Conceptualizing and Contextualizing Mindfulness: New and Critical Perspectives

Håkan Nilsson
Abstract

This dissertation aims at analyzing mindfulness as a concept and a multi-dimensional phenomenon in its historic and primordial but also contemporary contexts. In the course of examining this more general question, this dissertation targets four specific objectives: 1) classifying existing definitions of mindfulness, 2) critically analyzing and interpreting the Buddhist and Western interpretations and practices of mindfulness, 3) elaborating on the social and existential dimensions of mindfulness, and 4) applying these dimensions in advancing the notion of mindful sustainable aging in the context of successful aging. Paper I examines and assesses the numerous definitions of mindfulness that have been presented over the years by a wide range of scholars from a variety of disciplines. Paper II traces the roots of modern mindfulness in Buddhism. It continues by exploring the utility and practices of mindfulness in the context of social work. The definitions provided in Paper I and the Buddhist underpinnings discussed in Paper II call attention to the fact that in addition to the more commonly considered physical and mental dimensions, mindfulness contains a social and an existential dimension as well – dimensions that remain underresearched and not well understood. To redress this imbalance, Paper III elaborates on these two latter dimensions, emphasizing their potential to enhance health, wellbeing and meaning in life. Paper III further argues that a more nuanced understanding of physical, mental, social and existential mindfulness can be obtained by examining the interconnectedness of all four fields. Paper IV continues the discussion of the social and the existential dimensions of mindfulness with specific emphasis on their utility for
successful aging, and advances the notion of mindful sustainable aging. Paper IV highlights the potential of mindfulness for living a meaningful life and boosting the elderly’s capacity to find deeper meaning in their final stage of life.
Original Papers

The dissertation is based on the following Papers, which are referred to by their Roman numerals in the text:

**Paper I**

**Paper II**

**Paper III**

**Paper IV**

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I would like to start by expressing my deepest appreciation to my principal supervisor Associate Professor Ali Kazemi for his hard work and patience in initializing and completing this dissertation. This project would not have come to an end if it hadn’t been for his support and academic guidance in dealing with micro- as well macro-issues. Moreover, I would like to thank my co-supervisor Docent Pia Bülow at Jönköping University, who became involved in June 2014, for her constructive feedback.

The pursuit of this dissertation was originally inspired by my own longstanding practice of meditation as well as an early fascination with Eastern philosophy and religion. During my religious studies at Göteborg University, I immersed myself in not only the study of Asian religions, but also in the Japanese language. During this time, I also became an accredited practitioner of Qi-gong, and later of MBSR for professionals. Beside these contemplative forms of training I also practice ju-jitsu, iaido and bujutsu. Despite these various forms of involvement with Asian traditions for many years, the topic of mindfulness had escaped my interest until 2011, when Professor Åke Sander suggested it as a topic for my licentiate thesis. Since that meeting, mindfulness has occupied my time not only as a subject of research, but also as a vital aspect of my personal life.

Also, I would like to express a special note of thanks to English language editor Allan Anderson for his dedication and professionalism in editing this work. Thanks are also due to Rhonwen Bowen and Pia Sundh for editing the latest version of the introduction and the Swedish summary. On a more
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Håkan Nilsson
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I. Introduction

Mindfulness has emerged on the scientific arena in a particular historical, scientific and cultural context. In this dissertation, I will touch upon these contexts, and my ambition is to look at mindfulness from both an outside-in, as academic researcher and an inside-out perspective as a mindfulness practitioner. This has, of course, influenced my pre-understandings, readings and interpretations of the texts. What interests me about mindfulness is how it is been adopted by a variety of traditions, thoughts and different contexts. However, my main concern is to highlight two less under-researched dimensions of mindfulness, namely, the social and existential. This is motivated by the fact that mindfulness researchers have generally tended to focus their attention on the physical and mental dimensions of mindfulness. While these two dimensions are obviously of fundamental importance, since mindfulness training directly involves the practice of body scanning, meditation and yoga, its social and existential dimensions should be explored as well, since they also carry the potential to enhance human resilience and

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1 According to Sun (2014), the term “mindfulness” existed in the English language long before it became associated with Buddhism and meditation. The term mindfulness emerged in 1530, when John Palsgrave (1485-1554) translated the French term pensée (i.e., thought or mind). In its early usage, mindfulness was seen as important in supporting Christian ways of being, through maintaining a habitual or continual mindfulness of God’s presence. That means that frequently keeping God in mind and being aware of his presence helps to prevent sin. Thus, western mindfulness, from its early stages supported religious life and had a distinct moral and affective quality, a usage of mindfulness in our contemporary society that is largely obsolete (Sun, 2014).
psychophysical wellbeing. It is with the hope of redressing the current neglect of the social and existential dimensions among mainstream researchers that this dissertation focuses on mindfulness both as a form of social interaction and as a meaning-centered activity.

To that end, it is also important to recognize mindfulness as a social phenomenon not essentially different from the social work practice. Both mindfulness and social work aim at setting free resources in society and promoting empowerment and human welfare and in the short and long run, to build a sustainable society (Chappell, 2003; Turner, 2009; Watts & Loy, 2002). Moreover, the social dimension of mindfulness naturally involves discussions related to the existential dimension as well. Consequently, living a life of stress, suffering and illness together often act as a trigger for an individual’s quest for meaning (Moore, Metcalf, & Schow, 2006). In this respect, the existential dimension of mindfulness carries the potential of being highly facilitative in terms of increasing people’s sense of meaning, purpose and overall wellbeing. This calls to mind what Sherman and Siporin (2008) claim: “This aspect of mindfulness practice fits well within the increasing attention in the social work literature devoted to the subject of client spiritual needs and problems” (Sherman & Siporin, 2008, p. 261). Additionally, the practice of mindfulness training can afford a sense of existential wellbeing, which increases personal resilience, the ability to cope with various life stressors and self-transcendence, defined by Frankl as that aspect of human existence which “is always directed to something, or

2 My definition of existential wellbeing should be understood in terms of purposes and direction in life, expressed through social interactions and marked by empathy and compassion.
someone other than itself – be it a meaning to fulfill or another being to encounter lovingly” (Frankl, 1975, p.78).

1.1. Aims of the dissertation

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze mindfulness as a concept and as a multi-dimensional phenomenon in its historic and primordial but also in its contemporary contexts. In the course of examining this more general question, this dissertation targets four specific objectives: 1) classifying existing definitions of mindfulness, 2) critically analyzing and interpreting the Buddhist and Western interpretations and practices of mindfulness, 3) elaborating on the social and existential dimensions of mindfulness, and 4) applying these dimensions in advancing the notion of mindful sustainable aging in the context of successful aging.

Mindfulness will be analyzed with the aid of notions coming from Alfred Schutz’s phenomenological sociology, Martin Buber’s philosophy of dialogue, Erik Erikson’s developmental stage theory, Victor Frankl’s logotherapy together with theories from the fields of social works and gerontology. The dissertation will also explore a number of ideas and practices originating from both traditional and modern Buddhist thought.
2. Background

Over the last several decades, mindfulness training has grown to become one of the most widespread practices in the West, representing an increasing number of therapies, self-help regimes and forms of intervention. Today, a rapidly growing body of evidence seems to indicate that mindfulness is an effective and beneficial form of treatment for a variety of mental and physical conditions (Baer, 2003; Didonna, 2009; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004). In addition, the public marketplace has made room for a burgeoning amount of literature on the role of mindfulness both in the management of illness and in the positive cultivation of health and wellbeing.

Mindfulness has attracted the interest of academic disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, medicine and religion, each of which has approached the subject with questions arising from their own theoretical lens. It can, for instance, be noted that researchers in psychology have tended to focus on how the term mindfulness should be defined and applied (e.g., Baer, 2003; Brown, Ryan & Cresswell, 2007; Dimidjian & Linehan, 2003; Germer, 2005), whereas medical researchers have been more interested in examining the practice’s tangible health benefits (e.g., Grossman et al., 2004; Hoffman, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 2013) as well as its therapeutic effects on such conditions as Type 2 diabetes (Rosenzweig, Reibel, Greeson, Edman, Jasser, McMearty, et al, 2007), fibromyalgia (Grossman, Tiefenthaler-Gilmer, Raysz, & Kesper, 2008), rheumatoid arthritis (Pradhan, Baumgarten, Langenberg, Handwerger, Gilpin, Magyari, et al, 2007), chronic low back pain (Morone, Greco, & Weiner, 2008) and
attention deficit hyperactive disorder (Zylowska, Smalley, & Schwartz, 2009).

This dissertation analyzes and critically discusses various definitions of mindfulness in its historic and contemporary contexts and emphasizes the importance of bridging the gap between the Buddhist tradition and the secular mindfulness movement in the West. By doing this, this dissertation presents a holistic view on mindfulness by considering its physical, mental, social, and existential dimensions with an emphasis on the latter two dimensions.

In the next section various perspectives on and practices of mindfulness are presented.
3. Perspectives on mindfulness

Mindfulness may be analyzed and understood in various ways. In this section, which is divided into three parts, I shed light on two different epistemologies. Specifically, I discuss the experiential meditative tradition as it appears in Buddhism and the Western practices of mindfulness. This chapter ends with an attempt to bridge these two approaches.

3.1 Buddhist roots of and perspectives on mindfulness

Buddhism\(^3\) is perhaps the world’s largest nontheistic religious tradition, represented by several ancient and medieval schools of thought as well as a wide range of modern Western interpretations. As such, it has been understood in a variety of ways depending upon one’s point of departure (religious, psychological, historical, phenomenological, etc.) and the angle of vision from which its various components have been conceived (Eastern, Western, secular, therapeutic, etc.). In one modern interpretation, for example, Wallace (in Weick & Putnam, 2006) has conceived of Buddhism as a “means of enhancing attentional stability and clarity, and of then using these abilities in the introspective examination of conscious states to pursue fundamental issues concerning consciousness itself” (2006, p. 276). In more traditional interpretations however, Buddhism, in its traditional guise, is

\(^3\) The term “Buddhism” is not intended to imply that there is “one Buddhism” or to privilege one particular interpretation as “traditional”. Rather it is used to denote a context of explicit oriented around teachings derived from the Buddha.
often conceived as a means of mitigating human suffering (Pali: dukkha) through enlightenment (Pali: sambodhi) and the elimination of material hankering, ultimately leading to liberation from the cycle of birth (Pali: samsara) and death (i.e., salvation) (Hong, 1995).

The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, is said to have propounded four noble truths (Pali: cattāri ariyasaccānip): the truths of suffering, their origin, their elimination, and the pathway to their transcendence. In the renowned first sermon after his enlightenment, the Buddha is reputed to have said: “Birth is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with unloved or unpleasant conditions is suffering; separation from beloved or pleasant conditions is suffering; not getting what one wants is suffering” (Hayes, 2002, p. 62). The source of suffering, according to the Buddha, is a desire or hankering, which can be brought to cessation via the discipline known as the Eightfold Noble Path (Pali: ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo) (Kumar, 2002). The Eightfold Noble Path is divided into three major parts (see Figure 2). The first part consists of concentration (Pali: samādhi) and the following paths: right effort (Pali: sammā vāyāma), right mindfulness (Pali: sammā sati) and right concentration (Pali: sammā samādhi). The second part, wisdom (Pali: paññā), deals with right understanding (Pali: sammā-diṭṭhi) and right thought (Pali: sammā sankappa). The third part, ethical conduct (Pali: sīla), consists of right speech (Pali: sammā vācā), right action (Pali: sammā kammanta) and right livelihood (Pali: sammā ājīva) (Schmidt, 2011).

Within this context, the word “right” assumes an important meaning because it underscores the fact that Buddhist mindfulness is not an ethically neutral practice, but rather one that requires discriminating between wholesome and
unwholesome actions (Monteiro, Musten, & Compson, 2014). According to Dhammika (1990), a degree of ethical judgment is necessary to properly practice mindfulness. In this respect, mindfulness in Buddhism has a strong commitment to moral way of life, most commonly, for the layperson the five precept (Pali: pañcasīlāni) a moral/ethical dimension of being, seldom addressed by psychological texts concerning mindfulness (Cohen, 2010).

Thus, sammā sati in the eightfold path is interpreted by Anālayo (2003) both as a path factor, and as a general mental factor (p. 57). By this, Anālayo means that there is a qualitative distinction between performing “right” mindfulness as a path and/or general factor on the one hand and performing “wrong” mindfulness (Pali: miccha sati) on the other (Anālayo, 2003). Sati in the definition of right mindfulness (sammā sati) stands for two mental qualities; diligent (Pali: ātapi), which implies vitality to engage in the practice of mindfulness and clearly knowing (Pali: Sampajañña), which implies the interpretation of what has arisen (Sun, 2014). But sati is also to be understood as a state of mind free from desires and discontent and directed towards the four satipaṭṭhānas; body, feelings, mind, and dhammas, which becomes the path factor of right mindfulness according to Anālayo (2003). The four satipaṭṭhānas are described in a recurring passage:

Here, a monk dwells contemplating the body in the body…feelings in feelings…mind in mind…phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world (Dīgha Nikāya, 22.1, as quoted in Bodhi, 2011, p. 21).

In traditional Buddhism, the purpose of sati is to be master of one’s own mind disentangling oneself from chain reactions that usually keep on invading our minds. Most fundamentally, Buddha claimed to provide a
means by which to become liberated from the cycle of perpetual birth and death and attain the final aim of nirvana.

Figure 2. The Eightfold Noble Path (Adapted from Schmidt, 2011)

However, one must also consider that there are diverse schools of Buddhist thought that hold slightly different ontological perspectives and other points of view. Shen and Midgley (2007), for example, have noted the differing ontological slants of the Theravadins, the Mahisasakias and the Sarvastivadins, three important schools of Indic Buddhist thought: the Theravadins emphasize that worldly phenomena are characterized by impermanence (Pali: annica), suffering (Pali: dukkha), and the absence of an essential self (Pali: anattā); the Mahisasakias emphasize the importance of the present, over and above the past and the future; and, the Servastivadins emphasize that all things exist in the past, present and future. As Buddhism spread from India to China to Japan and elsewhere, it adapted to the exigencies of each local culture, including local traditions such as Taoism,
Confucianism and so forth (Lopez, 1999). However, among all the various schools of Buddhist thought, it is Theravada Buddhism that is of particular interest here, largely because it has a strong connection to the Western conception of mindfulness.\(^4\)

As indicated above, mindfulness is rooted in Buddhism and formalized both as a training method and as the state of awareness that this method is intended to develop (Shennan, Payne, & Fenlon, 2011). Nonetheless, over the last hundred years or so, many Western thinkers and sympathizers \(^5\) interested in both traditional and modern forms of Buddhism have viewed mindfulness as pragmatic, as a self-regulatory practice that helps the individual adapt to society – enhancing her sense of health and wellbeing and improving the quality of her work and relationships within a Western capitalist framework (Purser & Milillo, 2014; Stanley, 2013). It is this form of mindfulness that, over the last two decades, has received the greatest amount of attention from Western scholars and therapists. Let us now go on and examine mindfulness in its more common Western guise.

\(^4\) The oldest written references for the notion of mindfulness or *sati* in the Pali language can be found in the so-called *Pali Canon* of the Theravada Buddhist branch. Theravada is the oldest Buddhist school, which today is practiced in Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. All other Buddhist traditions, such as Tibetan or Zen have their origin in this tradition (Schmidt, 2011).

\(^5\) The word “sympathizer” refers to a type of person who embraces an amalgam of popularized Buddhist and Hindu teachings and generally accepted scientific ideas. The supernatural and soteriological contents do not play a major part in their life (McMahan, 2008).
3.2 Western perspectives on and practices of mindfulness

Mindfulness has become a widespread and popular activity in the West. Similar to words such as yoga and meditation, most people nowadays have also heard about mindfulness. The uptake of mindfulness meditation within psychology, neuroscience and medicine and other disciplines has almost unanimously been celebrated as a new, inspiring and exciting development (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). In the Western world of health care medicine and even beyond therapists of all kind of schools, mindfulness is used mostly as an intervention and therapy method (Didonna, 2009; Wilson, 2014). Mindfulness is seen as a self-regulatory tool used to heal (without a soteriological frame of reference) a variety of mental and physical conditions (Didonna, 2009; Schmidt, 2011). Mindfulness as an intervention and therapy method in the West has shown a considerable amount of promising results during the 21st century (Baer, 2003; Didonna, 2009; Grossman et al., 2004). Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training (MB-EAT) are the more common therapy methods. While the developers of these programs claim to have designed them for general application, each has become known for the treatment of a specific disorder. MBCT, for example, has been largely applied to the treatment of depression (Segal, Williams, & Tiesdale, 2002), whereas MBSR and ACT have been mostly applied to those suffering from stress and/or chronic pain (Hayes, 2002; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). DBT, on the other hand, has been largely aimed at the treatment of borderline personality disorder (Linehan, 1993), while MB-EAT has targeted individuals suffering from binge eating disorder (Kristeller, Baer, & Quillian-Wolever, 2006).
In addition to these more established mindfulness-based regimes there are a number of less known programs, such as *Mindfulness-Based Relationship Enhancement*, (Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2004) that focuses on improving couple’s relationships, and *Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention*, (Witkiewitz, Marlatt, & Walker, 2005) that specializes in the treatment of addictive behavior. There is also *Mindfulness-Based Childbirth and Parenting*, which targets pregnancy- and parenting-related depression and stress (Vieten & Astin, 2008), as well as *Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training* (MMFT) (Stanley, Shaldach, Kiyonaga, & Jha, 2011), which has even attracted the attention of the military services.

As a therapy and/or intervention technique, mindfulness has the benefits of bringing awareness to the body, thus activating the “being” as opposed to the “doing” mode (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Practicing mindfulness involves, among other things, the release of stress (Baer, 2003; Didonna, 2009; Grossman et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Sedlmeier, Eberth, Schwartz, Zimmerman, Haarig, Jaeger et al, 2012). In light of this fact, mindfulness can be seen as an important tool for the use as a coping strategy relative to the handling of stress in daily life (Hick, 2009; Kessen, 2009; Schmidt, 2011; Sedlmeier., et al, 2012). People who are less stressed have a greater opportunity to bring awareness to the present moment. Calming down the stress systems of SAM⁶

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⁶ The SAM system is under the regulatory influence of the sympathetic nervous system as well as the adrenal medulla. Understanding the workings of the adrenal glands is vital for those that are endeavoring to understand the physiology of stress response—i.e., both the SAM and HPA stress response systems (Jones & Bright, 2001).
(sympathetic adrenal medullary system) and HPA (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis) leads to a feeling of reduced time pressure, better and more effective breathing and a body that brings awareness moment by moment. One becomes literally “awake”. Moreover, it is assumed that mindfulness practitioners acquire valuable tools that teach them to notice thoughts, feelings and behavior (Barnhofer & Crane, 2009).\(^7\) In general, the practitioners of mindfulness learn to take care of body and mind by becoming more aware of what is happening in the here and now—in the present moment. By becoming more present in the moment and obtaining greater access to the consciousness and the senses (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell), it is assumed that the practitioners act rather than react to the things happening around them (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Viewing mindfulness through such a lens can facilitate our understanding of mindfulness as a basic human capacity rather than a mere therapeutic tool (Brown & Cordon, 2009).

However, Western practitioners of so-called formal mindfulness not only meditate and do the body scanning and yoga exercises as therapy; it is used to manage stress or to cure their illness. Training mindfulness also becomes a way to improve self-image, life-skills and to gain health (Shapiro & Schwartz, 1999; Wilson, 2014). In this regard, mindfulness plays a part in the search for real, authentic happiness. For instance, the uptake of positive psychology by the coaching- and motivational industry, which also includes

\(^7\) In their article, Barnhofer and Crane (2011) argue from a perspective influenced by Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (CBT). Their contribution to mindfulness as an intervention and therapy method is therefore based on Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT).
mindfulness, assumes to offer a practical guide on how to get the ‘life one wants’ (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Lyubomirsky, 2007). Lyubomirsky (2007) writes:

> In a nutshell, the foundation of happiness can be found in how you behave, what you think, and what goals you set every day of your life. ‘There is no happiness without action.’ If feelings of passivity and futility overcome you whenever you face up to your happiness set point or to your circumstances, you must know that a genuine and abiding happiness is indeed within your reach, lying within the 40 per cent of the happiness pie chart that's yours to guide (p. 68).

In this regard, Kabat-Zinn (2005) states that mindfulness practice can lead to being less caught up in destructive emotions, and that the training predisposes us for greater emotional intelligence and balance, and ultimately greater happiness. This approach of “hiding” Buddhism’s presence when bringing mindfulness into non-religious settings seems to be working for the moment.

> ‘Reconceptualizing’ mindfulness as a biomedical or psychological technique moves the expertise into the scientific realm and aligns it with secular modernist ideals (Wilson, 2014). Furthermore, Wilson argues for promoting

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8 As has been stated by Kabat-Zinn, and as cited by Wilson (2014), “The intention and approach behind MBSR were never meant to exploit, fragment, or decontextualize the dharma, but rather to recontextualize it within the framework of science, medicine (including psychiatry an psychology), and healthcare so that it would be maximally useful to people who could not hear it or enter into it through the more traditional dharma gates, whether they were doctors or medical patients, hospital administrators, or insurance companies” (Wilson, 2014, p. 87; see also Sun
mindfulness in the West as a training that results in various kinds of health effects; this involves altering the sources of authority over Buddhist practice. Books and articles that stress the physiological and psychological benefits of mindfulness practice often urge readers to seek out professional counselors to help them with mindfulness, but do not recommend receiving advice from ordained Buddhist teachers or attending a temple in order to further their practice (Wilson, 2014).

Mindfulness meditation in the West started within behavioral medicine and mind-body frameworks. Now we find it (i.e., mindfulness) in the fields of psychology, and neuroscience, but also increasingly in the social sciences such as education (e.g., Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014), organization studies (e.g., Dane, 2011), social work (e.g., Hick, 2009) and economics (e.g., Borker, 2013).

We have so far discussed two different epistemologies, the Buddhist sacred tradition and Western empirical science. In chapter 3.2.1 (formal mindfulness) and 3.2.2 (informal mindfulness), we take a closer look at the more practical sides of mindfulness in the West, which I highlight from both an outside-in (i.e., as an academic teacher) and inside-out (i.e., as a practitioner of mindfulness) perspective.

3.2.1 Formal mindfulness
Formal mindfulness involves setting aside time to go to the mental “gym” which entails regularly dedicating a certain period of time to cultivate the

(2014) for a similar discussion about the necessity to recontextualize rather than decontextualize mindfulness).
three physical practices of mindfulness; body scanning, meditation (sitting, standing or lying down and walking) and yoga.

**Body scanning** is about becoming more present in the body (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). One can practice body scanning for a long or short period, lying in bed at night or in the morning, by sitting or standing (to stand and scan the body is also taught in Qigong, in the Da-Mo method. There are countless creative ways to bring the body scan or any other lying down meditation into one’s life (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

The way to do the body scan (see Figure 3 is by letting the mind sweep through various parts of the body, beginning with the left toe and then moving through the entire foot, i.e. the sole, the heel, the top of the foot - then up to the left leg beginning with the ankle and moving on to the shin and the calf, the knee and the kneecap, the thigh in its entirety, on the surface and the deep, the groin and the left hip, then over to the toes of the right foot, the other regions of the foot, then up the right leg in the same manner as the left. From there, the focus moves into, successively and slowly, the whole of the pelvic region, including the hips again, the buttocks and the genitals, the lower back, the abdomen and then the upper torso- the upper back, the chest and the ribs, the breast, the heart and lungs and major vessels housed within the ribs cage, the shoulder blades floating on the rib cage in the back, all the way up to the collarbone and shoulder. From the shoulders, to the arms, starting from the tips of the fingers and thumbs move successively through the fingers, the palms and backs of the hands, the wrists, forearms, elbows,
upper arms, armpits, and the shoulders again. Then move to the neck and throat and finely the face and head (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). 9

When doing body scanning, it is said that the entire body “floats away” or has become transparent. What is left is nothing but the breath flowing freely across all the boundaries of the body according to Kabat-Zinn’s (2013) description of body scanning. Conducting body scanning on regular basis, the practitioners are described by Kabat-Zinn (2013) as becoming aware that the body is not quite the same every time they do it. Bodies are constantly changing, and to observe the body from one time to another can tell people a lot about how they feel about their bodies.

Body scanning is of importance for people suffering from stress and/or pain (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Becoming aware of the body from time to time and learning how to control one’s breath has a high impact on feelings that are connected to these states (i.e., stress and pain). Kabat-Zinn (2013), whose knowledge on mindfulness and MBSR is based on experience with stress and pain patient groups, writes:

9 Body scanning as a relaxation method bears some resemblance to progressive muscle relaxation (PMR). According to the founder of PMR, Edmund Jacobsen (1938), muscle tension can be reduced much more if the subjects were taught to pay attention in to the sensations they experience as they tense and relax individual groups of muscles. PMR describes a particular sequence of muscle groups for an individual to follow. The sequence can begin with the person relaxing the hands, then the forehead, followed by the lower face, the neck, the stomach, and finally the legs. Each muscle group is tensed for 7-10 seconds and then relaxed for 15 seconds. This is usually repeated two or three times in a relaxation session, which generally lasts 20 or 30 minutes (Sarafino, 2002).
Each time you scan the body, you are letting what will flow in flow out. You are not trying to force weather to ‘letting go’ or purification to happen, which of course is impossible anyway. Letting go is really an act of acceptance of your situation. It is not a surrender to you fears about it. It is a seeing of yourself as larger than your problems and your pain, larger than your cancer, larger than your heart disease larger than your body, and identifying with the totality of your being rather than your body or your heart or your back or your fears (p. 88).

Figure 3. Body-scanning. Lying down in ‘corpse’ pose (Pali: savasana) and letting the mind sweep through various parts of the body. Drawn by the author.

**Meditation** is a practice done in many postures such as by lying down, standing and/or sitting (Kessen, 2009). In the early stage of meditation practice, the most comfortable way of meditating is by lying down. This is for instance done in postures that are known in yoga as the corpse pose (see Figure 3); this entails lying on one’s back with the arms alongside the body and the feet falling away from each other (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). However, the crucial part of lying down and meditating is not to fall asleep.
To sit and meditate can be done in different ways depending on the experience and the subtlety of the body. In the West, it is customary to sit on a chair or meditation bench and meditate. It requires less effort to sit and meditate in a chair, meditation bench or on a pillow compared to sitting with the back directly on the floor meditating (Burch, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2005). If one chooses to sit with the back directly on the floor and meditate, one can use one of three possible poses (Sanskrit: āsana); full lotus, half lotus and or the kneeling pose with or without a meditation bench (see Figure 4).

![Figure 4.a-c](image)

Figure 4.a-c. Sitting meditation in (a) lotus pose (Pali: padamsana) and (b) half lotus (Pali: siddhasana) and (c) the kneeling pose (Japanese: seiza) with a meditation bench. With kind permission of the illustrator, Lars G. Henricsson, 2012.

In two of the corresponding forms of meditative practice, concentration (Pali: Samatha) and insight meditation (Pali: vipassana), attention is directed in different ways. Concentration meditation involves fixing one’s attention on an internal object (e.g., one’s breath), a word or phrase (e.g., a mantra), or an external object (e.g., a candle or mandala=a visualized image) (Brown & Ryan, 2004). With insight meditation, attention is said to lead to a heightened awareness of the ongoing stream of apperceptual and perceptual
phenomena (Brown & Ryan, 2004). As noted by Levenson and Aldwin (2013), the main purpose of mindfulness in Buddhism is clear awareness. They metaphorically liken the awareness to a storm, and by meditating we become aware of the storm in what we call “ourselves”. In doing so, we can have an effect on our inner weather simply by observing it. By observing the “storm” in detail and seeing it as not “ourselves”, we can accept its impermanence and let it dissipate (Levenson & Aldwin, 2013).

In the case of concentration meditation, a very important understanding is that concentration can develop in any situation, even though it is easier in some situations. Mikulas (2011) notes for instance, that concentration usually first develops as sustained attention to keep one’s mind focused on a particular object or class of object, as already mention above.

Walking meditation, another way of practicing meditation is known by the name kinhin (a Japanese word) in Zen Buddhism, and aims at releasing bodily tension by walking back and forth in a line, or round and round in a loop (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). An ideal time to practice walking meditation is right after the sitting meditation, when the mind is already stilled, to at least some extent, to the practice (Ṭhānissaro, 2012). Practicing walking

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10 Brown and Ryan (2004) explain the difference between apperception and perception in this way: “The term ‘perception’ is typically used to refer to the consciousness of external stimuli received through the five senses, while philosophical discourse often refers to ‘apperception’ as the consciousness of internal events and experience” (2004, p. 247). Here, however, one can ask what the term “pure” in the above sentence has to do with apperception. James (1899) refers to the concept “apperception” as a result of the association of ideas, i.e., the mind’s way of internalizing and processing objects such as memories, ideas and interests.
meditation is done with full attention to breathing and insertions of the feet (Kessen, 2009). Kabat-Zinn (2005) gives us the following instruction:

Beginning with lifting just one heel, we then bring awareness to moving that foot and leg forward, and then to placing of the foot on the ground usually first with the heel. As the whole of this now forward foot comes down on the floor or ground, we note the shifting of the weight from the back foot through to the forward foot, and then we note the lifting of the back foot, heel first and later the rest of it as the weight of the body comes fully onto the forward foot, and the cycle continues: moving, placing, shifting…(pp. 269-270).

One can practice walking meditation at any pace, from ultraslow to very brisk (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). However, the balance is crucial, as the above quotations from Kabat-Zinn reveal.

**Mindfulness yoga** is the last of the three physical techniques as applied in physical and mental dimensions of mindfulness. Historically, yoga and meditation can be seen as intertwined in each other (Feuerstein, 2008; Nelson, 2009). The word “yoga” is etymologically derived from the verbal root *yuj*, meaning “to bind together” or “to yoke”, and can have many connotations, such as “union”, “conjunction of stars”, “grammatical rule”, “endeavor”, “occupation”, “team” and many more, according to Feuerstein (2008).

*Hatha yoga*, according to Boccio (2004), is the most popular yoga practice in the West. The esoteric meaning of *hatha* is that it signifies *ha* the sun and *tha* the moon, which further means the yoga that unifies the power of the sun and the moon – the male and the female energies within all of us (Boccio, 2004, p. 10). *Hatha yoga* devotes attention to the physical body, by using
special postures and purifying the body through diet or other means (Feuerstein, 2008). In the “traditional” form of *hatha yoga* there are three main elements: the body, the mind and the breath. For each of these three parts *hatha yoga* offers special techniques. For the physical parts (the body) it offers the *asanas* (postures), for the mind it offers *kriyas* (action), *mudras* (seals) and *bandhas* (locks). In addition, for the breath it offers a special technique called, *pranayamas* that involves breath control (inhalation, exhalation and suspension) (Raub, 2002). When performing *asanas* and *pranayamas*, the practitioners of *hatha yoga* gain psychophysiological effects that have a beneficial influence on the musculoskeletal system, the cardiopulmonary system, the nervous and the endocrine system (Raub, 2002). In this regard, Salmon, Lush, Jablonski and Sephton (2009) refer to *hatha yoga* as an exercise that has been linked to raised levels of the brain neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin, which have emotion-enhancing effects (2009).

In Western society, generally, modern *hatha yoga* has acclimatized to shifting contexts; from the counterculture of Indian ascetic renouncers, to the counterculture of turn-of-the-century American practitioners of *tantra*, to the counterculture of Transcendentalism and metaphysical religion, and to the counterculture of proponents of physical culture (Jain, 2015). Modern *hatha yoga*, as part of the Western physical culture movement, is known by the name ‘postural yoga’. Jain states, quoting Singleton, that postural yoga, “emerged as a hybridized product of colonial India’s dialogical encounter with the worldwide physical culture movement”(Jain, 2015, p. 37).11

11Jain (2015) refers to postural yoga as a collection of complex data made up of a congeries of figures, institutions, ideas, and practical paths involving mental or
*Hatha yoga* is first and foremost known as the yoga technique used in the Western mindfulness (i.e., mindfulness yoga), by Kabat-Zinn and many others (Boccio, 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Kabat-Zinn (2005), describes the practice of mindfulness yoga in the following way, “Through the practice of mindfulness yoga, we can expand and deepen our sense of what it means to inhabit the body and develop a richer and more nuanced sense of the lived body in the lived moment” (p. 276). In *hatha yoga* there are as many as 840,000 poses, of which 84 are important. Some of the more common poses used in MBSR are seen below.

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physical techniques – most commonly meditative, breathing, or postural exercise. Thus, yoga in general is a living and dynamic tradition that should be understood in pluralist terms and through a polythetic approach (Jain, 2015).
Figure 5 a-h. Some of the most common poses in *hatha yoga* (With permission, via license, from Mobilus Digital Rehab AB, 2010).
3.2.2 Informal mindfulness

Mindfulness, apart from its formal practice, can also refer to a certain attitude towards one’s experience and actions in daily life, more precisely termed informal mindfulness. As Kabat-Zinn (2000) writes “The heart of the practice in MBSR lies in what we call informal meditation practice, i.e., mindfulness in everyday life. The true meditation practice is when life itself becomes the practice” (p. 240).

Schmidt (2004) points out that mindfulness in daily life simply means “to be present” in all of one’s activities (p. 9). That entails it is a way of being. Being as opposed to doing. Being mindful, in an everyday context, is to pay attention in a particular way, with the intention, in the present, with no judgment according to Kabat-Zinn (2013), and further on to learn how to direct the awareness toward the lived body, a switch from a doing-mode to a being-mode (Anālayo, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). In the same vein Hick (2009) writes:

As human beings we are more like ‘‘human doings,’’ keeping ourselves busy with endless activities and tasks. This often operates to distract us from our lives. Doing mode involves a lot of thinking about the future or the past, not being fully in the present… This is where mindfulness comes in. It is nonjudgmental moment-to-moment awareness. In short, it is dwelling in the being mode with acceptance (p. 7).

A relatively common way to learn about this switch mode in MBSR-courses is to start with the raisin-eating experiment. According to Kabat-Zinn (2013), this experiment is the first introduction to meditation practice in the stress clinic; this is also confirmed by my own experience learning MBSR
for professionals. However, the aim with the experiment is to be more present (i.e., being-mode) in an everyday activity, such as eating a raisin, or other meals. By exploring the raisin with our entire senses (i.e., sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch) one is supposed to be made aware of the raisin moment by moment, which leads to new ways of seeing and being in life (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Kessen (2009), with a background as professor in social work stresses that we can practice mindfulness twenty-four hours a day by bringing awareness to every activity that is a part of our daily lives. We only need to focus on the present moment (Kessen, 2009). Notwithstanding, this sort of being-mode in everyday life should not be regarded as a on and off switch. It is more of a description of a daily mode that has been introjected in the mind during years of mindfulness training.

3.3 Bridging Buddhist and Western mindfulness practices

In sections 3.1 and 3.2 above, I have portrayed two different epistemologies; the sacred tradition of Buddhism and the secular culture of Western mindfulness movement. The reason for this contrasting picture has been to challenge, in dialogue, two approaches with such different histories, assumptions, cultural baggage and philosophical underpinnings. However, to ensure a further dialogue between Buddhism and the Western mindfulness movement, this section attempts to cross-fertilize these two epistemologies in terms of philosophical underpinnings, assumptions, and cultural baggage. Both Buddhism and the Western mindfulness movement come together at
their root, as both open up for social issues (i.e., participating in the mindfulness group or the *sangha*) and existential issues (i.e. focusing on the broader issue of meaning in life). The next two sections, 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 will elaborate on this.

3.3.1 *The social dimension of mindfulness*

A secular mindfulness group (e.g., MBSR-group) can be compared to a Buddhist *sangha* (“the community”) in the sense that its members come together on a regular basis to perform mindfulness training (e.g., meditation) — individual practices that also function as venues for the expression of the social dimension of mindfulness (personal informed by Kabat-Zinn, 2015-05-25).

Mindfulness training enables both bodily and mental development and calls forth two invaluable human characteristics: empathy and compassion. This sort of training also allows for a very special and important internal form of visualization and dialogue known as loving-kindness or *mettā* meditation.

The term *mettā* is said to originate from Theravada Buddhism and to be synonymous with compassion. Among the many meditational exercises in Buddhism, *mettā* meditation holds a central place (Anālayo, 2003, p. 195).

12 In Theravada Buddhism, *karuṇā* is one of four divine abodes (*brahmavihāra*) along with loving kindness (*mettā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) (Gethin, 1998). One can speak of two kinds of compassion: the internal (visualizing and affirmative), passive type (*mettā*) and the external (engaged), active type (*karuṇā*).
According to Anālayo, mettā meditation contributes to the social dimension of mindfulness by helping individuals to counteract pathological feelings of alienation and low self-esteem and establish harmonious relations with both human and non-human beings (Anālayo, 2003; Burch, 2011). In this regard, Kwee (2012) speaks of mettā meditation, empathic compassion and shared joy as the alpha and omega of Buddhist action (Kwee, 2012) and this statement can be generally applied to mindfulness as well. Thus, this form of Buddhist meditation is common in many MBSR programs and appears in numerous mindfulness books (Wilson, 2014).

The process of mettā meditation calls upon the meditator to wholeheartedly contemplate the following four phrases (Kuan, 2008): 1) allow me to experience security and freedom from both internal and external harm; 2) allow me to become healthy; 3) allow me to know happiness and, 4) allow me to live a life of ease. Each of these phrases is intended to be first directed toward oneself, then toward a particular benefactor (someone that has made an important contribution to one’s life), then toward an intimate friend, a neutral person and an enemy (a disliked or confrontational figure in one’s life); at the last stage, each is meant to be directed toward all the living things of the world. At each stage of meditation, one is supposed to invoke the person in mind by uttering her name and directing each of the four phrases to her. The final stage involves the opening of one’s heart as an

13 See also the study by Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel (2008) on loving-kindness meditation and how this form of practice gradually facilitates the development of positive emotions such as happiness, love, joy, contentment and so forth.
invitation to all human beings and then widening the circle to include all the living entities of the world.

Mettā meditation is primarily designed to transform the selfish mind into one that is more giving and caring; the ultimate aim is to increase one’s feelings of empathy and compassion toward all living things (Anālayo, 2003; Fredrickson et al., 2008; Gilbert & Tirch, 2009). Feelings of empathy are based on an authentic emotional understanding of another’s needs and interests. Both empathy and compassion are aimed at the Other from the meditator’s inner world, and thus can be viewed as both an internal and an external dialogue. Dialogue, in this regard, is mindfulness training at a social level. It is not a discussion about external issues, but more a way to share and to hear personal experience of other people that opens awareness to the range of human factors involved in social behavior (Chappell, 2003). Thus, regular and frequent meetings to monitor moral action and to resolve problems by discussion were the Buddhist social model of dialogue and accountability in its earliest days (Chappell, 2003).

Although each meditator exists in his or her own separate space (i.e., internal process) during mettā meditation, all participants nonetheless remain mentally and emotionally close. This relation of distance and closeness to others can be viewed as a “twofold movement” in which the first (“establishing distance”) presupposes the second (“entering into relationship”). A somewhat similar idea can be found in Buber’s “I and Thou” (1997, p. 10), where it is suggested that an I-Thou relationship can exist only when we come together and face each other as subjects (closeness) while simultaneously maintaining our integrity as independent autonomous beings (distance). Also related to the social dimension of
mindfulness is the idea that the body is an expression of the self in terms of both symbolic and social meanings, it being a reflection of our lifestyle, attitudes and interpersonal dealings with others.

In this regard, it can be said that mindfulness practices carry the potential to increase ethical awareness and the sense of social responsibility toward other people and the world. In Buddhist thought, this is viewed as an external interaction or dialogue characterized by a commitment to various forms of activism in the here and now (González-Lopez, 2011). The Vietnamese Zen master Hahn has termed this “engaged Buddhism,” a form that calls for action in response to the various vital issues of the time in which we lived — e.g., climate change, the abuse of the environment, social alienation, world conflict and so forth. In other words, the mindfulness practitioner must be aware not only of what is going on within his or her own body and mind, but also of what is going on in the surrounding world (Hahn cited in: Gonzáles-Lopez, 2011, p. 450). Because of this mutual interdependence, there cannot be social structures without human agency or human agency without social structures (Sapsford, Still, Wetherell, Miell, & Stevens, 2003).

Another leading proponent of this approach is the modern Buddhist and peace activist Sivaraksa, the founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. In his book *The Wisdom of Sustainability, Buddhist Economics for the 21st Century*, Sivaraksa (2009) presents a sweeping vision of mindfulness that carries us beyond mere self-improvement to the betterment of the world at large and the development of a sustainable future for all mankind:

On a political level, mindfulness can help in our work against consumerism, sexism, militarism, and many other ‘isms’ that
undermine the integrity of life. It can be a tool to help us criticize positively and creatively our societies, nations, and even cultural and religious traditions. Consumerism endangers the biosphere and strengthens multinational corporations that care more about profit than the wellbeing of people. We must be mindful of how we create and use wealth (p. 83).

In *Mindfulness and Social Work* (Hick, 2009), the authors are tying mindfulness techniques to social work practice. The target of *Mindfulness and Social Work* is focused on both mindfulness interventions and the development of mindfulness within the practitioner. While conceptual development is of importance, the editor and the contributors maintain that the study of mindfulness also needs to demonstrate the effects of its use in order for it to be seen as a sustainable discipline in the field of social work. Todd (2009), one of the contributors, argues in her chapter, “that a reentering of the interior lives of community members can help us to understand the impact that mindfulness practices can have on community mobilization and sustaining change” (p. 173). Furthermore, Leonard (2012) stresses that: “practicing mindfulness helps social workers to be more aware of how behavior impacts the environment, one’s thought processes and one’s values” (p. 7).

3.3.2 The existential dimension of mindfulness

From his own personal experiences in Auschwitz as well as his encounters throughout his career with numerous individuals, Frankl (1988) concludes that the primary motivating factor in human life is not the pursuit of power and/or enjoyment, but rather the search for meaning. In *The Will to Meaning. Foundation and Application of Logotherapy* Frankl (1988) mentions that
meaning in life can be derived through creativity, experience and attitudinal values (Frankl, 1988). In *The Human Quest for Meaning. Theories, Research, and Application*, Wong (2012) expands upon this understanding as follows: “After all, it is meaning that gives life clarity, direction, and passion. It is meaning that endows life with a sense of significance and fulfillment. It is meaning that helps us navigate through trouble waters; meaning manifests itself through thoughts, emotion, and actions” (p. 636).

Although religion and/or spirituality has been proposed as one way in which humans may meet these existential, meaning-related needs (Berger, 1969; Moore, Metcalf, & Schow, 2006), one can also find them as an existential basis of all of the needs identified by Maslow (in Park, 2012) and in social work practice as well. In this respect, much of social work practice is concerned with making sense of, and transforming painful social experience (Newberry, 2012). However, the search for ontological meaning is a never-ending project that evolves through the major phases of one’s life, namely adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood and old age. In the discussion on the existential dimension of mindfulness, the term *meaning* is intended to refer not only to the context of the individual, but also, and primarily, to the social context of the group. Frankl (1979) has noted in this connection that the feeling of being an included and accepted member of a group is of great importance to the individual’s sense of meaning and value in life. In addition, Kwee (2012) asserts that: “Meaning is socially, not privately, constructed actively by members of the community who develop ways of speaking to serve their needs as a group” (p. 264).

Fry and Debats (2010) have additionally noted that when individuals suffer the loss of their group identity, their sense of meaning suffers as well. As
noted by Hick (2009), social workers are offering a variety of mindfulness-based group interventions in a range of contexts, from hospital to community health clinics and private practice. Using mindfulness to help caregivers and people who care for chronically ill family members could be considered as a question of bringing mental health to these groups, as well as meaning making values within the social work practice.

Given the vital nature of the search for meaning in life, the potential contribution of mindfulness to the fulfillment of this aim is certainly worth considering. Indeed, because systematic mindfulness training is said to place the individual more in touch with his or her own interior, it can, in many cases, lead to a questioning of the general meaning of life as well as the specific meaning of human suffering—which includes the inevitable triad of old age, disease and death.

Frankl himself considered suffering to be an inevitable aspect of life, as did the Buddha, although each recommended his own approach to the matter of how suffering should be handled. In this connection, Frankl (1979) notes that “/…/ life’s meaning is an unconditional one, for it even includes the potential meaning of suffering.” Frankl’s own life epitomized Nietzsche’s dictum: “He who has a why to live for, can bear almost any how” (Peterson, 2001, p. 61). It is this “why”, this meaning in life, which gives life an impetus to work toward survival and to find meaning in even the most horrendous places and situations (Peterson, 2001). While the Buddha, to some degree, shares this point of view, he claims that it is because of one’s material hankerings and attachments that one becomes bound by suffering. In this view, one can become free from all kinds of suffering by following
the way of the bodhisattva (Hong, 1995), which basically means to practice the eightfold noble path.

Questions concerning the meaning in life and suffering are also related to the questions concerning existential wellbeing. Existential wellbeing, in this context, should be understood in terms of purposes and direction in life, expressed through social interactions that are marked by empathy and compassion. In Buddhism, (existential) wellbeing is achieved through the development of mental equilibrium as well as the realization of “one’s fullest potential in terms of wisdom, compassion and creativity” (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006, p. 691).

The practice of mindfulness, moreover, also affords a sense of psychological wellbeing through its program of physical and mental exercises, which leads to an increase in personal resilience, namely, the ability to cope with various life stressors, and a heightened sense of purpose in life. Beyond this, Brown & Ryan (2003) suggest that mindfulness facilitates wellbeing through self-regulated activity as well as by satisfying the basic psychological need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In some theories, having a sense of purpose in life is thought to be a necessary condition of wellbeing, meaning that an individual cannot be considered to have achieved genuine wellbeing without it (Wong, 2012). In this regard, it appears that mindfulness carries the potential of being highly facilitative in terms of increasing the individual’s sense of meaning, purpose and overall wellbeing.
4. Methods

This section discusses the research methodology in a broad sense. In this dissertation document analysis using insights from hermeneutics and phenomenology was used. In the following, I will describe interpretative and experiential approaches, and continue with discussing more specifically the analytical approach inspired by hermeneutic phenomenology.

4.1 Interpretative and experiential approaches

Broadly speaking, one can say that there are basically two contrasting approaches to the (social) psychology of religion: 1) the empirical approach, which can be traced to G. Stanley Hall and his students at Clark University, especially E. Starbuck, who is said to be one of its earliest proponents (Wulff, 2007); and 2) the interpretative approach, which is epitomized by William James’s magisterial *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), quoted in Wulff (2007).

The (social) psychologists of religion who largely embrace the empirical approach have been almost entirely wedded to methodologies that rely upon one form or another of statistical analysis and the extrapolation of a sample’s results to the population as a whole.
In contrast, interpretative psychologists of religion, including humanistic and experiential social psychologists (see Sapsford et al., 2003), have largely relied upon a “qualitative proto-phenomenological” approach that embraces a variety of qualitative methods, including document analysis, historical and clinical case studies, interviews and other such techniques. In this regard, Wulff (2007) notes that such interpretative researchers are “less concerned with generalizations” and can thus, “just as easily pursue the psychology of religious contents as they can the psychology of religious persons, and the contents or persons may be located either in the present or in the past” (pp. 261-262). The concern of experiential humanistic social psychologists is to study personal and social life in the actualities of lived experience (Sapsford et al., 2003).

This dissertation can be considered interpretative and experiential humanistic from three standpoints. First, it largely relies upon the expert opinions of numerous scholars and authorities in the field of mindfulness. Second, it admits the importance of subjective experience as well as the scientific value of first-person accounts, historical records, historical/clinical case studies, and so forth (Sapsford et al., 2003; Wulff, 2007). Third, it is concerned with multiple realities as opposed to searching for one objective reality (Denzin, 2010).

The main tool of a subjective humanistic approach is the emphasis on particular events, or on individual experiences, for only through these can the meaning of inner experience be realized (Sapsford et al., 2003). Within this approach, the material consists of historical records, clinical and non-clinical studies dealing with mindfulness mainly in psychology, social work, and Buddhism.
Although empirical articles are crucial to the study of mindfulness, there are voices that have been raised against all these empirical articles or approaches that overflow the research field of mindfulness (Brown & Cordon, 2009; Dawson & Turnbull, 2006; Purser & Milillo, 2014; Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014; Stanley, 2012; Stanley, 2013). It is therefore of importance to contribute, as in this dissertation, with non-empirical studies. According to Cropanzano (2009), there are three common types of non-empirical studies/articles: (1) theory articles that seek to propose new conceptual models, (2) review articles that seek to summarize and explain an existing literature and (3) critique articles that seek to explain why an area of study is moving in the wrong direction. Consequently, in the following is a discussion based on how I have worked with these three types of non-empirical studies.

*Paper I* treats mindfulness as a concept with various definitions and contrasting meanings. As a review article, *Paper I* summarizes the primary research on mindfulness definitions and provides an alternative definition influenced by modern Buddhism and Western phenomenology. A comprehensive search strategy was employed to identify the various extant definitions. A systematic search was made of the following three databases: Google Scholar, PsycARTICLES and SocINDEX. In these searches, *mindfulness* was used as the keyword and combined with the terms *definition, conceptualization* and *nature*. From the reading of the abstracts and the introductions, 18 diverse (overlapping) definitions were extracted. These were then combined with 11 definitions gleaned from a study by Dane (2011), to which Dane added one of his own, bringing his total to 12. Thus,
the analysis was conducted on 30 definitions of mindfulness categorized into four themes.

*Paper II* discusses and problematizes the practice of mindfulness in its Western secular draft, *doing mode*, in comparison to the sacred tradition of Buddhism, *being mode*. As a critical article, Paper II asserts the importance of preserving the most valuable features from the Buddhist paradigm, for instance, to be an ethical, spiritual and compassionate human being, but also to remove parts of the soteriological content that seem too hard to practice for Westerners, for instance, the noble eightfold path, in order to present a view that can be learned and taught in a secular Western mindfulness guise.

*Paper III* and *Paper IV* are theory articles. Paper III advances a four-field model of mindfulness consisting of the physical, mental, social and existential dimensions. Paper III argues that a more nuanced understanding of physical, mental, social and existential mindfulness can be obtained by examining the interconnectedness of all four fields. Furthermore, Paper III highlights the importance of authenticity in social encounters by discussing empathy and compassion in a social interaction model.

*Paper IV* advances the concept of mindful sustainable aging by integrating four common psychosocial theories in the gerontology field, the activity theory (Havighurst & Albrecht 1953), the disengagement theory (Cummins & Henry, 1961), the successful aging theory (Rowe & Kahn, 1987) and the gerotranscendence theory (Tornstam, 1996). Mindful sustainable aging aims at highlighting a more holistic way of approaching the elderly’s aging process by elaborating and discussing how mindfulness could serve as a tool for the achievement of a sustainable longevity.
4.2 Other methodological considerations

The primary method in this dissertation was text based, i.e., document analysis, and influenced by a hermeneutic phenomenological approach involving the translation and interpretation of texts. The methodology\(^\text{14}\) was influenced by hermeneutics, as it addressed the translation and interpretation of texts. This was done by a lengthy investigation, focused on traditional and contemporary texts, commentaries and the interpretation of diverse views of mindfulness. All the four papers have basically comprised the following: 1) narrative readings of various kinds of theoretical and empirical texts on the topic of mindfulness derived from a variety of journals and books. Additionally, to reframe mindfulness within a theoretical context or school tradition, I have used firsthand sources from “philosophers” such as, Buber, Erikson, Frankl and Schutz; 2) the examination of the “phenomenon” of mindfulness with a focus on concept, context and the lived body, relative to its social and existential dimensions; and, 3) a critical epistemological analysis and a hermeneutic phenomenological “inspired” examination of mindfulness as both an ancient discipline rooted in Buddhism and a modern form of contemporary Buddhism and therapy that attempt to foster positive human development.

\(^{14}\) Polkington (1983) supported the use of the term *methodology* rather than *method* to describe the use of phenomenological and hermeneutical phenomenological traditions. A methodology is not a correct method to follow, but a creative approach to understanding, using whatever approaches are responsive to particular questions and subject matter. Madison (1988) supported the notion that method focuses the researchers on exact knowledge and procedure whereas methodology uses good judgment and responsible principles rather than rules to guide the research process.
In this dissertation, I have used document analysis as a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents (cf. Bowen, 2009). As has been noted by Davie and Wyatt (2011), working with documents involves both an analysis of content and a careful consideration of production, use and function within a specific socio-historical context. In this regard, I have attempted to examine how the mindfulness literature deals with the points of consideration mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, namely, at analyzing mindfulness as a concept and a multi-dimensional phenomenon in its historic and primordial but also contemporary contexts.

The analytical procedure has been done in three steps: *skimming* (superficial examination), *reading* (thorough examination) and *interpreting* texts (Bowen, 2009). This iterative process has combined elements of critical epistemological analysis and of hermeneutic phenomenological “inspired” analysis, which will be discussed below. First however, some mention about the validity. A way to gain validity in qualitative research is to include reflexivity, not only with the various interpreted texts, but also with prominent scholars from the field. To discuss and check the analysis and interpretations of texts with a critical mass is known in the research literature as having a “critical reference group” (Pyett, 2003). This is said to strengthen the validity of the qualitative analysis. In my case, I have not only reflected over various types of interpreted texts, I have also checked and discussed my texts with prominent scholars and Buddhists in conferences, workshops and through email correspondence.
The process of exploration was framed in a critical epistemological texts analysis, and through a hermeneutic phenomenological investigation. The next two paragraphs will discuss these two approaches.

To conduct a critical epistemological text analysis postulates that there is a dialectical relationship between language and society and between text and context (Hellspong & Ledin, 2013). Language, according to this view, is a social construction anchored in the individual and the collective intention and attitude that need to be valued. In addition to such a statement, it is of importance to also criticize texts and their sender for what they have chosen to highlight or not (Hellspong & Ledin, 2013). In providing such an approach, Paper I is mostly concerned with analyzing and classifying existing definitions of mindfulness from a variety of types of sources; Paper II critically analyzes and interprets the Buddhist and Western practice of mindfulness. In Paper I, the texts have been extracted from a lot of western sources (research fields) dealing with the concept of mindfulness, in reference to the context of Buddhist sati. In Paper II, mindfulness has been contextualized within two contexts; Buddhism and social work in order to ascertain how they could be developed and integrated or bridged.

A hermeneutic phenomenological investigation is characterized by its focus on relatedness and the intuitive essences and description of a phenomenon (e.g., mindfulness) (Wilcke, 2002). From this approach, I am mostly concerned with how to understand the phenomenon of mindfulness, from both a Western and Buddhist perspective. A first step in this direction, was taken by orienting myself about this phenomenon, by reading historical and contemporary Buddhists, clinical and non-clinical articles and books on mindfulness, as well as participating (being-there) in mindfulness
conferences, workshops and training sessions (and of course my daily training as a practitioner of mindfulness) (cf. Wilcke, 2002).

A second step, was done by interpreting (thinking), describing and contextualizing (writing) mindfulness from both a Western secular point of view and from a Buddhist sacred setting and root. The interpretative procedure in Paper I was conducted by organizing the definitions of mindfulness into four themes (a way to show what we see or hear in a text): the activity, the internal mental state, the external stimuli and the cultivating theme and by subsequently fusing the horizons of the Western mindfulness concept with the Buddhist concept of sati. In Paper II, two contexts, namely, the Buddhist and the social work were fused into dialogue (Gadamer, 1997), in an attempt to understand how these contexts discuss mindfulness. Paper III interprets mindfulness in the context of resilience and in the course of a life span. For these reasons, Paper III added a four-dimensional model of mindfulness to arrive at a better understanding on how the physical, mental, social and existential dimensions can impact on health. In this regard, two less focused dimensions, the social and the existential, were interpreted and discussed more in detail. Finally, Paper IV took up the thread from Paper I (to conceptualize), by introducing and discussing a new concept, mindful sustainable aging. Paper IV also drew on Paper II by contextualizing this new concept within the context of four common psychosocial theories of aging. Further, Paper IV provided a deeper understanding of how mindfulness can mediate a sustaining resource for wellbeing and meaning in old age; this is something that was brought up in Paper III.

In the next section, I will summarize Papers I-IV.
5. Summary of the studies

5.1 Paper I

Reconciling and thematizing definitions of mindfulness

Paper I aims to classify modern and secularized definitions of mindfulness in comparison to the Buddhist definition of sati. To afford a greater sense of the various extant research perspectives, Paper I examined and analyzed definitions of mindfulness, gleaned from a broad range of scholars, practitioners and Buddhists. Paper I also provides an indication of future research directions by offering its own definition, based upon what appears to be the current state-of-the-art in this field. The result revealed that mindfulness (or sati in Buddhism) can connote many plausible meanings; thus the concept is not easily defined and the definitions provided in the literature are not only overlapping, but also different in essence from the Buddhist concept (sati), which per se could confuse the reader. To that end, the “solution” has been to identify and to classify existing definitions of mindfulness into four distinctive themes; the activity, the internal mental state, the external stimuli and the cultivating theme, and further to elaborate a definition that creates a bridge between the Western way of mindfulness and the Buddhist sati.

5.2 Paper II

From Buddhist sati to Western mindfulness practice: A contextual analysis.

In Paper II, the aim was to critically analyze and interpret the Buddhist and Western practices of mindfulness. Mindfulness, as an “imported” spiritual and soteriological phenomenon was interpreted within two contextual
perspectives: the Buddhist perspective and the social work perspective. The findings reveal that mindfulness in its Western guise, i.e., social work context, shares a common aim with Buddhism, namely, to decrease human suffering and to enhance human well-being. The goal was furthermore to present the relationship of mindfulness (or sati) to the contexts mentioned above. In this respect, rather than to promote one particular perspective over another, the aim was rather to encourage social workers to enter into dialogue with Buddhist teachers, clinicians and mindfulness instructors, as well as to uphold the efficacy and credibility of mindfulness techniques, should they choose to employ them in their work.

5.3 Paper III

_A four dimensional model of mindfulness and its implication for health._

In Paper III, the aim was to introduce and explore a health perspective using a four-field model of mindfulness, to highlight the concept of resilience, and to further elaborate the social and existential dimensions of mindfulness. In this regard, Paper III reveals the importance of highlighting mindfulness from a “holistic” perspective. Thus, to gain health and to achieve resilience, in the course of life, is seen through the four dimensions of mindfulness: physical, mental, social and existential. Even though a vast amount of research has been conducted regarding physical mindfulness (practicing mindfulness, body scanning, mediation and yoga), and mental mindfulness (dealing with thoughts and feelings), Paper III proposes that the next essential step in mindfulness training is to involve the less known social (mindfulness in a social context) and existential dimensions (mindfulness as a meaningful activity) as well. In this respect, Paper III argues for the addition of these two fields that can serve to enhance resilience and promote
human health, especially as these dimensions are related to both social interaction/group and meaning-in-life contexts.

5.4 Paper IV

Mindful sustainable aging: Advancing a comprehensive approach to the challenges and opportunities of old age.

In Paper IV, the aim was to present and elaborate a new concept in the field of gerontology, namely mindful sustainable aging. In the course of developing this concept, the psychodynamic perspectives of both Erikson and Frankl were employed, as well as four other psychosocial theories of aging: the activity theory, the disengagement theory, successful aging theory and gerotranscendence theory. Using Erikson’s developmental stage theory and Frankl’s meaning-centered therapy, this Paper explores the ways in which mindfulness might be important in terms of coping with the psychosocial crisis of old age and the struggle to find meaning in late life. The results show that the practice of social and existential mindfulness, previously highlighted in Paper III, are both a beneficial and a healthy undertaking that help to enhance healthy aging and improve the quality of elderly people’s meaning in life.
6. Discussion and conclusion

As previously stated, this dissertation aimed at analyzing mindfulness as a concept and a multi-dimensional phenomenon in its historic and primordial but also contemporary contexts. In this respect, I have argued throughout the four Papers that the usefulness of the Western mindfulness movement will become more profound if it is somehow able to reclaim and reincorporate at least a portion of its traditional Buddhist sensibilities, which are connected with questions of interpersonal and social responsibility, as well as present and ultimate meaning. One of the problems, however, that relates to this statement is how to conceptualize and contextualize mindfulness (Sun, 2014). What is clear is that the concept of mindfulness is more compelling and popular than it has ever been before (e.g., Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Seen from this point of view, mindfulness is not one thing, but many.

The mindfulness movement is also colored by the contexts to which it migrates and simultaneously transforms in the process (Schmidt, 2011). What has interested me in this research journey is how to bridge and cross-fertilize the empirical science of Western mindfulness with the experientially and meditatively oriented Buddhists sati. In accomplishing this task, this dissertation has pursued to reconcile existing definitions of mindfulness, to critically analyze and interpret the Buddhist and Western interpretations and practices of mindfulness, to emphasize and elaborate the social and existential dimensions of mindfulness, and to apply these dimensions in promoting successful aging.
In pursuit of the objectives of the this dissertation, a text based approach, i.e., document analysis, was used as it has the advantage of deepening one’s understandings of a phenomenon (e.g., mindfulness) using interpretive techniques. Additionally, the influence of the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach offers the potential to move beyond the literal interpretation through context setting (e.g., Paper II, social work and Buddhists contexts; Paper IV; mindfulness in old age and gerontology). Thus, as been noted by Wilcke (2002), “hermeneutic phenomenology aims to elucidate live experience and to reveal meaning through a process of understanding and interpretation” (p.7). Furthermore, hermeneutic phenomenology allowed for reflection on the meaning of experiences. One potential limitation, however, of text based studies is the lack of empirical content provided by other people. Respondent validation is therefore not possible. Thus, the researcher cannot validate what has been derived from the text interpretations. The limitation of the hermeneutic phenomenological method is that it focuses on experience that is unique to the individuals and to theirs setting, in this cases the lived body experiences derived from texts. Findings can therefore not either be generalized to a larger population, nor can findings be directly used as the basis for policy decisions (Wilcke, 2002).

In the following subsections, I will make remark on each paper in terms of how they are connected to each other and in connection with the four specific objectives above. This section ends with some implications for practice and suggestions for future research.
6.1 Bridging definitions of Western mindfulness and Buddhist sati

This dissertation has demonstrated the importance of classifying existing definitions of mindfulness, by taking into account its Buddhist historical roots, as well as its modern contexts and expressions (e.g., Purser & Milillo, 2014). Although mindfulness has probably gained ground as a result of its scientific legitimacy, it is striking how popular it has become despite ambiguities in defining it (e.g., Chiesa, 2012). In this regard, Paper I is mostly concerned with how mindfulness has been interpreted and defined from both multi-disciplinary and Buddhist points of view. Paper I provides a new comprehensive definition of mindfulness, in an attempt to bridge the gap between Western and modern-Buddhist forms of mindfulness (cf. Gethin, 2011). Paper I strongly argues that mindfulness should be seen as a practical blend of “social practice” in a Western and Buddhist guise, and “ethically-minded awareness”, partly in a Buddhist sense of meaning. Thus, “social practice” in this regard is viewed both as a training method to perform body scanning, meditation and yoga, and as a more engaged and all-encompassing type of mindfulness, rather than one that is primarily focused on individual self-improvement and personal enlightenment (cf. Carrette & King, 2005). This view of mindfulness, i.e., mindfulness as a “social practice” recurs in Paper II and Paper III. Furthermore, Paper I combines mindfulness training with the cultivation of an ethical mind that fosters empathy and compassion toward other humans and to a sustainable society as a whole. This particular issue is discussed more extensively in Paper III.
6.2 The boundaries between two contexts of mindfulness

The dissertation has argued for a critical and contextual interpretation of mindfulness practice. Paper II opened up for two different ways of viewing mindfulness (i.e., the Buddhist and social work context). Thus, Paper II emphasizes the importance of a continued dialogue and cultural interchange between the fields of Buddhism and social work (cf. Hick, 2009). The main reason for this is that they are partly intertwined on a macro level; both contexts share a common interest in mindfulness as a practice, external activism, and they carry the potential to increase [ethical awareness] the sense of responsibility and justice toward other persons and the world (González-Lopez, 2011). Another issue, initiated and discussed in Paper I, is the fact that mindfulness or sati is rooted in the Buddhism context, with its various traditions and cultural scripts. Seen from this point of view, mindfulness is not one thing but many. It is important to gain insights into how mindfulness in different ways reveals “the truth” about human existence and how its practice appears to alleviate different forms of suffering. To that end, Paper II argues for a closer collaboration between social workers and mindfulness instructors and Buddhists. In sum, Paper II stressed the importance of building bridges across the two cultures, i.e., the western mindfulness (social work) and Buddhist sati, in a manner that honors the viewpoints of both cultures, rather than subsuming one tradition into another (cf. Schweder, 1991).

6.3 A holistic view of mindfulness

Returning to the physical and mental dimensions which were partly interwoven in several definitions of mindfulness discussed in Paper I and the
social dimension highlighted in Paper II, Paper III argues that a more nuanced understanding of physical, mental, social and existential mindfulness can be obtained by examining the interconnectedness of all four fields. Merging these four dimensions brings a much-needed holistic model of mindfulness that can serve to explain how practitioners of mindfulness can gain health, resilience and wellbeing. The four-dimensional model of mindfulness was largely inspired by the international research community’s struggle for a broader concept of health (cf. DeMarinis, 2008), and by Frankl’s assertion that people must be understood as physical, psychological, social and spiritual beings (McFadden, Ingram, & Baldauf, 2000). That entails approaching mindfulness practice and thoughts from a holistic perspective. The decision, however, to focus on the social and existential dimensions of mindfulness was brought about by the fact that the Western mindfulness movement has been almost exclusively involved in the training of the body and the mind (Purser & Milillo, 2014). Highlighting the social dimension of mindfulness initiated in Paper II, and adding and illuminating the existential dimension paved the way toward a broader and more holistic approach to the practice of mindfulness, as well as encouraging further research along these potentially productive lines. This is something that Paper IV takes into account.

6.4 Mindful sustainable aging: A new concept

Thinking holistically, Paper III introduced the four-field model of mindfulness. Following in the footprint of Paper III (i.e., elaborating on the social and existential dimension of mindfulness), Paper IV made a novel attempt at advancing the notion of mindful sustainable aging in the context of successful aging. Paper IV stresses that we are in need of new ideas and
ways of thinking about aging. In light of the medical progress and technological innovations that have made it possible to keep old people alive longer now than earlier, Paper IV argues for other ways, or tools (e.g., mindfulness), not only to keep old people alive but also to make them physically active, mentally alert (e.g., Young & Baime, 2010), socially included and upholding a sense of existential purpose of living (e.g., Park, 2007). In recognizing the holistic nature of human life, the notion of mindful sustainable aging appeals to what lies beyond an old person’s psychophysical nature – the social and existential aspects. In this regard, mindfulness can provide reorientation helping older persons to view old age not primarily as a stage of stagnation and absence of meaning, but of new growth and development characterized by being rather than doing (cf. Seeber, 2000).

6.5 Concluding remarks

The practice of mindfulness is epitomized by three fundamental routines: body scanning, meditation and yoga. These cornerstones of the training process have been subjected to numerous discussions among researchers and practitioners regarding their effectiveness in terms of reducing suffering and improving wellbeing. Mindfulness and Buddhist sati has proven to be effective in many contexts as discussed in this dissertation. However, the usefulness of mindfulness training/practice was specifically targeted in the context of social work (Paper II) and elderly care services (Paper IV). Social workers can use mindfulness both as an intervention tool to help their clients and a valuable self-care instrument to effectively manage the stress inherent in their work (cf. Hick, 2009; Sherman & Siporin, 2008). Giving old people
the opportunity to practice mindfulness is to bring the well-derly perspective into elderly care (Wykle, Whitehouse, & Morris, 2005). Indeed, mindfulness in late life is a coping strategy but also a powerful tool to find meaning and strengthen social bonds in additions to the physical and mental benefits.

Despite all the discussions on the benefits of practicing mindfulness, we are still unable to free ourselves from suffering and conflicts in the 21st century. As a species we can perform miracles, as Hahn (2008) put it, every day with the help of mindfulness, but if we just devote ourselves to doing rather than being in mindfulness, we are either incapable of using the training properly, or we do not know how to apply the training effectively. Hence, a good way as discussed in this dissertation is to target intrusive feelings, thoughts and/or challenges in life by bridging the pragmatic thoughts of western mindfulness (i.e., mindfulness as a self-regulating tool) with the spiritual tradition of Buddhism, which in the latter case means to nurture the traditional Buddhist values of loving-kindness, ethics and compassion (cf. Fredrickson et al., 2008). I am intrigued to see how this new critical perspective on mindfulness will evolve in the future.

In consolidating and furthering the direction for future research on mindfulness, some tentative suggestions are provided in the following. First, in order to better understand the essence of mindfulness, the area is in need of further theorizing. This effort is important because the concept of mindfulness is not well understood within contemporary behavioral science as noted by Brown and Cordon (2009). In this regard, the need to do more critical epistemological analyses as well as hermeneutical and phenomenological analyses is warranted (Brown & Cordon, 2009). Such approaches could help us frame not only the essence of mindfulness but also
to add reflexivity to our research inquires, directing us toward research questions and concerns that are culturally and historically relevant.

Another suggestion is that we need more experientially based studies, which means coming in touch with people’s experiences of doing mindfulness together. This is something of a societal and existential issue that should be more explored in the research field of mindfulness (cf. Purser & Milillo, 2014). In doing so, experientially based studies could provide a vehicle for deepening our understanding of the practice of mindfulness. Additionally, such approaches will also allow the researchers to reflect on the meaning of experiences, thus providing added dimensions such as the social and existential.

Furthermore, in consideration of all the quantitative studies that continue to grow in this field, we require not only results from each study about different disabilities and/or diseases, but also longitudinal studies that address, for instance, the following questions: 1) How enduring is the awakening of awareness in the present moment that is said to result from body scanning, meditation and yoga? 2) How permanent is this influence? 3) How enduring are the results of mindfulness training programs that target specific problems?

Finally, the importance of conducting integrative and interdisciplinary research is acknowledged. For the field of mindfulness to grow in ways proportionate to the complexity inherent to the phenomenon, efforts to understand the underlying processes will be facilitated with a continued increased implementation of interdisciplinary research. However, to effectively continue to apply such approaches, we need to balance the
practical and individualized ways to cultivate mindfulness in the West, and the Buddhist sacred and ethic view of *sati*.

The ongoing practice and refinement of such interdisciplinary research will be of immense benefit to the extension of mindfulness through a dialogue with Buddhist theory and practice. However, we need also to examine, in greater detail, how mindfulness is used and altered by non-Buddhists, especially those who claim or participate in some other religious tradition (Wilson, 2014). This dissertation shows that this dialogue is of importance in an effort to understand and bridge western empirical science and the empiricism of the meditative discipline of Buddhism. Transferring theoretical insights into practice is an important area for future research on mindfulness. In conclusion, with this dissertation, I have tried to contribute to the research on mindfulness by increasing our understanding of it as a concept and the contexts in which it has been and is currently used.
Svensk sammanfattning

Att konceptualisera och kontextualisera mindfulness: Nya och kritiska perspektiv

Denna avhandling har som syfte att analysera mindfulness som begrepp och som flerdimensionellt fenomen i dess historiska, ursprungligen buddhistiska sammanhang, men även i dess samtida tillämpning i västerlandet. Avhandlingen består av fyra delarbeten. Dessa delarbeten utforskar sammantaget begreppet mindfulness genom att: 1) göra en begreppslig utredning och klassificera olika definitioner av mindfulness, 2) kritiskt analysera och tolka buddhistiska och västerländska formuleringar och tillämpningar av mindfulness, 3) utveckla och teoretisera kring de mindre uppmärksammade sociala och existentiella dimensionerna, samt genom att 4) tillämpa dessa dimensioner för att utveckla ett nytt begrepp inom äldreforskningen, mindful hållbart åldrande med utgångspunkt i begreppet framgångsrikt åldrande.

Delarbete I

Det första delarbetet klassificerar moderna och sekulära definitioner av mindfulness genom historien i jämförelse med den buddhistiska definitionen av sati. Definitionerna av mindfulness har hämtats från ett brett spann av forskare, praktiker och buddhister. Respektive definition har sedan undersömts och analyserats utifrån olika perspektiv. Delarbetet visar att mindfulness kan ges väldigt varierade innebörder; således är begreppet inte enkelt att definiera och de definitioner som återfinns i litteraturen är inte bara överlappande, utan ibland helt åtskilda, inte minst i relation till det
buddhistiska sati. Delarbetet har därför identifierat och klassificerat en rad olika definitioner av mindfulness och placerat dem i fyra distinkta teman; det första är mindfulness som aktivitet, det andra är mindfulness som ett inre mentalt tillstånd, det tredje är mindfulness som yttre stimuli och slutligen mindfulness som självkultiverande egenskap. Delarbetet tillhandahåller även en syntetisk definition i syfte att överbrygga klyftan mellan västerländskt orienterad mindfulness och den buddhistiska motsvarigheten sati.

Delarbete II
Att kritiskt analysera och tolka den buddhistiska och västerländska tillämpningen av mindfulness är syftet för delarbete II. Sett som ett importerat, andligt fenomen, tolkas mindfulness här utifrån två kontextuella perspektiv: buddhistiskt och socialt arbete. Delarbetet innehåller en kontextuell analys som visar att mindfulness i sin västerländska tappning, det vill säga mindfulness i sitt sociala sammanhang, delar ett gemensamt mål med buddhismen, genom att båda strävar efter att minska mänskligt lidande och att förbättra människors välbefinnande. Avsikten är inte att framhålla ett perspektiv över ett annat, utan att uppmuntra socialarbetare till en ömsesidig dialog med buddhistiska lärare, kliniker och mindfulness instruktörer i syfte att uppnå effektivitet och trovärdighet när det gäller mindfulness som metod i det sociala arbetet.

Delarbete III
Synen på hälsa inom mindfulness presenteras och undersöks i delarbete III med hjälp av en fyrfältsmodell. Delarbetet diskuterar och framhåller särskilt betydelsen av den sociala och existentiella dimensionen av mindfulness och belyser vidare begreppet resiliens i detta sammanhang. Delarbetet
argumenterar för vikten av att tala om mindfulness i ett holistiskt perspektiv. Delarbete III argumenterar för att ett holistiskt förhållningssätt där samspelet mellan de fysiska, mentala, sociala och existentiella dimensionerna beaktas påtagligt kan stärka individers resiliens och främja människors hälsa.

Delarbete IV


Sammanfattande konklusion och framtida forskning

Mindfulness är ett mångtydigt begrepp, och av detta skäl ett återkommande tema för en mängd motstridiga diskussioner bland forskare och bland utövare av mindfulness. Avhandlingen framhåller vikten av att slå en brygga mellan den buddhistiska traditionen och den sekulära mindfulness rörelsen både i begreppsligt avseende och i sättet att kontextualisera mindfulness. Mindfulness i denna avhandling presenteras som ett holistiskt begrepp; en social praktik med ett meningsgivande fokus, som vilar på tre grundläggande
färdigheter: kroppsskanning, meditation och yoga. Huruvida dessa färdigheter leder till ett minskat lidande och till förbättrad fysisk och mentalt välbefinnande har under de senaste tre decennierna varit föremål för diskussioner bland forskare och praktiker.

Om vi går in och ut ur ett mindfulness-tillstånd, som enligt buddhismen är pågående, är det sannolikt att vi inte använder träningen på rätt sätt. Mindfulness som ett sätt att hantera utmaningar i livet som diskuterats i denna avhandling vilar både på västerländskt orienterad (pragmatisk) mindfulness, som ett självreglerande verktyg, och Buddhism. I det senare fallet betyder det att slå vakt om och aktivt kultivera de traditionella buddhistiska värderingarna – kärleksmässig omtanke, etik och medkänsla, något som leder till frälsning.

Som avhandlingen visat finns behov av att göra fler hermeneutiskt och fenomenologiskt baserade analyser av mindfulness som fenomen. Sådana ansatser hjälper till att hitta ”kärnan” i mindfulness, och bidra till en högre grad av reflexivitet när det gäller mindfulness som kulturellt och historiskt betingat fenomen. Fältet är även i behov av mer upplevelsebaserade studier, genom att konkret undersöka människors upplevelser av att praktisera mindfulness. Upplevelsebaserade studier bör kunna bidra till en fördjupad förståelse av mindfulness som kulturellt fenomen, och den sociala och existentiella dimensionen av mindfulness som den uttrycks i praktiken.

Fortsatt integrativ och tvärvetenskaplig forskning är vidare av största vikt för att bidra till en överbryggande dialog mellan den västerländska varianten mindfulness och den buddhistiska sati. Att även undersöka hur mindfulness används av icke-buddhister, särskilt kopplat till andra religiösa traditioner,
skulle ytterligare fördjupa dialogen. Denna avhandling har bidragit till forskningen om mindfulness genom att analysera begreppet inom olika kontexter där mindfulness praktiseras och har ökat vår förståelse och kunskap om mindfulness i ett holistiskt perspektiv.
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