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Mindfulness Matters: The Universal Need for a Healthy Mind

Jennifer L. Blalock

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MINDFULNESS MATTERS:
THE UNIVERSAL NEED FOR A HEALTHY MIND

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Mental illness is prevalent in American society, affecting about 1 in 5 individuals (“Learn About Mental Health”). Addressing trauma is one way of preventing mental illness. The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study by Dr. Vincent Felitti of the Kaiser Permanente Foundation and Dr. Robert Anda of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, looked at the connection between negative childhood experiences, such as substance abuse in the home, to the most common causes of death manifested in adulthood. Mental health affects physical health, and one of the ways to address the effect of lifetime traumas is to develop coping skills such as mindfulness and engaging with nature. Mindfulness has been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, stress, chronic pain, and blood pressure (Brown, et al 211-237). Engaging with nature has been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, stress, and blood pressure as well (Tyrväinen et al. 1).

My exhibition will consist of an installation that acts as a practice in mindfulness meditation for myself and as an introduction to the basic tenets of mindfulness for the viewer. Interconnectivity, being in the moment, and accepting circumstances without judgment are all concepts that are introduced to the viewer through paintings, drawings, screen prints, and zines (self-published magazines).

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Mental health affects everyone. It “includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act” (“Learn About Mental Health”). It determines how well one reacts to life’s hardships, interacts with other people, and makes the choices that guide one’s daily life. Although often used interchangeably, mental health and mental illness are not the same. “A person can experience poor mental health and not be diagnosed with a mental illness. Likewise, a person diagnosed with a mental illness can experience periods of physical, mental and social well-being” (“Learn About Mental Health”). Mental health impacts physical health. Mental illnesses, such as depression, increase the risk for many common health problems, “like stroke, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. Similarly, the presence of chronic conditions can increase the risk for mental illness” (“Learn About Mental Health”).

There are many possible causes for mental illness, such as early adverse life experiences, chronic medical conditions, “genes or chemical imbalances in the brain, use of alcohol or recreational drugs,” or social isolation and feelings of loneliness (“Learn About Mental Health”). Most sources agree that about 20% of the adult population in the United States are affected by some form of mental illness every year (“Learn About Mental Health;” “Mental Health Myths and Facts;” “National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Comparison of 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 Population Percentages (50 States and District of Columbia)”). “Mental illnesses are among the most common health conditions in the United States. More than 50% [of adults] will be diagnosed with a mental illness or disorder at some point in their lifetime (“Learn About Mental Health”).” According to MentalHealth.gov, “...less than 20% of

children and adolescents with diagnosable mental health problems receive the treatment they need” and “only 44% of adults with diagnosable mental health problems...receive needed treatment.”

It is possible to prevent some mental illnesses by “addressing known risk factors, such as exposure to trauma” (“Mental Health Myths and Facts”). It is also possible to maintain positive mental health by developing coping skills such as mindfulness. My work is an environment created to introduce the viewer to the concept of mindfulness and the prevalence of mental illness, creating an awareness of the present in a way that evokes fascination, calm, and curiosity. It is my interpretation of mindfulness represented by video performance, drawing, screen printing, and painting. I have chosen to use imagery and elements that may allow the viewer to relax and look upon these visual stimuli without judgment and with enjoyment. Reserving judgment is a strategy of openness, wonder, and curiosity according to author Brad Lichtenstein (122).

Because mental health is a sensitive issue for many, I use an avatar as a symbol for myself and for the viewer. I use a symbol so that the viewer may simply engage with what the avatar is doing rather than who she is. The original character of Priscilla Panda is a guide who demonstrates the concepts associated with mindfulness and is the first image that viewers see upon entering the exhibit. I also perform as Priscilla in videos. She is a cartoonish figure with a pink and purple papier mâché giant panda mask on her head. In one painting, she looks at a figure on a table, a cast shadow behind both of them. She is looking at a piece of art just as the viewer is doing in that moment, and in that action they are connected: the viewer, Priscilla Panda, and the artwork, both on the walls and in the real world. The interconnectivity of all

things, beauty, pain, objects, thoughts, and emotions, are a basic tenet of mindfulness. “People normally cut reality into compartments, and so are unable to see the interdependence of all phenomena” (Nhāt Hahn 75).

The practice of being in the moment, enjoying simplicity, and accepting all internal and external stimuli without judgment can be healing both psychologically and physically. These are a few of the basic tenets of mindfulness, which “has been associated with lower levels of emotional disturbance (e.g., depressive symptoms, anxiety, and stress), higher levels of subjective well-being...and higher levels of eudaimonic well-being (e.g., vitality, self-actualization) (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Carlson & Brown, 2005)” (qtd. in Brown et al. 220).

Davidson et al. found that after a four week and an eight week period, mindfulness meditators had more antibody titers in reaction to the influenza vaccine than their control group. This corresponded to more activity in the left frontal side of the brain. “Among subjects in the meditation group, those who showed a greater increase in left-sided activation from Time 1 to Time 2 displayed a larger rise in antibody titers...” (Davidson et al. 567-568). In the installation, each object is offered as a guided imagery meditation, most demonstrably in the video of Priscilla Panda meditating on the beach at sunrise.

The left-sided frontal activation of the brain demonstrated that meditation can reduce anxiety and increase feelings of well-being (Davidson 569). “With ongoing practice, this state can be cultivated with a variety of intentions from relaxation to coping” (Lichtenstein 122). Coping skills are important for all people who have experienced the suffering and trauma that often comes with life. Being able to cope with life’s stressors is necessary for one’s

psychological and physical health, whether from lifestyle factors in childhood, or those learned in adulthood.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACEs Study) of the 1990s by Dr. Vincent Felitti of the Kaiser Permanente Foundation and Dr. Robert Anda of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, looked at the connection between negative childhood experiences, such as substance abuse in the home, to the most common causes of death manifested in adulthood. They found that as the number of childhood exposures to adverse experiences increased so did the risk and occurrence of smoking, severe obesity, physical inactivity, depressed mood, and suicide attempts. In the same way, as ACEs increased, so did the risk and occurrence of alcoholism, drug use, more than 50 sexual partners, and history of an STD (Felitti et al. 249-250). Significantly, there was also a relationship between ACEs and the presentation of ischemic heart disease, cancer, chronic bronchitis or emphysema, history of hepatitis or jaundice, skeletal fractures and poor self-rated health. Interestingly, for a history of stroke or diabetes, there was no relationship (Felitti et al. 250). Also noteworthy is that smoking was acknowledged as a coping skill that benefitted individuals psychologically, even if destructive to their health physically. The ACEs study demonstrates the importance of overall mental health on our physical health as well as our emotional well-being.

CHAPTER II

VISUAL INFLUENCES

My work is eclectic, consisting of both realistic and abstract paintings, silhouettes in screen prints, performance in video, a large scale drawing, papier mâché sculpture, zines, and found objects like a mirror and Adirondack chairs. This eclecticism is a result of the influence of major artists and movements in the 20th century compounded with the range of teaching materials required of a former 21st century high school art teacher.

Dada and Surrealism: Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray

Marcel Duchamp was a giant in the 20th century, influencing the art world and artists directly from the early 1900s to the 1960s and beyond. His influence led to a rise in individualism in the arts and provided several conceptual nudges to artists working during the 20th century. Duchamp's "art-as-idea" tradition is what greatly affected my understanding of what makes art exceptional and how artwork can interact with the viewer. Duchamp went from painting the Cubist-inspired "Nude Descending a Staircase" at the 1913 Armory Show to creating his "Fountain" of 1917, providing inspiration to create work that contains a range of expressions, from use of material to content. According to Tancock, Duchamp disdained "the lack of imagination that leads to a personal style" so he worked in a variety of media as well (163). It is the special mark of a 21st century artist to be able to express oneself in more ways than one. The artist of the 21st century should be a producer of culture to revitalize society and move art forward. Artist Matta Echaurren said that Duchamp attacked the problem of art in the 20th century "and solved it—to paint the moment of change, change itself. I have devoted myself to that same problem ever since" (Tancock 164). Echaurren says it best that the

problem of art is to “paint” change itself. This can be change of thinking about art, or it can be social change. I would like to create a change of thinking about mental health, mindfulness, and taking care of oneself. Duchamp created a change of thinking about art.

Duchamp’s “Fountain” was a rebellion against the status quo of the art world. It was a new way of looking at things that changed the perspective of many artists, and therefore culture. Viewers became essential to the completion of the artwork. Duchamp disdained the idea of the artist as ultimate Author, to use a term used by philosopher and critic Roland Barthes. Duchamp and composer John Cage both “rejected the notion of the artist as an inspired creator who dictated the correct approach to the spectators or the auditors” (Tancock 165). Cage, like Duchamp, also distrusted value judgments due to his exposure to Zen philosophy, which values all stimuli or events as contributors to the wonder of life.

Many major artists respected Duchamp’s conceptual foundation. Jasper Johns said that “Duchamp’s field of action” was one in which “language, thought, and vision can act upon one another” (Tancock 166). Duchamp has said that language alone is not enough to convey ideas, that ideas get lost in the translation from cognition to verbalization. I fully embrace the concept of art as a three-headed beast that marries language, thought, and vision to try to communicate something as complex as an idea. The Nouveaus Realistes believed Duchamp’s Readymades created a new vocabulary for visual artists in a world of cities, factories, and mass production (Tancock 162). Andy Warhol’s Duchampian influence is seen in his Campbell Soup cans and Brillo pad boxes, which are specific Readymade, mass-produced imagery. In fact, when *ARTnews*’ G.R. Swenson asked Warhol if ‘Pop [Art]’ was a bad name, he replied, “The name sounds so awful. Dada must have something to do with Pop—it’s so funny, the names

are really synonyms. Does anyone know what they're supposed to mean or have to do with, those names?" (Swenson 19). As Duchamp said in his interview with Mike Wallace, "But you see, even if it doesn't take a long time to choose a snow shovel from the hardware shop, even so, you have to think and put a word on it, and it's half poetry and half plastic" (Sawelson-Gorse 47). Duchamp's interest in language to serve his thought, in addition to the visual, was a unique perspective on titling artwork to add to the meaning of the overall work.

My screenprints are like Readymades in that they use found images to serve a new composition. They are created using a method similar to Man Ray's Rayographs. Man Ray was also an eclectic artist who was associated with Dada and Surrealism, both of which, "liberat[ed] him from established artistic and technical categories...Whenever he felt the urge to materialize an idea he chose the medium most suitable to express it with the same ease with which a carpenter picks up from his bench the tool most suitable for his purpose" (Schwarz 8). Man Ray's interdisciplinary approach reflects the fact that life is stranger than art, or as he himself put it: "Perhaps the final goal desired by the artist is a confusion or merging of all the arts, as things merge in real life" (Schwarz 8).

Rayographs are "camera-less direct contact photography" (Schwarz 57). Man Ray created Rayographs by accident when he placed three-dimensional objects on light sensitive photo paper that had not been exposed with a negative. He placed "a small glass funnel, the graduate and the thermometer in the tray on the wetted paper," and when he turned on the light, "before [his] eyes an image began to form, not quite a simple silhouette of the objects as in a straight photograph, but distorted and refracted by the glass more or less in contact with the paper and standing out against a black background, the part directly exposed to the light..."

(Schwartz 236). My screen prints are created in much the same way, by placing cut out *National Geographic* pictures directly onto the exposure unit before placing the screen on top and exposing it with light. The result is a silhouette of the original image, unlike Man Ray's Rayographs.

Screen printing is a tool of mass production. Once an image is burned into the screen, it can be used over and over again to create many prints in an edition. Reusing the images of a magazine known for its topical variety and photographic beauty makes for compositions with gorgeously detailed silhouettes that become symbols for those subjects, creating a connection or impression of being in nature. Imagery depicting elements from nature, such as animals or plants, has been shown to be beneficial to one's well-being (Howell et al. 166). Duchamp used the ephemera of his day to create his artwork, from "Fountain" to "L.H.Q.Q." and make waves in the world of art. I choose to use the imagery of *National Geographic* to create a feeling of well-being in the viewer, as just viewing images of nature has been shown to be beneficial to a viewer's feeling of well-being.

Allan Kaprow and the Blur Between Art and Life

My work for *Mindfulness Matters* focuses on the viewer experience with the intention of promoting a peaceful feeling that envelopes the viewer as he or she moves through the installation. Depictions of my avatar and symbol for the viewer, Priscilla Panda, punctuate important ideas contained within each element of the installation. Priscilla acts as a guide, standing in for her viewers in paintings, demonstrating what one who is mindful can do when interacting with art. They are she, as she is them, erasing the boundary between art and life, becoming a part of the art itself. As the viewer moves from glittery, shiny screen prints of fauna

to calm paintings, he or she will pass by a polished mirror, representative of the Zen metaphor that when one is mindful, one reflects everything around oneself lucidly and without judgment. Calm, colorful paintings lead the viewer to walk into a drawing of the mindful driver on the highway of life, who concentrates on the present, glancing at the past in the rear view mirror only if necessary, without anxiety about reaching a future destination. A video performance piece of Priscilla Panda meditating on the beach at sunrise provides a quiet moment for the viewer for reflection and awareness of the present moment. The artwork is not completed until the viewer has seen and interacted with the piece.

Allan Kaprow is a major influence on my idea of art and life occupying the same space in real time, with no boundary between them. Historically Kaprow was influenced by Jackson Pollock, breaking away from the two-dimensional picture plane and traditional rules for judging artwork. He is associated with Happenings, an art movement beginning in the late 1950's in which artist and audience participate collaboratively in a live performance, sometimes impromptu or sometimes announced. In discussing a painting of Malevich, a tinted square, off-kilter on an off-white background, Kaprow emphasizes that the intention of such art is superficial in form in order to direct our thoughts towards transcendence. Judging artwork based on how it looks is a form of codified, routine formulas for making tasteful artwork without reaching for the metaphysical (Kaprow 156). Pollock rejected making artwork solely for form's sake and created new directions for the field of painting by allowing energy and chance to create visual balance. The lack of a boundary between art and life was inspired by composer John Cage, who said, "Musical sound and noise (customarily divided) are really one; so are art and life" (Kaprow 160). The idea of life as art and vice versa has been a profound one.

Everyone creates art by living their daily lives, and like those lives, art can be routine and orderly, or messy and scattered. I choose to present life as one that is full of variety and visual interest through the different modes of presentation in the installation, from screen prints to paintings to video.

“If a Rembrandt were to be used for an ironing board (as Duchamp proposed), or if as is more usually the case, an ironing board or its equivalent were to be placed, like a Rembrandt, in a museum, the issues that arise relate to the motives, not the formalism or antiformalism of the acts” (Kaprow 161). It does not matter what form it takes, what matters is the intention of the artwork. And the artwork can envelope the viewer, as Kaprow says later: “...but it should be obvious nowadays that everyone entering a gallery is immediately on display as a work of art. One cannot be alone...Everything becomes art, not self-awareness” (151). According to Kaprow, wedding ceremonies, football games, and classroom teaching are all instances of theater in our daily lives. Telephone conversations, digging ditches, gathering scientific data, all are theatrical performances that do not have to exist on stage or require announcement (Kaprow 174). According to Kaprow, an artist may work in “non-art modes and non-art contexts but cease to call the work art, retaining instead the private consciousness that sometimes it may be art, too,” such as “social work in a ghetto, hitchhiking, thinking, etc.” Even viewing a work of art could be art in itself, as I hope the viewer perceives when he or she sees my work along with the polished mirror. I offer my artwork as an example of the interconnectivity of people, their environments, and their experiences.

Kaprow stressed, “Communication can be basic research” and that the art world believes in looking at art reverentially and meditatively (Kaprow 178). Each work of art in my

thesis show is an object for interaction and meditation. It is commonly said that the average museum goer looks at each work for a total of three seconds. Three seconds provides a moment for a viewer to observe and react to outside stimuli, interacting with an artwork and completing the thought that sparked its creation. Doing “life consciously, however, life becomes pretty strange—paying attention changes the thing attended to...” (Kaprow 195). So the viewer changes the art object by interacting with it and adding a unique layer of meaning to the work as perceived by the viewer, just as Duchamp believed.

In the performance piece of Priscilla Panda, the viewer can take a moment to relax with the sound and motion of the ocean waves, the lack of movement from Priscilla, and the occasional sea bird flying into view. I use Priscilla to demonstrate being conscious of the moment, being present in the now so that, as Kaprow says, “Such consciousness of what we do and feel each day, its relation to others’ experience and to nature around us, becomes in a real way the performance of living, and the very process of paying attention to this continuum is poised on the threshold of art performance” (Kaprow 196). Pollock guided artists to the idea that anything and everything could be art, from the ephemera of our daily lives to our bodies, and even our city streets. Artists of the past 60 years are free to work with materials that range from old socks to dogs to movies to the traditional materials of art. I chose to work in screen prints, paintings, drawings, sound, found objects and video to create an overall experience for the viewer that is completed once the viewer steps in front of and around the work itself.

Abstract Expressionism: Barnett Newman

After World War II American artists “felt a lack of recognition and financial support from the public” (Stiles 15). Free to create what they wanted, artists began to experiment with large-

scale works, “far exceeding the space limitations of the private apartments of potential collectors, and, in dialogue with their art, reenacted what they conceived as the drama of contemporary experience” (Stiles 15). Jackson Pollock was one of these painters, creating paintings that were “almost mural-sized works” (Stiles 15). Mark Rothko said that he painted “very large pictures” because “[h]owever you paint the larger pictures, you are in it. It isn’t something you command” (Rothko 28). Barnett Newman also made large paintings that were meant to engulf the viewer’s field of vision. He said of his 1950 show in New York, “There is a tendency to look at large pictures from a distance. The large pictures in this exhibition are intended to be seen from a short distance” (Rosenberg 61). Rather than use abstraction to explore the energy of movement and the aesthetics of line and color, Newman used the language of abstraction to evoke the transcendental. Like Kaprow, his art was a vehicle to reach the metaphysical.

According to Newman, abstract art had become reduced to “ornament” because of “confusion...concerning the nature of abstraction” (Newman 26). He believed that he and his contemporaries were not focused on the aesthetics of geometric forms, but in creating forms that by their abstract nature carry some abstract intellectual content” (Newman 26). He refused an association with surrealism because, rather than trying to make sense of the dream world or his own personality, he was trying to “penetrat[e] into the world-mystery. His imagination is therefore attempting to dig into metaphysical secrets. To that extent his art is concerned with the sublime” (Newman 27). He likens the artist to the Creator, who also created from chaos and “tried to wrest truth from the void” (Newman 27).

By focusing on form and idealized aesthetics, as “high art” did during the Vietnam War, Newman felt that Western art had “deprived itself of the power to deal with man’s deepest experiences” (Rosenberg 29). In 1967 Newman said,

...We felt the moral crisis of a world in shambles, a world devastated by a great depression and a fierce World War, and it was impossible at the time to paint the kind of painting that we were doing—flowers, reclining nudes, and people playing the cello. At the same time we could not move into the situation of a pure world of unorganized shapes and forms, or color relations, a world of sensation. And I would say that, for some of us, this was our moral crisis in relation to what to paint. So that we actually began, so to speak, from scratch as if painting were not only dead but had never existed (Rosenberg 27-29).

Newman believed that, like the artists he admired in the Kwakiutl tribe, his art must be “directed by a ritualistic will toward metaphysical understanding” (Rosenberg 30). This understanding must use the language of abstraction to create living vehicles of expression, and “that its end must be vision or enlightenment. The creation of art must be equal to a religious rite” (Rosenberg 30). Though not associated with Zen or mindfulness per se, Newman was well-versed in philosophy (Rosenberg 229). His insistence on art as a sacred rite is similar to the tenet in mindfulness that everything one does is important: a sacred act performed in a state of wonder and appreciation at being alive. While Nhāt Hahn does not specifically mention art making, he does assert that every “...act is a rite, a ceremony. Raising your cup of tea to your mouth is a rite” (39). Nhāt Hahn recommends practicing mindfulness when conversing with a friend, and Newman regarded looking upon a painting to be as important as meeting someone

new. “The problem of a painting is physical and metaphysical. It’s no different, really, from one’s feeling in relation to meeting another person” (Auping 31).

Pop Art: Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol

Before Kaprow said that communication was basic research, in 1958 the art critic Lawrence Alloway remarked: “The new role for the academic is keeper of the flame; the new role of the fine arts is to be one of the possible forms of communication in an expanding framework that also includes the mass arts,” such as product and vehicle design, advertising, Hollywood, “science fiction, pulp magazines, comics, television...computer, and robotics” (Stiles 325). He and artists of the London-centered Independent Group, among them Richard Hamilton and John McHale, “criticized...dividing fine (or high) art from popular (or low) culture” (Stiles 325). McHale stated that “...the transformation [of the fine arts]...is merely part of the live process of cultural diffusion which, like many other aspects of societal interaction in our period, now occurs in a variety of unprecedented ways” (Stiles 325). Stiles supports McHale’s claim because post-World War II, “every decade has witnessed artistic investigation into the relationship between popular culture and the fine arts” (326). For Roy Lichtenstein, this investigation included comics; for Andy Warhol, this included product design, disaster, and celebrity. The incorporation of imagery typically associated with everyday life has strongly influenced my drawings and screen prints. According to Roy Lichtenstein, this incorporation of our entire visual culture is a different way of seeing and thinking. In an interview with G.R.Swenson, he said, “Pop Art looks out into the world; it appears to accept its environment, which is not good or bad, but different—another state of mind” (R. Lichtenstein 388). This acceptance and interaction with one’s environment has been a mainstay of art in the latter half

of the 20th century, with artists lifting the veil between high and low art, and reflecting the world around them. In the 1960s and today, this means a fascination with technology. Both Lichtenstein and Warhol were interested in producing objects reminiscent of mechanical production, going through great pains to create the look of mechanically-produced imagery. Yet each image created by these artists are unique. Lichtenstein painted sections of comic strips that incorporated “the benday dot from commercial printing...calling attention to the mechanized, depersonalized quality of his process and choice of subject matter” (Stiles 333-334). Andy Warhol wished that he were a machine. He said of his work that “[t]he reason I’m painting this way is that I want to be a machine, and I feel that whatever I do and do machine-like is what I want to do” (Warhol 390). His former assistant Gerard Malanga stated that Warhol “wanted to keep the human element out of his art, and to avoid it he had to resort to silk screens, stencils, and other kinds of automatic production” (Malanga 192). My use of screen prints and stencils is not to obscure the human hands that made them, because even they have idiosyncrasies. The plus side of harnessing the power of mass production is that art can be owned by many people, instead of just the wealthy elite, and this communication can be seen by a larger audience. Warhol saw the benefit of this as well. In his interview with Malanga, Warhol said, “If I remember correctly, I felt that if everyone couldn’t afford a painting the printed poster would be available” (192). The more an image is available, the greater its ability to disseminate information.

Zines and DIY Culture

Zines, or self-published magazines, have been around for centuries. They are typically a reaction against the status quo, such as consumerism, or a celebration of marginalized genres,

such as punk. Most often, they are a representation of the real life of the average person. They embrace “the ethic of DIY, do-it-yourself: make your own culture and stop consuming that which is made for you” (Duncombe 7). While Pop Art was a celebration of commercial imagery and production, zines and DIY culture celebrate the alternative, the marginalized, and the home made. “[Z]ines and underground culture offer up an alternative, a way of understanding and acting in the world that operates with different rules and upon different values than those of consumer capitalism” (Duncombe 10).

Zines began to gain popularity during the 1930s when they were mostly fanzines of “science fiction stories and critical commentary” (Duncombe 11). In the mid-1970s, they began to become associated with punk music, which had been shunned by the “mainstream music press” (Duncombe 11). In the 1980s, fans of other cultural subgenres, political dissenters, and “disgruntled self-publishers” began to make their own zines, which were then collected in a larger zine that reviewed them called *Factsheet Five* (Duncombe 11). “While other media are produced for money or prestige or public approval, zines are done—as *Factsheet Five’s* founding editor Mike Gunderloy is fond of pointing out—for *love*: love of expression, love of sharing, love of communication...zines are also created out of *rage*” (Duncombe 18).

Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* is considered “the zine heard ‘round the world” by zine historian Gene Mahoney (Duncombe 32). Motivated by the injustice of British colonial politics, Paine’s pamphlet is estimated to have had a distribution between 100,000-250,000 copies (Duncombe 32). Paine and other pamphleteers explained what British politics would mean to American society; however, after the late 1960s, the personal became political:

One of the prominent ideas that came out of the tumult that was the New Left was the idea that the ‘personal is political,’ a notion best and most frequently articulated by the feminist movement. Simply stated the idea went something like this: Politics existed not only on the level defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in terms of policy, states, and governments, but also on the plane of personal interaction—on the street and in the bedroom. With this new definition what could be considered within the realm of ‘the political’ was significantly expanded (Duncombe 33).

My political rage is directed toward a society that has little empathy for much of its population, from women and people of color, to those affected by mental illness. I am of the one in 25 who are affected by a serious mental illness like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (“Mental Health Myths and Facts”). Through my experiences I have seen that most people do not know what to say or do when a friend or loved one is in crisis unless they have experienced such a crisis firsthand. A few myths concerning the mentally ill: they are violent, melodramatic, and could just “snap out of it” if they wanted to do so (“Mental Health Myths and Facts”). The key to changing these perceptions is to educate those who are ignorant. My zines seek to eradicate these myths through explaining the facts regarding mental health and mental illness in easy to understand language and illustrations. The casual format and imagery are meant to disarm the skeptical and empower individuals who may feel helpless in the face of an issue so little understood. My zines are mini-zines, capable of fitting in one’s pocket and easily passable to someone who may need it, either for themselves or a loved one. The more people begin to understand the problem of mental illness, the more likely society will be to change.

CHAPTER III
CONCEPTUAL INFLUENCES

The ACES Study

The leading causes of disease conditions and mortality in the United States are related to health behaviors and lifestyle factors, which have been called the “actual” causes of death. Abuse and other negative childhood experiences contribute to these risk factors; therefore, these experiences “should be recognized as the basic causes of morbidity and mortality in adult life” (Felitti et al. 246). Sociologists and psychologists have published research to this effect, but the medical research in this vein has not been deemed relevant to most “primary care physicians because it focuses on adolescent health, mental health in adults, or on symptoms among patients in specialty clinics” (Felitti et al. 246). The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study describes the prevalence of exposures to abuse and household dysfunction, as well as the relationship between the number of these categories and the most common causes of death in adults.

The study used seven categories of childhood exposures to abuse and household dysfunction: psychological abuse, physical abuse, contact sexual abuse, and exposures to substance abuse, mental illness, violent treatment of the mother/stepmother, and criminal behavior. The most prevalent of the seven categories was substance abuse in the household, the least prevalent was criminal behavior in the household (Felitti et al. 249). As the number of childhood exposures increased so did the risk and occurrence of smoking, severe obesity, physical inactivity, depressed mood, and suicide attempts. In the same way, as ACEs increased, so did the risk and occurrence of alcoholism, drug use, more than 50 sexual partners, and

history of an STD (Felitti et al. 249-250). Significantly, there was a dose-response relationship between the number of childhood exposures and the following diseases: ischemic heart disease, cancer, chronic bronchitis or emphysema, history of hepatitis or jaundice, skeletal fractures and poor self-rated health. Interestingly, for a history of stroke or diabetes, there was no relationship (Felitti et al. 250).

ACEs correlate with smoking, alcohol or drug abuse, overeating, or sexual behaviors that may be used as coping skills to deal with the stress of abuse or dysfunction (Felitti et al. 253). Behaviors like smoking, alcohol, or drug use would be used chronically to cope with negative emotions. People who are depressed are more likely to smoke, so those who have experienced ACEs may benefit from using nicotine to regulate mood (Felitti et al. 254). The health risk behavior of smoking was common as ACEs increased. Smoking is perceived as a problem medically and socially, but from the perspective of the user, it represents an “effective solution that leads to chronic use, which can later lead to emphysema, cardiovascular disease, or malignancy. Thus, incomplete understanding of the possible benefits of health risk behaviors leads them to be viewed as irrational and having solely negative consequences” (Felitti et al. 254).

The respondents in this study were made up of men and women, mostly in their late 40s and early 50s. Respondents were predominantly white, 83.9%, and female, 53%. The average age of participants was 56.1 years old (Felitti et al. 247). Respondents were also educated, with an average of 14 years of education (Felitti et al. 247). This shows that childhood trauma is not just a byproduct of poverty; many people from all backgrounds experience some kind of dysfunction that impacts their health into adulthood.

The authors recommend prevention as a solution. Preventing ACEs “require[s] societal changes that improve the quality of family and household environment during childhood” (Felitti et al. 255). Early home visitations during the first three years of life can help. If a “family based primary prevention effort” can be implemented on a large scale, there could be long-term benefits for overall adult health. (Felitti et al. 255). The health problems caused by ACEs are most likely overlooked because of the time delay from exposure to manifestation. Further research and training are “needed to help medical and public health practitioners understand how social, emotional, and medical problems are linked throughout the lifespan” (Felitti et al. 256).

Even without a mental health diagnosis, much of the population has a need for healthy coping skills to prevent later onset of health problems and to promote physical, social, and emotional well-being. It would be ideal to prevent childhood stressors that impact health later in life, but for those who have grown up, healthy coping skills are necessary for self-care and preventative medicine. A healthy coping skill and method of self-care that leads to personal growth and occurs naturally in human disposition is mindfulness.

Mindfulness in Psychology

The potential of mindfulness has been explored in Western psychological and medical research increasingly over the last 30 years, and has been adopted in clinical treatment settings. Mindfulness challenges “Western cultural attitudes” and “established paradigms in psychology, that emphasize...the ego, or constructed self” as the primal guide for how humans behave (Brown et al. 211). Mindfulness began in Buddhist psychology. When Thomas William Rhys Davids (1843-1922) used the word mindfulness for the Pali word, sati, he tried remember,

recollection, and memory, emphasizing the continual remembering of the present moment, or present moment recollection (B. Lichtenstein 121). Its focus on attention and awareness are an emphasis on consciousness. “Awareness is the conscious registration of stimuli, including the five physical senses, the kinesthetic senses, and the activities of the mind” (Brown et al. 212). To take notice of something is to engage one’s attention, the basic level of consciousness. To pay attention is to have genuine experiences and clarity of vision in one’s actions. Mindfulness is defined by Kabat Zinn (2003), developer of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), as ‘awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment’ (p.145)” (Lichtenstein 121). Reserving judgment “is an orientation strategy of openness, wonder, and curiosity, as experiences are accepted and embraced” (Lichtenstein 122). This information is included in one of the exhibit’s zines as part of a primer on mindfulness.

To begin processing outside stimuli, traditionally the brain judges it as “good, bad, or neutral”, especially in reference to the self. Then it connects the stimuli to a memory before finally filing it away into existing beliefs or long term memory (Brown et al. 212). The judgements the brain makes are the result of one’s perceptions. They are also necessary for the brain to organize or disregard stimuli as beneficial to oneself, or irrelevant. This is essential for “goal pursuit and attainment,” which is the drive behind human motivation. To be mindful is to be receptive and non-judgmental, accepting stimuli as they are. “...Thoughts, images, verbalizations, emotions, impulses to act, and so on—can be observed as part of the ongoing stream of consciousness” (Brown et al. 212). Using the phrase “stream of consciousness” is a wonderfully descriptive way to describe the mindful mind. Thoughts come and go one after the

other with no filter and no value judgments. They continually flow by until action is warranted. By reserving judgment and preconceived ideas, the mindful individual has clarity and some objectivity in responding to the present moment. Disabling judgement through the use of Priscilla Panda is a way to provide clarity before introducing a subject that could make some individuals uncomfortable.

Brown and Ryan in 2003 defined mindfulness as “receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience” (Brown et al. 212) This is a simple definition, with some attributes implied. When mindfulness is thought of as a process, there are five main facets: self-regulation of attention, present moment focus, nonelaboration, nonjudgment, and tolerance (B. Lichtenstein 121). Mindfulness trains one’s ability to focus attention. By focusing on a single object, or anchor, an individual can strengthen “cognitive flexibility and the capacity for self-regulation.” (B. Lichtenstein 121). By practicing meditation, one can self-regulate to the point of relaxation as a coping skill. Each object in the installation is offered as an object of meditation: a guiding image meant to hold the viewer’s attention for a few moments, and provide an overall feeling of well-being.

One attribute of mindfulness is clarity of thought and emotion as well as stimuli. Because of this, mindfulness is described as being “pure or lucid” awareness, as though one were a polished mirror, reflecting everything around itself without judgment, as in the Zen metaphor (Brown et al. 213). The clarity offered by pure awareness makes skillful improvisation possible, with easier access to one’s knowledge, sensibilities, and intuition. One’s knowledge, sensibilities, and intuition are the result of individual perception and disposition. The mindful human is aware of his or her perceptions, and he or she does not

judge them. Being mindful involves a “non-interference with experience” by simply noticing what is happening in the moment. Mindfulness is not escapist or encouraging lack of thought; it is rather an observation of thoughts. Thoughts are another form of stimuli to notice and pay attention to. Thoughts can be regarded as sensory objects, engaging sight or sound in memory. The goal of the mindful mind is to be flexible with its attention, being aware of anything and everything that is pertinent to the current situation. “Preliminary evidence suggests that mindfulness is associated with attentional control..., but mindfulness and concentration are considered unique capacities, and some evidence supports this distinction (Dunn, Hartigan, & Mikulas, 1999)” (Brown et al. 213). Concentration is attention to the point of tuning out sensory stimuli, but mindfulness is a “fluid regulation of states of attention and awareness” (Brown et al. 213). In mindfulness one accepts and observes all like a scientist: with objectivity in the pursuit of knowledge. But instead of being removed from one’s subject, the mindful individual “participates”, being aware of one’s existence in a single moment while still interacting with it. Because of the participatory nature of the mindful individual, compassion for self increases, as does empathy for others (Brown et al. 214).

Being oriented in the present leads to more authentic experiences. Gestalt psychologists note the difference between living *in* the present and living *for* the present. Mindfulness is not hedonism, fatalism, or escapism. Rather, it is a way to experience one’s pure existence without attention to the past or future, because one does not exist in those constructs. One only has power to act in the present moment, and it is this present-orientation that can utilize self-control and attain goals. It is a meta-cognitive skill that is considered to be an “inherent capacity of the human organism” (Brown et al. 214).

In current psychology, mindfulness is considered a skillful way to self-regulate, accept without judgment, and think about the processes of the brain. Kabat Zinn's definition includes intention, which is considered separate from mindfulness according to Buddhist scholarship (Brown et al. 2015). Self-regulation involves attention to one's inner mechanisms and responding in ways that are situationally appropriate rather than habitual. Reflection and introspection are important keys to self-regulation. Reflection and introspection lead to a consciousness that both regulates and creates action toward goals. One way to allow oneself to create the right action toward goal attainment is by creating a "fertile void" (Brown et al. 2017). While one is paying attention to the present moment, one is not hyper-vigilant, but rather uses relaxed attention so that the "fertile void" is created where the right decision can present itself. "This is the fundamental, integrative process of Gestalt formation, and is thought to be the key to healthy self-regulation" (Brown et al. 2017).

There are four clinical treatment methods for enhancing self-regulation and quality of consciousness. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) (Brown et al. 2019). MBSR is about 25 years old and emphasizes sensory experience and meditation as tools for personal growth. MBCT, ACT, and DBT focus on awareness of thought, emotion, somatic sensation, and behavior. Mindfulness is the primary focus of these methods. "While initially targeting individuals with physical and psychiatric issues, MBSR and ACT are now also applied to healthy, stressed populations" (Brown et al. 2019). The ACES study shows that much of the population has stressors that they have been coping with since childhood, and using coping skills that may be unhealthy to handle those stressors. Mindfulness methods

provide an opportunity for individuals to use reflection and introspection to take care of themselves and cope in a way that also leads to personal growth and overall well-being. All treatment methods centered on mindfulness encourage “an awareness of thoughts, emotions, desires, and other phenomena that arise without latching onto or acting on them” (Brown et al. 219). Acceptance without judgment is key, and may help to develop the capacity for sustained attention to present life experiences, especially when they are traumatic or negative. Brown, Ryan, and Creswell posit “that mindfulness may facilitate well-being directly, by adding clarity and vividness to current experience and encouraging closer, moment-to-moment sensory contact with life...without a dense filtering of experience through discriminatory thought (219). Current research supports this claim, using the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) to report lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, with high levels of well-being marked by greater life satisfaction, more energy, and self-actualization (Brown et al. 220). Even just two weeks of mindfulness was associated with higher levels of well-being, showing that the practice of mindfulness, not just the disposition to be mindful, can be beneficial to overall well-being (Brown et al. 220). Using the MAAS to self-report the effects of mindfulness has shown that the practice has led to “a greater awareness, understanding and acceptance of emotions, and a greater ability to correct or repair unpleasant mood states in study participants (Brown et al. 220). Research using fMRIs backs up this data. Previous research has found that people with higher MAAS scores “were less reactive to threatening emotional stimuli as indicated” by responses in the amygdala and prefrontal cortex while labeling each stimulus (Brown et al. 220). This shows that more mindful people reserve emotion when analyzing stimuli, consistent with mindfulness’s emphasis on observing phenomena without judgment.

This lack of value judgments regarding stimuli may also aid individuals during high-emotion events such as trauma or death. In a study about the effect of mindfulness on an “induced sad mood,” mindful participants were able to recover from the sad mood quicker. (Brown et al. 220). In another study where participants looked at negative slides, mindful individuals were able to look at them longer (Brown et al. 220). This demonstrates the usefulness of mindfulness as a coping skill for psychological stressors even with healthy populations. All people experience trauma in some form, and mindfulness is an excellent method to cope with that trauma. In randomized clinical trials testing for ACT, studies show reductions in psychological symptoms in healthy people, and rehospitalizations in psychotic patients, as well as stigmatizing and burnout in substance abuse counselors (Brown et al. 221).

MBCT and DBT are used for treating clinical patients. “MBCT focuses on increasing metacognitive awareness and present moment, non-judgmental awareness of negative thoughts and feelings in at-risk depressive patient populations (Segal et al, 2002)” (qtd. in Brown et al. 221). The increased awareness prevents relapse by creating increased sensitivity to depressive thoughts. DBT has mainly been used with borderline personality disorder populations, whose “mindfulness training has emphasized participatory, or engaged nonreactive observation of present moment experiences, among other qualities” (Brown et al. 221). In DBT studies, it has been shown to reduce distress, suicidal ideation, and psychiatric hospitalizations. It improves social adjustment and “global mental health functioning” (Brown et al. 221).

The psychological applications of mindfulness show that the practice can benefit healthy populations who deal with stress and traumatic events. The methods of MBCT and DBT are

used for clinical populations, ranging from depression to borderline personality disorder. All reduced depressive symptoms and further psychiatric events, whether self-harm or hospitalization. Much evidence suggests that being engaged in the present moment, being aware of internal and external phenomenon, and reserving judgements can be beneficial to one's overall psychological health and well-being.

Mindfulness and Physical Health

The ACES study demonstrated that adult health is affected by lifestyle factors experienced during childhood and by coping skills learned as a result of those lifestyle factors. The ability to handle stressors from one's past and present is essential to one's physical health. This ability can be honed through the practice of continual engagement in the present, the awareness of internal and external phenomena, and the acceptance of this stimuli without judgment. Most research into the health benefits of mindfulness are concerned with pain, chronic illness, or injury (Brown et al. 221). Brown et al. state that when such conditions are present and one tries to not to think about them, this avoidance can make anxiety worse, and make the individual actually more sensitive to physical pain (221). In a study "with burn patients receiving dressing changes, Haythornthwaite et al. (2001) found that those in a sensory focusing condition reported greater pain relief relative to those in a distraction group and less remembered pain compared to usual care group participants" (Brown et al. 222). Regarding chronic pain, Forsyth and Hayes used Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in a model that included "contact with the present moment, acceptance, defusion, self-as-context, committed action, and values" in order to "increase psychological flexibility, which is the ability to contact the present moment more fully and to change or persist in behavior that

serves valued ends (Fletcher and Hayes, 2005). With regard to pain, ACT is now an empirically tested psychological intervention for pain treatment and has recently been listed by Division 12 of the American Psychological Association as an empirically supported treatment for chronic pain (447).

Acceptance has been shown to be effective with chronic pain, “which includes unwanted thoughts or bodily sensations” (Forsyth and Hayes 447). In their study comparing the effectiveness of mindfulness, acceptance, and average coping in an induced pain task, Forsyth and Hayes used awareness of breath as the measure of mindfulness to cope with pain (448). Acceptance is a proven tool for pain tolerance in controlled experiments, but mindfulness has not been studied as thoroughly under controlled experiments to test pain tolerance (Forsyth and Hayes 448). Sixty-seven participants submerged one of their arms in freezing water and were told to cope in any way they chose, and the amount of time they were able to remain submerged was measured. They were then split into three groups. One group listened to a recording explaining what it means to accept pain without applying judgment. One group listened to a recording explaining how to remain mindful of one’s breathing. The last group were told to cope however they could “(spontaneous coping)” (Forsyth and Hayes 451). The results were that “a mindful awareness breathing rationale” was “as effective as an acceptance of thoughts rationale with regard to pain tolerance, with no significant difference found between the two” (Forsyth and Hayes 453). Mindfulness is as effective as acceptance in short term pain tolerance as well as chronic pain. “...Accepting pain, without physically or mentally bracing against it, disempowers the habituated link between narrative and physiology, and increases tolerance” (B. Lichtenstein 122).

In their study on alterations in the brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation, Davidson and Kabat-Zinn, et al. hypothesized that study subjects who meditated for an eight week period would have greater activity in the left side of the brain, which activates during some kinds of positive emotions and is associated with individuals who have more positive senses of well-being. They also hypothesized that subjects would have a greater amount of antibodies to the influenza vaccine. Because left-sided frontal brain activity is associated with a healthy immune system, the authors also hypothesized that the more change toward left-sided brain activation, the more of an increase there would be in antibody titers, the measure of antibodies in the blood, to the influenza vaccine. They drew blood at four and at eight weeks. At the conclusion of the study, the researchers found that “in response to the influenza vaccine, the meditators displayed a significantly greater rise in antibody titers from the 4 to the 8 week blood draw compared with the controls” (Davidson and Kabat-Zinn, et al. 566). Their findings also suggested that meditation can activate the left-sided frontal area of the brain associated with decreased anxiety and increased feelings of well-being (Davidson and Kabat-Zinn, et al. 569). The authors suggest that this left-side frontal “activation is associated with more adaptive responding to negative and/or stressful events” (569). Subjects with greater left-side frontal activation showed quicker recovery after negative stimuli (Davidson and Kabat-Zinn, et al. 569) Recent research cited by the authors has shown that “relaxation and stress management procedures increase T-cytotoxic/suppressor (CD3+CD) lymphocytes in HIV-infected men” (564). Also known as killer T-cells, these lymphocytes are a type of white blood cell that lock onto and destroy a virus. These examples demonstrate that mindfulness

and meditation can help arm the immune system in the fight against illness and aid the body in recovery.

Mindfulness can improve physical health in other ways as well. When an individual ruminates, it could “be the mechanism by which repeated, dysfunctional physiological activation occurs (Verkuil, Brosschot, Gebhardt & Thayer, 2010), resulting in poorer health, increased heart rate, lowered heart rate variability, increased cardiovascular disease, and poor sleep (Brosschot & Thayer, 2006, 2007)” (B. Lichtenstein 123). In a study cited by Brown et al., in a regulated clinical trial mindfulness meditation exercises were performed during 30-40 phototherapy treatment sessions for psoriasis patients, a skin condition that becomes inflammatory under stressful conditions. By the end of the study, patients who performed the mindfulness exercises had clearer skin than in the control group (Brown et al. 223). In another study, middle schoolers meditated for 20 minutes each day for three months. At the end of that period, participating students “had reductions in resting and some ambulatory measures of systolic blood pressure (Brown et al. 223). Mindfulness is a wonderful tool for stress reduction, and in effect, a balm that improves physical health in a myriad of ways.

Nature and Health

Research into the effects of green spaces on urban dwellers “are suggested to support residents’ possibilities to cope with every stress and to have a beneficial effect on human health (Frumkin, 2001; Maas, Verheij, Townsend, Pryor, Brown, & St. Leger, 2005; Nilsson, Baines & Konijnendijk, 2007)” (Tyrväinen et al. 1). Previous studies have shown that stress and “insufficient recovery from stress, are recognized as an increasing problem and a cause for long-term effects on health (McEwen, 1998; Sluiter, Frings-Dresen, Meijman, & van der Beek,

2000)” (Tyrväinen et al. 1) Stress affects people in a variety of physical ways, from the heart and digestive system to the immune system. (Tyrväinen et al. 1) Preventing stress would be beneficial to one’s health and to one’s health care system and anything that can prevent stress is worth studying. In previous research cited by Tyrväinen, et al., short term visits to forested areas “can lower blood pressure and pulse rate and reduce cortisol levels” (2). Cortisol levels are often used as a marker for stress because it is one of the major chemical stress responses in humans. While cortisol levels did not change for the participants in Tyrväinen et al.’s study, the participants’ self-reported well-being, mood, and creativity did. After just 15 minutes viewing an urban park and an urban wooded area in Helsinki, participants reported a restored mood (Tyrväinen et al. 5). People had fewer negative emotions in the forest compared to the park and the control site, a busy area in the city of Helsinki (Tyrväinen et al. 6). Subjects felt “incoherent” in the city, and creative in the two green spaces (Tyrväinen et al. 7).

Tyrväinen et al.’s results are consistent with what is proposed by Attention-Restoration Theory (ART), in which nature and all things that occur within it can refresh one’s depleted attention and mental functions (Cox et al. 147). Cox et al. also cites Stress-Reduction Theory (SRT) which states “that natural environments facilitate reductions in physiological arousal following stress (Ulrich et al. 1991)” (Cox et al. 147). Previous research cited by Cox et al. suggests that having a green space in one’s neighborhood is associated with greater well-being and lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (White et al. 2013) and (Beyer et al. 2014) (qtd. by Cox et al. 147) The Cox et al. study focused on vegetative cover and bird population in gauging the availability of nature experiences in the neighborhoods of three neighboring towns in southern England. Vegetation has previously been found to have stress reducing benefits,

also helping people to recover from mental fatigue “(e.g. Fuller et al. 2007, Alvarsson et al. 2010, Dallimer et al. 2012)” (Cox et al 148). Having a variety of bird species in one’s environment and bird watching has also been shown to increase mental well-being. Listening to birds singing has also “been shown to contribute toward perceived attention restoration and stress recovery (Ratcliffe et al. 2013)” (Cox et al. 148). Cox et al. found that natural elements that could be observed during the day, “namely vegetation cover and afternoon bird abundances were positively associated with a lower population prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress” (149). They did find however, that the people who benefited most from these natural elements were those with mild or moderate mental-health disorders (Cox et al. 150). The authors suggested that making green spaces more inviting to the public will get them outdoors and help them to participate in physical or social activities. They also suggest that the beauty created by “the visual complexity of the landscape” would affect “mental restoration and well-being (Shanahan et al. 2015b)” (Cox et al. 153).

In their study on the associations of nature connectedness, well-being, and mindfulness, Howell et al. cite a previous study by Saraglou, Buxant, and Tilquin (2008) in which participants reported increased positive emotions “such as enjoyment and wonder” after watching a nature-oriented film (166). Weinstein, Przybylski, and Ryan (2009) exposed participants to “nature-oriented slides or a plant-laden laboratory” and “showed that immersion in either simulated or actual nature boosted vitality” (Howell et al. 166). This shows that elements of nature in one’s immediate manmade environment can still be beneficial to one’s psyche. “Appreciating the beauty of a blossom, the loveliness of a lilac, or the grace of a gazelle are all

ways in which people can, in some small measure, fill their daily lives with evolutionarily inspired epiphanies of pleasure' (Buss, 2000, p.22),” (Howell et al. 166).

Mindfulness in Buddhist Tradition

Be a bud sitting quietly in the hedge

Be a smile, one part of wondrous existence

Stand here. There is no need to depart.

This homeland is as beautiful as the homeland of our childhood

Do not harm it, please, and continue to sing... ('Butterfly Over the Field of Golden Mustard Flowers') (Nhāt Hahn 47).

Mindfulness in Buddhist tradition is an exercise in loving each moment and making everything one does the most important thing one does. According to Zen Master Thích Nhāt Hahn in his book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, one should be present while washing the dishes: enjoying the activity of taking care of one's household and one's self, and appreciating being alive by washing the dishes. Hurrying through the process means that “we are not alive during the time we are washing the dishes. In fact we are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink...Thus we are sucked away into the future—and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life” (8). While one is doing the dishes, one should be aware of how one inhales, and how the stomach expands with deep breaths, contracting with each exhale. Breathing is an important component in mindfulness. Buddha “teaches that one should use one's breath in order to achieve Concentration” (Nhāt Hahn, 12). Nhāt Hanh describes mindfulness as “keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality” (Nhāt Hahn, 16). Every moment of life is a miracle to be wondered at with genuine, focused attention.

Mindfulness is to focus one's attention on the task at hand, using "a calm heart and self-control..." (Nhāt Hahn 20). Focusing one's attention is a form of meditation, and can be used while chopping wood, cleaning one's house, taking a bath, or making tea. Being aware of the mechanisms of one's body while breathing is a way to bring focus back to the present moment. "Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts" (Nhāt Hahn 22). Focused breathing is the best way to avoid distracting thoughts and build up concentration power, which is the result of practicing mindfulness. Noticing how the stomach expands as one inhales, and begins to lower again with exhale, is a simple meditation that focuses on breathing and the length of time each inhale and exhale takes. Focused breathing is the tool that helps us persevere in hopeless situations (Nhāt Hahn 37). According to Hanh, meditation should be practiced while walking, lying down, washing the dishes, working, "drinking tea, talking to friends, or whatever you are doing..." (Nhāt Hahn 39). Let every activity be the most important event in your life. "Each act is a rite, a ceremony. Raising your cup of tea to your mouth is a rite" (Nhāt Hahn 39). Every moment and action is sacred, an opportunity to celebrate being alive, with wonder, enthusiasm, and patience.

Relaxation is the means to "realize a tranquil heart and clear mind. To realize a tranquil heart and clear mind is to have gone far along the path of meditation" (Nhāt Hahn 58). In order to be mindful of thoughts and emotions, one should observe them without judgment, entertaining them only if pertinent to the current moment. The key is to acknowledge one's thoughts and feelings, recognize them for what they are, and let them pass. In mindfulness, the practitioner is "both the mind and the observer of the mind" (Nhāt Hahn 62). The interconnectedness of thoughts, feelings, and outside stimuli is a basic tenet of mindfulness.

“We should treat our anxiety, our pain, our hatred, and passion gently, respectfully, not resisting it, but living with it, making peace with it, penetrating into its nature by meditation on interdependence” (Nhāt Hahn 95). Every pain and joy is connected and part of the experience of living.

CHAPTER IV
EXHIBITION ANALYSIS

Mindfulness Matters: The Universal Need for a Healthy Mind is an installation of 33 works comprised of video, drawing, sculpture, found objects, prints, paintings, and zines. The exhibition opened on March 31, 2018 in the University Museum at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

The ultimate goal of this installation is to create a feeling of well-being in the viewer that they may carry with them throughout the exhibition. The secondary goal is to introduce the viewer to concepts of mindfulness, from being in the moment to interconnectivity. These ideas are expressed initially in the hallway with the first two paintings that the viewer encounters, and continue to the last gallery, where viewers are invited to sit and meditate mindfully.

Upon entering the University Museum from its main entrance, the first works the viewer encounters are two paintings introducing the character Priscilla Panda (see fig. 1). In *Interconnectivity*, the viewer joins Priscilla in looking at a sculpted figure on the table. In this action viewer and panda are linked; the viewer is looking at a work of art in the form of a painting while Priscilla is looking at a sculpture. Through this connection, the viewer completes the work and becomes an actor in the installation, just as Priscilla Panda is. In *Life is Art*, my self-portrait looks into a mirror to see Priscilla Panda as my reflection. In combination with the title, the reflection demonstrates the idea that people are art themselves, which adds another dimension to *Life is Art's* companion piece *Interconnectivity*. The viewer is art looking at art, and the art looks back, communicating with the viewer; the figure on the table returns Priscilla's and the viewer's gaze. The blur between art and life becomes apparent, and the

viewer may continue through the exhibition as an actor on a stage with no boundaries, as espoused by Allan Kaprow. *Interconnectivity* introduces the mindfulness concept that everything is connected. This is the viewer's first encounter with the concept of mindfulness in the installation.



Fig. 1. *Life is Art* (left) and *Interconnectivity* (right).

In the first gallery, the viewer will immediately see a large, 4'x11' drawing titled *In The Moment* (see fig. 2). As represented in the drawing, I have taken off the panda mask in order to focus—or be mindful—my concentration on the present as evidenced by the text on the steering wheel. The steering wheel represents the power one has in the present moment. As a mindful driver or actor, I only glance at the past if needed, which is why it is in the rearview mirror. The past has no power in the present. The future is far ahead, unknown, and undeveloped, but the present is colorful and in detail because it is the most important, and the most powerful.



Fig. 2. *In the Moment*.

Along the walls in this gallery are seven editions of zines in glass bowls so that anyone may reach in and take one, as they would a piece of candy (see fig. 3). The first four zines relate to mindfulness and being in the moment. *Mindfulness: A Primer* contains the basic tenets of mindfulness: continual attention to the present moment, the miracle of daily life on this planet, and practicing breathing to unite body and mind. *Mindfulness Meditation is Easy*, covers simple exercises for beginners adapted from *The Miracle of Mindfulness* by Thích Nhất Hahn. These exercises include following your breath and half-smiling, to washing the dishes and making tea. The back of this zine includes a pro tip: anything can be mindfulness meditation as long as one is paying attention to what one is doing. In *A Day of Mindfulness and You*, Nhất Hahn's recommendations for a day of mindfulness includes taking care of oneself and one's household. Only simple work like laundry or cooking is allowed. *Grounding in the Now (When Panic Strikes)* is an illustrated exercise to help someone who is having an anxiety attack. These zines are hand-written and illustrated simply for immediate absorption of the information. Most of the

zines are in black and white or utilize selective color to relate to the bold lines and selective color of *In the Moment*. *How to Spot a Mental Illness* is located on a pedestal by itself between two windows because of the personal nature of its contents. This particular zine is placed in this location to allow the viewer space to reflect on the characteristics associated with common mental illnesses. The zine is written as though these symptoms are present in a loved one, but if the information resounds with the reader, they have the space and the privacy to read.



Fig. 3. Zines, installation view.

The last two zines in this gallery bookend the door to the other parts of the exhibition. *How to Help: A Quickguide* and *Being There* are two how-to zines for when a viewer has

recognized symptoms of mental illness in a loved one. *How to Help* demonstrates the conversation one could have if concerned that a loved one may be mentally ill or going through a crisis. *Being There* describes what it looks like to support a loved one dealing with mental illness, from taking a walk or just listening, to helping them find services in their area. Resources are on the back of the zine directing viewers to MentalHealth.gov and suicide prevention hotlines.

In the center of the middle gallery, viewers will encounter *Joy*, a 3'x4' papier mâché elephant (see fig. 4). Its surface is collaged with beautiful scenes of nature and the universe: flowers, seas, animals, and outer space. The choice of surface decoration is influenced by Howell et al.'s research, which demonstrated that just looking at scenes from nature can be beneficial to one's well-being (166). These depictions of nature foreshadow the imagery of animals and plants in the penultimate gallery.



Fig. 4. *Joy*

Joy serves three functions. It is a reference to a previous work featuring two elephants: one representing regret and the other representing future joy in artmaking. *Joy's* second function is to serve as the literal elephant in the room, a metaphor for the subject that should be discussed: one's mental health. Its last function is to represent the first translation attempts of mindfulness and the continual remembering of the present moment (Lichtenstein 121).

In the next gallery, the viewer is surrounded by abstract landscape paintings inspired by the sunrise (see fig. 5). The focal point in this gallery is a 3'x6' painting that translates the colors of a sunrise on Oak Island, North Carolina on August 14, 2017. Each color from that sunrise is represented by a horizontal band. The colors of this painting are also echoed in unique compositions in the smaller, 2'x3' paintings that adorn the other walls in the room. All of these paintings inspire a feeling of well-being and positivity, a breath of fresh air after delving into the information contained within the zines.



Fig. 5. *Sunrise, Oak Island, NC* flanked by companion paintings.

In the penultimate gallery are screenprints, enlarged sunlight prints, and a mirror (see fig. 6). As discussed earlier, the mirror is a metaphor for mindfulness, as it reflects reality

lucidly and without judgment (Brown et al. 213). The mirror also serves as a reminder that the viewer is part of the installation, an actor connected with the artwork on a boundless stage. The sunlight prints feature dandelions in various stages: budding, flowering, or being blown away. Sunlight prints are made in a similar manner to screenprints by placing objects on light sensitive paper and exposing them under the sun's rays. The screenprints are made by placing images cut from National Geographic magazines directly on the glass of the exposure unit under the screen and exposing them. This creates a silhouette of the image on the screen. A few screenprints were made using National Geographic images that have been scanned, resized, edited, and printed as silhouettes on transparency film to match the silhouettes produced by placing the images directly on the exposure unit.



Fig. 6. Screenprints, installation view.

All of the screenprints feature animals, for the diversity of the animal kingdom is one of the most fascinating aspects of nature. Humans are included in this diverse display of Animalia.

In two of the screenprints, man and beast interact. In *Showoff*, a young Native American boy stands on his pony to the delight of his relatives. In *Swimming with Turtles*, three swimmers float as sea turtles and fish swim around them. These images are meant to invoke curiosity and wonder in the viewer, as well as to remind the viewer of the idea of interconnectivity. On the adjacent wall, screenprints of elephants and ants inspire wonder at the incredible range of life on this planet. Between ants and elephants there are kangaroos, rhinoceroses, dolphins, and llamas. In the top row of screenprints, birds appear: parrots, cardinals, and songbirds. These prints were inspired by research that found that having a variety of bird species in one's environment, bird watching, and listening to birdsong have been shown to increase mental well-being (Cox et al. 148). Color is used to unite this variety of animals. An analogous color harmony of yellow, green, and blue, along with metallic neutrals, create harmony among these unique images. Gold and silver ink are used to refer to the elements that make up our natural world. Spray glitter is used in some images as an homage to the diamond dust employed by Andy Warhol in his prints.

In the last gallery, the viewer is invited to sit down and meditate with Priscilla Panda. Adirondack chairs flank a projector that displays a video of Priscilla meditating on the beach at the sunrise in Oak Island that contributed its colors to the paintings featured in the middle gallery. Each chair has its own set of headphones so that viewers may tune out the world and enjoy a moment of peace. The only movement is that of the occasional bird and the rolling of the waves on the sand.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Mindfulness Matters: The Universal Need for a Healthy Mind is an installation that brings attention to the state of one's well-being in a positive, instructive way. All of the works featured in the exhibition connect the viewer to methods of coping with stressors, from mindfulness and being in nature to blurring the lines between life and art. The exhibition discusses mindfulness as a concept: from reserving judgment and being in the moment, to interconnectivity and meditation.

Mindfulness Matters is meant to start a conversation in a society that frowns on expressing feelings or needing help. Talking about how one is really thinking and feeling should be as natural as talking about the weather. Communicating about what one needs should not be a shameful event, and likewise taking care of oneself should not incur feelings of guilt. After seeing this installation, my hope is that viewers will walk away feeling refreshed and reflective about their own health and their own connection to nature. Both are simple, both are powerful. They are a way to wield that power in the present and to enjoy life in an authentic way. As the ACEs study shows, most people need to develop positive coping skills for the benefit of their mental and physical health. While childhood experiences contribute to one's history and health in adulthood, one may learn to employ strategies that can help to overcome learned bad habits and to promote good ones in their place. Stressors from living on a planet of immense beauty and cruelty affect one's whole health; mindfulness, nature, and art can be used as powerful tools that can mitigate these stressors.

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