everyday life. She also seemed to experience an initial conflict regarding the place of mindfulness and how it is related to the contexts of science and religion.

An in-depth analysis of the results and findings of this study yield two overriding conclusions that can be made regarding Lia's subjective experiences of mindfulness. Firstly, it appears that she predominantly experienced mindfulness as task-oriented. The theme of Lia's mindfulness practice being task-oriented can be linked to all the identified dimensions of mindfulness; it appeared to act as a "driver" and seemingly constituted the largest part of her subjective mindfulness experiences. Secondly, it seems that Lia generally experienced personal growth and development during her mindfulness practice. The theme of development emerged from almost all the dimensions of mindfulness in the conceptual framework. Overall, findings of this study indicate that Lia experienced mindfulness with a sense of development. She developed her awareness and understandings of mindfulness and mindlessness. She developed the "skills" necessary for mindfulness practice – including present-centered attention and awareness, attitude and heart qualities, and the self-regulation of attention and awareness. Thus the general conclusion can be made that Lia subjectively experienced mindfulness as incorporating personal growth and development on several levels.



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## **Chapter 5**

# **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

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### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Chapter Five addresses the conclusions and recommendations made in this study. I first provide an overview of the previous chapters and a summary of this study's findings. I discuss conclusions drawn, and address the research questions. The potential contributions and limitations of this study are also described. I then make recommendations for practice, training, and further research. Chapter Five ends with my closing remarks.

### **5.2 OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS**

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Chapter One served as an introduction to orientate the reader regarding the purpose and rationale of this study, and the main research question guiding the study; namely, "How does an adolescent subjectively experience mindfulness?" Chapter One presented a definition of key terms, the paradigm that I adopt as a researcher, and a basic overview of the research methodology, quality criteria, and ethical considerations applied in this study.

Chapter Two presented the phenomenon of mindfulness as it is described in the literature reviewed. A general definition of mindfulness was discussed, as well as how it relates to contemporary psychology. The chapter then discussed the five dimensions of mindfulness that I extracted from the literature, these being 'present-centered attention and awareness'; 'attitude and heart qualities'; 'self-regulation'; 'universalism of mindfulness'; and 'mindlessness'. Empirical research relating to mindfulness was reviewed, including that

relating to physical and psychological conditions, and studies conducted with non-clinical populations, children, and adolescents. Finally, Chapter Two explained the conceptual framework applied throughout this study – the “dimensions” of mindfulness.

The research methodology applied in this study was presented in detail in Chapter Three. The discussion began by explaining the interpretivist paradigm within which I place myself as a researcher. It then focused on the research design of this study (case study), including its strengths and limitations, and how the participant for the case was selected. Chapter Three then explained the following methods of data creation that were applied in this study; “mindfulness sessions”, creative expression, a journal, interviews, transcripts, and field notes. My reflections as a researcher on the data creation process followed. The steps of data analysis and interpretation were discussed, as well as my reflections thereof. The quality criteria of the study (credibility, transferability, and dependability) were presented, and the chapter concluded with a look at the ethical considerations of this study, including informed consent, safety in participation, trust, confidentiality, and credibility of the researcher.

In Chapter Four the results and findings of this study were presented. These were discussed in terms of the ‘dimensions of mindfulness’ conceptual framework applied to the data. Lia’s subjective experiences of each dimension of mindfulness were presented in terms of the themes that emerged from the data analysis and interpretation process. These findings were discussed and compared to what the available literature on mindfulness portrays. These findings are summarised in the following section.

## **5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

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The purpose of this study was to explore and generate an in-depth understanding of an adolescent's subjective experiences of mindfulness. The 'dimensions of mindfulness' conceptual framework was applied in order to achieve this goal. Therefore, I now present a summary of this study's findings according to the identified framework.

### **5.3.1 PRIMARY THEMES**

Results of the study indicate that Lia subjectively experienced three dimensions of mindfulness ('present-centered attention and awareness, 'attitude and heart qualities' and 'self-regulation') in terms of several primary themes.

#### **5.3.1.1 Present-Centered Attention and Awareness**

The first theme emerging from the first dimension indicates that Lia's present-centered attention and awareness in mindfulness was predominantly task-oriented, resulting in her focusing on attention more than awareness. That is, she identified a task to direct her attention towards in the present moment, and appeared to interpret mindfulness as the successful focused attention on present tasks. The second theme emerging from the 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension suggests that Lia's present-centered awareness included more external happenings than internal ones. She thus experienced this dimension of mindfulness as being more aware of external phenomena such as sounds, as opposed to internal experiences such as thoughts or feelings. The third and final theme identified within this dimension of mindfulness was that, with present-centered attention and awareness, Lia came across enhanced sensory experiences. These included the examples of "mindful eating", "mindful breathing" and "mindful body awareness". It appears there is a relationship between these themes that would further enhance our understanding of Lia's subjective experience of the 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension of mindfulness. Task-orientated attention led to enhanced sensory experiences for Lia. It also meant that Lia

possibly became more aware of external happenings that distracted her attention from the task. It thus seems that Lia's interpretation of the 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension of mindfulness as predominantly task-oriented attention, was her overall experience of this aspect of mindfulness.

### **5.3.1.2 Attitude and Heart Qualities**

The second dimension of mindfulness discussed was 'attitude and heart qualities'. This dimension is comprised of two aspects that form part of the attitude with which one practices mindfulness; intention, and the heart qualities such as compassion, non-judgment, acceptance and kindness. The theme that emerged relating to intention was one of development. As Lia's own understanding of what mindfulness entails grew, so too did her intention to be mindful. Again, Lia's intention was related to staying task-oriented, as that was a predominant feature of her subjective experiences of mindfulness. The second and third themes that emerged relating to the 'attitude and heart qualities' dimension were discussed individually, but also shown as linked on a continuum. In light of the heart qualities of mindfulness practice, Lia appeared to experience movement from a sense of perfectionism towards "letting go" of the negative elements of perfectionism such as self-judgment and criticism. Lia initially strived to practice mindfulness to the best of her ability and was fairly "harsh" on herself when she perceived that she was not doing so. She did, however, appear to realise that she could adopt a more compassionate attitude towards herself as the study progressed, thereby letting go of some perfectionism and experiencing more of the heart qualities associated with mindfulness practice.

### **5.3.1.3 Self-Regulation**

The next dimension of mindfulness identified was the ‘self-regulation’ of attention and awareness as it applies to mindfulness practice. Four themes of Lia’s subjective experiences of mindfulness emerged from the data in light of this dimension. Firstly, it became clear that Lia’s self-regulation of attention in general is interest-driven. This applied to her mindfulness practice as well; as her interest in mindfulness developed, so too did her ability to self-regulate her attention and awareness in mindfulness. Secondly, Lia experienced the need for silence in order to effectively self-regulate her attention in particular. The third theme that emerged relating to this dimension was that it required substantial effort for Lia to self-regulate her attention and awareness in mindfulness. Finally, however, it emerged that Lia’s ability for self-regulation in mindfulness improved as her understanding and experience of mindfulness developed.

## **5.3.2 SECONDARY THEMES**

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### **5.3.2.1 Mindlessness**

In terms of the ‘mindlessness’ dimension of mindfulness, once more the theme of development and increasing awareness arose. As Lia experienced mindfulness through exposure and practice, she realised what mindlessness is, which in turn enhanced her mindfulness practice. This relationship appeared to apply conversely as well. Thus the theme identified within this dimension of mindfulness was an increased awareness of what mindlessness is.

### **5.3.2.2 Universalism of Mindfulness**

Two themes relating to the universal element of mindfulness emerged from the data analysis and interpretation. Firstly, Lia experienced the realisation that mindfulness can be a way of life. She seemed to interpret mindfulness as a technique that she could directly apply to her everyday life. The second theme within this dimension was the conflict that Lia experienced in the initial stages of the study regarding mindfulness' place in science and religion. The theme of her uncertainty as to where mindfulness is located within these two contexts was apparent.

The above section has focused on a summary of the results and findings of this study. I now consider the conclusions that can be drawn based on these results and findings as discussed in Chapter Four and above.

## **5.4 CONCLUSIONS**

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An overall analysis of the results and findings of this study suggests two prevailing conclusions that come to the fore in terms of Lia's subjective experiences of mindfulness – (i) being task-oriented and (ii) experiencing personal growth and development.

Firstly, Lia's subjective experiences of mindfulness appear to have been predominantly task-oriented overall. The examination of the findings of this study reveal that, although task-orientation emerged as a strong theme within the 'present-centered attention and awareness' dimension of Lia's subjective experiences of mindfulness, it was linked to all the dimensions. Being task-oriented in her mindfulness practice was also evident in Lia's subjective experiences of her intention to be mindful, as well as the "perfectionism" that she applied to all identified tasks – both aspects of the 'attitude and heart qualities' dimension. Furthermore, Chapter Four illustrated that task-orientation was also tied in to Lia's subjective experiences of her self-regulation of attention as applied to mindfulness practice. Task-orientation ties in to mindlessness in that an awareness of mindlessness assisted Lia to become more mindful and to refocus her attention on identified tasks. In terms of the universalism of mindfulness, being

task-orientated applied to tasks in everyday life for Lia. As mentioned in Chapter Two and Four, the dimensions of mindfulness that I identified from the literature have been presented individually, however it is imperative to view them as interconnected. 'Present-centered attention and awareness', 'attitude and heart qualities', 'self-regulation', 'mindlessness', and 'universalism of mindfulness' all interact dynamically to create the complete experience of mindfulness. It therefore follows that this conclusion of Lia's subjective experiences of mindfulness being task-oriented overall should be evident across the dimensions.

This same principle applies to the second conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this study. The theme of Lia experiencing personal growth and development through her mindfulness practice emerges across almost all the identified dimensions of mindfulness. As discussed, Lia experienced development within the 'attitude and heart' qualities dimension, in that she moved from an initial perfectionism towards letting go of the associated negative aspects. As Lia's understanding and experience of mindfulness increased, her ability to self-regulate her attention in mindfulness also appeared to develop, as well as her awareness of mindlessness and the universalism of mindfulness. Lia thus appears to have experienced personal growth and development in her understanding and practice of mindfulness, in terms of most aspects of the framework within which her experiences have been interpreted. It seems that, overall, as Lia's awareness of what mindfulness entails and her experiences thereof increased during the study, so she developed personally, specifically in terms of her "skills" (maintaining present-centered attention and awareness, self-regulating attention and awareness, and adopting heart qualities) in mindfulness practice.

## 5.5 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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The above discussions have focused on answering the research questions. In light of the above discussions, then, I present summarised answers to the research questions of this study.

### ❖ PRIMARY QUESTION:

- *How does an adolescent subjectively experience mindfulness?*

An adolescent subjectively experiences mindfulness in terms of numerous themes that emerge within the five dimensions of mindfulness – as discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

### ❖ SECONDARY QUESTIONS:

- *How does an adolescent make sense of mindfulness?*

An adolescent makes sense of mindfulness by understanding it as a technique that can be applied by herself, in order to keep her attention focused on tasks in everyday life.

- *What meanings does an adolescent attach to mindfulness?*
- *How does an adolescent relate to the experience of mindfulness?*
- *What are the potential challenges of mindfulness practice for an adolescent?*
- *What are the potential benefits of mindfulness practice for an adolescent?*



In response to these secondary questions, the following statements are made as, based on the findings of this study, it is assumed that this is how Lia would respond :

- *“Mindfulness helps me to stay focused on tasks that I’m supposed to be doing every day.”*
- *“Mindfulness means I can have enhanced sensory experiences.”*
- *“Now that I know about mindfulness, I can decide to be mindful when I want to.”*
- *“Mindfulness has taught me that I don’t have to be so harsh on myself when I am not doing something exactly right.”*
- *“Now that I know about mindfulness, I realise what I am doing cognitively in order to pay attention.”*
- *“If I am interested in mindfulness then I will learn more about it and practice it more.”*
- *“I need silence in order to practice mindfulness in the best way possible.”*
- *“Being mindful requires a lot of effort, but I try hard to do it to the best of my ability.”*
- *“As my understanding of what mindfulness is develops, so too do my mindfulness skills.”*
- *“As my understanding of what mindfulness is develops, so too does my realisation of what mindlessness is, and vice versa.”*
- *“Mindfulness can be linked to science and religion.”*

The following are actual statements made by Lia during the course of the study:

- *“Mindfulness has helped me with my schoolwork.”*
- *“Mindfulness has taught me to do things better.”*
- *“Mindfulness helps me to use my time better, and to focus on each moment.”*
- *“Mindfulness helps me to achieve my goals and brings me a step closer to success.”*
- *“Mindfulness has helped me to be less judgmental and harsh on myself.”*
- *“Mindfulness can become a way of life.”*
- *“Mindfulness is a way to improve my life.”*
- *“Mindfulness can be applied by whoever, whenever, wherever.”*

## **5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

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I identified several factors that are potential limitations of this study. Firstly, due to the nature of the study and the data creation methods applied, I developed a close working relationship with Lia. As participant observer, I was directly involved during each session, and was therefore susceptible to the possibility of researcher-induced bias. As researcher in this study I became vulnerable to the possibility of subjectivity in my observations and interpretations, and had to maintain a professional approach to the research at all times, setting clear boundaries about my role. Keeping a research diary, reflecting on my experiences in this regard, and briefings with my supervisor assisted in preventing subjectivity as far as possible.

Secondly, the nature of the research topic was quite complex, resulting in some explanations of mindfulness during my discussions with Lia. These discussions therefore included some of my own interpretations and experiences of mindfulness, which may have influenced Lia's understandings and sharing of her experiences. This is a limitation from one perspective, however on the other hand; the sharing discussions were advantageous from another angle. I believe they enabled the building of trust and an open relationship between Lia and myself, which became a "safe" space for her to be honest and to share as much of her experiences as possible. This in turn facilitated the rich descriptions and in-depth understandings sought from the study.

A further potential limitation of this study relates to Lia's style of interaction with her world. She openly described herself as a "perfectionist", wanting to do everything to the best of her ability, in order to satisfy herself and to impress her best upon others as well. It is possible that she could have discussed her subjective experiences of mindfulness in terms of what she perceived the best experiences to be. It is also possible that she wanted to "please" the researcher. Although I believe that this may have been a limitation in some parts of the study, a careful examination of the data leaves me the impression that this was not the case overall.

A fourth potential limitation of this study is that it is restricted to a single case study, therefore the findings are not necessarily generalisable. The research must be read with this in mind, however, it also important to note that this was not the purpose of the study. This study particularly focused on a single case in order to generate the rich descriptions and deep understandings sought from an interpretivist paradigm. Thus in this limitation, also lies this study's distinct strength as discussed below.

## **5.7 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

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The rich descriptions and in-depth understandings generated from this study serve as a potential contribution to be made to our understandings of an adolescent's subjective experiences of mindfulness. It has been made clear that a substantial gap in the literature exists from this perspective. There is a lack of qualitative investigations on the topic of mindfulness, as well as a lack of research focusing on mindfulness as it potentially pertains to children and adolescents. This study could contribute to the identified gap in the available literature. Mindfulness has been identified as holding much promise as a positive phenomenon that can be developed in the maintenance of physical, mental and emotional health and well-being. This is especially relevant in light of positive psychology and trends towards more holistic approaches to health and well-being. This study could potentially contribute in light of these contexts.

## **5.8 RECOMMENDATIONS**

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### **5.8.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING AND PRACTICE**

As discussed previously, mindfulness shows potential promise as a positive phenomenon that can be cultivated in the development of health and well-being. It is recommended that practitioners in the health professions and in education consider mindfulness as a potentially useful technique, particularly with the youth. Given the complexity of mindfulness as discussed, practitioners need to receive adequate training in the conceptualisation and applications of mindfulness. With the appropriate training and foundations, however, practitioners in a wide variety of contexts can apply mindfulness, within their scope of practice. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, it is preferable that practitioners engage in their own personal mindfulness practice, in order to effectively apply it in their professional practice. Another potential benefit of applying mindfulness in practice is that a series of basic techniques can be taught initially, and then individuals can engage in the practice thereof themselves. As mentioned previously, self-practice is the only way to develop mindfulness,

which relies on the commitment of the individual. After self-practice, individuals could then reconnect with professionals in order to discuss their experiences and continue the intervention in such stages, which would possibly then be more productive and meaningful. Thus mindfulness “homework” or “self-study” programmes can be developed, offering perhaps a more affordable and sustainable support option. Furthermore, this approach encourages individuals to take responsibility and to feel empowered. This is crucial given the field of psychology’s move away from the “medical model”, towards a helping profession that views “patients” rather as “clients” who are co-creators in developing self-help skills to build their own overall health and well-being.

In the application of mindfulness in practice, professionals are also encouraged to familiarise themselves with the specific moderations that can be made to mindfulness for children and adolescents. Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) explain that this specific population group require greater explanation and rationale, use of different practices, useful metaphors, variety and repetition, shorter practice times, involving parents, and mindfulness in groups (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008).

In light of the above, then, recommendations for training include comprehensive training in mindfulness conceptualisation and application for health practitioners and professionals in education and other applicable fields. Practitioners should be trained at both the theoretical and practical level, as discussed. Training and practice should be grounded in a “wellness” paradigm, such as positive psychology, which strives to utilise mindfulness in the creation and maintenance of holistic health and well-being. Continued professional development and refresher courses are also recommended for both clients and professionals.

## **5.8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Recommendations for further research include studies that could be done in terms of the following possible research topics and different methods :

- ❖ How do an adolescent's experiences of mindfulness compare with those of a younger child?
- ❖ What variations in techniques must be made in mindfulness interventions with children compared to adolescents?
- ❖ What is the applicability of mindfulness in the classroom?
- ❖ Exploring the subjective experiences of mindfulness of a larger group of adolescent participants
- ❖ Exploring the potential application of mindfulness with younger children
- ❖ Employing action research design in exploring the effects of mindfulness practice on children and adolescents
- ❖ Exploring the effectiveness of mindfulness as an intervention technique in addressing scholastic/social/behavioural/emotional difficulties in children and adolescents
- ❖ Exploring the relationship between mindfulness and concentration difficulties
- ❖ The effects of mindfulness practice on educators and their professional work
- ❖ The effects of mindfulness practice for families
- ❖ Follow-up/longitudinal studies relating to the above

## 5.7 CLOSING

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In closing this dissertation of limited scope I would like to offer some reflections on the processes I have experienced during this study. This study has challenged me both personally and professionally. In exploring Lia's subjective experiences of mindfulness, I was forced to examine my own subjective experiences. More importantly, I was tested in terms of my theoretical knowledge and grounding in the concept. This research made me realise that at times I could offer valuable theoretical knowledge and experience, and at others I repeatedly asked myself the question, "what *is* mindfulness?!" Sometimes I was left thinking that; after all, I really "knew nothing". As highlighted throughout this study, mindfulness is simple on the surface and appears to be a relatively "easy" concept to understand and apply in practice. However, a closer look reveals its intricacy, complexity, and elusiveness, both on a conceptual and practical level.

Hatch (2002:149) describes that one's research is never finished. "There are always more data than can be adequately processed, more levels of understanding than can be explored, and more stories than can be told." This is how I feel about this study; it could go on, there is more to explore, there is still more to be revealed and to understand. This is made all the more poignant by the very nature of mindfulness itself, which almost begs to be unpacked further. Or is this possibly the paradoxical irony of the human mind? We want to analyse, compartmentalise, and reduce something so powerful and profound, that ultimately, we are denying ourselves that very experience that exists within ourselves.

Kabat-Zinn (2003) strongly indicates the necessity of engaging in a commitment to personal practice of mindfulness, before one can even begin to apply it in a professional capacity. I agree with this perspective, as in my experience, personal practice has added to the depth and experiential understanding of mindfulness, enhancing both my personal and professional endeavours. Furthermore, I believe it is only in practice, that one realises how the "universal longing in people for happiness, well-being, resilience, and peace of mind, body, and soul" might be "effectively met, honoured, and mobilised for transformation" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003:152). The words of Siegel (2007:15) also continue to resonate in me, "We are in

desperate need of a new way of being – in ourselves, in our schools, and in our society. Our modern culture has evolved in recent times to create a troubled world with individuals suffering from alienation, schools failing to inspire and to connect with students, in short, society without a moral compass to help clarify how we can move forward in our global community”. I hope that this dissertation might have left you, the reader, with a greater insight into the phenomenon of mindfulness, how an adolescent subjectively experienced it, and how it might be able to play a part in the positive transformation of our global community, in the context of a move towards greater holistic health and well-being.

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# APPENDICES

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **PERMISSION VIA E-MAIL FROM JON KABAT-ZINN**

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----- Original Message -----

From: Carey Dellbridge

To: Simon Whitesman

Subject: Contact for Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn for ethical clearance

Dear Mr Whitesman

I received your contact details from Karen Diederichs, she thought you may be able to help me. I am currently completing my thesis for my Masters degree in Educational Psychology, through the University of Pretoria, and my topic is Mindfulness! It is a qualitative study with an adolescent - the title is "An Adolescent's Subjective Experiences of Mindfulness". I am hoping to use some of the material that Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn has developed, specifically his "Mindfulness for Beginners" CD. I was wondering if you might be able to assist me in contacting him via e-mail, in order to obtain his permission to use the material in my research? If you are able to help in this regard, I would be most grateful! Please let me know should you require any further detail.

Kind regards,

Mrs Carey Dellbridge

---

Simon Whitesman wrote:

Hi Carey

I am happy to fwd the request to Jon but can you be a little more specific as to how you intend to use his CD in your research

Kind regards

Simon

---

----- Original Message -----

From: Carey Dellbridge

To: Simon Whitesman

Subject: Re: Contact for Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn for ethical clearance

Hi Simon

Thanks for your response :) I intend to use the CD as follows:

The research will include approximately 4-6 sessions. Each session will be structured around 1 of the tracks on the CD. The participant will listen to/participate in the guided meditation on the CD, whereafter the "data generation" will take place. This will take the form of unstructured interviews and discussions around the participant's subjective experiences of the guided meditation. Data will also be generated by the participant partaking in creative expression activities - such as artwork and clay modelling - to express their experiences of Mindfulness after each session. The participant will also keep a reflective journal over the course of the study. Thus the CD will be used as a means of introducing Mindfulness, and creating an opportunity for the participant to experience it by partaking in the guided discussions and meditations on the CD. I hope this helps... If you believe more detail is required, I am happy to provide it. My supervisor is also available to comment if necessary.

Many Thanks,

Carey

---

Simon Whitesman to me

Hi Carey

Below is Jon's response:

It is fine with me if Carey wants to use some of the tracks from Mindfulness for Beginners for her research project as long as she understands that they are to be used only for that project, and not to be duplicated. In fact, I am happy to learn that she wants to pursue such a project.

I wish you well with the project. I look forward to hearing more once you have completed it.

Warm regards

Simon

---

Carey Dellbridge to Simon

Dear Simon

Thank you SO much for your assistance, and if possible, please could you forward my sincere thanks to Dr K-Z as well! As well as the fact that I am very clear on the permission guidelines - there will be no duplication of his CD - I have bought it for my own personal use as well as specifically for this research project alone.

I will stay in touch and forward you details of my research once it is complete. Thanks again :)

Warm regards,

Carey

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

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UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

**CLEARANCE NUMBER : EP08/06/02**

**DEGREE AND PROJECT**

M.Ed Educational Psychology  
An adolescent's subjective experiences of mindfulness.

**INVESTIGATOR(S)**

Carey Dellbridge - 25278411

**DEPARTMENT**

Educational Psychology

**DATE CONSIDERED**

25 July 2008

**DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE**

APPROVED

*This ethical clearance is valid for  years and may be renewed upon application*

**CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS  
COMMITTEE**

Dr S Human-Vogel

Handwritten signature of Dr S Human-Vogel in black ink.

**DATE**

31 March 2009

**CC**

Dr Carien Lubbe-De Beer  
Student administration

This ethical clearance certificate is issued subject to the following conditions:

1. A signed personal declaration of responsibility
2. If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted
3. It remains the students' responsibility to ensure that all the necessary forms for informed consent are kept for future queries.

Please quote the clearance number in all enquiries.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **VISUAL DATA IN DIGITAL FORMAT**

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