Undergraduates' Experiences With Mindfulness Practice: A Qualitative Study

Joseph Perry Croskey II

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UNDERGRADUATES' EXPERIENCES WITH MINDFULNESS
PRACTICE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2019
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The volume of research concerning mindfulness has grown in recent years, however few researchers have specifically explored the effects on undergraduate students utilizing a four-week mindfulness-based intervention (MBI). In the proposed study, a specialized four-week MBI curriculum was offered to the general population of undergraduates attending a rural, public university and the researcher explored students’ experiences in a qualitative format.

This study synthesizes portions of conceptual lenses of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), the stress process (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981), and symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969), to investigate students’ utilization of newly learned mindfulness and meditation skills. Findings from the study reveal that students learn to cultivate adaptive behaviors and purposefully assign meaning to events, thereby moderating the negative impact of stressors on their well-being. The practices have positive impacts on other important outcomes. Students gained insight about themselves and reported improved coping skills, problem solving and academic engagement. Results from the study also show that students enjoyed learning new skills while appreciating something unique during a four-week MBI; a sense of being that is palpable and a deeper connection to those around them.

The detailed descriptions of students’ experiences is to promote practitioners, administrators, and students understanding of the multiple benefits of an MBI in the
undergraduate context. The hope is that in the future, MBI will be utilized for undergraduate students to aid in academic and overall life endeavors.

*Keywords:* mindfulness-based intervention, undergraduates, qualitative research, emotion regulation, well-being
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World peace begins with inner peace. - Dalai Lama aka Tenzin Gyatso
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Vignettes

This investigation begins with the students’ stories regularly presented to the investigator and others who work closely with undergraduates. The following vignettes provide a perspective into the lives of college students and the multiple stressors they face daily. The stressors can be from external situations or internal thoughts. These stressors are in addition to the academic challenges posed by higher education.

Bethany is back in the office for the third time this week. This time the discussion about her struggles with her math class is too much and she breaks down crying. I pass her the tissues that I always keep on hand. She says that her roommate is horrible, and she can’t study in the room because her roommate always has friends over or plays stupid music. Bethany decides she must withdraw from the class in order to maintain her other work and her sanity.

Donna comes in with an angry expression on her face and says:

I just came from the financial aid office. They said that I still owe money, even though they sent me an email informing me that I have a refund. I spent that money on books and now I don’t have any money left to pay them. How am I supposed to pay, no one in my family can afford that amount? My mom already works two jobs and she has another baby on the way. I try to help her out on the weekends, but then I don’t have enough time to study. And what did they mean when they said I’m not a sophomore. I’ve been here two years.

John comes in and says he must drop the Honors Program. There is no way he can pass the game theory class and it is going to kill his GPA and chances to get into a good medical
school. John remarks: “I’ve talked with others and they agree that the professor is horrible, and they don’t know what they’re doing in this class either. I spent two hours on one homework problem last night and I still didn’t get it. This is just ridiculous. I have to be released from this class or I’ve got to drop the Honors Program.”

Bill came into the office with his mother and grandmother. The mother called earlier and said Bill needs to talk with you about withdrawing from a class. Bill barely got a chance to speak, meanwhile his mother insisted he participate in disability support services because he must in order to receive the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation benefits. Bill does not want the label nor the services. His mother encouraged him to participate in another program that would provide books and additional support services. Bill does not want to take the time to participate in extra advising or mentoring, believing he can do it on his own, even though his mother clearly made the argument that she cannot afford to buy books each semester.

**Introduction to the Study**

Undergraduate college students report overwhelming stress and anxiety (Bamber & Schneider, 2016; Garlow et al., 2008; Lu, 1994). The stress is related to a variety of stressors that students experience. Undergraduate students face a significant life change as they move into emerging adulthood and meet new, multi-faceted responsibilities (Arnett, 2000; Bamber & Schneider, 2015). Students face challenges from academic rigor, papers and tests, reduction in sleep, social situations, roommate issues, family issues, financial difficulties, and other stressors that substantially contribute to perceived distress (Bamber & Schneider, 2016; Shearer, Hunt, Chowdhury, & Nicol, 2016). Unresolved stress can lead to anxiety and other mental health problems (Bamber & Schneider, 2015). Researchers Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, and Martin (2018) found that this age group increasingly reports mental health issues related to increased screen
time on digital devices, especially smartphones. Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, and Martin (2018) found that the stress from screen time led to “increases in depressive symptoms, suicide rates, and suicide-related outcomes (p.3).”

To cope with stress and anxiety, students increasingly seek assistance from overloaded university counseling centers. According to the 2014 National Survey of College Counseling Centers, 94% of counseling centers are serving increased numbers of students with psychological problems (Gallagher, 2015). In addition to administrators' reports, alarming numbers of students report significant levels of distress (Gall, Evans, & Bellerose, 2000). A study published in 2015 reported that stress and anxiety negatively impacted academics of more than one fifth of students (American College Health Association [ACHA], 2015). Approximately 50% of students report notable levels of depression and anxiety (Garlow et al., 2008).

Universities regularly provide programming to improve students’ success; nevertheless, stress continues to devastate students and negatively impact their curricular and co-curricular outcomes. Reducing the negative impact of stress is helpful in students’ outcomes (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Kohler Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009). An activity that is a promising strategy for students to reduce stress and anxiety is a mindfulness-based intervention.

Mindfulness is considered a broad concept with several conceptual and operational meanings (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Siegel, Germer, & Olendzki, 2009). Researchers conceptualize mindfulness as both a state and a trait (Kiken, Garland, Bluth, Palsson, & Gaylord, 2015). Researchers often use constructs such as "control of attention, awareness, non-reactivity, and non-judgmental thoughts" (Bamber & Schneider, 2015, p.3). Mindfulness meditation practices have existed for thousands of years, often shared or taught in spiritual traditions (Goleman, 2004a). Teachers in the U.S. commonly teach mindfulness
meditation practices from a secular perspective without requiring religious or cultural beliefs (Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Shapiro, Brown, & Astin, 2008).

Mindfulness-based interventions instruct learners to be “consciously aware, moment-by-moment, of thoughts, bodily sensations, feelings, and the environment” (Li, Howard, Garland, McGovern, & Lazar, 2017, p. 62). The instruction teaches participants to focus on the present situation and not to ruminate about the past or fear future imaginations (Rogers, 2016). Mindfulness meditation instruction encourages acceptance of thoughts and feelings without judging them or believing there is a wrong or right way to think or feel in any particular situation (Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

The current study investigates students’ experiences with mindfulness and meditation practices. This chapter provides a background understanding of the problem of undergraduate stress. The purpose of the study and the conceptual framework follows. The appropriateness of the qualitative research design for the questions posed by this study, the assumptions and delimitations of this research, and the definitions are presented in this chapter.

**Background of the Problem**

Researchers have studied college student stress for years, yet students continue to suffer (Bamber, & Schneider, 2015; Lu, 1994). College requires students to acclimate to new situations. During this process, stress and anxiety often occur (Bamber & Schneider, 2015). In a 2015 study, most students (94%) reported feeling overwhelmed by all the things they had to do (n = 13,500 on a national survey) and almost “45 % reported being so depressed that they had difficulty functioning” (American College Health Association [ACHA], 2015, p.16). Demand for campus mental health services increased five times more than the enrollment growth in 2016 at 139 member schools (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2017).
Furthermore, students feel pressure from academics, adjustment, relationship issues, sexual abuse (current or previous), eating disorders, or severe distress (Gallagher, 2015). There are a host of issues leading to the increase in stress levels undergraduate students report. This research expounds on these below.

Students feel pressure to do well now and in the future. Students experience elevated stress to complete their assignments and earn good grades. The perception of the importance of a single project or paper having a disproportionate impact on one's life leads to high stress for many students (Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2012). Students worry about studying, homework, group projects, presentations, and tests, in addition to the overall increased academic standards. Deadlines, multiple responsibilities, and heavy workloads threaten students' well-being (ACHA, 2015). Students may feel an increase in stress due to ambiguity concerning unclear academic guidelines, different performance standards for different professors, or the perceived consequences of poor performance (Yousaf, Usman, & Akram, 2016). Academic challenges may lead to a lack of sleep. Often, nearly a third of students report not being able to sleep (ACHA, 2015). They also worry about their future opportunities to attain the job or graduate school opportunity they desire most. In addition to academic and career concerns, students have emotional challenges stemming from relationships.

Students face roommate and relationship issues (intimate and social) in addition to other conflicts. Konrath (2013) and other researchers found a drop in empathy among students and a paradoxical elevation in disconnection over the last 30 years. Students increasingly are distressed by interpersonal interactions. This lack of connection may lead to challenging relationships with peers and college employees (Twenge, 2017). There are family problems and health problems with a family member or partner that may cause stress (ACHA, 2015, p.16). Students and their
families experience the financial burden of college. Thirty-four percent of students report financial strain as traumatic or very difficult to handle (ACHA, 2015, p.16). When students experience difficulties with finances, it may preclude them from devoting sufficient time to studying, either due to worry or working.

Students may have faced traumatic events before attending college. The National Comorbidity Survey (NCS) reports that over half of” surveyed adults have experienced one or more traumatic events during their lifetime” (Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes, & Nelson, 1995, p.1052). Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes and Nelson (1995) explain the experiences that qualify as traumatic include “life-threatening accidents, rape, sexual molestation, childhood physical abuse, or neglect” (p. 1052). Furthermore, they state, “witnessing these events happen to another person also qualifies as vicarious trauma” (p. 1053). Often, people are resilient in their response to trauma (Galatzer-Levy, Burton, & Bonanno, 2012). Research by Thompson, Arnkoff, and Glass (2011) suggests that "trait mindfulness and acceptance are associated with greater psychological adjustment” (p. 220). Further research in this area of trauma and mindfulness is done by others, such as that of Rousseau and Cook-Cottone (2018), suggests that learning mindfulness skills and yoga can help manage the impact of stress trauma.

The factors enumerated above (relationships, family, financial issues, trauma) lead to stress students experience and potential mental health problems (DeRosier, Frank, Schwartz, & Leary, 2013). Students who experience overwhelming stress and anxiety report “poor relationships, lower levels of co-curricular engagement, lower grades, and lower graduation rates than students not suffering from mental health issues” (Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2012, p.2). Stress is a significant issue for university students.
Very few colleges have developed robust programming to address the low numbers of students who receive treatment for stress or other mental health issues (Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2012). Kitzrow (2003) asserts the need for implementing innovative strategies to meet the demand for students’ mental health services, including increasing counseling center hours, creating peer counselors, and providing group therapy and self-help programs. Some colleges have implemented courses to teach mental health, well-being, and relaxation skills in order to address students' stress-related issues (Brown & Schiraldi, 2004; Sidman, D'Abundo, & Hritz, 2009). A few schools have adopted campus programming from groups such as Active Minds and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (Cook, 2007). These efforts are not prevalent, nor are they reaching all students (Kitzrow, 2003). Some institutions have also experimented with using movement-based courses like yoga and other exercises to lower students' perceived stress and to increase mindfulness, mood, and self-efficacy (Caldwell, Harrison, Adams, Quin, & Greeson, 2010). Mindfulness intervention shows some promise as a stress and anxiety reduction strategy for students in addition to other benefits (Bamber & Schneider, 2015; Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2012).

Mindfulness-based programs have been growing in the West due to positive outcomes for wide-ranging health challenges, including stress-related and other clinical problems (Zenner, Hermleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014). Standard mindfulness-based interventions are based on mindfulness-based stress relief (MBSR) or similar programs and typically last eight weeks. There is empirical research demonstrating the benefits of mindfulness and meditation for stress relief and well-being (Greeson, Juberg, Maytan, James, & Rogers, 2014; Lazar, 2005; Sedlmeier et al., 2012).
Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, and Walach (2004) found in their meta-analysis that mindfulness-based stress relief can help a wide variety of people to cope with their problems, both clinical and nonclinical. Research from another team demonstrates MBIs potential to promote health in non-clinical populations (Sedlmeier, Eberth, Schwarz, Zimmermann, Haarig, Jaeger, & Kunze, 2012). Keng, Smoski, and Robins (2011) reviewed empirical literature of mindfulness studies from a variety of sources and reported that mindfulness interventions resulted in several positive effects including improved behavioral regulation, better subjective well-being, diminished emotional reactivity, and reduced negative psychological symptoms. Chiesa and Serretti (2009) found that MBSR is beneficial for reducing stress in healthy populations.

The mental fitness skills that comprise the mindfulness and meditation-based intervention have shown promise in helping individuals and organizations thrive (Gelles, 2016; Hülsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013). Additionally, there is evidence attesting to the popularity and promise of incorporating mindfulness-based interventions in schools (Jain et al., 2007; Shapiro, 2015; Waters, Barsky, Ridd, & Allen, 2015; Zenner, Herrmelen-Kurz, & Walach, 2014).

Mrazek, Franklin, Phillips, Baird, and Schooler (2013) found the widely applicable benefit of a reduction in mind wandering and improved working memory capacity that leads to improved GRE performance for students. Regehr, Glancy, and Pitts' (2012) meta-analysis of stress reduction interventions found strong support that “cognitive, behavioral, and mindfulness-based approaches are effective in reducing the effects of stress on university students, including reducing levels of anxiety, depression, and cortisol response” (p. 10). Greeson and colleagues (2014) research demonstrated that a (prescribed curriculum also referred to as manualized in this
document) mindfulness and meditation-based program is beneficial for reducing graduate and undergraduate students’ perceived stress at a selective university.

The current study investigates the benefits of a short term (four-week) MBI for 18 – 23-year-old undergraduate college students, in the emerging adult age group, at a rural public institution. Sedlmeier and colleagues Eberth, Schwarz, Zimmermann, Haarig, Jaeger, and Kunze (2012) describe the growing awareness that some people meditate for the self-regulation benefits of a mindfulness practice while others choose to practice meditation and mindfulness to gain wisdom or for positive transformations of consciousness. The study will help inform people of the reasons and benefits expressed by undergraduate students who voluntarily participate in a short MBI practicing mindfulness skills. The study participants will learn and practice the skills. The researcher anticipates that this practice will benefit them by reducing stress levels and perhaps in other ways, the research may uncover. There is a gap in the literature concerning studies from a qualitative perspective concerning the outcomes of mindfulness-based interventions and how they may assist the general population of undergraduates at public institutions / in dealing with stressors.

**Problem Statement**

Little is known about the details and utility of a short-term mindfulness-based intervention for reducing stress among the general undergraduate student populations. The current focus of mindfulness research chiefly investigates the objective physiological and behavioral benefits of mindfulness meditation practices (Bamber, & Schneider, 2015; Walsh, 1979). Students often learn contemplative practices in class for 16 weeks or with a homogeneous cohort like medical students or nurses. Many interventions occur over eight weeks or the entire semester. Often programs are created from traditional methods for teaching mindfulness and
meditation (Rogers & Maytan, 2012). These programs may not utilize appropriate and engaging pedagogical methods for the undergraduate age group (Greeson et al., 2014). The program utilized in this research was formulated to maintain structure, require participation and practice, frequently encourage and motivate students, and benefit from small group learning with peers (Rogers & Maytan, 2012). Although the benefits of mindfulness practice are becoming known, several researchers assert the need for more qualitative descriptive research describing the experience of participants in mindfulness-based interventions (Cullen, 2011; Grossman, 2011; Maloney, Lawlor, Schonert-Reichl, & Whitehead, 2016). Grossman (2011) argues that more qualitative studies are needed because “these methods are likely to afford greater insights into the psychological mechanisms and characteristics related to the practice of mindfulness” (p. 1039).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to examine the lived experiences of a self-selected convenience sample of undergraduate students who actively participate in a structured mindfulness-based intervention (MBI). More specifically, the study will examine how the undergraduate students' mindfulness and meditation practice informed their behavior and understanding of their day-to-day interactions, and it will assess the extent to which it increased the students' coping resources for dealing with stressors in their environment. A secondary purpose of this study is to determine whether an MBI may be a useful resource for college administrators to incorporate into student activity programming.

**Conceptual Framework**

This study will apply the Stress Process Model (SPM) (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981) and the theories of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) and symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969) as conceptual lenses through which to analyze small public state university undergraduate
students' experiences with skills learned during a structured mindfulness-based workshop. The researcher used these conceptual lenses with the assumption that learning and practicing mindfulness and meditation practices in a group setting for four weeks would enable students to develop a new set of skills and resources to better cope with the stress that arises from interactions and situations. The researcher sought to learn if using these developing skills will lead to a positive impact on their self-perceived well-being.

The investigator postulates that practicing meditation and the mindfulness skills will allow students to acquire a habitus that is different from what they learned in their formative years at home. This new habitus will allow students to respond differently to stressors in their environment. This research further postulates that participation in the MBI will increase students' moderating resources, and they will more effectively deal with their stressors and have better outcomes. This study integrates theories representing ideas from the symbolic interactionist micro or individuals' perspective with the macro theory of the SPM and harnesses the concept of habitus as a means to explain how the students learn and continue to use the skills learned in the MBI.

As shown in Figure 1 below, students exist and operate within a particular social structure and culture. They face a variety of stressors as described in the opening vignettes. When a stressful event occurs, students apply their various coping resources and strategies to the situation. Those strategies and resources are a part of the students’ habitus and typically provides a reflexive response to the situation. For example, imagine your response when you are a little late to an important meeting at work, and a car pulls out in front of you moving very slowly. Practicing mindfulness skills learned in an MBI provides students with additional skills to negotiate stressful situations and calm the autonomic stress reaction. MBI participants are taught
to recognize the sensations in their bodies and thoughts going through their mind in the present moment so that they can pause and choose the response they feel will lead to the best outcome in a situation.

Figure 1. Author created image of cultivating a mindful habitus.

The stress process model (SPM) posits that stress proliferates and individuals respond differently to stressors due to their experiences and the accumulation of stressors they have faced in the past (Aneshensel, 2015). This study uses a partial application of the SPM. The SPM can facilitate an understanding of why individual students experience the stressors of college differently, and as a result, have different outcomes when faced with similar daily interactions and occurrences. The model shows that the increase of personal and social moderating or coping resources leads to a reduction in adverse mental health outcomes.

Students enter college with a learned way of perceiving and reacting to the world or habitus (Lareau, 2003). They learned this habitus from the social worlds they inhabit. Habitus
represents an individual's thought process about how things work in the world (Lareau, 2003). Students initially acquire habitus, their social and cultural capital, from their experiences within their family (Bourdieu, 1984). It is essentially the individual's reaction to and interaction with the social world around them. The surrounding environment consists of education, ethnicity, religion, social class, and other variables. Students' habitus includes the resources they have learned and can bring to bear on the stressors in their lives. Habitus is essential because it demonstrates how the undergraduate student embodies skills and resources to interact within and on social and material structures at the university (Angus et al., 2007).

Symbolic interaction (SI) is a useful way to study how students make sense of and interpret the world, and conduct themselves in social situations (Blumer, 1969; Carter, & Fuller, 2015). According to Mead (1934), people are always engaged in internal conversation, thinking about the past or anticipating the future in the process of self-monitoring. Blumer (1969) expanded this idea to describe a person's subjective understanding of verbal or gestural communication and labeled this process symbolic interaction. Symbolic interactionists are concerned with the subjective meaning students utilize as agents to create, make sense of, and handle themselves and their world (Snow, 2001). There is an ongoing tension in the debate between the individual agency and the structural influence of the social world.

The self arises from interactions with others, and behavior arises from the thoughts about an idea of what a generalized other might think in the symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1969). As thinking beings, we can deliberately choose our behavior based on how we interpret and give meaning to situations instead of just reacting thoughtlessly. The meaning that is attached to everyday symbols may vary from individual to individual and from situation to situation. Meanings can change over time based on what people learn and experience (Crossley,
Symbolic interaction is vital to this study because it investigates the micro-conditions of how people give meanings to symbols and how those meanings influence their behavior. SI will shed light on how people can create shared meanings in order to interact and learn in a small group of peers.

Mindfulness is not necessarily related to or supported by these theories; however, they serve as a useful framework to illustrate the complex, stressful, and social nature of the life students face and how mindfulness might fit into their lives. The theories will allow the research to move beyond the individual descriptions towards the social arrangement of the intervention and their lives.

This study seeks to uncover insight about students who participate in a standardized four-week MBI, learning and practicing a variety of meditation and mindfulness skills. Students will develop resources and learn new skills, that allow them to apply nuanced or beneficial meanings to their thoughts and feelings that arise from social settings and interactions. Learning to intentionally and skillfully choose the meaning of an event can have an impact on thoughts, feelings, emotions, behavior, and outcomes. Typically, someone's habitus will lead them to unwittingly interact with symbols giving them meanings similar to meanings they learned to give them in the past (Walsh, 1980). However, beginning with the idea that the self is socially constructed, new social interactions and groups, may lead to changes in a student's typical repertoire of behaviors (Pagis, 2015; Summers-Effler, 2002). Learning mindfulness may help students understand that although they cannot control everything, they can control their reaction to events. Practicing mindfulness can teach a person how to calmly accept, acknowledge, and ride the highs and lows of the emotional rollercoaster en route to clear, wise, and original decisions for each situation encountered (Kabat-Zinn, 2011).
The practice of mindfulness is different from the emotion work or management of emotion historically posited in symbolic interactionism. A mindful stance allows the actor to accept emotions and choose the appropriate behavior with equanimity (Pagis, 2015). A metaphor of a horse leading the rider describes how people allow their emotions to dictate their actions. The rider who skillfully directs the horse to arrive at the destination is akin to someone adroitly noticing their emotions and choosing the behavior that leads to the sought-after outcome. Cargile (2011) argues that the critical difference between mindfulness and other strategies of emotion or behavior management is active acceptance. A person becomes more aware of unwanted responses instead of resisting or avoiding them (Cargile, 2011). Participants in the MBI will learn this through personal engagement with the mindfulness and meditation practices and a social learning process of structured discussion with each other and the facilitator.

**Significance of the Study**

There is a dearth of qualitative literature investigating mindfulness and meditation as a stress coping resource for the general population of undergraduate students at a rural small public state institution of higher education. Researchers have investigated the promising de-stress benefits of mindfulness and meditation in a variety of settings. However, there is a lack of information expressly for the undergraduate student age group (Greeson et al., 2014). Not only is there a paucity of literature for this age group, but there is also an inadequate amount of qualitative research representing the voice of mindfulness practitioners (Grossman, 2011). This study seeks to bridge these gaps in the literature. This investigation will address the lack of undergraduate students' voices in the literature on mindfulness meditation in the academy. This study also will inform institutions about the potential efficacy of an MBI from a student’s perspective.
A practical significance of this study is that it could provide students with resources to address stressful challenges faced while attending college. MBI have demonstrated promise in ameliorating a wide range of psychosocial difficulties (Khoury et al., 2013). Indeed, research by Meiklejohn and colleagues (2012) found, "mindfulness training can enhance students' capacities in self-regulation of attention and emotions" (p.296). Meiklejohn and the team learned that mindfulness training could buffer the developing brain from the deleterious effects of excessive stress" (p. 296). Students who participate in an MBI may be able to cope more effectively with social struggles and academic rigor. Students can learn to react differently to situations which tended to provoke an inadequate emotional and behavioral response in the past. Students may choose mindfulness and meditation skills as better coping mechanisms than drinking or using other harmful substances, and they may perform better on academic assignments and thrive in co-curricular activities.

Students can learn a skill that can benefit them for a lifetime by participating in an MBI. The skills learned in an MBI can improve well-being, formal classroom learning, students' ability to regulate and process emotional responses, and other pro-social behaviors (Wadlinger & Isaacowitz, 2011). The work of Charoensukmongkol (2014) illustrates one example of the potential for life-long benefits from mindfulness practices. Charoensukmongkol (2014) maintains that students who practice mindfulness meditation can improve their Emotional Intelligence (EQ). Improved EQ positively influences the learning process and learners' performance (Arguedas, Daradoumis, & Xhafa, 2016; Goleman, 2006). Possessing a higher EQ has long term benefits for individuals and teams as demonstrated in the research (Boyatzis, Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Craig, 2008).
Finally, the study may demonstrate to higher education professionals that they can implement an MBI in programming as a relatively low-cost method to help students manage stress effectively and become more involved in the university. Faculty can incorporate MBIs into first-year seminar programming and other courses in addition to the workshop format employed by this study. Greek life and other student organizations can offer MBI programming to members. Programs like TRIO Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Programs, and others can train their students to use mindfulness and meditation skills to their benefit. The ability to provide individuals in a group with skills that they can apply in other aspects of their lives is more efficient than the typical counseling center model of one-on-one services. The researcher postulates that the staffing and space costs to run a program of this nature is negligible in comparison to the benefits to the students.

**Researcher Positionality**

My father retired from the US Air Force as a noncommissioned officer, and my mother was a first-grade teacher. I was fortunate that my parents enjoyed the different countries we lived in and made friends with the locals and lived in their community. I was brought up in the Episcopal Church but at a young age was exposed to other religions in Turkey and Okinawa. I am still a very active member of the Episcopal Church today. I completed most of my K-12 schooling in a small military town in Illinois. My mother and father encouraged my appetite for reading. *Siddhartha*, by Hermann Hesse (1951), is one book assigned by my high school English teacher that influenced and opened my thoughts to Buddhism, other concepts of human nature, and spiritual journey. I graduated from the US Military Academy at West Point and served six years as an Infantry Officer, including deployment from Germany to the first Gulf War, Desert Storm. I became interested in how people process stressful events differently during this period.
I have been curious about meditation and meditative practices like qi-gong, tai-chi, and yoga for a while. I worked in several areas after the Army. My interest in the healing arts led me to practice massage therapy for a while. Eventually, I found my vocation in serving students at a university level. In various positions at the university, I interact with students who are stressed out and struggling with the differences between home, high school and what they experience in college. I have worked in various capacities to help them deal with their challenges. In addition to working with any student who is exploring different majors, I work with students in the Honors program and students in a program devoted to serving low-income students from the state who did not excel in high school.

My curiosity about meditation piqued when I began my doctoral program and found research by Hall (1999) that showed meditation has positive benefits for students. My inquiry deepened when I learned that Google offered mindfulness workshops and the mindfulness, neuroscience, and emotional intelligence-based leadership development course entitled Search Inside Yourself (Tan, 2014). My research led to participation in the Contemplative Mind in Higher Education Summer Institute. The Summer Institute interactions with Mirabai Bush and Dr. Arthur Zajonc led to participation and certification in the Search Inside Yourself curriculum with Meng, Kelly Boys and other excellent teachers. I completed a ten-day Vipassana Meditation silent retreat as taught by S.N. Goenka in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin. I continued to learn more about mindfulness and meditation from my teachers. My own experience was that increased mindfulness allowed me to focus for longer periods of time and to minimize distracted behaviors while working on projects. I also became more patient and accepting of people and situations. These experiences and others strengthened my desire to share the practices with students and learn what they thought about them.
Research Design

This study seeks to understand how students in a rural public university setting perceive an MBI and mindfulness practices included in the four-week workshop. A qualitative study is the best tool to begin to answer this type of question. A qualitative design “is suited to promoting a deep understanding” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 9) of an activity from the students’ perspective.

The constructivist paradigm is well suited to this qualitative research because it will allow exploration of individuals' subjective meanings of their experience of the MBI in this situation (Creswell, 2017). Grossman (2011) argued that the inherent subjectivity and complexity of mindfulness is more suited to qualitative analysis. Cullen (2011) noted that Buddha “exhorted his students to learn for themselves if his teachings were beneficial and not to believe anything solely based on what someone says” (p. 4). Constructivists like Schwandt (2000) posit that "reality is socially, culturally, and historically constructed" (as cited in Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 9). The researcher will be a participant observer in this project and will have the role of "passionate participant" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 9). The researcher's participation in this four-week phenomenological study provides more profound access to the "lived experience" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 11) of the participants.

The design influences the "research questions, data collection and analysis, and report write-up" (Creswell, 2014, p. 187). The researcher will ask students about their understanding of mindfulness and to share their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about mindfulness and meditation. This investigation will allow the researcher to gain insight into students' thoughts about participating in an MBI. Additionally, this study will determine if the MBI provides skills
to allay stressors and improves coping resources or social support to ameliorate the adverse events, chronic strains, and traumas students face.

**Research Question and Sub-Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore undergraduate students’ lived experiences related to the mindfulness-based intervention.

RQ. What are the undergraduate students’ perceptions of and experiences with a mindfulness-based intervention?

SQ1. Do students perceive that their stress coping resources are changed after participating in a mindfulness-based intervention?

SQ2. Do students perceive a change in mastery, self-esteem, or social resources due to the skills learned from the mindfulness-based intervention?

The study examines how undergraduate students perceive an MBI and if it helps them navigate the institution with a different understanding of their stressors.

**Site Setting**

The setting for this study is a rural, public institution where the investigator is employed. The geographical location and socioeconomic status of the students and region are different from other studies available and reviewed.

The university is now a member of the state system of higher education. The university specializes in preparing students for professional careers and offers 97 program options from certificate to bachelors, several masters degrees and one doctoral degree. The university has two campus locations and also serves a growing number of online students. The study site location is in a rural, sylvan, rolling hills area.
The population of the town was 4,817 in 2014. The population has been declining, and industries have closed over the last ten years. The median household income is $28,375 for the town. Nearly one in five county inhabitants subsist in poverty. The university is situated in an area where future economic prospects are in decline. The area is conservative and traditional. The region is relatively devoid of any offerings where people might learn or hear about meditation. There are no yoga studios in town nor within a 16-mile radius.

The town population is over 90% white, and the county population is more than 96% white, which is similar to the entire region (datausa.io June 2018). Less than half of the residents in the town over 25 years of age have a bachelors degree (city-data.com, June 2018). In the region, more than 12% do not have a high school diploma and less than 25% have more than a high school diploma (Overview of the United States, June 2018). Almost a quarter (23.3%) of enrolled students and just under 10% of each incoming class are the first in their family to attend college. A poll by a local online news outlet (explorevenango.com, 2017) revealed that the most significant number (37%) of respondents felt a college education is ‘not too important' when asked the question "'How important is college education?" These poll results correlate with findings of Byun, Meece, and Irvin (2012), detailed in their research on rural-nonrural disparities in postsecondary educational attainment.

The grocery stores in town are limited and more than two miles away from the university, effectively making the area where students reside a food desert, "vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods" (USDA, June 2018). Obesity rates in the area are high (33%), and overall risky and harmful behaviors are common in the region. Nearly 70% of the population are overweight and at least 23% smoke compared to 21% in a nearby urban region (County Health Profiles, June 2018).
The university serves 4,330 undergraduate students. Approximately 3,000 of those undergraduate students are enrolled at the study site. Females typically comprise 60% or more of the incoming class and almost 64% of the student body. Ninety-five percent of students receive some form of financial assistance. More than one third (35%) of students enrolled at the university receive the Federal Pell Grant. The Pell Grant is for families who earn less than $30,000 annually.

University students often come from impoverished rural or inner-city areas. Rural youth are likely to live in poverty and as a result, experience chronic strain (Johnson & O'Hare, 2004). The University students participated in a nationwide study about financial wellness, literacy, paying for school, debt, and need. The Ohio State University conducts the Study on Collegiate Financial Wellness, and the 2017 study included students from 90 campuses representing 65 institutions. Nearly 700 students from this institution and more than 28,000 overall completed the online survey. Thirty-two percent of students at this institution who completed the survey said they were stressed about finances in general, which is a higher percentage than other schools. Forty-one percent of students survey respondents said that they were somewhat unlikely or very unlikely to be able to come up with $400 in cash in the event of a financial emergency during the school year. A higher percentage of our students compared to other respondents say they get no money from parents and family to support their education.

The University Fact Book indicates that almost 90% of the students attending the University are from the state (Fact Book, 2017-2018). The majority of the students come from the surrounding rural counties. People of color comprise approximately 12% of enrolled undergraduate students. African-American students have comprised 6%-8% of the student population for the last five years and 7.5% in 2017. The number of Asian students hovers around
1% over that time, and the Hispanic population went from less than 1% to 2.7% in 2017 while the White, Non-Hispanic went from nearly 86.9% to 82% in 2017. Students who identify as multi-racial or do not specify, comprise approximately 3% each, in 2017 2.8% and 3.6% respectively. A large city in about 110 miles and another is approximately 300 miles away. Most minorities attending the university come from those cities. Many students choose to commute from the surrounding rural communities.

For a variety of reasons, the university accepts most applicants. Research demonstrates that students who attend high schools located in rural communities experience fewer course choices and have fewer resources for college preparation (Byun, Meece & Irvin, 2012). Average SAT scores of first-time students are 519 for reading and 507 for math. Approximately 5% of students take a remedial course any given year. Typically, more than 70% of students are retained until the second year, 74.12% from 2016. More than half 51.55% of a recent cohort year graduated within six years. Given the enrollment characteristics, the graduation rate from the university is laudable. Collegefactual.com (2019) ranks it in the top 8% based on the expected versus actual graduation rate and the university was recognized by Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) in their report, "Promoting a Culture of Student Success" (2010). The report highlighted public universities with a high percentage of Pell Grant recipients; SAT/ACT's are at or below the national average yet having a substantial percentage of these students achieving a bachelor's degree. The University was one of 31 universities nationwide that met the criteria and one of 16 model universities chosen for this study by SREB.

Students can choose to participate in a wide variety of student organizations and co-curricular events. The university recognizes students every spring for their academic and co-curricular achievements. Although these opportunities are available for engaging students, not all
choose to participate. The lack of engagement has led to increased efforts to increase graduation rates. The university has hired professionals to serve as student coaches to assist students with adjusting to the rigors of college life.

Assumptions and Delimitations

Several theoretical, topical and methodological assumptions were made in this study are described below, followed by the limitations.

Theoretical assumptions made were based on findings by several researchers (Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Langhout, Drake, & Rosselli, 2009; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005), some who utilized understanding from the stress process model, indicates that a portion of the low-income, female, and minority students who receive Federal PELL and PHEAA state grants at the public rural institution face significant stressors, both at home and from school, that could lead to poor outcomes related to stress and negatively impact academic outcomes. A significant number of students in this population are from low-income families and are the first generation in their family to attend higher education. These students may not have the habitus or cultural and financial capital to navigate the obstacles in the institution. The habitus of other students, the staff, and faculty may be so foreign that the students feel like they cannot adapt to the situation nor feel like they belong (Langhout, Drake, & Rosselli, 2009). This difference in habitus and capital may lead to more stressors and poorer outcomes.

Additional theoretical assumptions are based on symbolic interaction theory. Symbolic interaction theory suggests that students may not understand that one poor or failing grade is just information to guide them to make different choices in the future. One lousy grade or semester does not mean that they cannot learn to adjust to the collegiate environment. Students may misunderstand a professor's perspective and take the interactions with the professor as an affront
to them personally. For instance, when a professor tells a student that they do not, under any circumstances, allow a late submission, that student may feel that this is a mean action directed only towards the student.

Recent encouraging theories on mindfulness motivated this investigation. Research on a mindfulness program for this particular population is limited; however, related research on mindfulness-based programs indicates they are effective at helping people manage stress (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), have better outcomes in class work (Hall, 1999; Ramsburg & Youmans, 2014), change their behavior in certain situations (Bowen, Chawla, & Witkiewitz, 2014), and change the internal conversations they have about the past and the future (Morone, Lynch, Losasso, Liebe, & Greco, 2012). It is this evidence and more that led me to want to learn more about the ability for mindfulness practices to enhance the students’ experience and enrich their curricular and co-curricular activities, as well as their lives in general.

My initial methodological assumption was that students would participate in a program with several requirements, even though there is no financial reward or other material benefits for participating. Another related assumption was that enough students will choose to participate based on word of mouth, personal contact, flyers, emails, and other media. Furthermore, once students began the program, they would find enough reason to continue and complete the program rather than drop out and devote their time to other pursuits. Once students finished the four-week MBI, they would also participate in the focus group and the interview. I assumed that students would honestly answer the questions posed in the focus group and interview. I asked questions that generated students’ engagement and responses that provided enough information to draw useful conclusions to answer the project questions.
My goal was to gather and process data in a systematic, thematic, analytic, guided method and to generate knowledge and understanding from this process. I reviewed the data and obtained an initial understanding. I ordered the data into categories or themes that used all the data sources, ensuring as much as possible an understanding of the participants’ meanings (Creswell, 2014).

The delimitations were made by the researcher in the development of the proposal in consultation with several resources. Creswell (2014) suggests 3-10 subjects for phenomenological studies such as this. The mindfulness-based program creators suggest an ideal size is 10-12 students. The researcher determined to make this study optional and not part of any class or program so that an excessive number of participants would not participate. The researcher determined from the outset that participants would not be coerced to join or remain in the program. The goal was to determine the feasibility for utilizing this program for the specific population of undergraduates served by this university. The university has a significant population of low-income, first-generation and rural students. I imagined most students did not have much if any experience with mindfulness practices. I chose to focus my efforts on recruiting underclass students to participate. I hoped to uncover students’ lived experience with mindfulness and meditation practices by delimiting the study in this way.

**Definition of Terms**

Co-curricular activities: Learning activities are provided by university personnel to engage students and enhance and enrich the curriculum (Leung, Ng, & Chan, 2011. These activities can help students develop workplace skills including the ability to work in teams, exhibit leadership, solve problems, effectively communicate, and value diversity (Reaves, Hinson, & Marchant, 2010). The activities can include participation in student clubs, service-
learning activities, student development programs/workshops, and internships, among others. The learning from these activities is student-centered versus content-centric (Leung, Ng, & Chan, 2011).

Curricular activities: Learning activities that primarily occur in the classroom during a course offered by an educational institution (Merriam-Webster, 2018). The instructor directs the learning.

Contemplative practices: Brady (2007) characterizes contemplation as “the act of attending with nonjudgmental awareness or being open to things just as they are” (p. 1). The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education states that contemplative practices come in many forms and “cultivate a critical, first-person focus” (Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, n.d.-a). Further, it states “Contemplative methods incorporated into daily life act as a reminder to connect to what we find most meaningful and can help us quiet our minds in the midst of action and distraction” (Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, n.d.-b). The contemplative practices employed in this study are deep belly breathing, dynamic breathing, body scan, sitting meditation, walking meditation, gathas, guided imagery, labeling thoughts meditation, eating meditation, and labeling feelings meditation.

Meditation: Meditation, like the word sport, is used to refer to a wide range of practices (Lutz, Dunne, & Davidson, 2010). “Meditation refers to a family of mental training practices that are designed to familiarize the practitioner with specific types of mental processes” (Brefczynski-Lewis, Lutz, Schaefer, Levinson, & Davidson, 2007, p.1). Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, and Davidson (2008) state that “conceptualize meditation as a family of complex emotional and attentional regulatory strategies developed for various ends, including the cultivation of well-being and emotional balance” (p. 1).
Mindfulness: A scientific understanding of mindfulness continues to evolve (Lutz, Dunne, & Davidson, 2010; Smalley & Winston, 2010). The “word mindfulness may be used to describe a psychological trait, a practice of cultivating mindfulness (e.g., mindfulness meditation), a mode or state of awareness, or a psychological process” (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2016, p.6). Mindfulness is a way of learning to relate directly to whatever is happening in your life, a way of taking charge of your life, and a way of doing something for yourself that no one else can do for you (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). The definition most widely cited is that mindfulness is the “awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment-by-moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 144). Further, mindfulness is a way of learning to live more fully in the present with an attitude of curiosity and acceptance (Rogers & Maytan, 2012). This investigation utilizes a Buddhist approach to mindfulness. Mindfulness is deeply rooted in Buddhist tradition and philosophy (Wallace, 1999).

Mindfulness-based stress relief (MBSR): MBSR is an eight-week program originally developed in a hospital setting for patients with chronic illnesses by Kabat-Zinn (2013). The program teaches meditation and yoga skills. MBSR is now applied across an extensive range of populations (Kabat-Zinn & Chapman-Waldrop, 1988; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, Burney, & Sellers, 1987). The method, based primarily on Buddhist practices, appears effective for chronic pain, anxiety disorders, general psychological well-being, psoriasis, and recurrent depression (Grossman et al., 2004).

Stressors: Aneshensel (2015) defines stressors as “events and circumstances that people encounter that threaten their ordinary capacity to adapt or obstruct their attainment of sought after ends” (p. 2). Stress is the perception that a situation or event exceeds coping resources
(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress “implies a disturbed person-environment relationship that coping is meant to change” (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985, p. 150).

Student Success: Positive outcomes in curricular and co-curricular activities (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011).

**Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

This chapter laid out the foundation for the proposed study, including an overview of the problem the research addressed, the purpose of the study, and an overview of research design. Concerning the problem, an unfortunate number of students, for a variety of reasons, are not graduating from college. Students are experiencing more ennui and less hope that a college degree is beneficial. Undergraduates face considerable stress. The stress process model provides a structure to understand how a change in student resources can impact their response to stressors.

Universities create a variety of programs and resources to help undergraduates matriculate. Universities are motivated to help students matriculate and graduate for a variety of reasons. In addition to compassion, financial goals motivate universities to help students succeed. Universities recognize the hardships that occur due to significant enrollment and retention challenges. The current complex, volatile, ambiguous global conditions and the emergence of the knowledge economy inspire many people to argue that the kind of education required now includes developmental outcomes in excess of academic learning (Davidson et al., 2012). There is a growing base of empirical evidence attesting to the multifaceted benefits of mindfulness practice. There is a dearth of information describing a diverse group of undergraduate students’ experiences with a brief mindfulness-based intervention not in a classroom. This investigation will provide data to fill that gap in knowledge by investigating
undergraduate students’ perceptions of a voluntary mindfulness-based intervention conducted for 75 minutes weekly in the evening for four sessions.

The following chapter provides information on the challenges facing institutions of higher education and how colleges are striving to help students adapt to stressors via mindfulness-based interventions. Next, I will discuss undergraduate students, the stressors, and the difficulties students have moderating stress. I will describe the stress process model, followed by a discussion of habitus, symbolic interaction, sociology of emotion, and contemplative practices. The chapter provides evidence attesting to the multitude of benefits related to mindfulness-based practices. Finally, I present data from the few published qualitative studies on mindfulness.

Next, the methods chapter outlines the strategy used to gather data for this qualitative study. The investigator recruited participants from a rural university. The sample was undergraduates over the age of 18 who consented to participate in the four-week mindfulness-based intervention. The chapter provides the details of data gathering during and after the intervention via journal entries, participant observation, focus group, individual interviews, and a semi-structured questionnaire.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Orientation for the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of undergraduate students in a rural state university comprised of a significant population that is first-generation and low-income, regarding what these students experience in a mindfulness-based intervention. This study is grounded in three major sociological theories related to human behavior, and this chapter examines the body of literature surrounding those theories and mindfulness.

This chapter initially focuses on sociological research on habitus, the stress process model, and symbolic interaction. The final examination centers on the theoretical framework of mindfulness, especially as it relates to college students and young adults.

This literature review was conducted using “mindfulness based interventions, university OR college students, habitus, stress process, symbolic interaction, phenomenology, stress, qualitative, mindful*, MBSR, meditation in various combinations with training, intervention, undergraduate, emerging adult, stress and mental health on college campuses. The databases searched were SocINDEX, Sociological Collection EBSCOhost, PsycINFO, PubMed, Business Source Complete, ERIC, CINAHL,SAGE, ProQuest, ProQuest Psychology and ProQuest Dissertation Abstracts International.

Habitus

Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, as expressed in his book *The Logic of Practice* (1990), provides a lens to investigate the activities of everyday life. Bourdieu (1990) defines habitus as “Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles that generate and organize practices” (p. 53).
A person's habitus is the point of view or perspective a person takes (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus represents an individual’s thought process about how things work in the world. People express themselves verbally and nonverbally through body language. People interpret this expression through their habitus. Throughout socialization, individuals incorporate regular patterns of thought and behavior representative of their class origins. As noted above, much of the student body is composed of rural and inner-city youth from low-income families and poorly resourced schools. Bourdieu (1972) writes that habitus is how one “knows one's place” in the world (p.82). Lehmann (2007) describes habitus as something that “creates dispositions to act, interpret experiences, and think in certain ways” (p. 92). Spratt, Shucksmith, Philip, and Watson (2006) describe the difference between habit and habitus by explaining that habitus is not purely repetition; habitus can generate new responses, albeit constrained within a social structure.

Habitus establishes the critical link between the student and place (Angus et al., 2007). The place where one’s body is located has an impact on one’s behavior. Crossley (2001) “posits the body bears and enacts the habitual schemas that are imbued with a pre-reflective sense of the social and material environment” (as cited in Angus et al., 2007, p. 1092). Students tend to respond to situations with habitual actions, even though each situation is unique. This reflexive response is apparent when students initially treat college like high school before they realize the demands will be significantly different. Students eventually learn that each professor presents material uniquely and requires different levels of understanding. As students learn to adapt, their habitude changes due to events and surroundings (Angus et al., 2007).

Casey (2001) describes the idea of places being embedded in us and defines idiolocality as the “persistence of place in the body,” as distinct from habitus, which he describes as the “socially encoded core of our bodily self” (p. 415). Idiolocality refers to how people experience a
place in their bodies. For example, my body responds to being in my home differently from being in another’s home or my office. A scent from a person’s childhood home may trigger bodily responses reminiscent of their past.

Researchers Angus, Rukholm, Onge, Michel, Nolan, Lapum, and Evans (2007) demonstrate the concept of idiolocality in their research on habitus, stress, and the body. Their research found that places can “support or constrain health-related activities” (Angus et al., 2007, p. 1088). The participants in the study linked stress to habits associated with contexts and places. “Idiolocality also captures the myriad ways in which certain situations or places cue people to act in ways that reflect the deeply sedimented and preconscious qualities of habitus” (Angus et al., 2007, p. 1093). Idiolocality reinforces the notion that students act based on prior experiences without considering the present context. A student who states something like, “I can't stand that one person in my class, they always…” is an example of ingrained place-based habitus or idiolocality. Habitus can impact personal interactions and impact an individual’s behavior and beliefs about an institution.

Lehmann (2007) argues that habitus may influence students’ decisions to leave the university. Students bring values from home, and this means their habitus may be incongruous with the values at the institution. This fundamental discontinuity may lead students to sense a “lack of fit” (Lehmann, 2007, p. 92) that propels them to leave or change institutions. As was noted above, many families in the area do not think college is essential. Many families do not have experience with college and therefore cannot sufficiently help their children navigate the trials of the university experience. Bourdieu (1972) argued that these values or habitus are related to two “principles of differentiation:” cultural capital and economic capital (p. 178).
Cultural capital is akin to cultural competence. Cultural capital is how people see the world and what they value (Flora & Flora, 2008). Cultural capital comprises the social assets, education, types of knowledge, credentials, tastes, and ease in cultural situations that can be converted to help or hinder the social mobility of an individual (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Cultural capital consists of three constituent parts: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Cultural capital is embodied when it is acquired or inherited, like a regional accent. The institutionalized aspect of cultural capital refers to qualifications and credentials that can be ranked, measured, and certified. Cultural capital tells people how to act and what qualifies as inappropriate behaviors (Flora & Flora, 2008). Economic capital denotes the material resources (e.g., money, car, computer) that a student possesses (Flora & Flora, 2008). Economic resources can be used to produce other resources (Flora & Flora, 2008). Researchers customarily investigate habitus through the lens of economic and cultural capital. Recently, scientists have proposed a nuanced perspective of habitus, borrowing from work in cognitive sociology (Ambrasat et al., 2016).

The work of Ambrasat et al. (2016), Ignatow (2007), Lizardo (2004, 2012), Pickel (2005), Vaisey (2009), and others have evolved the understanding of habitus. Ambrasat and colleagues (2016) evaluated survey data of 3,438 respondents and constructed an innovative conceptualization of habitus. Ambrasat and colleagues (2016) regard habitus “as an individual-level pattern of meaning making” (p. 2). They extended the reasoning of Pickel (2005) who argues that operational principles of the habitus can be conceived as biopsychosocial and “found on various layers of the individual” (p. 442). Pickel (2005) asserts that habitus incorporates linkages between the cultural, social, psychological, and biological dimensions of reality. The habitus process is a sociocultural and mind-body system of patterns of perception, expression,
and meaning making (Pickel, 2005). Ignatow (2007) suggests that habitus is a form of embodied knowledge. Individuals are biopsychosocial systems (Pickel, 2005). Habitus addresses a student's perspective and typical behavior in different locations, and symbolic interaction is useful to explore actions in a particular situation.

**Stress Process Model**

The stress process model (SPM) (Pearlin, 1989, 1999, Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, and Mullan, 1981; Wheaton & Montazer, 2010) provides researchers an explanatory model to describe the origins, mediators, and outcomes of stress in a social environment. Pearlin and colleagues’ (1981) original stress process model articulated three significant facets: sources of stress (eventful experiences, life strains, diminishment of self); mediating resources (social supports, coping, self-concepts [self-esteem and mastery]); and manifestations of stress. The model helps to illuminate the social distribution of mental health. Researchers often use the model to expose experiences and conditions that lead to unequal distributions in mental health outcomes related to stress. Individuals inhabit a particular place in society and culture, and this social-structural arrangement has an impact on their inner lives and consequently, the facets of the SPM. The model posits that events and circumstances a person faces generate stressors, and increased stress exposure leads to greater probability of adverse mental health outcomes (McLeod, 2012; Pearlin, Schieman, Fazio, & Meersman, 2005; Thoits, 2011). According to research studies, it is not just a particular life event or condition that predicts stress; the event is mediated through people’s perceptions in addition to the resources and actions people mobilize to diminish or avoid distress (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981).
Stressors

Wheaton (1999) defines stressors as “conditions of threat, challenge, demands, or structural constraints that, by the very fact of their occurrence or existence, call into question the operating integrity of the organism” (p. 281). The conditions which lead to stress, more specifically, distress, are called stressors (Au, 2017). Stressors are events that overcome persons' adaptive capabilities and require an adjustment in behavior (Anenshensel, 1996; Pearlin & Bierman, 2013; Thoits, 1995). Wheaton, Young, Montazer, and Stuart-Lahman (2013) identify three levels at which students might perceive stress: micro, meso, and macro. Micro refers to students' exposure to stressors on personal levels (Au, 2017). Meso refers to the range of levels above the individual and limited by their network, such as a neighborhood or campus (Au, 2017). Macro refers to larger systems such as states, for instance, the national unemployment rate (Wheaton, 1999). The SPM identifies meso and micro level connections between particular stressors, resources, and outcomes while maintaining the impact of macro social structural influences on these processes. Stressors can occur in a range from a distinct occurrence to something that happens on a frequent or continuous basis (Wheaton et al., 2013). Wheaton and colleagues (2013) describe five main types of stressors: traumatic, life events, nonevents, chronic, and daily hassles.

Historically, researchers’ initial approaches to investigating stressors fixated on objective discrete life events like unexpected unemployment, bereavement, disasters, accidents, and other potentially stressful incidents. Life events (i.e., moving away to school) can be stressors perceived to be less distressful than traumatic events (i.e., sexual assault) (Wheaton et al., 2013). Traumatic events are more severe in the level of threat and have more potential for their effects to be harmful for a longer period (Wheaton, 1999). Dohrenwend and her colleagues explained
life events as “objective occurrences of sufficient magnitude to bring about changes in the usual activities of most individuals who experience them” (Dohrenwend, Askenasy, Krasnoff, & Dohrenwend, 1978, p. 207).

Not all life events are equally stressful to everyone; most can agree that an event which someone considers undesirable is the most distressing (Aneshensel, 1992). Students experience stressful events such as moving to college, the anticipatory stressor of what will happen upon graduation, and changes in relationships (Beiter et al., 2015). Dill and Henley (1998) compared nontraditional (older adult) and traditional-age college students to determine what each group perceived as stress and stressors. The Adolescent Perceived Events Scale allowed participants to rate life events according to “frequency, impact, and desirability,” and results suggested substantial differences between the groups' perceptions of stressors (Dill & Henley, 1998, p.25). Traditional students were more likely to rate school performance and social events with peers as stressful (Dill & Henley, 1998). Researchers Ross, Niebling and Heckert (1999) found that intrapersonal issues were the most likely causes of stress amongst undergraduates. Students completed the Student Stress Survey and reported differences in sleeping patterns and dietary habits, increased workload, leisure time away from school during breaks in the academic calendar, and new responsibilities.

Studies of life events found that experiencing stressful life events leads to distress (Brown & Harris, 1978; Thoits, 1983). Life events, like a student moving away from home, are typically considered acute. Pearlin (1983) argued that events generate chronic stressors. The distinction between acute and chronic stressors merely refers to the length of exposure to the stressor, not to the duration of its impact on a person (Wheaton, 1983). Some research has noted that students may face an increased risk of exposure to potentially traumatic life events.
(Galatzer-Levy, Burton, & Bonanno, 2012). For example, a sexual assault is initially a discrete event. However, the trauma can develop into an emotional experience that becomes a continuous or chronic stressor for the victim. This example demonstrates a possible causal connection between stressors as a discrete trauma that becomes chronic and might, in turn, become a nonevent (Thoits, 1983; Wheaton, 1994).

Change can be stressful, but so can a lack of change (Gersten, 1974; as cited in Au, 2017). Nonevents are stressors caused by the lack of something, for instance, not earning the grades hoped for or not attaining a goal (Wheaton, 1999). Nonevents can be considered as a discrete event and paradoxically also as a chronic stressor (Wheaton, 1999).

Chronic strains are enduring threats, conflicts, and problems that people face daily yet which are difficult to capture (Aneshensel & Mitchell, 2014; Pearlin, 1989; Wheaton, 1997). Wheaton (1997) suggests seven forms: (1) threats, including perceived threats; (2) demands: an overload where expectations exceed available resources; (3) structural constraints: lack of access imposed by structure of social environment to achieve goals; (4) complexity: too many roles and responsibilities that clash or demands from too many sources; (5) uncertainty; (6) conflict: regular enactment of the conflict or fear of bringing it to the surface; and (7) under-reward: based on outputs relative to inputs or in contrast to others’ similar inputs (as cited in Wheaton et al., 2013). Researchers have identified financial hardships, resource deprivation, and restriction of choice as causing chronic stress (Pearlin, 1999).

Chronic stressors may be persistent, though hidden temporarily, and suddenly emerge, leaving it perplexing to determine whether a discrete life event or a culmination of continuing strains caused a behavioral response (Drentea & Reynolds, 2015; Pearlin, 1999). These strains are most often associated with the difficulties that arise within the arena of key social roles and
role sets and conditions of deprivation (e.g., low socioeconomic status) (Pearlin, 1989). Simon (2007) reports on numerous studies which confirm that socially disadvantaged persons in the U.S. face “greater exposure to undesirable events and chronic strains than their socially advantaged peers” (p. 8). The location of this study has a significant number (more than one third) of students from low socioeconomic conditions.

The daily hassles and stress students face are topics researchers have examined frequently (Ross et al., 1999). Researchers have determined what comprises daily hassles. “Daily hassles are the relatively minor irritating, frustrating, distressing demands of everyday life that are micro-level stressors” (Wheaton, 1999, p. 284). These mundane realities can have a cumulative effect that can be quite stressful and should not be ignored (Au, 2017; Wheaton, 1999).

**Financial stressors.** People's socioeconomic status is related to the number of stressors faced in their lives and adverse health outcomes (Aneshensel, 1992; Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan 1981; Thoits, 1995; Turner, Taylor, & Van Gundy, 2004). Extensive research demonstrates that economically disadvantaged people suffer injurious mental, physical, and behavioral outcomes related to stressors (Everson, Maty, Lynch, & Kaplan, 2002; Gilman, Kawachi, Fitzmaurice, & Buka, 2002). Aneshensel (1992) found evidence to support the idea that low-status social groups were more likely to encounter challenging life conditions leading to higher rates of stress-related problems. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) noted that the poor and less educated often have fewer coping resources and “utilize the least effective coping strategies”(p.17).

**Subjective stressors.** Sociological research predominantly emphasizes the objective social origins of distress: “how structural arrangements produce variation in exposure to stressors and access to resources and, thereby, variation in outcomes. The underlying dynamic in this
This view has been critiqued by many (Cohen, Kessler, & Gordon, 1995). The same environment may have different impacts on different people (Aldwin, 2007). A stressful situation that requires capacities or resources that a person does not have may be comfortable or stimulating for someone with those preferences or capacities (Aldwin, 2007). For example, one student may prefer classes heavy in mathematics or sciences while another may prefer literature and writing. Aldwin (2007), in her book *Stress, Coping, and Development: An Integrative Perspective*, describes how patients’ perception of pain is partially due to their beliefs and thoughts about pain, in addition to their coping strategies.

McLeod (2012) cites development in Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend's (1969) work that suggests that the same objective circumstance can mean something different subjectively to different people. For instance, some students assign different meanings to events like moving away to college and various homework assignments. This study will investigate undergraduate students at a public institution. This research will focus not on these objective structures, but more on the meaning construction students utilize as they confront stressors in their proximate environment. Presumably, these stressors will often arise from interpersonal interactions.

**Cognitive stressors.** Cognitive stressors include the negative self-talk individuals engage in. Negative self-talk or ruminative thinking is considered to increase mental distress that follows a stressor (Moberly & Watkins, 2008). In a review of 100 studies, Thomsen (2006) found that there is substantial evidence for a “positive association between rumination and anxiety,” (p. 1) but more evidence is necessary to determine the relation between rumination and other harmful effects.
**Affective stressors.** Stress can activate negative emotions (Aldwin, 2007). People may notice anger, sadness, or frustration in response to stressors (Aldwin, 2007). Research by Mroczek and Almeida (2004) demonstrated that daily negative affect was related to the interaction of daily stress and neuroticism in a sample of 1,012 subjects varying in age. Researchers Shallcross, Troy, Boland, and Mauss (2010, p.1) found in a community sample that “acceptance of negative experiences can protect individuals from feeling negative affect and also protect them from depressive symptoms” (p.921).

**Stressors at the confluence of objective factors and subjective assessments.** People who face enduring stressors such as low income or who are impacted by a life event may experience new strains as a result of the particular event. Stress proliferation is when one stressor leads to another. These new strains can lead to a sequela of negative emotions (Simon, 2007).

**Resources**

Researchers found that exposure to stressors did not inevitably lead to the same emotional distress for everyone and therefore "sought to discover social factors that intervene" between undesirable life events "and individuals' emotional reactions to them" (Simon, 2007, p. 15). Research utilizing the stress process model found that vulnerability to stress was as or more critical than differential exposure to stressful life events (Aneshensel, 1992; Thoits, 1987). This understanding leads to further investigation of moderating resources. Stressors’ damaging effects are mediated and moderated by social and personal resources individuals draw on to be resilient. Although stressors may arise from the conditions or subjective thoughts of students, these may also provide tools for mitigating stress (Au, 2017). Coping resources “hinder, prevent, or cushion the development of the stress process and its outcomes” (Pearlin, 1999, p. 405). Vital to the SPM and individuals are the psychosocial resources, social and personal, that buffer the undesirable
effects stressors potentially have on wellness (Aneshensel, 1992; McLeod, 2012; Pearlin &
Aneshensel, 1986; Thoits, 1986).

**Coping resources.** Individuals' coping resources that are significantly and positively
related to better wellness outcomes include facets of self-concept such as mastery and self-
esteeem, which are related to cultural capital (Turner et al., 2004). Useful social coping resources
include social supports and family (Thoits, 1995). Coping, social support, and self-concept were
often the resources examined (Thoits, 1986). Investigators concentrated on "developing
interventions to bolster coping skills, sense of empowerment, self-esteem, or supportive
networks" (Thoits, 2010, p. S47) for 20 years, beginning in the 1970s. Later, focus shifted from
bolstering individuals' psychosocial resources towards addressing macro-level structural
inequalities. As noted above, universities provide a variety of co-curricular programs to support
students. Research has demonstrated that there are four prominent coping resources: "coping,
social support, mastery, and belief systems" (Au, 2017, p.62).

**Coping.** Individuals use coping behaviors to reduce or prevent stress and possible
negative consequences (Dykstra, 2015). Several theorists created different theories to describe
changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands
that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 417). Coping is an
active process that excludes “habitual or automatic adjustments to the requirements of daily life”
(Thoits, 1986, p. 417). Pearlin (1999) offers that coping "refers to the behaviors that individuals
employ in their behalf in their efforts to prevent or avoid stress and its consequences" (p. 406).
One might change the situation that generates stressors or modify the meaning of the stressor
(Pearlin, 1999). Pearlin et al. (1981) sought to understand "normative modes of coping that

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people learn from and share with their membership groups" (p. 341). Pearlin (1999) submits that it is unfortunate that we do not fully know the "influence of social and interpersonal contexts" of a particular coping behavior (p.406). For instance, it is hard to learn if a student learned their coping strategies from a parent or if they change their approach depending on the current role situation.

Researchers including Pearlin and Schooler (1978) subdivided a range of coping strategies into three broad types, called problem-focused, emotion-focused, and perception- or meaning-focused strategies (cited in Thoits, 1986, p. 417). Thoits (1986) writes that "problem-focused coping consists of direct actions on the environment or the self to remove or alter circumstances appraised as threatening" (p. 417). Thoits (1986) says individuals utilize emotion-focused strategies "to control undesirable feelings" resulting "from stressful circumstances" (p. 417). Research findings suggest that individuals learn to transform their emotions to align them with cultural emotion norms and reduce stress (Simon, 2006). Thoits (1986) asserts that "meaning-focused coping refers to re-framing the meaning or significance of a stressful situation to reduce its emotional impact" (p. 417). Thoits (2009) argues that "altering the meaning of a stressor is effective in bolstering self-esteem and alleviating distress when it is accompanied by increased involvement in alternative rewarding activities" (p. 24).

**Social support.** Thoits (1986) notes that an "individual's efforts at stress-management can be supplemented and strengthened by the guiding participation of others in those efforts" (p. 419). Thoits (1986) suggests that this is the essence of social support. Social support refers to "functions performed for a distressed individual by significant others such as family members, friends, co-workers, relatives, and neighbors" (Thoits, 1986, p. 417). Pearlin et al. (1981) argue
that support comes from significant relationships that "involve the exchange of intimate communications and the presence of solidarity and trust" (p. 340).

Social support, including functional and structural support, can be provided by significant others (Thoits, 1995). Functional support can be received or simply perceived as available (Simon, 2006). Types of functional support include emotional, informational, or instrumental support (Simon, 2006). Instrumental aid is material aid or actions that enable role responsibilities to be completed (Thoits, 1986). Empathy, compassion, caring, and group belonging are demonstrations of socioemotional aid (Thoits, 1986). Thoits (1986) cites House's (1981) assertion that informational aid is communication such as advice, personal feedback, or information that could be opinion or fact that might make an individual's life circumstances more comfortable.

Universities provide a variety of support structures for students on each of these levels. Phinney and Haas (2003) reported that students who expressed strong social support aligned with their collegiate goals experienced a stronger sense of self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-determination. These positive feelings led to a strong belief that they could cope better with stressors. Functional support can benefit individuals when they receive it or when they perceive support is available if needed (Simon, 2006). Research by Cohen and Wills (1985) indicates that an intimate confiding relationship provides the most effective social support.

People are embedded in social networks. Structural support is the support that benefits people and is received or perceived from these networks. Researchers may investigate social networks by noting the characteristics, such as the number of relationships and frequency of contact, in addition to others (Simon, 2006). Support can come from a close friend, roommate, relative, or others in a person's network. Individuals in the network may provide support by
helping individuals reinterpret situations as less threatening; helping to understand, accept or alter physiological sensations, with substances or meditation; or by interrupting the tendency to dwell on the situation or emotion (Thoits, 1995).

**Mastery.** One dimension of a student’s self-concept, mastery, also operates as an intervening coping resource in the stress process (Pearlin et al. 1981; Au, 2017). Mastery provides a “sense of control” or a "generalized belief that most circumstances in one's life are under one's personal control and not just luck or fate" (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p.5; Thoits, 2010, p. S46). Self-esteem, in contrast, is defined by Rosenberg (1965) as a self-evaluation that "expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval toward oneself" (p. 5). A student with mastery perceptually minimizes or neutralizes a sense of threat from a stressor and this, in turn, leads to a sense of self-confidence in their ability to overcome stressors (Au, 2017). Pearlin (1999) poses an interesting question to explore the concept of mastery: "as we contemplate the future, to what extent do we feel in control of the direction of our trajectories?" (p. 409). Mastery encourages flexible responses and social learning to take prophylactic action rather than escape behavior, in addition to learning to reduce the occurrence of stressful events (Aneshensel, 1996; Au, 2017; Turner & Lloyd, 1999).

A student with a high level of mastery is more likely to try several attempts at solving a problem that has been distressing compared to a student with a low level of mastery or mindfulness (Schieman & Plickert, 2008; Thoits, 2010). Socioeconomic status and mastery are inversely associated (Anenshensel, 2015). A student from a lower status or a disadvantaged group (women, minorities, poor or working-class individuals) is likely to have lower levels of coping resources (Thoits, 2010). The data indicate that structural disadvantages and multiple adversities in childhood proliferate into adulthood and old age (Thoits, 2010). A higher
socioeconomic status provides more cultural capital, such as finances for endeavors, access to educational opportunities, and more (Au, 2017). Turner and colleagues (2004) found that personal resources are significantly positively related to stress-buffering effects for young adults.

**Meaning construction.** Researchers (Benson, 2014; Pearlin et al., 1981) argue that people learn coping skills from a membership group such as a person's family. This idea points to the social origins of how people assign meaning to events in their lives. Recent conceptions of the SPM by McLeod (2012) suggest meaning construction as central to the stress process. McLeod's (2012) argument addresses how sociologists can present an expanded version of the stress process model that disaggregates the objective (i.e., material) and subjective (i.e., symbolic) properties of the model's major components and adds meaning negotiation as a process that links macro-social contexts, objective life stressors, and material and social resources macro-cultural contexts, subjective life circumstances, personal meanings (beliefs, values, and self), and outcomes (p. 175).

In McLeod's (2012) approach, “meaning construction is an ongoing process by which people construe the significance of an event or condition for themselves or others” (p. 175).

**Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interaction provides a perspective on society from the perspective of the self in social interactions. There are a variety of interactionist approaches. In general, the theory describes how individuals act with one another in their society (Blumer, 1969). The framework argues that people construct the “self” through social interactions (Jeon, 2004, p.251) People in society interact in a shared reality built on subjective meanings (Jeon, 2004). Mead (1934) generated the theory, and his students organized it into a book entitled *Mind, Self and Society*. Blumer advanced and advocated Mead's work (Jeon, 2004).
Mead (1934) believed that no person is an island, and the development of individuals is a social process. How people learn to assign meaning to things is a social process. For instance, students may automatically think of taking a test as an anxiety-inducing event, based on previous interactions with teachers, classrooms, and tests. Mead (1934) posits that people change because of interactions with other people, ideas, events, or objects. To act, people assign meaning to things and choose their behavior based on that meaning (McLeod, 2012).

Mead (1934) posits that humans give meaning and significance to symbols and gestures. The shared meaning of the symbols and gestures are at the root of the ability to communicate. Mead (1934) explains that communication happens because "through gestures, responses are called out on our own attitudes, and as soon as they are called out, they evoke, in turn, other attitudes" (p. 181). For instance, someone may understand or misunderstand that when a student has their headphones in, they are communicating that they do not want to interact directly with another person. Blumer (1969) offered three premises for the study of social reality: "People act toward objects based on the meaning those objects hold for the actor; the meaning of objects is negotiated through social interaction; and, because the meaning of objects is subject to people’s interpretive processes, meaning is mutable” (as cited in Fields, Copp, & Kleinman, 2006, p.157).

Cooley (1998) illuminated the idea of the continual internal conversation by providing the metaphor of the looking glass self. Imagine a student about to post a selfie. They pose, snap the picture, review the picture, and decide if they will post and share that image of themselves with the rest of the world or not. This decision to post is guided by their imagination of how it will appear to another person, imagining their judgement of the picture, noticing an internal sense of pride or shame based on that imagination. This internal dialogue generates a sense of
self and is maintained through interactions with others (Fields et al., 2006). Interactions with others, imagined or real, can change how a person feels or their emotional state.

Hochschild's (1979) research evinces the models of emotion work and feeling rules, among other things. Hochschild (1979) describes emotion work as the "act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling" (p. 561). The work is the effort to manage the feelings, not the outcome, of the situation. The active attempt to create, change, or modify emotion is emotion management (Hochschild, 1979). A person can strengthen or evoke their absent feelings or suppress unwanted feelings. When a person notices a discrepancy in their feelings, they can choose to work on them with any combination of cognitive, somatic, or expressive techniques. Hochschild (1979) demonstrates that emotion norms guide the management of emotion. The feeling rules of society remind members of the appropriate range of emotions to feel, the right intensity, and the time for a situation. For instance, a student knows the appropriate response for someone cutting them off in traffic (Hochschild, 1979).

Interestingly, these feeling rules apply to the precursor to action, not necessarily the action itself (Hochschild, 1979). Dykstra (2011) connected the theory of emotion management to the stress process model. In her research, she considered emotion management as a potential stressor for registered nurses (RNs).

Symbolic interactionists' new understandings of emotions are grounded in the challenge to conventional formulations of emotions as purely innate responses to external stimuli (Fields, Copp, & Kleinman, 2006). Fields and colleagues (2006), amongst others like Turner (2007), assert the social nature of feelings. Feelings are “constituted and sustained by group processes” (Fields et al., 2006, p. 156). Emotions are shaped by culture (feeling rules) and students’ capacity to understand the sensations in their conscious awareness.
Research (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017; Thompson & Waltz, 2010) reminds us that it is crucial to understand that acceptance of emotions is opposite to experiential avoidance, the attempts to distort or avoid unwanted thoughts and feelings (Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette, & Strosahl, 1996). Acceptance from a mindfulness perspective does not mean resignation. Acceptance empowers people to choose their behavior and not react unthinkingly or impulsively to things as they are (Rogers, 2016). The typical and perhaps habitual reaction to unwanted thoughts and feelings is to avoid or attempt to change them, which is often unsuccessful (Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000). Students might also become hyper-focused on the negative aspect of an experience and not notice the rest of the experience (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). For instance, a student might have given an excellent presentation for class but can only think about a slight stumble over a question after the presentation. Lindsay and Cresswell (2017) argue that acceptance (composed of a variety of concepts such as nonreactivity, equanimity, nonjudgment, openness, nonevaluative, and non-elaborative) allows a mindful student to welcome "unwanted" thoughts and feelings into awareness, and they are allowed to diminish as other experiences arise. This allowing of all thoughts and feelings to arise and fall away is also applied to positive thoughts and feelings; these “experiences are not actively sought after, nor are they grasped and clung to when they do occur” (Lindsay & Cresswell, 2017, p. 50).

Pagis (2008) refers to this ability to experience clarity about present sensations as emotional autonomy. Mindfulness meditation practitioners learn that actions do not have to be habituated responses to changes in the external environment (Pagis, 2008). DeSteno, Lim, Duong, & Condon (2017) argue that mindfulness meditation fosters compassionate responses from practitioners and decreases aggressive knee-jerk reactions to situations and stimuli. Mindfulness is conceptualized as both a state that is temporary and as a trait that is consistent
over time (Kiken et al., 2015). Kiken and her team (2015) suggest that more research is needed to determine if more time in a state of mindfulness during an MBI could lead to changes in trait mindfulness. Individuals’ behavior will have interpersonal effects, and research (Kimmes, May, Seibert, Jaurequi, & Fincham, 2018) suggests that if we enhance someone's trait mindfulness or their mindful predisposition, that will have a positive impact on interpersonal relationships and non-verbal intersubjective dimensions of communication (Pagis, 2010). Stanley (2012) agrees, arguing that mindfulness is not just a psychological practice but a profoundly social one. Indeed, Pagis (2008) argues that mindfulness meditation is an act of cultivation, and to create new responses, "one is required to change certain elements of the habitus to deal with the deeper structure of meaning that is engrained in our bodies" (p. 59).

Mindfulness

Scholars have different ideas about the word mindfulness (Dreyfus, 2011; Gethin, 2011). The word mindfulness may be used to describe a trait, a state, a practice of cultivating mindfulness (e.g., mindfulness meditation), or a process (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2016). It may be easiest to start by examining un-mindfulness before looking at specific ideas of mindfulness. In contrast to being mindful, most people have probably encountered moments of mindlessness or unawareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Schoen and Gordon (2015) and others have described mindlessness as a “loss of awareness resulting in forgetfulness, separation from self, and a sense of living mechanically” (p. 116). Mindfulness is in contrast to states of mind when thoughts are preoccupied with the past, future plans, daydreams, worries, automatic habitual behavior, hopes for something different, or are focused elsewhere (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004).

Mindfulness is primarily about attention and awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Kabat-Zinn (2003) states mindfulness is a "commitment to reside as best one can from moment to moment in
awareness with an open heart, a spacious, non-judging, non-reactive mind, and without trying to
get anywhere, achieve anything, reject anything" (p. 150). Mindfulness training teaches students
to be aware of how they perceive their environment, how to understand their bodies' reactions,
how to pause before acting (which gives them more choices), and that it is possible to generate a
better response to the perceived stress and the physiological changes they are experiencing
(Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Mindfulness develops from the practice of being fully aware of the present
moment. It is often based on a type of meditation that involves the practice of focusing carefully
on an object or activity such as breathing, walking, eating, or other mundane daily activities such
as washing the dishes (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Teasdale (1999) argues
that it is not the specific activity that is important; rather, it is the ability to utilize the activity to
be open and accepting of present moment experiences.

Meditation is regarded as a "family of mental training practices that are designed to
familiarize the practitioner with specific types of mental processes" (Brefczynski-Lewis et al.,
2007, p. 1). Yates, Immergut, and Graves (2017) refer to meditation as the systematic process of
training the mind. There are two broad categories: concentrative meditation and mindfulness
meditation. Concentration practices employ focus on a specific object of attention, such as a
word (mantra) (Goyal et al., 2014). When the mind wanders to something else, the practitioner
redirects attention to the object. Mindfulness meditation does not restrict focus to a single object.
Instead, awareness follows thoughts, feelings, or sensations (Goyal et al., 2014). Lee (2015)
suggests that students utilize mindfulness meditation as a secular meditative practice to cultivate
their attention and awareness skills. The definition of mindfulness provided by Kabat-Zinn
(1994) is referenced most often, and he describes it as "paying attention in a particular way, on
purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally" (p. 4).
The ability to enhance mindfulness by using various meditation techniques is common in Buddhist spiritual practices (Bishop et al., 2004; Hanh, 1976). Contemplative and mindfulness practices are found in various places, cultures, religions, and spiritual practices over thousands of years (Teasdale, 1999). In the 1970s, researchers in the West primarily studied Transcendental Meditation (TM). TM is concentrative meditation, typically repetition of a phrase or mantra. Another form of meditation is mindfulness meditation, and although practiced for centuries in some Buddhist cultures (Dharmic traditions), it has just recently received attention from Western researchers. Unlike TM, mindfulness meditation asks the practitioner to focus on phenomena as it arises in the six senses: hearing, the feeling body, tasting, smelling, seeing, and the thinking mind (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Empirical investigations of MBIs are multidisciplinary and suggest that interventions such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), create clinically significant improvements for many issues, including stress and depression (Baer, 2011).

Mindfulness meditation practice builds a type of attention characterized by a "nonjudgmental awareness, openness, curiosity, and acceptance of internal and external present experiences, which allows practitioners to act more reflectively rather than impulsively" (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009, p. 593).

Kabat-Zinn (2003) provides an operational definition of mindfulness that is used widely: “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment-by-moment” (p. 145). Kabat-Zinn (2015) further clarified the definition by describing the quality of mind in mindfulness:

"Mindfulness can be thought of as moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as non-judgmentally, and as openheartedly as possible" (p. 1481). What is essential in mindfulness is
how one pays attention (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998, p. 583). Kabat-Zinn (2003) suggests that mental training practices are "highly refined practices aimed at systematically training and cultivating various aspects of mind and heart" (p. 145), and this is the root of the idea of mindfulness. Mindfulness describes mental and emotional qualities. Kabat-Zinn (2003) suggests that a mindful person will not "fall into either the stream of conceptual thought or what the Dali Lama calls ‘afflictive’ or ‘unwholesome’ emotions" (p. 150). Mindfulness includes aspects of intention, attention, and attitude interwoven together in a process (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006).

Kabat-Zinn (2003) suggests that mindfulness "includes an affectionate, compassionate quality within the attending, a sense of openhearted, friendly presence and interest" (p. 145). A quality of acceptance of self and others is critical. Mindfulness is, on the surface, a simple concept; the practice of mindfulness and the application of "paying attention, in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally" is challenging (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.4).

For the current study, the students were taught the definition of mindfulness used by Rogers (2016), which is “the act of paying attention to your present-moment experience with an attitude of compassionate curiosity” (p. 12). Rogers (2016) also refers to mindfulness as “an approach to life that involved learning to give the bulk of your attention to your present-moment experience, instead of wasting time worrying about the future or regretting the past” (p. 1).

**Empirical Research on Mindfulness-Based Programs**

Portions of theories of symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969) and Bourdieu's (1984) work on habitus serve as a theoretical explanation of the potential value of MBI to help college students more effectively cope with stressors. Following is a review of empirical literature to determine if research also provides support for this position.
Dr. Kabat-Zinn created mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) to help patients suffering from pain that was not managed by conventional methods. MBSR is an 8-week program initially developed in a hospital setting for patients with chronic illnesses; practitioners implement MBSR programs across an extensive range of populations (Kabat-Zinn & Chapman-Waldrop, 1988; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, Burney, & Sellers, 1987). The standard structure of an MBSR program is 2-hour group meetings, individual practice 45 minutes, six days a week, and a six-hour silent retreat for eight weeks (Virgili, 2015). Typical MBSR programs teach several different techniques, such as sitting and walking meditation, mindful yoga, and body scan. Sitting meditation involves both mindful attention on the breath and a state of nonjudgmental awareness of perceptions and the continuous river of thoughts flowing through the mind. Walking meditation employs focus on the sensations of the feet while walking, rather than sensations of breathing. The body scan involves a gradual sweeping of attention through the entire body from feet to head, focusing noncritically on any sensation or feeling in body regions and using periodic suggestions of breath awareness and relaxation. Hatha yoga, a particular branch of yoga from the South Asian tradition (Van Ness, 1999), includes breathing exercises, simple stretches, and physical postures (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009).

The MBSR method appears effective for chronic pain, anxiety disorders, general psychological well-being, psoriasis, and recurrent depression (Grossman et al., 2004). Researchers continue to investigate the mechanisms of the mindfulness-based intervention's effectiveness. One explanation suggests the patient learns to discern primary sensation (i.e., pain, physiological symptoms of anxiety) from the cognitive or emotional response to that primary sensory experience (Siegel, 2007). Individuals learn to use mindfulness practices to examine the details of experiences and to clearly perceive the ever-changing nature of sensations and feelings.
(Siegel, 2007). Individuals utilize the ability to directly perceive as a means to counter reactions of aversion or withdrawal to psychological or physical pain. Individuals engaging in the practice of mindfulness cultivate their ability to access this state, on demand, for longer periods, regardless of context (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). MBSR is designed to teach people to live happier and more resilient lives, to relieve stress from life issues and assist in pain management by teaching mindfulness meditation and yoga skills (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). MBSR has proven so effective that practitioners in different fields have created mindfulness-based programs and mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) based on the original conception. For example, physicians who learned and practiced the mindfulness techniques were able to reduce feelings of burnout and attend to their patients thoroughly and with more empathy (Beckman et al., 2012).

**Mindfulness, College Students, and Young Adults**

Regehr, Glancy, and Pitts (2012) conducted a review and meta-analysis of cognitive, behavioral, and mindfulness interventions designed to reduce stress in university students. They included 24 studies of 1431 students (undergraduate, graduate, professional) found in peer-reviewed journals that employed random assignment to experimental or control group or parallel cohort design. Seven of the 24 studies utilized approaches based on MBSR. They found that these programs are effective in reducing stress in university students. This review found similar positive results for mindfulness for a broad range of populations and conditions as the meta-analysis by Grossman et al. (2004). Regehr, Glancy, and Pitts (2012) encourage universities to adopt these programs and make them widely available to students. The researchers conclude that these programs may potentially provide immense benefits to universities in terms of transformative student experiences and the potential to reduce health service costs related to student mental health problems.
Conversely, Goyal and colleagues (2014) argue that mindfulness is no more effective than active treatments such as drugs, exercise, or other behavioral therapies in their review and meta-analysis published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The purpose of their study was to determine why there are inconsistencies in the literature. Their analysis included studies that evaluated pre-post or controlled effects of meditation programs, including mindfulness-based programs, for a wide range of conditions. They excluded treatments like Acceptance and Commitment therapy, which utilize mindfulness as part of the treatment. They also excluded other results if meditation was not the foundation of treatment or the treatment was not for clinical adult populations with a medical or psychiatric diagnosis. The team reviewed over 18,000 reports and included 47 trials with 3515 participants in the final review. They found that mindfulness meditation programs have a moderate effect on reducing anxiety, depression, and pain. Their results indicate only low evidence of improvements in stress response or mental health-related quality of life. This information is promising because the mindfulness meditation programs are typically eight weeks long. Eight weeks is a relatively short time for a relatively low cost and very safe intervention modality. The results at 3-6 months were also positive. The results were not better than active treatments, but they were at least as effective and perhaps resulted in fewer adverse consequences. Goyal's (2014) team found low evidence of no effect or “insufficient evidence of any effect of meditation programs on positive mood, attention, substance use, eating habits, sleep, and weight” (p. 358).

Caldwell et al. (2010) learned that physical training in mindfulness helped to increase scores on a mindfulness aptitude survey. The study entailed 166 college students enrolled in either Pilates (a Western physical fitness system); Taiji quan (aka Tai Chi, an internal Chinese martial art); or Gyrokinesis (a Western movement technique which coordinates breath and mental
focus) for a 15-week class. Participants completed several evaluations on mindfulness (Five Factor Mindfulness Questionnaire – FFMQ; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006); perceived stress (Perceived Stress Scale 4– PSS4; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983); sleep quality (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index [PSQI]; Buysse, Reynolds, Monk, Berman, & Kupfer, 1989); mood (Four Dimensional Mood Scale [FDMS]; Heulsman, Neimanic, & Munz, 1998); and self-efficacy (Self-Regulatory Self-Efficacy Scale [SRE]; Harrison & McGuire, 2006) at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester” (p. 3). Their research also demonstrated that improved mindfulness was directly related to better sleep quality. The students who participated also experienced improved mood and less perceived stress. The findings from Caldwell et al. (2010) indicate that teaching mindfulness in a variety of ways helps students improve. The team focused on teaching mindfulness only by somatic methods such as yoga-like movement practices, Pilates, tai chi, and Gyrokinesis.

Bamber and Schneider (2016) conducted a narrative review of 57 research studies investigating the effects of mindfulness-based interventions on stress and anxiety in university students. Bamber and Schneider (2016) report that researcher’s investigated anxiety in 40 of the 57 studies, self-reported stress in 34, physiological stress in 11, and mindfulness in 24. A majority of studies showed significant decreases in anxiety (33 of 40), and stress (25 of 34) (Bamber, & Schneider, 2016). Most studies measuring mindfulness showed an increase (22 of 24) (Bamber, & Schneider, 2016). Studies measuring physiological stress produced inconsistent results indicating that further research is needed. The differences in the studies included duration, frequency, methods, and inclusion of a physical component such as yoga. The dose of the interventions ranged from one session to eight weeks of sessions. The researchers included a variety of mindfulness interventions in their review (Bamber, & Schneider, 2016). They
reviewed studies of MBSR (15 studies), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), acceptance-based behavioral therapy (ABBT), and unique interventions grounded in mindfulness meditation practices. The studies in the review typically used psychological self-report measures such as the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) (Spielberger, 2010), and the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The mindfulness measures that were employed were the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003), the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) (Buchheld, Grossman, & Walach, 2001), or the Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer et al., 2008). The researchers concluded that although mindfulness interventions are promising, much more research needs to be conducted, especially in general student populations.

Crowley and Munk (2017) used a qualitative methodology to learn how college students’ participation in an experiential meditation course impacted their outlook on life and relationship with others. The participants from the study were 28 undergraduate students enrolled in a three-credit Meditation for Health and Wellness course at a large Midwestern university. Participation was principally white upper-class students. There was no information obtained concerning the students’ prior knowledge of or experience with meditation. Students attended the class for one hour and 15 minutes twice a week for the entire 15-week semester. There were typically two or three meditations per class. The first meditation was 20-30 minutes long, and the other meditations were shorter. There was also time to read and reflect on the course text Wherever You Go, There You Are (Kabat-Zinn, 1994) or other readings. Students submitted a written response to the question “How has meditation impacted your outlook on life and your relationships with
Meditation practice impacted three significant areas: "mindfulness, psychological well-being, and compassion" (Crowley & Munk, 2017, p. 94). Students sought out ways to reflect and be present in their day-to-day lives. This reflection allowed them to put their problems in perspective, be present in each moment and make the best of it. Psychological well-being was evident in remarks like, "I now feel calm and at peace with my surroundings" (Crowley & Munk, 2017, p. 95). One student described the increase in compassion this way: "I feel like meditation has helped me realize that everyone is connected and everyone has their own suffering" (Crowley & Munk, 2017, p. 95).

Hjeltnes, Binder, Moltu, and Dundas (2015) employed a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach for their 8-week MBSR investigation. The 29 self-referred Norwegian university student participants (25 females and four males, mean age 28 years) had severe test anxiety, performance anxiety, and academic evaluation anxiety. The group met weekly for two to three hours, completed daily homework assignments, and participated in a day long retreat in the sixth week of the course. Interviews were scheduled within one month after the first scheduled exam following the completion of the MBSR program. Five salient themes were found: "(1) finding an inner source of calm, (2) sharing a human struggle, (3) staying focused in learning situations, (4) moving from fear to curiosity in academic learning, and (5) feeling more self-acceptance when facing difficult situations" (Hjeltnes et al., 2015, p. 5). Many of the students reported struggling with the meditation at the beginning, and then once they noticed the benefits, it became easier to focus on bodily sensations in anxiety-provoking situations and find the calm. Participants who discerned the benefits were motivated to make time for the practice. During the workshop, the
participants had the opportunity to hear others talk about similar struggles. Hjeltnes et al. (2015) reported that this normalized the challenging experiences for them and allowed them to share in the struggle together. One subject had the paradoxical insight that by accepting distractions, her capacity for concentration increased so that she could stay focused in learning situations: “if distractions happen, I know it’s not my fault; I just go back and keep coming back again, and again, and again” (Hjeltnes et al., 2015, p. 6). Benefits in the classroom expanded even further as participants moved from “fear to curiosity” (Hjeltnes et al., 2015, p.7) in their learning strategy. The practices spread into other areas of the participants’ lives when they finished the course. The participants described themselves as “being more accepting toward themselves at times when they were struggling in daily life” (Hjeltnes et al., 2015, p. 7). Indeed, the researchers report that “participants described experiencing meaningful forms of change in different domains of their everyday life” (Hjeltnes et al., 2015, p.10).

Tarrasch's (2015) qualitative analysis consisted of a two-semester pre-service course for students enrolled in a master's in Special Education or Education Counseling program. The sample was composed of 19 females between the ages of 25 and 41. The course satisfied a requirement, and students had to take it because it was the only course available. The two-semester course taught theories and research on mindfulness meditation, training in mindfulness practices, and instruction in how to teach mindfulness techniques to children. The course met for 13, 1.5-hour lessons. The first 10 minutes were reserved for students’ discourse about the previous week’s practice. The next hour focused on the theoretical background of mindfulness through different readings and discussions. For the last 20 minutes, the students learned and practiced one or two mindfulness exercises. The students completed weekly journals for the academic year. The journals were analyzed qualitatively. Themes that emerged from the analysis
of students' mindfulness training journal summaries were: process, experiences, and outcomes (Tarrasch, 2015). Initially, students with no meditation experience reported challenges with the process. As the participants became more familiar with the practices, they began accepting thoughts in a more compassionate yet detached manner. Student-reported outcomes included a perceived reduction in stress, improved sleep quality, and enhanced awareness of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Tarrasch, 2015). This study indicates that mindfulness practices can be integrated into academic settings successfully (Tarrasch, 2015). The professionals reported enhanced mental health outcomes. Also, the professionals improved their ability to share the benefits of mindfulness with their students.

Bender and colleagues (2015) sought to determine what strategies are most helpful in engaging homeless youth in a mindfulness intervention and to what extent the intervention increased the youths' mindfulness in their mixed methods study. The study utilized a three-day intensive workshop, Safety Awareness for Empowerment (SAFE), to train youth aged 18-21. They recruited youth from a shelter for homeless youth that offered a 40-day stay and other services. They recruited 97 youth, 41 in the control group, 56 assigned into the intervention group, and both groups received $20 gift cards. Thirty-seven students completed the entire intervention. The three-day intervention was composed of 12 hours of training. The training components included didactic lessons, experiential exercises, and group discussions facilitated by two leaders. They administered the intervention to small groups of six to eight youths during each cohort session. Youths' mindfulness was assessed via self-report adapted from the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (Baer et al., 2004b), the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (Buchheld, Grossman, & Walach, 2001), and the Southhampton Mindfulness Questionnaire (Chadwick et al., 2008). “Repeated analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to measure the
change in mindfulness scores for intervention youth and control youth” (Bender et al., 2015, p. 500). Youth in the intervention group who spent the most time meditating showed significant improvement compared to the control in their ability to observe based on the inventory. Four coders analyzed transcripts to determine the qualitative results, with 94% interrater reliability. They used template analysis to develop a priori codes to assist the analysis and identify emerging themes. Bender and colleagues (2015) found that facilitation techniques were essential to engagement. Group leaders’ use of personal stories about challenges and how mindfulness was personally helpful was useful in eliciting the youths' participation. They used a variety of relevant real-world examples to describe mindfulness terms and situations where mindfulness skills can be applied. Bender and colleagues (2015) found that peer-to-peer interaction was crucial for helping the youths understand and engage with the material. Although the youths agreed with facilitators that mindfulness could impact their sense of safety, the youths' daily hassles and lack of shelter and other basic needs were obstacles to the regular practice of mindfulness skills. Youths also identified that current and past traumas were obstacles to mindfulness. The facilitators helped youths recognize that by being mindful they might be more aware of situations and less likely to unexpectedly be threatened by a situation that "came out of nowhere" (Bender et al., 2015, p. 504). Group facilitators discussed with the youths how to skillfully apply mindfulness to their ruminating internal narratives about the untrustworthy nature of potentially helpful staff or services. Facilitators helped the youths to evaluate each situation on its own merits instead of habitually grouping staff with sweeping negative characterizations.

Hindman's (2013) study of undergraduate and graduate students at a private university compared two six-session workshops for stress management. One workshop utilized formal
mindfulness meditations and informal practice while the other taught brief mindfulness exercises and informal practice. Thirty-four students completed consent forms, 13 in the formal workshop, 11 in the informal, and 10 in the wait-list condition. Women were 88% of the sample, and the mean age was 22.35 years in a range of 18-30. Participants described themselves as 11.8% other, 2.9% African-American, 5.9% Latino, 8.8% Asian, and 70.6% Caucasian. Fifteen of the 34 participants were graduate students. A significant (82.4%) number of participants had prior meditation, yoga, or contemplative practice experience. The facilitator advertised the workshops in flyers, newsletters, an information table at the student center, and announcements at the beginning of classes. The six workshops were one hour in length and led by two experienced facilitators. The formal workshop consisted of a discussion about engaging in mindfulness practice, didactic instruction about mindfulness and its relationship to students’ stress, formal mindfulness meditations and daily informal incorporation of mindfulness into day-to-day experiences, and formal mindfulness meditation practice. The prescribed meditation time increased from an initial requirement of 10-15 minutes daily to 30 minutes by the fifth session. The facilitators gave handouts with psychoeducational content, instructions for formal meditation, and homework assignments at the end of each session. The informal group received the same didactic instruction and handouts but had no formal meditation practice during workshop sessions or as homework requirements. Students in the informal group engaged in brief (five minutes or less) mindfulness exercises created by the instructor or similar to those found in Acceptance Commitment Therapy or Metacognitive Therapy. For homework, the informal group was asked to incorporate mindfulness in their day-to-day activities.

Both treatment groups were compared to a wait-list control group (Hindman, 2013). The participants were evaluated based on responses to several measures: Five Facet Mindfulness
Questionnaire; Mindful Attention Awareness Scale; Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II; Experiences Questionnaire; Self-Compassion Scale; Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales; Ruminative Response Scale; Penn State Worry Questionnaire; Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire; Satisfaction With Life Scale; Credibility/Expectancy Questionnaire; and other researcher generated questionnaires and logs (Hindman, 2013). The group with the formal practice reported “significant within-group changes on all measures” and lower stress, more self-compassion, greater decentering, and higher levels of mindfulness than the other groups (Hindman, 2013, p. 3). The results indicate that programs with formal mindfulness meditations and informal practice are more useful for students.

Greerson et al. (2014) evaluated the effectiveness of a mindfulness training program for college students and other emerging adults. The MBI program, Koru, had been developed and used in the elite university setting for several years (Greerson et al., 2014). Koru consists of four required 75-minute classes. Students commit to practicing meditation daily for 10 minutes, completing a daily meditation log and required reading from the course text Wherever You Go, There You Are (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). The daily meditation log has a space to note two things for which the student is grateful. Students are taught one to three mind-body mindfulness and meditation skills during each session. They learn and practice new skills after a period of reflection about the previous week’s skills. The skills include breathing exercises, walking and eating meditation, and guided imagery. The course text was recently changed to The Mindful Twenty-Something: Life Skills to Handle Stress… & Everything Else (Rogers, 2016). The classes are taught by one or two teachers and include 12-14 students per cohort. Students typically seek out the program offered through the Counseling and Psychological Services department because
they hope to reduce stress and enhance psychological well-being. The program is free, voluntary, not graded, and does not carry academic credit for participation.

Greeson et al. (2014) considered any student who completed three out of four classes as a participant in the study. The majority of the 90 students in the randomized controlled (wait-list) trial that spanned fall and spring semester were graduate students (71%), female (66%), and white (62%), and the mean age was 25.4; the eldest student who completed the entire program was 31. Seventy-four students completed the post-intervention survey. Students completed online surveys assessing symptoms of stress (PSS), sleep dimensions (Medical Outcomes Study), mindfulness of thoughts and feelings (Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised – CAMS-R), self-compassion (Self-compassion Scale), and gratitude (Gratitude Questionnaire – GQ-6). There was no financial compensation offered for completing surveys. Greeson and his team of researchers utilized “linear mixed-effects models” for primary analyzation of between-group effects (Greeson et al., 2014, p. 5). The results showed significant improvements in perceived stress, sleep, mindfulness, and self-compassion (Greeson et al., 2014). The wait-list groups experienced the same improvements as the initial group, but even better improvements in sleep (Greeson et al., 2014).

**Summary**

A preponderance of the evidence demonstrates that the stress process model is useful for identifying individuals' responses to stressors in the environment (Anenshensel, 2015; Pearlin, 1999; Thoits, 2011). The stress process articulates that individuals have coping resources that can diminish the impact of perceived stressors in the environment (Aneshensel, 2015; McLeod, 2012; Pearlin, 1999; Thoits, 2010). Habitus posits that people learn how to respond to the environment and stressors via socialization from family and the people close to them (Lehmann,
Lehmann (2007) describes a student’s decision to drop out because of the interaction between students from different social classes; the working-class students choose to leave due to the clash in values. Symbolic interaction is useful to depict actors' behavior with other individuals (Blumer, 1969; McLeod, 2012). Students' emotions and feelings have a social nature and arise out of interactions with others (Fields et al., 2006). Students determine the meaning of experiences and objects, and this interpretative process is mutable (Callero, 2003; Fields et al., 2006). Learning, through mindfulness practices, to become aware of and accept emotions is unlike avoidance and other strategies to manage emotions (Burkitt, 2018; Lindsay & Creswell, 2017; Thompson & Waltz, 2010).

Recent research demonstrates that students are stressed and increasingly seeking professional help on campus (Gallagher, 2015). There is not enough professional staffing available on most campuses to assist the entire student body (Gallagher, 2015). Research demonstrates that mindfulness-based interventions help students deal with stress (Goyal et al., 2014; Keng et al., 2011; Shapiro, Bootzin, Figueredó, Lopez, & Schwartz, 2003). MBI are effective in classroom settings and for people with clinical diagnoses. The classroom-based interventions are typically eight weeks or longer. There have been very brief (one or two doses) interventions in classrooms that have a positive effect (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998).

This research may confirm that a manualized intervention delivered to the general population of students at a rural institution of higher education with a 40% population of PELL grant recipients will provide similar results. This study draws participants from all majors, and there is no grade attached in any way to participation in the study. There were no other external rewards for participation.
This study provides evidence of the efficacy for offering a four-week manualized (the format for each session was laid out and followed from the program manual) mindfulness-based intervention for the general population of students in a rural institution of higher education.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research effort was to understand undergraduate students' perceptions surrounding participation in a mindfulness and meditation intervention. The investigation sought to understand their experience with the workshop format and any behavioral or emotional differences they noted as a result of learning the skills taught in the intervention.

Research Design

Qualitative phenomenological methods were appropriate for this study because the goal was to generate data rich in detail about students attending this rural public institution who participated in a mindfulness-based intervention (Creswell, 2014). This methodology allowed me to explore narratives and uncover participant-defined meanings while minimizing the researcher’s meaning (Willig, Stainton-Rogers, 2008). Students' lived experience as collected through the methods detailed below provided rich descriptions of the mindfulness-based intervention and college life. The goal of the research was to discover whether a mindfulness-based intervention would increase resources students can apply to mitigate the impact of stressors. The researcher gathered data by acting as a workshop participant observer, then conducting a focus group and student interviews as the primary sources of data collection. Also, student journals, responses to the intake survey and another survey after the MBI, in addition to casual encounters with participants, provided data.

One workshop was video recorded to provide feedback to the facilitator so that she could evaluate her presence and delivery. The video recording was not used to provide data for the research, just for the facilitator to make improvements to the workshop. The focus group was
audio recorded to capture as much data as possible. A semi-structured interview guide and probe questions were created to focus the discussion of the group (Asbury, 1995). A colleague joined the investigator to capture as much data as possible during the focus group.

Students signed an informed consent form agreeing to the terms of the study. The consent form (Appendix B) explained several things. The form described the study, the study procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, the potential risks, benefits, confidentiality, and information about the researcher. Before human data collection, the study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects and the site's University Institutional Review Board. Permission was obtained from the research site to conduct the study.

**Researcher as Key Instrument**

The researcher is typically a key instrument and involved with participants in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), inquirers should explicitly identify factors that shape their interpretation. As I was a participant observer in the MBI, conducted the focus groups and interviews, and interpreted the data, it is appropriate for me to provide some further insight into my background and biases.

I have been searching for a way to be more productive, effective, present, available, empathetic, and compassionate. I have been working with students with the least resources and academic preparation for college for 20 years, which is my entire academic career. I have had an interest in meditation for most of my life. When the opportunity presented itself for me to learn more about meditation and how it could help me, I dove in. When I realized that mindfulness meditation helped me to be a bit better in many areas, I thought it might just be helpful for students too.
I was aware that my background created the potential for bias to emerge while conducting the study and interpreting the data. I decided to consult with my dissertation chair and committee. Moreover, I practiced reflective journaling to mitigate the potential for bias to ruin the study. Although there is potential for bias, my firsthand experience with the phenomenon also served to enhance the study.

**Research Site**

The research site is a small rural public Mid-Atlantic University. The site is different from large universities with strong mindfulness programs and research activity on mindfulness-based interventions. The site of this research is a small public institution that has approximately 4,000 undergraduate students. Approximately 35% of the students receive Federal Pell Grants and State Higher Education Assistance Agency grants. The percentage of grant recipients is an indication of the low socioeconomic status of a significant portion of the students. Six-year graduation rates hover around 50%. The undergraduate student population is 64% female. Over 90% of the students are from the state, and the majority of those are from rural counties.

I am currently serving as the Director of the University Advising Services Center with responsibility for advising undecided students. Additionally, I serve as the Assistant Director for the Honors Program and Director of the Act 101 program. The facilitator for the MBI program is the spouse of the primary investigator, and she does not work for the university. The facilitator has a daily mindfulness practice and is certified to teach the Koru program. The facilitator had limited prior experience teaching mindfulness meditation but is skilled at facilitating workshops and classes with college undergraduates. The facilitator has a passion for working with this age group. She has developed this passion over her more than 15 years working with this population in various capacities. She is a certified coach and holds an MA in Higher Education Student
Affairs. The facilitator exhibits the qualities of an effective MBI instructor. She exudes the
warmth, authority, and authenticity noted by McCown, Reibel and Micozzi (2016) as essential
qualities.

**Population**

I used purposive sampling to recruit participants for this study to find individuals who
wanted to experience the phenomenon. This study sought to learn more about a sample of the
general population of students from the campus who are interested in mindfulness meditation. In
qualitative research, the purpose of the sample is to uncover the significance and meaning of
certain phenomena. Purposefully selecting is a strategy in qualitative research that effectively
provided data for this research question (Creswell, 2009).

I initially recruited incoming freshmen students via email to participate in the study. It is
doubtful that students felt undue pressure to participate in the study. I only teach one course to
junior students in the Honors Program during the spring semester on occasion and therefore, I do
not typically grade students in a classroom setting. There were no monetary gifts nor academic
credit provided as an incentive for participation in this study. It is highly unlikely that students
chose to participate in this mindfulness-based intervention due to grades or other types of
inducement. The data relies on this self-selected convenience sample.

I asked campus faculty to tell students about the opportunity. I shared posters with other
offices in the area. I took posters to the opening activities day event and shared them with
students walking around and students at the various tables. During this event, all recognized
student organizations share information with new first-year students and other students. I placed
posters in residence halls and other buildings on campus. I gave flyers to students who met with
me. The poster was also in electronic format and shared on social media sites as well as the TV
monitors in the student center. The TRiO office shared the information with their students via email. Sharing the flyers personally seemed to generate the most response.

I communicated with university administrators about the potential benefits students might experience from the program. This study was not disruptive to university activities. The initial information on flyers and emails encouraged the population to attend a general information meeting one week before the actual intervention start date. This meeting was at the same time as the workshop but in a different location. The researcher and facilitator were present at the 45-minute meeting.

Students received general information about the workshop and mindfulness at the information meeting. Students received a copy of the informed consent form and the initial intake questionnaire. I reviewed the documents and answered questions, and then students had time to complete them. They were asked to bring these to the first MBI session if they did not turn them in during this meeting. Twenty-three students were present at the information meeting. Ten students who were willing to commit to the four weeks and additional research requirements began the program. The sample size fell within the suggested guidelines. Creswell (2014) notes that phenomenological research typically ranges from three to ten individuals. The guidelines from the creator of this MBI recommend no more than 12 students for this program.

**Data Collection**

Creswell (2014) suggests that the research approach should connect to the problem, fit the audience, and relate to the researcher's own experience and expertise. This investigation relied upon methods, instruments, and data illumination that are common to qualitative inquiry. I decided to utilize multiple types of data gathering techniques for this project. The researcher previously conducted a focus group with an older population who had participated in a similar
mindfulness training. This experience informed the researcher that a focus group would not provide the richness of detail, nor triangulation, so I made the decision to gather multiple forms of data including participant observation, focus group, and participants’ interviews that are followed by a semi-structured questionnaire.

**Participant Observation**

The four-session, 75-minute workshops were held on Tuesday evenings during the fall semester. The researcher participated in each workshop. The investigator wrote field notes for each meeting. At the beginning of each workshop, there was a structured time for individuals to “check in” and share their thoughts about their experience with mindfulness practices over the last week. The check-in period provided a valuable opportunity for learning and data gathering. The information gleaned during that time helped me create pertinent questions for the focus group and individual interviews. The check-in process at the beginning of each class facilitated the discussion in the focus group meeting because the participants became familiar with each other and accustomed to speaking about the practices and challenges.

**Focus Group**

I conducted a focus group with the workshop participants at the same location and at the same time one week after the fourth session. The self-reports during the focus group provided insightful data about the participants' perceptions. The focus group discussion provided insight into some of the similarities and disparities in the participants' opinions. The focus group interaction helped to generate interview questions. All of the eight students who completed the MBI participated in the focus group. It was recorded and transcribed. Participants’ responses are confidential. The initial question was, "What was the most important part of the workshop?" Questions about resources, stress, experience with the group, trust, self-efficacy, self-esteem,
emotions, emotional response to issues, and participation in organizations followed. The focus group was audio recorded for transcribing purposes. A colleague, who is a professor of Sociology, helped to capture statements, body language, and other nonverbal behavior during the focus group. The researcher kept the focus group discussion relevant to the research questions. The colleague, an experienced researcher, was prepared to ensure this investigator did not influence or bias the students' responses.

**Participant Interviewing**

The dyadic participant interviews were conversational and began with a script about how the interview would proceed. After students agreed to the terms and recording, an open-ended question was asked: "Please describe what stands out to you about your experiences in the mindfulness workshop that we held here at this university." Questions that followed were based on their responses and came from the prepared questions in Appendix F. The questions were designed to gather more information from the interviewees to more clearly understand their perspective.

The interviews occurred in the researcher's office. The room is private, and both doors were closed, but there is glass bordering the doors. I took notes during the interview. The interviewee was thanked for their time and efforts. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim. I read and annotated the transcripts. I reminded each interviewee that all interviews would be kept anonymous. I shared that the purpose was to determine the viability of teaching mindfulness to college students at this institution. I kept analytic memos and contact summary notes. The memos allowed the researcher to connect the data from each interviewee. These connections led to a coherent assembly of the data. The contact summary notes discuss
setting, students’ attitude, demeanor, and content. They were helpful in understanding and served as a reminder of the interview.

I solicited both negative and positive feedback about the workshop. I endeavored to understand students’ perceptions of mindfulness and a mindfulness workshop in the local collegiate setting. The interviews did provide a different context and depth from respondents in comparison to the focus group responses. They also served to gather data that might be missed in the focus group setting because not everyone had the opportunity to speak during that time. Besides, the interviews deepened my understanding of individual perspectives.

**Semi-Structured Questionnaire**

After the focus group, volunteers were emailed a link to an anonymous online semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire allowed me to gather data that volunteers may not have shared during the focus group session and interview. Students may not have responded during the focus group for a variety of reasons, and the questionnaire gave them that opportunity. Also, the questionnaire served to gather data if a participant could not show up for an interview for some reason. Some questions were open-ended, arranged in order to cover the sought-after data (Richards & Morse, 2007). This structured approach may help the comparability of data across “individuals, times, and settings” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 80). This additional method of gathering data will also aid in triangulation (Maxwell, 2005). The questions are in Appendix G. Table 1 below contains information about the timing of the data collection procedures.
Table 1

Data Collection Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three Weeks Prior to MBI</td>
<td>Email introduction letter and consent form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Weeks Prior to MBI</td>
<td>Met with prospective participants. Answered questions. Brief explanation of mindfulness, 23 present for the meeting. Provided volunteers access to D2L shell so that they have access to complete the informed consent, initial survey with demographic information. Also, paper copies handed out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week One of MBI</td>
<td>The group received first meditation instruction and overview of process. Belly breathing and dynamic breathing is taught. Participant Observation (PO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Two of MBI</td>
<td>The group met for second lesson on walking meditation and gathas/meditation poems. Meditation logs collected/discussed. Addressed online/app challenges. At the outset of session during check in, each student shared experience and mindfulness meditation practice. PO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Three of MBI</td>
<td>The group met to learn guided imagery and labeling thoughts during meditation. Check in, everyone had opportunity to share. Interview protocol established based on field notes from participant observation. PO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Four of MBI</td>
<td>The group met, learned eating meditation and labeling feelings during meditation. Check in. PO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Five, Post MBI</td>
<td>Focus group meeting. Participants’ responses to the questions recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Six, Post MBI</td>
<td>Individual Interviews. Participants’ responses to the questions recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Six, Post MBI</td>
<td>Semi-structured questionnaire link sent to participants. Submission is anonymous.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This table designates the actions taken to collect data at times prior to, during and after the mindfulness-based intervention (MBI).

Intervention Procedures

I recruited ten students to participate in the mindfulness-based intervention. One trained and program certified leader facilitated the mindfulness-based intervention. The MBI used an evidence-based curriculum structured to teach meditation and mindfulness mind-body skills to young adults. The material was taught in four weekly, 75-minute sessions beginning in the middle of the fall semester. The program was structured, and the facilitator followed a manual to present the information; therefore, this was a manualized MBI.
The instructions for each MBI session consisted of a formal meditation before the check-in period, brief didactic lessons, formal meditation, and mindfulness skills practice of the experiential exercises. Students were asked to complete a variety of tasks each day. Their assignments consisted of choosing to do an activity each day mindfully. This activity could be brushing their teeth or eating pizza. The MBI assignments also included: a commitment to practicing formal meditation for at least 10 minutes daily; completing and returning a daily meditation log, as well as reading the required chapters in the book, *The Mindful Twenty-Something: Life Skills to Handle Stress...and Everything Else* (Rogers, 2017); writing two things they were thankful for in the gratitude log; and writing a reflection on their practice in the journal (electronic or paper version).

The electronic version of the log was included in an app. The app provides a space to respond to the following prompts: “I'm grateful for (two things),” reflections, the mindfulness or meditation skill used, daily mindful activity, and open comments. The app also provides relevant tips, skills, and guided meditations. The app’s contents are organized by week. For instance, week one gives a video to the skills that were taught: belly breathing and dynamic breathing. There are two guided meditations, body scan, and breath awareness. The reading assignment is also annotated in the app. There is a timer available for students to use to mark their practice. The user can set the time, and a bell rings at the beginning and end of the time period chosen. The default time was set at 10 minutes. The app also tracks user stats over time. Stats include consecutive days, the number of sessions, total time in hours and minutes, average meditation time per session, longest meditation session, and the skill most often used.

Participating in three out of the four sessions was considered as full participation. There was an opportunity provided for the students to make up a session, but that was not needed. I
encouraged participants to participate in the entire process but also assured them that they could, at any time they chose, withdraw from the study. I shared this at the information session, through the voluntary informed consent process, and at the initial session. The researcher used pseudonyms throughout this dissertation for the college sites and study participants to safeguard confidentiality.

Each session began with a five-minute meditation that ended with the gentle bell sound from a singing bowl struck by the teacher. After the first session meditation, students shared their name and motivation for participating in the workshop. The second through fourth sessions began with a check-in period. During the check-in, students shared their experiences with the mindfulness practices, including wins and challenges over the previous week. This check-in offered the facilitator an opportunity to connect and utilize effective engagement skills to address issues and build motivation to practice. The facilitator shared stories germane to students' lives and about her own experience with the practices.

During each session, students learned and practiced mindfulness meditation and one or two mind-body skills, including breathing exercises (i.e., belly breathing, dynamic breathing), walking meditation, gathas, guided imagery, mindful communication, and eating meditation. After each lesson, students had an opportunity to ask questions and clarify the practice. During check-in at the beginning of class, the facilitator was methodical about asking each student questions about their practice in an encouraging manner.

The facilitator responded to the students' meditation logs and provided guidance as necessary. The response was a positive acknowledgment of what the student learned or became aware of and encouragement to continue practicing. The facilitator occasionally posed questions to invite students to think deeply about their new-found awareness or new understanding. She
engaged the students and inspired them to be curious about meditation and mindfulness practices. She would affirm to them that continuing to practice would bring the future benefits of calm and clarity they sought.

**Methods of Analysis**

My objective was to identify factors relevant to the effects of a mindfulness-based intervention for undergraduate students as reflected in interviews, focus group discussion, participant observation, a semi-structured questionnaire, and other interactions during the intervention. Each interview, including the focus group, was viewed as a single incident, considered individually in the analysis. Some parts of the data were winnowed to focus on significant statements and relevant themes (Creswell, 2014). Common themes were identified across the data to address the research questions and essential elements of students' experiences with an MBI.

I explored the transcribed focus group and interview documents with the intent to apply the qualitative methods as described by Creswell (2014). Frequency of similar statements and emotional valence of the student assisted the researcher in determining significant statements (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Inductive and deductive thinking were employed to determine the meaning of the students' statements.

Richards and Morse (2007) suggest these five basic steps to guide the thematic analysis: (1) collection of verbal data; (2) reading of these data; (3) breaking data into some kind of parts; (4) organization and expression of data from a sociological perspective; and (5) [making a] synthesis and summary of data for purposes of communication to the scholarly community. (p. 172). They also recommend writing and rewriting in addition to reflecting on the material.
Recordings from the focus group and interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The investigator also listened to the recordings and read the transcripts multiple times to develop understanding and identify concepts that emerged from various participant experiences. I coded transcripts. Coding was done in Microsoft Word initially. I then entered data into NVivo, which is a qualitative data analysis software package. NVivo organizes a variety of content from interviews, surveys, focus groups, audio, video, and more. The transcription for the focus group and each interview was entered as a separate source.

Open coding is the initial process of data analysis (Birks & Mills, 2011). Birks and Mills (2011) argue that the generation of codes requires constant comparison of the incident with incident in the data. I began coding after the initial interview, and after several interviews were reviewed the coding changed as patterns and categories emerged.

After some coding and conversations with colleagues, I began to categorize the codes based on my research questions. I reviewed the data and themes began emerging for each research question. I grouped the themes into nodes based on the categories in the NVivo software. I utilized the quasi-statistical approach described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) to determine the relative importance of codes. I conducted word frequency queries, but language patterns of some of the speakers skewed the results. One participant said the word “like” in almost every sentence as a filler. An example: “Yeah, because at first I was like, ‘Oh I'm going to do this’ and then I was like, ‘I don't know.’ Like how is this going to work, and I was excited because like I have never done anything with meditation.” Others had similar speaking habits of using one word repetitively, so I did not use word frequency queries.

After coding the data and themes and connections uncovered, I reported and interpreted the findings. I used these patterns, categories, and themes to deduce and generate assertions from
the data to answer the research questions. The last stage draws the relationship between the students' experiences in this research project and the literature and how the findings answer the research question.

The data analysis process included:

- Reviewing focus group transcript
- Reviewing all semi-structured questionnaire responses
- Reviewing all interview transcripts notes
- Initial coding in MS Word
- Collecting significant passages in Word
- Reflecting on data
- Importing the data into NVivo
- Coding the data in NVivo using open coding
- Evaluating the codes based on the research questions, grouped into categories
- Defining the properties of the dominant themes
- Using phrase frequencies to give an idea of the themes’ importance

The codes are in Appendix H.

**Ethical Considerations**

The researcher submitted the study to the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects and the site's University Institutional Review Board for review and approval. In preparation for IRB, the researcher completed updated training on human subjects’ protections and reviewed the Code of Ethics of the American Sociological Association.
Treatment of Participants

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) inform researchers about the importance of protecting the rights of participants. The researcher gave students adequate information to make an informed decision about participating in the MBI. This information included the purpose of the study, the expectations for participating in the MBI, data collection, and utilization details.

The researcher told the participants that engaging in the study was entirely voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without repercussions or penalty. The investigator told the students that they would not receive compensation for participation. The researcher explained to the students that there was a minimal risk that they could experience negative emotions while participating in the MBI and study. The researcher informed the students that the meditation and mindfulness exercises are not a substitute for professional assistance if they were dealing with distressing concerns. Participants were invited to experiment with the practices and informed that they may or may not find personal benefit from engaging in the MBI. Participants were made aware that the study might benefit other students and the university.

Confidentiality

The researcher informed the MBI participants that information they shared would be kept confidential within the bounds of safety. The participants were made aware of mandated reporting laws and reminded that any information regarding the intent to harm one's self or others would require the researcher to report to appropriate authorities. The researcher explained to students that identifying information would only be available to him, and pseudonyms would be used to report the results. The exception was that other participants heard the responses spoken during the MBI and focus group.
Data Storage and Retention

The researcher assured the participants that recorded material from the MBI sessions, focus group, and interviews or written materials regarding the study would be in a locked file cabinet. All information stored electronically was password protected. The investigator will retain written materials, such as transcriptions and field notes for five years, and then they will be destroyed if not needed for further research.

Transcription

The researcher secured the assistance of a professional transcriptionist to transcribe the focus group and interviews to ensure accurate data. The researcher reviewed the transcripts and updated them based on session notes in order to provide a clear picture and rich description. For instance, some words from the MBI, such as gatha, were uncommon and not transcribed accurately. Additionally, the recordings were reviewed simultaneously with the transcriptions to provide an accurate account.

Report of Findings

I aimed to maintain trustworthiness throughout all phases of the research. The researcher endeavored to accurately represent the participants' thoughts, feelings, and actions so that the material is credible (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The investigator sent the transcribed interviews and summaries to the participants for their review as an aspect of member checking. The MBI instructor debriefed with the investigator to ensure an accurate representation of events. Detailed accounts of the activities are provided to enable transferability.

I made all efforts to ensure implementation integrity. Complete scripts of the mindfulness and meditation instructions are available, in addition to other aspects of the program. Weare and Nind (2011) recommend carefully documenting the theoretical base, defined goals, explicit
guidelines, and training of the mindfulness facilitator. The steps of implementation were carefully documented (Durlak and DuPre, 2008), and participation was tracked closely. The facilitator's actions were reviewed by external evaluators to ensure program integrity.

I closely monitored participation in several ways: during the weekly workshop sessions, through journal entries, and through meditation logs.

**Trustworthiness**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) discuss trustworthiness as a way that qualitative researchers seek to control for biases in a study. They refer to the work of Guba and Lincoln (1998), who suggest trustworthiness arises from credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. I worked to enhance the trustworthiness of this qualitative study's findings by employing several methods.

**Credibility**

I sought to increase credibility by matching the method to the question I wanted to answer and the type of explanation. I was aided by senior researchers to develop this appropriately. Credibility was enhanced by gathering data from multiple methods for this study. I also reviewed findings with professional colleagues to accomplish this. I stayed abreast of the literature on mindfulness, which continued to emerge during this process.

**Dependability of the Data**

I actively sought out the feedback of participants regarding the accuracy of the interpretation of the data. This member checking allowed participants to comment on the descriptions, themes, and interpretations. The focus group, individual interviews, and questionnaire helped to triangulate the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The researcher reviewed events with the facilitator and used field notes to obtain triangulation of the data.
Transferability

I attempt to address this by creating a "thick, rich description of the participants and the context" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 78). This detail enables people to conduct a similar MBI experience in their context using similar methods and criteria.

Participant and Researcher Concerns

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) share potential challenges related to the researcher and participants in a qualitative study. As a researcher with a keen interest in mindfulness and meditation practices, I affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings. Also, I collected self-reported data from the participants. The participants may have reported emotions, behaviors, and other information they thought would benefit the researcher. The participants may have intentionally or unconsciously given inaccurate reports.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the study designed to understand the undergraduate students’ experiences with a four-week mindfulness-based intervention. A qualitative inquiry was employed because the investigation of such phenomenon is at a nascent stage. The purposefully selected participant sample was made up of eight of ten students who completed the MBI. Four data-collection methods were employed, including participants’ observation, focus group, individual interviews, and questionnaire. Guiding the development of the data was the literature and emergent themes. The researcher used various strategies such as triangulation to meet standards of trustworthiness.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This research study concerns the mindfulness-based intervention undergraduate students experienced at a small, rural state university. This investigation aimed to gain new in-depth knowledge of how an MBI influenced students' stress experiences, resilience, and other situations common to college life. This chapter will discuss the students' experiences.

Data collection occurred in several ways. I gave participants an intake survey, which is in Appendix D. The researcher gathered data during each session of the MBI as a non-participant observer. After the last MBI session, I conducted a focus group with the participants who completed the MBI in the same room. I invited a colleague from the campus sociology department to record notes during the focus group. The colleague, who is experienced with qualitative methods, provided an external observation of the process. The focus group questions are found in Appendix E. Data from the focus group was recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed with the interview data. After the focus group meeting, several participants completed a semi-structured questionnaire that is found in Appendix G. Participants scheduled interviews with the researcher after the focus group. The interview questions are found in Appendix F. The interviews took place in the researcher’s office and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews lasted one to two hours, covering diverse aspects of the participants’ experiences with the MBI and practices learned, how the MBI had influenced their experience of stress, and coping with stress, classroom experience, relationships and other topics that arose from the open-ended questions. The participants were provided a copy of the transcription to ensure accuracy of meaning.
Intake Survey

An intake survey was given to each participant before the training began at the information meeting. The participants were asked to bring it to the initial meeting completed. Additional intake surveys were available at the first session, and some participants arrived early and completed them before the session began. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix D.

The participants may have reported the following information on an intake survey, during the MBI weekly session, in their journal, during the focus group or the interview, or on the follow-up survey. Pseudonyms are used in this report to protect the identities of the participants.

Participants’ Demographics

The MBI creator suggests that a small, diverse group of 8-12 participants is best for this type of program designed for emerging adult college students (Rogers, 2013). Ten participants began the training, and eight completed the training. The intake survey responses can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3 below. One LatinX male and one white female dropped out. Although the majority of students classified themselves as middle class (60%), 70% were Pell and PHEAA grant recipients, indicating that their family income is below middle-class income. Half of the students' fathers had attended some college, and only two students' mothers had completed college. The majority of participants (60%) were freshmen in their first semester of college. There was one sophomore, one junior, and two seniors. The group was primarily 18 years of age, and the oldest was 23. Two students self-identified as multi-racial.
Table 2

Participant Demographics From Intake Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Pell</th>
<th>Mother College</th>
<th>Father College</th>
<th>Yr in College</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Davisha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>BL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>WH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>WH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>WH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lois</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>WH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Multi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelsey</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>WH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephine</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Multi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JaneDNF</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>WH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JohnDNF</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>HIS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table illustrates self-reported participant demographics.

Information was gathered to determine how students heard about the availability of the workshop. Half of the students heard a personal invitation from the researcher in various settings. Twenty percent read about it in their email. One student heard about it from their work-study supervisor, and one student heard about it from faculty teaching their Inquiry Seminar or working with their living-learning community (LLC). The survey also asked about their health ("Do you have any physical problems or disabilities or any history of mental health problems?"). The question about their health was to ensure that students did not have serious mental health issues that were being treated by a professional. Half of the students indicated that a significant change (i.e., moving or family issues) was causing some of their stress. When asked about their ongoing stress, responses ranged from everything, all aspects of college, paying for college, or what to do after college (graduate school choice or work). Most had no previous experience with mindfulness, and the 40% who had some experience indicated that involvement was negligible. There was a variety of majors involved in the study. JaneDNF and JohnDNF in the Table 2 below did not finish the program. The participants’ GPA (at the end of the semester) ranged from less than 2.0 (one of the two students who withdrew from the program) to over a 3.7.
Table 3

Additional Participant Demographics From Intake Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Hear</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Stress Change</th>
<th>Ongoing Stress</th>
<th>Prev. Exp. w/ Mindfulness</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>JohnDNF</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>N</td>
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</table>

Note: This table illustrates self-reported participant responses to intake survey.

Further Reflections on Mindfulness-Based Intervention

The information collected from the survey indicates that these first-generation, low-income students had few, if any, mindfulness tools or resources in their toolbox that would help them deal with all the stress associated with college (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). The survey, focus group, and interviews allowed me to triangulate and better understand the data. For instance, even though the initial survey indicated some students had some limited experience with mindfulness or meditation, when speaking with the students, I learned that their experience with mindfulness meditation was much more limited than the survey response implied. For instance, one said they fell asleep during a meditation tape played one day in their high school gym class. That is minimal experience with mindfulness practices.
Mindfulness and Meditation Workshop

We were all curious. I, as the researcher, had sent out emails, posted flyers in residence halls and other buildings on campus, posted flyers on various social media sites, including Facebook class pages for university students, and on monitors in the library and student center. I passed out flyers at different campus events and asked the TRiO director and staff and other faculty to mention the program when they met with or taught students. I gave flyers to numerous students who came through my office for course scheduling or other forms of advising, etc. I had put out this effort in order to get the 23 curious students seated in front of me into this too large of a room for the information session about an upcoming four-week mindfulness workshop on campus.

All those different means of reaching out to students were necessary. It typically takes more than one contact to convince someone to try something new. Hope described how she and her friend Hannah decided to participate:

Well I kind of, when you gave me that paper, I was like, okay this seems pretty cool but then I just kind of forgot about it honestly until you e-mailed, and then I was like oh yeah, this is something I wanted to do. So then I was telling Hannah about the e-mail that I got and that I thought I was going to do it, and then she was like, oh yeah I already signed up for that! That’s kind of how that happened.

Twenty-three individuals came for different reasons and with different levels of understanding regarding mindfulness. After some brief introductory remarks, I asked them to sit there for one minute. You, reader, should try it. Just set a timer on your watch/device and sit where you are for one minute. Time’s up. What did you hear in that intervening minute? Hmm, not sure? Let’s try it again. Set your timer for one minute and sit there listening to the sounds.
Listen for sounds near and far. Don’t be surprised if your body makes some of the sounds. Every time your thoughts drift to something else, bring your focus back to searching for sounds. Time’s up. What did you hear? Did you hear any noise from the air handling system? Did you hear any noises from outside the room? How did you feel? How was this second minute different from the first? Did it feel the same? Did the second minute of sitting seem shorter? Did the second minute feel less stressful? During the first minute were your thoughts all over the place, bouncing between your to-do list or things that happened in the past? Did you feel a bit more peaceful during the second minute?

Ten of those 23 students decided that the information I shared about the four-week mindfulness program and those two minutes of sitting were enough to compel them to come the following Tuesday at 5pm to a second-floor room in the library that was rarely used. Hope shared the following:

Umm, well whenever I heard about it, like I said, I thought it would just be a cool experience first of all, and hearing all the benefits about it, like reducing stress. I mean I think anyone could benefit from that, so that’s probably what drew me in, and then just actually doing it for myself, instead of just judging it ahead of time and being like, no, I wouldn’t like that, you know, actually doing it then I was sold, like then I realized that it is good.

The facilitator skillfully created an atmosphere in the room that invited a sense of calm, ease, and comfort among participants. I attended all four MBI workshop sessions as a non-participant observer. The facilitator would arrive in the room first and arrange the chairs in a welcoming way. There was a large window that overlooked part of the campus and filled the room with soft natural light so that the harsh overhead fluorescent lights did not have to be
turned on. The facilitator would welcome students as they walked into the area. The facilitator asked the participants to turn off any devices and put their things along the wall out of the way at the first meeting, and students did that on their own for subsequent meetings.

The participants sat around a large wooden conference room table in comfortable, high backed office chairs. At the first session, few participants spoke to one another beyond a brief greeting as they entered the room and found a spot to sit. At subsequent sessions, the participants would chat with each other about things going on until the session began.

Students were required to attend every session and log their daily meditation and gratitude in the app they downloaded explicitly for the MBI or on the paper copy of the log. Often people feel that they cannot meditate after one or a few experiences practicing (Rogers, 2016). Lois expressed this, and others chimed in their agreement and understanding.

Ten curious students showed up the following week for the first session and began the mindful learning journey together. Some of them knew about some of the practices they would learn, but most were inexperienced in using them. Paris shared why she thought it was helpful to learn mindfulness practices in a group setting:

It was a good experience. I’ve meditated in the past but I don’t feel like I was as effective at doing it cause it was just, I was just like I’m trying it out, I don’t really know if I’m doing it right. So like, to have a guided meditation with an instructor and then also the guided meditations on the (MBI) app… And also comfortable that I wasn’t the only one meditating. Like I actually saw other girls doing it too, so.

The facilitator stood at the area entryway greeting people before they went to the room down the hall. In each session, the facilitator teaches a mindfulness meditation and a mindfulness-based self-calming skill. The participants agree from the outset that they will attend
every session and practice daily for 10 minutes. The participants understood that they would benefit from the requirement to submit a log reflecting on their practice and writing two things for which they are grateful. The facilitator invited the student participants to experiment with various practices to learn what worked best for them. The facilitator would have had the opportunity to respond by email to their journal entries and any questions they may have submitted through the app, by email, or text over the ensuing week after a session. In this way, she could actively respond to questions that arose and provide extensive support for the participants. For instance, Hannah wrote in her journal about her practice session in her dormitory room:

It was really hard to concentrate at the beginning because I had a lot on my mind, and even though the room wasn't loud things like the air vent, my earbuds shifting, and my roommate moving distracted me super easily. I tried a few different ways of keeping track of my breath: counting and imagining that with every breath I took another step away from the river. I relaxed enough to be able to feel my heartbeat in my chest and realized that I was actually counting in sync with my heart. I just kept doing that, and I realized that it was way easier to keep focused on my breathing. I was only planning on doing 10 minutes, but apparently, I didn't set it up right or something because, after a while, I started to wonder why 10 minutes felt so long. I didn't want to break the meditation so just in case, so I waited a few more minutes. When it still didn't go off, I finally opened my eyes and saw that it had actually been 25 minutes!

Paris wrote in her journal after some weeks of practice: “I feel myself on a rise. I'm reaching a different level of peace. I haven't fully mastered it, but I'm figuring out how to control my moods and how to block out negativity that interferes.”
Students wrote in their gratitude journals that they were thankful for many things, ranging from "Nutella, mug cakes, family, kittens, When perfect timing provides opportunities, My professors, My support system, Cards against humanity and Halloween parties, life and earth, Failure, Struggle, Both allow me to keep going. Also, they motivate me to be better" to "Koru and the facilitator."

The facilitator would follow the student development dictum to "support and challenge" each participant in the process. One way she supported and challenged the students was by empathetically agreeing when Paris said that it was hard to find time to practice, then the facilitator asked the group to respond with ways that they found the time. Other students agreed that it was hard at first, but they found ways to make time for practicing and offered those suggestions and reasons why certain times worked best for them. The facilitator added some ideas of her own about how to make use of "extra time" such as waiting in line or for a class to start, then circled back around to Paris and asked her if any of the suggestions would work for her.

At the second lesson, after a week of practicing, students came in and said hello to each other in a friendly way. Students interacted very comfortably with one another. Students' comfort and familiarity with the surroundings were evident as they put their belongings away and found their seats, typically the same as the previous week. Participants smiled at one another and would strike up a friendly chat with the student sitting next to them about different things, sometimes noting that they saw one another, either in class or walking to some place on campus. The facilitator entered the room after most participants had arrived so that she could start the session on time.
The facilitator sat at the table with the participants. She began each session by ringing a singing bowl with one strike of the wooden striker. The subtle relaxing bell tone emanating from the singing bowl would fill the room, simultaneously quieting the chatter and bringing the focus to the facilitator. The facilitator initiated the first meditation practice, opening the meditation with words like "becoming aware that you are in the room, the awareness of the present filling your mind, displacing thoughts of worries, and judgments about the past or future." The facilitator would give additional instructions intermittently during the five-minute opening practice. Most students sat still, with their eyes closed, back reasonably straight, and focused on the facilitator's words guiding them to direct their attention to their breath or other sensations. Occasionally students would adjust themselves in their chair, scratch, or move their arms or feet. The participants would do this slowly so that their movement was barely noticeable to me the only other one in the room with eyes open. The facilitator would end the mindfulness meditation practice with another ring of the singing bowl.

The notes below were taken by my sociologist colleague during the opening mindfulness meditation at the focus group meeting and are indicative of the opening mindfulness meditations at the other MBI sessions:

- Deep breath in
- Students sitting still
- Two students fidgeting
- Voice directing meditation is very “meditation” like (Tara Brach like)
- One student’s chest noticeably going up and down as they are told to pay attention to the breath while others exhibit little movement.
- Three students have their heads resting on back of chair
Two have hands in lap, and other has hands in her hoodie pocket

Students are outrageously still, except student at end of table in a pink sweatshirt.

Can hear the HVAC system

Cannot hear student breathing

My writing and hair brushing up against my coat is the noisiest part of the room (to me)

Students open eyes at the sound of the bell

Students learned lessons about how to practice or respond to life situations during the check-in discussions at the beginning of each session. Students learned by participating in the group discussion, sharing questions and responses to each other, guided by the facilitator. The facilitator was careful to use examples relevant to their college experience.

**Example of Check-In Discussion: Students Learn From Facilitator**

Facilitator: So, I’m going to ask a question, we talked last week about not judging our meditation practice, right!? By trying to keep ourselves as judgment free as far as putting a label on and how are your practice is going while you are in it. So for those of you that your mind is wondering a lot and you feel like you can’t get there, I’m curious to know what get there means to you and then when we talk about how your mind wonders a thousand times, bring it back a thousand times, that happens and it happens to me even to this day, and so I am curious about the premeditation so you can get to your meditation.

Student: Alright I don't think it is quite as much judging as much as I feel like I wasted my time, it is sort of judgement but it's judgement even if it’s not like saying I did bad…but if I go through a 10 minute meditation and there is only three points in time, I've been wandering most of that 10 minutes and there is only three points where I realized, oh way I'm way gone and I only bring myself back three times, then I was
essentially daydreaming or being distracted and it doesn't feel like, because I know when I'm meditating and I can be present, it feels good. So to spend a 10 minutes meditating and not feel good is not rewarding and I had trouble feeling like I got something out of it even if they are supposed to be practicing the skill of bringing myself back, I'm not bringing myself back 20 thousand times, I'm bringing myself back 3 times which is not a lot of practice and it didn't feel like it was rewarding, it doesn't feel like it's something that can make me come back and do this practice afterwards.

Facilitator: So let's take that and turn it a little bit and think of it, that you gave your mind and body a rest 3 times that day as supposed to no times.

Another student said: Think of the jar as half full.

Students nodded agreement and chuckled.

Facilitator: Well, it's literally bringing your awareness back three times. You noticed three times and that is three times that you have allowed yourself to be in the present moment and those three times will then become six times, which will then become 50 times, which will then become a 100 times and you are going to notice with the practice and anything you ever try to practice at, you have to practice right, even if it is sport, learning instruments, even teaching your kids to learn to walk, you are doing good even if it's just three times in 10 minutes and she addresses that very well in the readings, because we all do that, we all say, “my mind was just going crazy.” That's okay, our minds go crazy, right, so maybe try and think of it in terms of what you are giving yourself rather than what you didn’t give yourself. Thank you for bringing up that point.
Example of Check-In Discussion: Students Learn From Students

One student, Lena, expressed during the interview how participants would talk with each other during check-in to help one another construct alternate meanings about situations. The MBI process provided a safe environment to discuss and experiment with different methods to handle stress-inducing situations. Lena states,

We were just able to talk about problems that may or may not have to deal with school. Like someone was talking about their roommate problems … like everybody’s been through that, at least in some sort of aspect so we were all able to kind of give advice.

Lena expressed how the structure of the program and the check-in period allowed the students the opportunity to learn from each other and the instructor about how to use mindfulness practices when facing stressors:

So, just meeting the new people was really great and then learning to manage stress of course was what, you know, the original reason I joined… So it was learning from an instructor and from other students doing the same thing.

The facilitator described acceptance in a way so that the students understood that acceptance is not passive resignation. She used examples like Rogers and Maytan's (2012) explanation: "acceptance is a very active state of seeing clearly the reality of each moment, then from this place of clear understanding, acting wisely" (p. 32). The researcher posed a question during the focus group meeting: "Describe a stressful situation and how you deal with it now that you have these tools." A student responded by talking about how the facilitator described acceptance: "I think talking about it is what it is, and I have no control over that feels so much better." Two other students said yes in agreement with that statement. Another student, Paris,
wrote in her gratitude journal "Accepting people for who they are" as one of the two things she was thankful for that day. Students read about acceptance and nonjudgment.

Nonjudgment means attending with curiosity and openness without automatic preconceptions of something being good or bad, right or wrong (Rogers, 2016, p. 16). The mindful mindset encourages students to focus on the present moment, nonjudgmentally. A reminder of the definition by Dr. Kabat-Zinn (1994) used most often to describe mindfulness is "paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally" (p. 4).

Participants experienced a sense of ease and comfort with other group members and the setting. During the first lesson, students learned what it means to use their diaphragms to breathe deeply. Students were asked to place their hands on their bellies and to notice the movement of their bellies in and out with each breath. Next, the facilitator taught a very active form of meditation called dynamic breathing. Dynamic breathing is a standing practice. The facilitator explained and then modeled each step. The full practice requires breathing quickly and deeply through the nose while moving the arms, which are bent, up and down, resembling a bird flapping its wings, while simultaneously bending the knees on the exhale and standing up on the inhale. This practice brought self-conscious giggles as students learned it. Everyone was learning this skill and others for the first time. Everyone knew the others were starting at the same point. It was not like learning a sport or musical instrument. There was no kinesthetic, rhythmic, mathematical, or interpersonal talent required, just an open mind because there was for most practices no visible evidence of ability.

I observed the group during the entire process, from recruitment, to workshop, to focus group, and through the last interview. Participating during the workshop sessions helped
establish rapport between the researcher and the participants. The week after the workshop, I held a focus group at the same time as the established workshop time and in the same location.

The focus group questions are in Appendix E. The focus group allowed me to gather insights from the group. There were some limitations to this format of data collection. Not every participant shared their opinion during the focus group. The time constraints also played a role in gathering data during the focus group. Although the focus group provided volumes of data, I sought to capture each individual voice to understand the experience through the participants’ lens sufficiently. The focus group conversation provided a segue into the interviews.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted after the focus group. It took several weeks to interview each participant. The interviews were transcribed after the meetings, and coding began after the transcription. The interview questions are in Appendix F. The questions during the interview were different from the focus group to highlight each individuals’ perception of the experience further.

The codes were categorized based on the research questions to aid with analysis. This categorization led to the development of themes. See Table 4 below for an example.
Table 4

*Initial Codes, Category, Themes*

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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Category Coping</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Primary Code: Benefits of Mindfulness Practice (BMP)</td>
<td>Experienced reduced anxiety and were able to find a sense of calm</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMP -Relaxing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMP – Calming</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased internal moderation of stress and challenging emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMP – Improved Sleep</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BMP – Deal with Stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Code: Perception of Change (POC)</td>
<td>Mindfulness practices were relaxing and calming</td>
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<tr>
<td>POC - Coping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

*Note. This table illustrates how codes were grouped into categories to help generate themes.*

The resulting themes are described in the summary of the research findings. Themes were delineated into three areas based on one of the research questions. The findings for each research question are summarized, and examples from the data are used to illustrate the themes.

**Findings Addressing Research Questions**

The primary research question was: What are Undergraduate Students’ Perceptions of and Experiences with a Mindfulness-based Intervention?

The theme that arose from the data is that students enjoyed learning that stopping for 10 minutes can change the rest of your day. The theme is based on the data from the interviews and focus group that align with the theoretical foundation of this study. This theme is built on the data that shows students enjoyed learning mindfulness practices, and the practices improved focus, patience, and life skills.
**Theme One: Enjoyed Learning That Stopping for 10 Minutes Can Change the Rest of Your Day**

The theme identified through inductive coding was that students enjoyed learning mindfulness and meditation practices because they experienced improvements in patience, focus, life skills, and personal resources related to a sense of mastery. This theme is composed of subthemes which address several items students reported: 1) Students enjoyed learning the mindfulness and meditation skills. 2) Most participants were not familiar with the skills taught. 3) Mindfulness training improved concentration and focus. 4) Academic engagement increased. 5) The students reported improvements in their patience and empathy towards others 6) and improvements in their problem solving and prioritizing skills. 7) Students discussed noticing and experiencing more happy moments. Table 5 below contains the frequency of the theme components for the primary research question.
Table 5

*Frequency of Theme Components for the Primary Research Question*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Number of survey responses addressing this theme</th>
<th>Number of interviewees mentioning this theme/# of references</th>
<th>Total quotes related to the theme</th>
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<td>Students enjoyed learning the mindfulness and meditation skills</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most participants were not familiar with the skills taught</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6/13</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mindfulness training improved concentration and focus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6/10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic engagement increased</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness training improved students’ patience and empathy towards others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2/5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness training improved students’ problem solving and prioritizing skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants report improved happiness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6/11</td>
<td>15</td>
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</table>

*Note.* This table illustrates the occurrence of themes.

During the focus group, Hannah shared, "I think something else that I learned was that just stopping for 10 minutes can change the rest of your day." Hannah meant that stopping her usual activities and taking time just to be, to practice the meditation skills for ten minutes, had a positive impact on her daily experiences. She elaborated about how her mind can race in response to the overwhelming daily to-do list. She takes time to meditate, and this practice calms her and eliminates her rumination. Afterward, Hannah experiences clarity:

> Because you can go into overdrive just with everything that you have to do that day, homework, meetings, tests, studying. If you just take 10 minutes just to stop, sit down, relax, meditate. Just let all your thoughts just calm down. Then open your eyes and then it's just like you have a whole new outlook. Like you know what you need to do, what you should do, what can wait. Then you can just get more organized, so you feel less stressed.
**Students enjoyed learning the mindfulness and meditation skills.** One of the most frequently occurring ideas for the primary research question was that students enjoyed learning about the different kinds of mindfulness and meditations. One aspect of this idea was often reported on the intake survey that they had not meditated previously or had little to no experience. The idea was mentioned nine times in six interviews and once each by the five survey respondents. During the focus group, one student noted that people are surprised to learn that someone can practice mindfulness while walking, and she noted:

> Like we have walking meditation, you can do it just walking, and like eating dinner. It's just little things like that, and a lot of people don't realize that it's as simple as that. Like you don't have to like pull out your candle and sit on the ground, there are little ways to meditate and big impacts.

Students enjoyed learning that there are different types of meditation or means of cultivating certain brain states. Students’ enjoyment with learning the practices is important because students have multiple options for how they spend their time. The MBI training must be engaging in order to maintain the students’ interest long enough for them to gain something valuable from the four weeks and many hours devoted to the practices. This theme supports the idea that students are willing to participate in a four-week training that required additional time commitments devoted to mindfulness and meditation practices.

This notion was mentioned frequently by participants. Davisha said, "I was really engaged in it. I enjoyed the process." Hannah said, "I liked doing it. I really like it. It was awesome." Josephine said, "I wanna say it's life-changing."

**Most of the participants were not familiar with the skills taught.** Mindfulness meditation is one way to develop a state that is on purpose, non-judgmental, and in the present
moment. Most workshop participants had very little experience with meditation practices. The novelty of the practice was mentioned 13 times in six interviews and once in the survey. This was in response to the question "Have you had any previous experience of meditation, yoga or mindful movement?" All participants noted that they were not familiar with some or any of the mindfulness meditation and other practices that were taught. This was supported by analyzing if someone reported learning a new meditation skill in one of the sessions, during the interview, in their log, or during the focus group. Lena shared: "I dunno. I guess one of the major things that surprised me was that you aren't supposed to stop your thoughts, you're just supposed to slow them enough to understand them." The workshop taught new meditation and related skills each week. Each week students were asked to practice the new skill and utilize the meditation practice they most preferred.

Kelsey explained:

I think what stands out to me is different types of meditation that you can do. I think that's really awesome because like when I first came into it, I thought there was one type of meditation and I was like I don't know, I don't know if I can just sit there and just be in my thoughts and not have my thoughts going through my mind, because it's really hard for me because I always am going, I'm a fast pace person and I constantly have things going through my mind.

To further illustrate that students were learning new skills is a statement by one student. Hope said “I tried different meditations. I kind of knew which ones really worked for me and which didn’t kind of immediately. But, I wanted to keep trying some of the other ones, you know, to be sure.”
**Improved concentration and focus.** The participants noted that the practices helped to improve their concentration and focus. The idea was mentioned 10 times in six interviews and once in the survey. Kelsey stated in her journal about her meditation, "I was more relaxed. I felt really focused," and others mentioned something about focus during the interview or on their survey response.

As an example of this theme, Davisha shared:

Oh, after I'd meditate, my concentration was like, amazing. Because I'd be sitting there at the computer and be like, oh I'm bored, I can't do this. I'd be like; I'll take a five-minute break. That, that never happened! It's never a five-minute break. But after I'd meditate for those ten minutes, I'd be like, okay that was my break, and I could go back to working. And I would. And I would finish most of my work for the day that I had in mind. So that was good.

**Increased academic engagement.** Paris shared how the training impacted her alertness and concentration in class:

You know, so I will speak more, and yeah, that was pretty much it. I would just speak more and participate more…And be more alert. Yeah, like I wouldn't like my mind wouldn't go wandering somewhere else, or I wouldn't be urged to like pull out my phone and get on social media. I was just more alert.

Hannah shared how she learned to cope with challenging classroom situations:

I do remember one time whenever I was in biology, I just randomly was thinking like 'I'm not really liking my biology class at all' and then I was like 'wait, we talked about this: don't see anything as negative or positive, just this is how it is right now, and just see it as not positive or negative, it just is.' So, that was kinda cool, cause I was like 'I'm saying it's
bad but it's really not. I'm sitting in a comfy chair just listening to someone talk. It's not like I'm dying or anything. I'm just there and I'm learning, and in an hour I'll be back in my room, doing whatever.

The students reported improvements in their patience and empathy towards others. The first response to the initial focus group question, "What was the most important part of the workshop?" was "Patience." Patience was mentioned five times in two interviews and twice in the survey responses. Lena made that comment, and several others chimed in with their agreement. When Kelsey described what patience meant to her, Lena thanked her for the explanation. One survey respondent wrote, "I am more patient with myself and others." In the interviews, Hope said, "I don't know. Yeah, I tend to just be a more patient person, I guess, so I don't know, I haven't really thought about it, but. I guess I just can't think of an instance necessarily." In one interview exchange, the researcher follows up with, "And you've gotten more patient?" Josephine responds, "Yeah… I don’t try to rip anybody’s head off now.” Kelsey stated, “And another goal was learning to be patient and learning to find solutions to the problems, and I think that I found a solution for that too, a solution to the problem.” Leigh exemplified this theme by sharing:

So, it's helping you with normal daily… And to take some of the stuff... condense my to-do list a little bit instead of stretching myself out. I'm able to compartmentalize some of those things so that the list doesn't seem so long, and it doesn't look like I'm trying to fit everything in or trying to please everybody by trying to squeeze in time to hang out with this person or trying to help this person with something.

Improvements in their problem solving and prioritizing skills. This improved state of mind led to improved problem solving and prioritizing skills for the MBI participants.
Lena applied this mindful perspective to other aspects of her life:

I think so, cause this helps just with patience, like I, because I was just so stressed out about everything I wasn’t willing to understand why people were acting the way they do, but now that I’ve calmed down and I can work through my problems, like they’re probably that way because of what I was going through that they’re stressed about something but they can’t figure out what it is so they just get upset and they lash out so like, okay, I understand you. I understand what’s wrong but you need (the MBI) to help you… Find your Zen… Yeah, just for the same reason, everybody’s stressed out about that it’s just not everybody has found a way to calm their mind, to figure out a way to help themselves, they just get upset over it.

Hannah shared: "Whenever I have really big workloads, usually I have this whole really big pile of stuff on my desk of what I need to do, and before I, like, try to conquer the beast, I meditate first, kinda like sort out everything, try to turn that into a list of things I need to do over the course of the amount of time I have set up. Not do everything at once."

**Participants report improved happiness.** Several students mentioned the idea that mindfulness-based training improved happiness in interviews and some survey responses. For example, Kelsey stated:

So, like being happy is like a goal for me. It necessarily shouldn’t be a goal. It should just be a mindset. Like, I should just be like "Yeah, I'm happy." And I think though when you're a college student, and you have a lot of stressors, finding that happiness every day can be difficult when you have stressors. Because you're like how can I be happy when I have this stressor? But I think after meditation I realized like I can be happy and have stressors. Because I can't change some of those stressors or I just have to deal with those
stressors, and I just have to do whatever I need to do to relieve that stress. But I can be a happy individual. That's a mood to me. That's not an emotion like that's a mood. Being happy with yourself and your mind and your body and like with yourself in general. I feel like a lot of women aren't happy with their selves. I just feel like that's always been a stereotype, umm, just because of certain things that go on.

Ann declared:

Yeah definitely. I always say that, again, I'm more focused on being happy as I am. I mean, which is really big. I feel like I've always been happy with who I am, but just the things that make me happy are okay because they make me happy. I've got to be kind about that. So, I feel like I've grown a lot just in the last year and just recognizing that I've grown and I'm like, 'that's okay,' and the things that change and some things don't change. So, I feel like I definitely have a better understanding of who I am and what I like to do.

Occasionally, students mentioned that the benefits they noticed from practicing made them happy. Josephine shared:

And I was like, all right you need to calm down and I noticed. I have Tourette's so I squeak and make noises, so I notice when that starts acting up, and I start meditating. I'm good. Like it starts to calm down and yeah, I'm very happy about that.

Although some participants noticed that the MBI helped them to experience happiness, not all of them felt that way. One shared that her happiness set point was pretty high and had not changed during the four weeks.

Mindfulness and meditation practices helped students remember to do the things that made them happy. According to Josephine: "So, and just being able to go back out in nature and be like this is my happy place." The participants were asked to write down two things they were
grateful for as another practice during the MBI, and Hope shared: "And, the gratitude, that's just
great in general. It's a great way to, you know, make you just happier." Hannah shared: "It's like
you have a destination, and you know what you're doing, so that makes everything more relaxed,
and it can make you feel happier."

**Summary of thoughts concerning the primary research question.** After conducting
the study and in-depth review of data, the research revealed that students perceive benefits from
participating in an MBI. The findings included: improved patience and empathy, improved
concentration and focus, improved problem solving and prioritizing skills, increased academic
engagement, and, fortunately, the students enjoyed learning new mindfulness and meditation
practices. It was nice to see friendly behavior and bonds forming between the students as the
MBI progressed. Students were kind to each other as they interacted. They were curious and
enjoyed learning from one another. When one person spoke about a personal situation, many
nodded in agreement and supported that statement with an example of their own. They seemed to
be working together as a cohesive team to learn these new skills.

**Research Sub-Questions**

The goal of this project was to gather and present data from the individual's perspective
about an MBI in a college campus setting. The researcher wanted to ascertain if an MBI was
feasible and worthwhile. Students face quite a bit of stress from a variety of sources, as noted in
the intake survey results, and the researcher wanted to know if an MBI would help them navigate
stressful situations more skillfully. To investigate this, the researcher created secondary research
questions. The first research sub-question was: “Are students' coping resources changed after
participating in a mindfulness-based intervention?" Theme two is related to the first sub-
question. The second research sub-question was: "Do students perceive a change in mastery, self-
esteem, or social resources due to the skills learned from the mindfulness-based intervention?"

Themes three through five are related to the second research sub-question.

**Theme Two: Being Aware of and Appreciating Each Moment is Calming and Reduces Stress**

The primary ideas related to the first research sub-question are summarized in this section. The theme identified through inductive coding was that being aware of and appreciating each moment is calming and reduces stress. The primary subthemes of this theme were that students who participated in the MBI noticed they felt reduced stress, experienced reduced anxiety and were able to find a sense of calm. Students experienced increased internal moderation of stress and challenging emotions and that mindfulness practices were relaxing and calming.

**Mindfulness-based training helped students reduce stress.** That mindfulness-based training helped students to reduce stress was mentioned frequently in all interviews and most survey responses. Mindfulness-based training helping students reduce stress was mentioned 27 times in nine interviews and 12 survey responses. In the focus group, one student commented: "I just like stop and think to myself and I tell myself, like I just kind of like give myself a mini pep talk in a way." Another student agreed and added, "And it also helps you with like being aware of the moment and appreciating each moment, definitely." During the interviews, Davisha explained:

I would say that instead of thinking about what’s stressing you out, you kind of, you acknowledge it and you kind of let it go. You’re like okay, well, we’ll get back to it but as of now I’m in the present I don’t need to be so concerned about it. I’ll do it later, but not
like later later. As soon as I’m done, I’ll focus on it, but I won't be as stressed about it. I'll be like, okay, I'm more confident that I can do this, I can get through this.

Paris shared:

And you could still have some stress with handling a stressful situation after. But it's like, you have less stress cause like you're practicing something. So like, you can have a bunch of stress and then the longer or, the more you go along, the less stress you have because you're releasing it with the meditation. So just like, if you're holding ten books, like ten books is the amount of stress you have, and as you walk along a path, you drop each book. Each book is decreasing your stress, as you meditate, like as you go along. Does that make sense?

In another example of this theme, Leigh indicated:

So I get stressed out really easily, but this really helped me just like kind of pull myself back and calm those nerves down to really gain control of that anxiety. It really helped me in the last couple of months. I was just trying to get through the very stressful weeks of graduating. It was really helpful for me.

Five students responded to the survey question, "How have your resources to deal with stress changed as a result of the Koru workshop?" with examples. For instance, one student responded: "They have changed drastically. I would either lash out or go to sleep and pretend I didn't deal with stress, which ultimately would cause me to feel sick. I feel as if I am able to face stress head on."

Mindfulness-based training helped students reduce anxiety and find a sense of calm. Students would use the word anxiety to refer to how they were feeling. Most students mentioned something about how the MBI helped with anxiety. Mindfulness-based training helping students
to reduce anxiety was mentioned 19 times in six interviews and in three survey responses. Lena shared:

I think it’s really helpful. With the panic attacks I know, I think we did, some kind of study at some point that said like 60% of college students end up, you know identifying with some kind of anxiety or panic disorder. So I think if more students had this available to them, then that would just calm them down cause it would give them the, okay had a couple of bad experiences but I'm still in control of what's gonna happen from here on out instead of just feeling like they lost control of everything. I feel like, I feel like this would help them because it would stop the racing thoughts that everybody has.

Leigh stated:

I noticed that it made me take a second. Like it helped me like take a minute and actually calm myself down, relax and focus on what I'm doing, stuff like that, like when I get a little bit too worked up because I have a lot of anxiety.

Ann shared:

I don't know. I think it was just maybe I started noticing things in my life that were a little bit easier, situations that were easier to control. I actually have anxiety really bad, and so I have a lot of panic attacks and stuff like that. So it's kind of a way to like not get me out of one but prevent them from happening. So I noticed that it was just an easier way to calm myself or think of other things or just realize that things are just a thought. That was like really big for me. That really resonated that like what you're worried about isn't anything to worry about. It's just a thought. Like the things that are happening are happening, whether you worry or not.

Hannah explained:
For me, I get stressed pretty easily, and I can get pretty worked up. So, whenever I noticed that I was starting to get too stressed like my mind was just racing and I couldn't focus on anything, I'd be like, Wait, I know how to deal with this now. Then I'd stop and just pick a meditation that I liked and just sit down and just do it. And then afterwards, my thoughts had slowed down, and I could actually figure out what I needed to get done.

It was really nice.

And Josephine offered:

And I was like, alright you need to calm down and I noticed. I have Tourette's so I squeak and make noises, so I notice when that starts acting up, and I start meditating. I'm good. Like it starts to calm down and yeah, I'm very happy about that." The interviewer asked if she had ever been taught skills to help with her Tourette's, and Josephine responded, "No. I was only ever offered meds, and I don't wanna take them. But, I found something (mindfulness meditation) that works, so, it’s awesome.

**Mindfulness-based training increased students' internal buffering of stress and emotions.** Another idea many participants expressed was their ability to increase their conscious awareness of an emotion they were experiencing in the present moment before they responded habitually to that emotion. They were able to increase the space and skillfully choose a response instead of just reacting to the stimulus. They cultivated adaptive behaviors based on a variety of situations. They learned to assign meaning to events purposefully. For instance, Lena responded in the interview:

I can work through my racing thoughts easier than I used to be able to. Instead of just being able, whenever someone asked me “Oh, what’s wrong?”, instead of being like “Oh
my gosh, everything’s wrong” it’s just I can pick out this one thing right now is what’s wrong.

During the focus group, two students described the typical thought process that might go along when someone does not respond immediately to your text message and how meditation changed that process.

Student 1: Umm, I forget what it's called, but like say for example, like you gave an example like if you text someone and then like they don't text you back immediately, and you're like oh my gosh, what are they doing.

Student 2: Right, your mind goes crazy thinking about all the what ifs?

Student 1: So, that one, yeah.

Researcher: Okay. So you feel more comfortable with yourself? How could I say this?

Student 1: No, I noticed that like I would jump to conclusions, or like, you know because I didn't get a response right away.

Researcher: Hmm. Okay, right. So now you notice that and you’re like…

Student 1: It’s okay to just wait.

Mindfulness-based training was relaxing and calming. Several students mentioned in their interviews that mindfulness-based training was relaxing and calming. Davisha stated, "Well I'd start out reading it (the gatha), and then I'd kind of hone into not saying it and be like okay, I'm just breathing in and out, and it was really relaxing." Similarly, Paris indicated:

I just feel like cause, from like I was able to meditate, that it kept me calm and relaxed enough where I wasn't as stressed, and then from doing that and feeling that way, I felt like I had more time to accomplish all of my activities for that day.

Hannah had this to say:
I'd say yeah, probably, because instead of being stressed or worried, I'm more relaxed and
calm and like, I know what I'm doing, so that makes me feel more relaxed and happy that
I'm not just in like a spinning vortex of all of the stressful things that I have to do.

**Summary.** The most frequently occurring theme for Sub-Research Question 1 was that
mindfulness-based training helped students be aware of and appreciate each moment. Students
felt that this practice of awareness could be calming and reduce stress and anxiety. The
mindfulness-based training increased students' internal moderation of stress and distressing
emotions. Students learned that by taking a minute, they could calm themselves, slow down
racing thoughts, and feel more in control of themselves in different situations. They learned to
recognize thoughts as just thoughts.

**Theme Three: Let It Go, Because It Is What It Is**

The primary ideas related to the next three themes and the second research sub-question
are summarized in this section. Research sub-question two: Research sub-question two has three
associated themes: 1) Let it go because it is what it is, 2) It was like insight for me, and 3) 
Experienced something different.

The first theme for this research sub-question identified through inductive coding was
“let it go because it is what it is,” characterized by these subthemes: (a) increase optimism, (b)
increase gratitude and compassion, (c) adopt a growth mindset, and (d) accept and let it go
because it is what it is.

**Increased optimism.** The most frequently occurring subtheme related to the mastery
aspect of Sub-Research Question Two was that the mindfulness-based intervention increased
optimism. All seven interviewees mentioned increased optimism a total of 23 times. Davisha
said, "It's just going back to really, about what I said about my previous mindset about being
more skeptical and kind of pessimistic about things. Now it's the opposite…I see myself in a much brighter light than what I did." Kelsey explained: “Yeah, so it's a really good feeling. It's not a good feeling being frustrated about something, but finding a solution in the end and realizing it's going to be okay.” Paris simply stated, “Yeah and then also, felt that I was more positive.”

**Experienced increased gratitude and/or compassion.** Along with optimism came the feeling of gratitude. Regarding gratitude journaling, Davisha explained:

I liked the, what was it, two things that I enjoy? (gratitude journaling) I liked that part, cause most things you think of as oh, they're insignificant or whatever, but when you write them down or type them into your phone you're like, yeah, I really like this thing that I'm writing down. It may be like, well why does she like that.

In another example of this theme, Hope said, "And, the gratitude, that's just great in general. It's a great way to, you know, make you just happier, so…. And it’s something that is just so easy to forget to do."

**Students adopt a growth mindset.** In addition to optimism and gratitude was another change in mindset. For example, Davisha mentioned:

I would say I have a more positive outlook on things. I would say that. I wouldn't say I was depressed, but I had a very negative viewpoint of how things would go. Like for a test, I'd be like, gonna fail that. Yep. Like, I would pass in the end, but it would be like, oh okay I pass. But now it's just like I know I'm gonna do this. I can study because I'm able to focus. So I'm able to put the focus into oh, I'm studying so I am going to pass this test. Rather than me sitting there studying saying oh, I'm going to fail this why am I studying.
Lena explained the growth mindset this way:

Well, like last year, I suffered from a concussion. Before that, I used to be able to just study for 2-3 hours straight, and I would be fine like I would absorb everything. But after that, like with the headaches and everything that came along with it, I couldn't learn that way anymore. It took me a long time to realize that, so I would just get frustrated. I learned how to deal with it last year. But, coming back to school, the semester just kinda started all over again cause it was frustrating that I couldn't do it. So this just kinda helped with if I'm doing homework. I'm finding that I still can't do as much as I used to at one point in time. But, if I just take a couple of minutes to just sit there and okay, I can't judge myself, this isn't my fault. It's not like this isn't actually gonna hurt me, I just have to learn to take things slower. So it was helpful just to learn you can't judge yourself while doing your schoolwork cause that's just not gonna help… And then, going along with the failing test, at first you're freaking out cause oh my gosh this is gonna ruin my life. But after 5-10 minutes of just calming down and not thinking about it, you're like okay, one bad test score probably isn't actually gonna hurt me that much. A lot of people including me before this, if I got one bad test store, oh it's not even worth studying for the other one cause obviously my way of studying isn't gonna work anyway. But once again, you kind of separate those two instances. My failure on this test doesn't really affect how I'm gonna do on this next test. It's different material. I have more time to fix it. I can analyze what I did wrong last time. Just, you can section them off. It's not just one big problem. You have to section them off into different problems and then deal with them separately.
Students learned to accept present reality and let go of wishing for something different because it is what it is. These changes in mastery also included increased serenity or acceptance. Students learned how to “let it go” and understand reality as “it is what it is.” For example, Josephine mentioned:

Like they (thoughts), come and be like okay, this is sad or something and then just let it go, so that helps me a lot… Just being able to calm down and okay, here goes this thought and it can go away, and I don't, normally I would get mad at myself and be like stop thinking, but now I'm like okay, it's a thought, it's over and done with, it can go.

Theme Four: It Was Like an Insight for Me

The fourth theme identified through inductive coding was that “it was like insight for me.” This theme, related to changes in self-esteem, is comprised of the following subthemes: (a) mindfulness-based training improved self-knowledge and emotional intelligence, and (b) mindfulness-based training improved self-efficacy.

Mindfulness-based training improved self-knowledge and emotional intelligence. Mindfulness-based training improved self-knowledge, and emotional intelligence was mentioned frequently by most participants. For example, Hope explained:

I would say probably the biggest thing that I've learned from this whole thing is just to be more self-aware. Like I was saying like listening to my body more and just reflecting on how I'm feeling more. So that's the biggest thing, just being more self-aware now.

Lena expressed the following about her ability to more clearly understand and relate to her racing thoughts:

Yeah, I mean it made it easier to kind of understand what I was asking for. Because if I just knew I was stressed out, I wanted help, but I can't tell you how I need help. I can't tell
you what's stressing me out I just know that something's wrong. So, to have you know, that 5-10 minutes of just not thinking about anything and then come back with a clear mind. I'm kinda able to pick out the major problem that I actually need to talk about. So... it's easier to ask for help when you take a couple of minutes to really understand what you need. I can work through my racing thoughts easier than I used to be able to. Instead of just being able, whenever someone asked me "Oh, what's wrong?", instead of being like “Oh my gosh, everything’s wrong” it’s just I can pick out this one thing right now is what’s wrong. You’re never gonna completely understand why you do what you do until you calm down and actually consciously attempt to decipher your thoughts.

Hannah illuminated more about how students in the MBI learned to pay attention through her development and reflection on her growth:

I liked the journaling, personally. It's kind of like when you have a book, and your teacher tells you to read it. It's like okay, you read the chapter, and you're done, and you throw it back in the corner. And the next day you forget what you read. Doing the journaling it made you do your meditation and think about your meditation, so you kind of feel like, okay, this affected me in this way. You can actually see how you were thinking before and after. Before, you were stressed about this, and afterward, you are, okay, now I am thinking about this in this way. So, you can actually see the difference and not just, okay, I did it.

In a final example of this idea about improvements in self-knowledge, Kelsey indicated being more self-aware of her emotions:

So that was nice too and writing down just how I felt, my emotions, I really liked that too because I sometimes have a hard time labeling my emotions, like differentiating between
emotions, like if I'm sad or if I'm just overwhelmed. So I think that helped too like, Today I felt really relaxed because, before, I felt overwhelmed with everything, so it helped too because I think, with the meditation, it helped identify what emotions I was feeling, not just being like, I was sad because I was overwhelmed. Like, no, I was overwhelmed, and I felt better because I didn't feel so overwhelmed because some of the stuff, I didn't need to be worrying about.

**Mindfulness-based training improved self-efficacy.** That mindfulness-based training improved self-efficacy was mentioned in many interviews and most questionnaires. Davisha shared that she was surprised that she completed the training because she might typically give up on something before seeing it through:

Well you told me about it, and I was like, okay, well let's try it, see how it goes, but I was like I'm not, I usually don't, I don't know how to put this. I'll do something, and then I'll stop it. And that's how I felt, that was gonna happen and I was like okay well, just in case, I'll tell him maybe that I'm not gonna be able to participate in it and fully complete it. But, I was able to complete it, and I was really surprised at that, so.

Hannah shared: “Since the program's ended, I'm using it more. When I do notice I'm stressed and then I use that kind of as my like 'start here,' instead of just staying stressed.”

Kelsey shared this about her improved confidence and sense of self-efficacy to respond to professors’ questions during class:

I'd feel like I really could intake a lot of the information and it was weird too because, when you say the answers, there is things that I would say in class that I was like, I didn't even know I knew that. I would just say it, and it was without thinking about it, which is a super weird thing.
Theme Five: Experienced Something Different

The fifth theme identified through inductive coding was that students experienced something different. The three subthemes related to the theme “experienced something different” were (a) built community, (b) improved understanding of others, and (c) improved relationships and making friends.

Students built community. The students expressed that they built community while participating in the mindfulness-based training. This captures the idea that the students did not know each other at the outset of the MBI but became familiar with and trusting of one another enough to share personal challenges and successes with the practices. Hope shared that, "It's wonderful to feel like I'm a part of something that has changed people's lives for the better." Another shared, "I will miss the feeling of community and support." And another stated,

I really enjoyed learning within a group setting. I felt like we created a very supportive community during our mindfulness journey. I didn't feel alone. More than anything, I liked the accountability. If I didn't have our group to keep me accountable, I likely would not have continued learning mindfulness practices after the first few practices.

Hope shared that the "group made us feel like we weren't alone in the journey." Hope explained in the interview:

Umm, well specifically I really enjoyed the feeling of community that our group provided, umm, I think we talked about that last night, that it made us feel like we weren't alone, in the journey, you know, it really helped. And for me, I'm someone, and I need accountability. Like I had those people to keep me on track with what we were doing. So, being able to share our experiences really, you know, it gave us thoughts on different things, like how to meditate in a different way than we hadn’t thought of, but it also let us
know that everyone else was struggling as well, you know. We weren’t alone in that…
that was the biggest thing for me, community support.

Josephine mentioned how wonderful it feels to be connected to people who accept you as
you are:

So, I think that was awesome that there was this little group of people kinda got to know
each other and it was just very non-judgmental, and yeah, I like it… I think just being
able to learn those practices and being in that little group.

**Improved understanding of others.** Hannah said, “I got to know some people who I see
now around campus, and we just wave to each other. That's nice.” This familiarity also improved
students’ understanding of others. This theme is somewhat related to the empathy and
compassion stated above. It is expressed in statements like this one by a participant: “As I said
eyearly, I have found that I am more open to starting conversations with strangers.”

Most students reported in the interviews, survey, and other data that the MBI improved
their understanding of others. Hope explained:

I think it's interesting because like you're learning more about yourself, but then I feel
like through doing that, you're learning more about other people and I guess the world,
you know what I mean?

Hannah suggested:

I know that we're all more similar than we think. People would say they are feeling this
and they are feeling that and you could kind of connect with everyone else: 'Yeah, I'm
feeling that, too.' So even though they might have a totally different life from you are
kind of on the same wave on how you are feeling.
**Improved relationships and making friends.** Related to improved understanding of others was the idea that students improved relationships and made friends. This theme is related to statements like, “I'm more open. I don't feel as if I have to hide my feelings anymore and that it is okay to show raw emotions.”

Kelsey said, “I think that helped too and like with patience as well and like just, I think it helps everything too. I don’t know I just. It helps all around… like with connections with people and relationships.” Paris also shared:

How I handled situations, like some things like that I would usually comment on like say if like me and my friends, were going through something or they were asking for my advice on the situation. Like some things that I thought were unnecessary I just wouldn't comment on or, yeah, just wouldn't take part on. And also, I found myself, like complimenting strangers and speaking to strangers.

Davisha responded:

It's nice. Better than holding onto those feelings of why is she mad at me or why is he mad at me or what did I do wrong? Rather than, yeah, it's better that way. I feel like I'm able to. I don't know how to put it in words but, be content with myself rather than be like, angry with everyone else, like, oh, okay, I see you.

**Summary**

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings on involvement in student groups. Students gain many benefits from participation in peer groups. One can surmise that based on the findings from this data, participation in an MBI is beneficial to student development, relatedness, community building, empathy, and friendship.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of undergraduate students in the state university consortium regarding their experience with a four-week mindfulness-based intervention (MBI).

In Chapter Five, I will analyze the findings from the seven interviews and the focus group against this study's theoretical framework. I will discuss the emergent themes from the data based on the research questions that guided this study. Implications for policy and practice in addition to recommendations for future research complete this chapter.

Students from a rural mid-Atlantic public university were recruited and purposely selected. Eight of ten undergraduate students completed the MBI, and I interviewed seven for this study. All the students who completed the MBI were women at different levels in their undergraduate career. An organization created the MBI at another university, and the facilitator was certified by that organization to teach the program following the manual.

The facilitator followed the manual and used the other resources provided by the organization to support the MBI. Students used the recommended textbook in addition to a program specific app. The app gave the participants access to demonstrations and instructions for the mindfulness and meditation skills taught during each session. The app also provided a timer for students to time their meditation practices. Students could use the app to submit their journal responses and the two things they were grateful for each day.

Participants met for 75 minutes at the same time for four weeks. Each session began with a five-minute meditation. The meditation was followed by a check-in period, during which each
participant was encouraged to share their experience with their meditation practices during the previous week. After each student spoke, the didactic portion of the session began. The facilitator would teach the new skills for the participants to practice. Students had the option to practice the new skills or one they preferred over the next week. Students were also encouraged to choose a daily activity to practice mindfully, like eating, brushing their teeth, or showering.

After the MBI, the participants met in the same location for the focus group. I conducted the focus group with the assistance of an experienced researcher and colleague from campus who teaches sociology. Students scheduled semi-structured interviews with me beginning after the focus group. The focus group and interviews were recorded and transcribed. Five participants completed the semi-structured questionnaire. A thematic analysis was used to evaluate the data. Member checking and triangulation were used to increase the trustworthiness of the results. Theoretical perspectives of habitus, the stress process model, symbolic interaction, and mindfulness provide a framework for this analysis.

A partial application of Bourdieu's theory of habitus is used in this research. Lareau (2003) describes habitus as "a set of internalized dispositions that operate in a large number of social spheres" (p. 276). These dispositions guide the behaviors of students in various situations and fields. Evidence shows that these dispositions are natural ways of acting in the world and systems comprised of “schemata or structures of perception, conception and action” (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 27 as cited in Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Habitus theory allows that it is possible to adopt new ways of being later in life outside of what students learned in the home (Cargile, 2011). Cargile (2011) argues that "the extent to which any two individuals operate within and across the same fields, they will develop similar habitus (p. 13)."
The stress process model (SPM) (Pearlin, 1989, 1999, 2010; Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981; Wheaton & Montazer, 2010) provides a framework to investigate the origins, mediators, and outcomes of stress in a social environment. The original SPM evaluates the essential resources of self-esteem, mastery, and social support (Elliot, 2014). This research investigates the impact of a mindfulness-based intervention on an individual's coping resources.

The theory of symbolic interaction provides a perspective on society from the perspective of the self in social interactions. Recent research by Fields and colleagues (2006) in this area suggests that emotions are shaped by culture as opposed to hard-wired innate responses. Fields agrees with the assertion by McCarthy (1989, p. 57) that feelings are "constituted and sustained by group processes" (as cited in Fields et al., 2006, p. 156). Additionally, research (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017; Thompson & Waltz, 2010) reminds us that it is crucial to understand that acceptance of emotions is utterly opposite to experiential avoidance. Pagis (2008) refers to this ability to experience clarity about present sensations as emotional autonomy. Furthermore, Pagis (2009) argues that meditation affords the practitioner the ability to develop self-awareness via an embodied self-reflexivity.

Kabat-Zinn (2003) provides an operational definition of mindfulness that is used widely: “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (p. 145). Students in this study were also made aware of Rogers’ (2016) conception of mindfulness, which is “the act of paying attention to your present-moment experience with an attitude of compassionate curiosity” (p. 12). Rogers (2016) also refers to mindfulness as “an approach to life that involved learning to
give the bulk of your attention to your present-moment experience, instead of wasting time worrying about the future or regretting the past” (p. 1).

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are undergraduate students’ perceptions of and experiences with a mindfulness-based intervention?
   a. Are students’ stress coping resources changed after participating in a mindfulness-based intervention?
   b. Do students perceive a change in mastery, self-esteem, or social resources due to the skills learned from the mindfulness-based intervention?

**Application to Theoretical Framework**

The image above, in Chapter One on page 12, (Figure 1) is a visual representation of the stress process examined in this study of undergraduate students who chose to participate in a mindfulness-based intervention. The presentation of the data in the previous chapter provided some background on the MBI participants’ social situation. The discussion below will illuminate connections to the literature presented in Chapter Two. The following discussion will continue from the presentation of the social structure data in the previous chapter to further describe students’ stressors, coping, and well-being outcomes, which were reported concerning the MBI. The information which follows will be presented in the order the students experienced the study from recruitment to interview.

Undergraduate students arrive at the university having learned and internalized a set of dispositions for operating in various settings. Students learn these dispositions from the social structure and culture they were raised in (Fields et al., 2006). They consider these operating rules
as normal. As students develop, they may learn new ways to operate and cope with stressors as they become more resilient (Fields et al., 2006).

**Summary of Key Findings**

Various themes and sub-themes surfaced as answers to each of the research questions posed for this investigation. The inquiry was informed by several methods including, survey, participant observation, focus groups, and the semi-structured interview questions. The following section provides findings from the research questions posited for this study, and the resultant themes that were uncovered through explication of the data. The implications for the utilization of mindfulness-based interventions for undergraduate students are addressed.

**Primary Research Question**

The primary research question was: What are undergraduate students’ perceptions of and experiences with a mindfulness-based intervention? There were several findings from the data related to this question.

The participants in the MBI enjoyed the experience of learning mindfulness and meditation skills and noticed differences in their day-to-day lives as a result of practicing these skills. The theme that arose from the data is that students enjoyed learning that stopping for 10 minutes can change the rest of your day. This theme is built upon the sub-themes that the students enjoyed learning the MBI material, that they were not familiar with MBI content, the practices improved concentration and focus, increased academic engagement, improved patience and empathy, improved problem solving and prioritizing, and that students noticed and experienced more happy moments. When we examine the literature about mindfulness and meditation practices, we see that research supports these findings (Rogers & Maytan, 2012).
Mindfulness-based training teaches students to develop qualities of mind that enable them to live more fully in the present (Rogers & Maytan, 2012).

Brown and Ryan (2003) describe awareness as the “background radar of consciousness and attention as a process of focusing conscious awareness” (p. 822). Brown and Ryan (2003) further state that “mindfulness can be considered an enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience” (p. 822). Students learn to be aware of when their minds wander (either into the past or future), and they can catch their wandering minds sooner, allowing them to concentrate and focus their attention more effectively on the matter at hand. One student said during the focus group, “...but now like I can take my days one by one and be like okay, well this is what I have to do today, I’m not going to worry about what’s to come tomorrow, but take it one step at a time, so being present in the moment."

Two students reported on the intake form and during the interview that they had some prior experience with mindfulness-based activities. None of them had incorporated these activities into their lives. One freshman, Hope, shared:

Yeah, I thought it was a new experience and I want to try new things when I'm at college. So I was excited to do this. This is a good thing to try, you know. It's not like other things you could be doing. You know what I mean. Like, it's a good way to spend your time.

Although the material was unfamiliar to the participants, the facilitator engaged and encouraged them so that they would continue learning the simple; yet difficult practices and find a way to make time to practice in their already hectic lives. The facilitator would respond to the students’ journal entries. Hope shared this about the facilitator and her responses to the journals:
She (Facilitator) was really great. And I really liked that she gave feedback. That’s one thing, kind of a side note. I really liked that she gave feedback on our journals. That was really nice. It was just a nice little thing to read. Like I looked forward to her comments.

Students appreciated and benefitted from the prompt and supportive attention received from the facilitator. The facilitator’s responsive, positive feedback likely generated motivation for the students to engage more fully in the novel mindfulness and meditation practices. The feedback also provided a structural means of social support that students could rely on. This likely built a sense of trust with the facilitator. Journaling helped in other ways. Daily journaling provided participants a way to reflect on the skill that they had recently learned. This process of reflection led to greater self-awareness. Hannah shared the following about how she appreciated the journaling process, as it helped her develop self-awareness:

Doing the journaling it made you do your meditation and think about your meditation, so you kind of feel like, okay, this affected me in this way. You can actually see how you were thinking before and after. Before you were stressed about this, and afterward you are, okay, now I am thinking about this this way. So you can actually see the difference and not just, okay, I did it.

Although the facilitator’s efforts and the structure of the MBI were beneficial, two freshmen students who began the MBI, one Caucasian female and one LatinX male, would not finish for personal reasons. These students did not return to school in the spring semester. Hannah shared this about learning mindfulness skills “With some people stopping just isn't the thing for them.” Mindfulness skills training is not suitable for everyone. Davisha was not sure about the program initially. She shared:
Well you told me about it and I was like, okay, well let’s trial it, see how it goes. But often I’ll do something and then I’ll stop it. And that’s how I felt, that was gonna happen. And I was like okay well, just in case, I’ll tell him maybe that I’m not gonna be able to participate in it and fully complete it.

Davisha decided to remain in the program because she noticed how the practices helped her to be aware of her thoughts, feel less stressed, and change some behaviors. The students who remained retained their inquisitiveness and learned "life-changing lessons" about how their mind works, how they are freed to choose, how to remain calm during a storm, how to find clarity in silence, and how to make good relationships with others. Josephine shared this when asked how she would describe the program to others:

I wanna say it’s life-changing… But I don't know if that's too like, broad of a statement… And, at least give it a try. Even if you're skeptical of it, like, just try it…You'll probably like it but I didn’t tell you so.

Academic engagement is related to the academic and social experiences that foster success in college (Soria and Stebleton, 2012). Students reported that they “will be more active in classes” and “I’ll be able to study harder and receive better grades.” Another response provided by Hope was:

Similar to classroom performance, it could only help. This past week, I had a massive calculus test to study for, so I was finding myself studying in the library for a couple hours every night that week. Even though that was no fun and I was dreading my test, I was able to say, "hey, it is what it is, I'm doing everything I can, so I will take it day by day." And I ended up getting an A on the test! So, I guess this training has allowed me to more readily accept my situation and be proactive and positive in dealing with it.
Rogers (2013) argues that mindfulness practice cultivates patience, which is the students’ capacity “to wait calmly in the face of frustration, adversity, or suffering” (Schnitker, 2012, p. 263). For instance, one student responded on the survey, “I am more patient with myself and others.” Learning to sit for ten or more minutes without anything to do helps students to learn patience. Students learn to have patience with themselves during the mild discomfort from sitting and directing their attention to a bodily sensation like their breath. Students then realize they can extend that patience to others.

Empathy, continuing the definition by Rogers (1961) found in Shapiro, Schwartz, and Bonner’s research (1998), is primarily “the capacity to understand, be sensitive to, and feel what another is feeling” (p. 582). The concept also includes the “ability to communicate this sensitivity to the person” (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998, p. 582). The focus of this investigation is the capacity to understand what the other is feeling. Students reported patience and empathy during the focus group and interviews as noted above.

Included in this theme was the idea that mindfulness training improved problem solving and prioritizing skills. Brown and Ryan (2003) demonstrate one facet of mindful awareness is that it leads to improved self-regulation. This type of awareness can facilitate students’ choice of behaviors that are consistent with their “needs, values, and interests” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 824). Research by Goldin and Gross (2010) also supports this finding. Goldin and Gross (2010) found that MBI subjects who learned to direct their attention reduced the fear and distressing emotions generated by the amygdala, and subjects displayed increased activity (through fMRI scans) in areas associated with executive control functions such as decision making and prioritizing. Improved self-regulation afforded students the opportunity to clearly see what they needed to attend to and plan accordingly instead of getting caught up in worry about their long
to-do lists and doing nothing as a result of the rumination. The improvement in self-regulation enabled students to overcome automatic unhelpful behaviors, such as procrastination and anxious thinking.

Happiness is related to psychological well-being. Psychological well-being can arise when a student possesses the resources to navigate stressful situations and not feel overwhelmed by depression or anxiety (Crowley & Munk, 2017). Crowley and Munk (2017) argue that students are likely to notice happiness when there is a lack of conflict or sense of peace.

Happiness can be measured as an emotional state of joy or as a cognition or reflection on a state of satisfaction (Argyle, 2013). This research is more concerned with the latter. The students were asked to journal about their meditation, their mindfulness activity, and two things for which they were grateful. The gratitude practice of writing down two things that they are thankful for helped students feel better about themselves. Josephine shared how the practice of gratitude made her feel happy “Yeah. Thinking about others makes me feel better.”

**Primary research question summary.** After conducting the study and in-depth review of data, the research revealed that students perceive benefits from participating in an MBI. The findings included: improved patience and empathy, improved concentration and focus, improved problem solving and prioritizing skills, increased academic engagement, and, fortunately, that the students enjoyed learning new mindfulness and meditation practices. It was nice to see friendly behavior and bonds forming between the students as the MBI progressed. Students were kind to each other as they interacted. They were curious and enjoyed learning from one another. When one person spoke about a personal situation, many nodded in agreement and supported that statement with an example of their own. They seemed to be working together as a cohesive team to learn these new skills. This group learning aspect was beneficial. Students learned more by
bouncing ideas about how to practice off of each other. Students felt more comfortable and were relieved that others shared similar struggles, stress, and anxiety. The ability to disclose about personal chaotic or positive events is associated with positive outcomes (Spera, Buhrfeind, & Pennebaker, 1994). This sharing of struggles may contrast with the positive images they are confronted with on social media.

**Research Sub-Questions**

There are two research sub-questions. The first research sub-question asks: “Are students' coping resources changed after participating in a mindfulness-based intervention?” Theme two is related to the first sub-question. Theme Two is “being aware of and appreciating each moment is calming and reduces stress.” The second research sub-question asks: "Do students perceive a change in mastery, self-esteem, or social resources due to the skills learned from the mindfulness-based intervention?" Themes three through five are related to the second research sub-question.

**Research Sub-Question One**

The stress process model (Pearlin, 1989, 1999, 2010; Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981; Wheaton & Montazer, 2010) provides a framework to investigate the origins, mediators, and outcomes of stress in a social environment. This research investigates the impact of a mindfulness-based intervention on an individual's coping resources. The findings related to coping discussed in Chapter Four included the theme two “being aware of and appreciating each moment is calming and reduces stress.” The primary subthemes of this theme were that students who participated in the MBI noticed they experienced reduced anxiety and were able to find a sense of calm. Students experienced increased internal moderation of stress and challenging emotions and that mindfulness practices were relaxing and calming.
What follows is an analysis using a partial application of the stress process model (SPM). The SPM provides a way to examine the relationship of students to the stressors in their environment and outcomes based on personal and social resources an individual can utilize to cope with those stressors. Hannah described how she knows that she is stressed below:

I just get antsy, and I think about everything all at once… I've always over-thought quite a lot…. It's easier for me (now) to identify when I'm getting super-stressed and knowing what to do when I am. Before (the MBI), whenever I realized that I was stressed, I was like, 'Okay, I'm stressed; let's just stress some more.'

Stress is the perception that a situation or event exceeds coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Students face multiple stressors while attending the university (Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999). Stressors arise in the environment in many forms. Students face academic rigor of tests and papers, social oppression such as micro-aggressions, relationships, financial struggles, transition to college and transition to life after college, and others (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011). Davisha faced challenging issues with her roommate. In the interview, Davisha said, “I’d say my roommate, she was a real stressor but it was kind of like, I’ll let it go.”

Lena describes some of the stressors college students face:

…every college student has moments of complete insanity ‘cause they don’t know what’s gonna happen in their life… So if I do horribly in one class, then they’re all gonna go down the drain and it’s gonna be terrible but, and then you have like, lectures that are going on like outside these, ones that’ll tell you all about graduate school, and why you should go to med school and why you should do this and why you should have a minor in some language that you probably never gonna speak but it’s gonna help you later ‘cause
it’s gonna help you get a job…Just there’s so many options out there, that it kinda
stresses me out to what will actually help me get a job in the future and what’s just gonna
be wasting my time because they’re not gonna care that I did this or not… So I think that,
yeah, just having so much thrown at you in school. Even though it’s great to have so
many options, having so many options is also kinda overwhelming.

Bamber and Schneider (2016) report that students who do not deal with stress effectively
will feel anxiety. Although students may use the term anxiety often, researchers have defined it.
"Anxiety is an ambiguous feeling that is worsened when a person experiences extended,
unresolved stress or multiple stressors" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, as cited in Bamber &
Schneider, 2016, p. 2). Students address those stressors by coping.

Coping is an active process that excludes “habitual or automatic adjustments to the
requirements of daily life” (Thoits, 1986, p. 417). People cope with stress by using cognitive and
behavioral efforts to manage the demands of stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Students
choose a strategy based on the resources they have available to cope with the situation. When the
strategies and resources are sufficient, students withstand the interpersonal difficulties with
positive wellbeing outcomes (Palmer & Rodger, 2009). When the resources or strategies are not
enough, the outcomes are detrimental to wellbeing.

Students were able to increase their ability to be more conscious of an emotion they were
experiencing in the present moment before they responded habitually to the emotion. This
internal moderation arises from increased internal state awareness or "sensitivity to ongoing
investigation describes how people learn how to respond to various emotions from their
experiences at home, their parents, and close environments.
Breathing skills (deep breathing or diaphragmatic breathing) are taught in the first session specifically to calm anxious minds and bodies (Rogers, 2013). Shapiro, Schwartz, and Bonner (1998) note that mindfulness meditation can bring about physiological relaxation. Relaxation is characterized by a sense of low tension or a generalized decreased sympathetic nervous system arousal (Benson, Beary, & Carol, 1974). There is a lack of arousal due to anger, fear, or anxiety (Benson, Beary, & Carol, 1974). Hannah described employing this new-found awareness of the power of breathing in the following manner:

For me, I get stressed pretty easily and I can get pretty worked up. So whenever I noticed that I was starting to get too stressed, like my mind was just racing and I couldn't focus on anything, I'd be like, 'Wait, I know how to deal with this now.' .. Then I'd stop and just pick a meditation that I liked and just sit down and just do it. And then afterwards my thoughts had slowed down and I could actually figure out what I needed to get done.

Hannah’s clarity and awareness of her emotional state reminded her to use the meditation skills she learned to calm herself once she realized she was stressed.

Ambrasat and colleagues (2016) regard habitus “as an individual-level pattern of meaning making” (p. 2). They extended the reasoning of Pickel (2005), who argues that habitus incorporates linkages between the cultural, social, psychological, and biological dimensions of reality. The habitus process is a sociocultural and mind-body system of patterns of perception, expression, and meaning making (Pickel, 2005). Similarly, Lehmann (2007) describes habitus as something that “creates dispositions to act, interpret experiences, and think in certain ways” (p. 92). Pickel (2005) argues that habitus is “generated by the system, emerging from joint activities of individuals” (p. 6).
These students acquired new ways of meaning making. They learned a new way of being, perceiving and expressing themselves in the world through the group process of this MBI. They learned these skills due to their social interactions throughout the MBI. The group helped to form new ways of being in the world. Although these new ways were not completely internalized in just four weeks, they operated in many social spheres like habitus. Students learned as Hannah noted during the focus group “that stopping to meditate for 10 minutes can change the rest of your day.”

Mindfulness allows a sort of "psychological freedom" (Martin, 1997, p. 291) from the grip of the habitus that generates behavior. Martin (1997) suggests that the act of being mindful and paying attention to sensations in the present moment, nonjudgmentally, allows a person the space where one's "habits of meaning, thought, behavior, or emotion are suspended, reconsidered” (p. 292). Students became aware of the ability to choose their behavior instead of just reacting to stimuli, adopting behavioral flexibility. The Simple Habit company shared a quote by Grace Edmunds on Instagram that alludes to these new ways of acting: "Awareness illuminates the possibility that you get to choose a different way of being" (retrieved 1 April, 2019). The mindfulness skills they learned helped them to be more self-aware. This newfound awareness and insight provided students a sense of emotional emancipation and access to the possibility of choosing their response to the stimulus in the environment (Lutz et al., 2008). Students applied new ways of being and behaving in the classroom, dorm room, with family (family room), and with strangers.

Josephine alluded to this awareness when I asked her during the interview to clarify what she thinks the definition of mindfulness is: “It’s kind of like digging deep into your soul a little
bit and bringing out the good. And just learning yourself better and knowing that everything will eventually be okay. It’s not just down the drain.”

Hannah thought of mindfulness this way: "I would say learning to just stop, breathe and be in the moment. Like kind of put your life on time out for a few minutes to just breathe."

Hanh (1976) describes mindfulness as "keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality" (p. 7). Hanh (1976) tells the story of a visit from a friend who wanted to help him wash dishes. Hanh tells him "there are two ways to wash the dishes" (p. 7). One way is to "wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes" (Hanh, 1976, p. 7). Another, less skillful way is to wash dishes while thinking of everything else on our to-do list or how someone upset us, just doing the dishes, but not aware of what we are doing at the time. Consider how this less skillful focus of your attention applies to other activities. For instance, when someone comes to your office to talk and you continue to type an email while only giving partial attention to hearing what they have to say and partial attention to the email. Mark, Williams, and Swales (2004, p. 316) inform us that the "danger of such an ‘automatic pilot’ mode is that old habits of thoughts may be triggered, and body sensations may be triggered, and escalate, without a person being aware of it” until the old behavior patterns occur, and the person has challenges dealing with the situation. In this case with the email, one might accidentally type a response in the email meant to be spoken to the person standing in the doorway.

With mindfulness, in Hannah’s situation above describing her racing mind, she was able to observe her internal experience and the external situation and not fall back into habitual behavior. Hannah was able to notice and not make an interpretation too quickly which might have led to more distress (Mark, Williams, & Swales, 2004). She was able to increase the space between the stimulus and the response. This increased space allowed Hannah to choose a
response, rather than react reflexively (Bishop, 2002; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, and Freedman (2006) refer to this “space” as a process of “reperceiving” (p. 377). Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, and Freedman (2006) describe reperceiving as a disidentification from one’s thoughts and feelings, allowing one to watch their “moment-by-moment experience with greater clarity and objectivity” (p. 377). Reperceiving is a “meta-mechanism of action” (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006, p. 377); reperceiving is said to overarch other direct mechanisms, such as self-regulation.

Another perspective on Hannah’s situation is that by learning mindfulness, she has enhanced her ability to adopt an adaptive coping style (e.g., reappraisal, active coping) while reducing her use of maladaptive coping styles (e.g., self-blaming, rumination, venting, distraction) (Keng & Tong, 2016). Garland et al. (2009) describe increasing the “space” as a mindful individual’s ability to shift focus from distressing emotions and thoughts, which helps broadening of attention and the ability to respond to stressful situations by generating positive appraisals. Keng and Tong (2016) argue that broadening of attention may “enable individuals to take proactive steps toward resolving a stressful situation” (p. 708), which is what Hannah did when she stopped and practiced a meditation in the moment of distress. This is aligned with the view of Hamilton, Kitzman, and Guyotte (2006), who suggest that mindfulness practice develops skills that lead to increased ability to construct realistic appraisals of stressors.

McLeod (2012) demonstrates that “all major conceptualizations of the stress process, including Pearlin’s, acknowledge that responses to stressors depend on their meanings to the person” (p. 173). McLeod (2012) reminds us of Thoits’ (2010) argument that identified meaning-focused coping as “re-framing the meaning or significance of a stressful situation in an attempt to reduce its emotional impact” (as cited in McLeod, 2012, p. 182). McLeod (2012) extends
symbolic interactionist principles and reasons that meaning construction is a social product central to the stress process. In this study, during the check-in process, students would describe to the group the situations they experienced over the past week in relation to the mindfulness practices they had learned. They could talk about their experience with the practices. Paris talked about two of her favorites: “Like I felt my muscles like release and like become untensed and then the imagery just took me to like a different place.”

The MBI participants gained insight and an improved sense of self-efficacy. Hannah shared: "For me, it really helped dealing with stress and learning the different things and actually being able to apply it to everyday life.” Lena describes during the interview how she has learned to handle stressors and panic attacks that arise near the end of the term in the following selection:

Now I can shorten the length of a panic attack by working through it by myself. This gives me a sense of accomplishment that I can do it without needing external medical help. Like I’m in control of my own life right now. I can handle it.

Hannah shared how previous coping strategies of avoiding were not as beneficial as practicing mindfulness meditation. With mindfulness, she was able to focus and do the work at hand instead of procrastinating. Hannah states,

I would say (mindfulness meditation practices) help a lot because I am a chronic over-thinker and stressor and procrastinator which just violent cycling but after I meditate, like I told you about, I can figure out everything in order. And a lot of times before, like cardio and stuff whenever I wasn't meditating, I'd always be like, I have this giant pile of work and it would be one of those do everything in order to avoid that giant pile of work. Like, hey, the dishes need cleaning or hey, let's me organize my closet from red to purple. Anything that seemed productive but wasn't what you were supposed to be doing, so I
would always be doing that stuff, just anything to avoid it but always looking at it out of the corner of my eye. And then, afterwards, like whenever I would meditate or beforehand, I'd be like, okay, I have this giant pile of work, I'm going to meditate and then I'm going to do it. Like no watching YouTube or Netflix or going to do something else. It's like I'm going to do this and this and then I'm going to go do my work.

These were examples of coping from the student’s perspective. Students shared during this investigation how they used these new mindfulness and meditation skills to cope with a challenging situation. Studies have shown that it is not just a particular life event or condition that predicts stress; the event is mediated through people’s perceptions in addition to the resources and actions people mobilize to diminish or avoid distress (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981). Palmer and Rodger (2009) found in their study that it is likely that mindfulness can increase someone’s ability to cope with stress and negative stress-provoking stimuli. The examples above illustrate some of the ways students’ coping resources changed due to their engagement with the MBI.

In Figure 1 above, stressors are moderated by coping, which entails using various coping strategies and resources, and in turn this leads to outcomes in well-being. The discussion above addresses the data on students' coping. The following section addresses sub-question two and also incorporates consideration of symbolic interaction theory.

**Research Sub-Question Two**

The following examples will address the final question, "Do students perceive a change in mastery, self-esteem, or social resources due to the skills learned from the mindfulness-based intervention?"
Mastery. The theme discussed in Chapter Four was “let it go because it is what it is.” This theme is comprised of increased optimism, increased gratitude or compassion, adopting a growth mindset, and a sense of acceptance based on being more present and mindful. These items comprise a sense of mastery, “a sense of control students feel they have over their lives” (Pioli, 2010, p. 603). What follows is analysis of the sentiment’s students expressed describing their efforts to cope with stressors they faced.

Students learned to be optimistic. Optimistic students believe that experiences will go the way the student hopes or expects (Scheier & Carver, 1985). The students were optimistic about their academic efforts. This optimism may have influenced the participants motivation and self-regulation regarding academic efforts. This optimism may have impacted their efficacy beliefs. Students’ efficacy is a similar construct defined by Bandura (1997) for this population. Efficacy requires Bandura (1997) provides the most widely cited definition of efficacy, which is students’ “beliefs in their capabilities to produce desired effects by their own actions” (p. vii). Bandura (1997) argues further that scholastic anxiety is best allayed by development of “self-regulatory skills for managing…self-debilitating thought patterns, and aversive affective states” (p. 236). Bandura (1997) asserts that efficacy incorporates self-regulation and also includes “social and motivational skills as well as cognitive ones” (p. 228). Both of these concepts are related to mastery as it is currently conceived. Pioli (2010) suggests that people with a sense of mastery “believe they can exercise control over the conditions of their lives and act accordingly” (p. 604). Davisha was able to develop a belief in her efficacy and noticed a transformation towards an optimistic perspective:

I went from pessimistic to positive outlook about many things, tests, life “I would say, I have a more positive outlook on things. I would say that. I wouldn’t say I was depressed
but I had a very negative viewpoint of how things would go. Like for a test, I’d be like, gonna fail that… Yep. Like, I would pass in the end but it would be like, oh okay I pass. But now it’s just like, I know I’m gonna do this. I can study because I’m able to focus so I’m able to put the focus into oh, I’m studying so I am going to pass this test. Rather than me sitting there studying saying oh, I’m going to fail this why am I studying and so passing the test.

Davisha developed this new way of behaving, and it was quite a contrast from her previous behavior. This perspective was possible because Davisha and other participants learned to recognize that they have the freedom and ability to direct their thoughts in a way that supports their growth, development, and achievement. Davisha developed the positive framed self-fulfilling prophecy aspect of mastery (Pioli, 2010). She also exhibited a new perspective of tests as less threatening of a stressor, which is characterized by those with a sense of mastery (Pioli, 2010).

Students were reminded of the positive feelings that come from being grateful and compassionate. Paris was reminded of taking time to be and do things that she had not done recently because she had been overwhelmed by the stressors of college. She shared:

And like, I gave a homeless guy an apple, like I just saw myself doing things that I didn’t do for a long period of time. Like I used to give like homeless guys money in high school and like, I stopped for a while and so… Just like acts like that…(helped her feel new feelings) Thoughtful… Compassionate… Considerate. Yeah…And then also appreciative of like, what I have too. ‘Cause a lot of people know what they have but they take it for granted.

These feelings of gratitude and compassion were indicative of changes in how Paris and other participants would deal with others whom they interacted with after participating in the
Gratitude is not only the quality of being thankful, but it also encompasses the aspect of “noticing and appreciating the positive in life” (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010, p. 2). Compassion in this context is a student’s “recognition of and desire to alleviate suffering,” (Jazaieri et al., 2013, p. 2) that also leads the student to engage in prosocial behaviors. Turner (2007) suggests that an attitude of gratitude can potentially generate social bonds.

A growth mindset is characterized by students who “believe their talents can be developed (through hard work, good strategies, and input from others)” (Dweck, 2016, p. 2). A student with a fixed mindset believes their “intellectual abilities are immutable” (Claro, Paunesku & Dweck, 2016, p. 8664). Davisha describes how she developed a growth mindset. Davisha learned to put her attention on helpful thoughts and behaviors. She stated that even her mother noticed a change in her behavior during the four-week MBI. She learned new ways of interacting with people, math tests, and other academic rigors. This MBI held a powerful new influence on her symbolic interaction and sense of mastery to deal with her stressors.

Davisha talked about how she previously dealt with stress: “I would sleep. I’d just sleep off the issues which didn’t really help, or I would just watch a video or something I enjoyed.” Davisha moved from an avoidance strategy to taking action to meet the challenge. This new strategy led to a positive change in her self-perception. Davisha shared this about her new perspective of herself: “I see myself in a much brighter light than what I did.” Davisha was developing a growth mindset about testing. A growth mindset is characterized by students who believe they can take action to achieve the desired results (Dweck, 2016). Davisha learned to believe she could handle focusing and studying for tests. She developed a new confidence about her ability to prepare for and pass tests.
Davisha was not the only one who changed previously unhelpful coping strategies. Josephine shared that before the MBI, she would cry when she was stressed out. Lena also developed a growth mindset about testing situations. These students learned that they could improve their intellect and academic achievement. Lena said this to describe how she was able to view testing situations and her future differently:

And then, going along with the failing test, at first you’re freaking out cause oh my gosh this is gonna ruin my life. But after 5-10 minutes of just calming down and not thinking about it, you’re like okay, one bad test score probably isn’t actually gonna hurt me that much. A lot of people, including me before this, if I got one bad test score, oh it's not even worth studying for the other one, because obviously my way of studying isn't gonna work anyway. But once again, (with mindfulness) you kind of separate those two instances. My failure on this test doesn’t really affect how I’m gonna do on this next test. It’s different material. I have more time to fix it. I can analyze what I did wrong last time. Just, you can section them off, it’s not just one big problem. You have to section them off into different problems, and then deal with them separately.

This new perspective on test taking was possible because she was able to clearly identify one specific thing to address instead of being overwhelmed by all the stressors, known and unknown, in her life. She learned to recognize that she can have a sense of control over her thoughts and feelings.

Students also learned to be present and mindful with a sense of acceptance. Mindfulness can be conceptualized “as a state of awareness that allows for an observation of mental states without over-identifying with them so as to create an attitude of acceptance” (Baer, 2011).” The Mindful Nation UK report defines mindfulness for schools, healthcare and general public well-
being as “paying attention to what’s happening in the present moment in the mind, body and external environment, with an attitude of curiosity and kindness” (Mindful Nation UK report, 2015). Acceptance of the present moment is a key feature of mindfulness. Acceptance is akin to non-judgment towards an experience (Feldman et al., 2007) and Bishop (2004) described acceptance as being open to what is really happening in the moment. Davisha related this about how she learned to stay mindful and accepting in the present moment:

I would say that instead of thinking about what’s stressing you out, you kind of, you acknowledge it and you kind of let it go. You’re like okay, well, we’ll get back to it but as of now I’m in the present I don’t need to be so concerned about it. I’ll do it later, but not like later later. As soon as I’m done, I’ll focus on it but I won’t be as stressed about it. I’ll be like, okay, I’m more confident that I can do this, I can get through this.

Davisha and others learned this from their practice of the skills, the facilitator, other MBI resources, and from each other. Paris shared how she learned to think about things that she could not control and how mindfulness practices helped her to manage stressors by focusing on the present moment and not ruminating about the future or what she imagined might happen. She remarks,

And then also like uncontrolled situations. You can plan your whole day out and it’s not gonna go exactly how you planned. So just having unplanned things occur can help you refer back to meditation cause it’ll just bring you back to that moment in that place.

Davisha learned to accept the discomfort from negative thoughts and unpleasant emotions without getting caught up in a story about them or trying to change them. Negative thoughts can arise in a person's mind, such as "I'm awful at writing," and the person can choose to realize that these automatic thoughts, which are often negative, are tendencies that are not
necessarily under an individual’s control. Once the students realized the negativity bias of their unconscious thought patterns, they could choose a more resilient growth mindset thought such as, “I can improve my writing with practice.” There are many things that people cannot control: the weather, our natural changing hair color, and the people in our environment. By accepting that there are some things that a person cannot change, a person learns to realize that things will change and can change, and they can let go of the personal struggle with their current perception of reality. This understanding and accepting can have a profound impact on a person’s mental health (Stupnisky et al., 2013. Research by Stupnisky (2013) and others asserts the positive relationship between perceived control and well-being.

The examples illustrate how students changed their view of a situation by using mindfulness practices to develop a sense of mastery and to be accepting and non-judgmental in the moment. The following section details how students evolved their views of their self-esteem.

**Self-esteem.** The theme concerning self-esteem, discussed in Chapter Four, was "it was like insight for myself." The facets of this theme included improved self-knowledge and emotional intelligence and a sense that mindfulness-based training improved their self-efficacy. Thoits (2010) describes high self-esteem as “a perception of oneself as a good, valued, and competent person” (p. S46). Students describe their self-growth and self-understanding and my analysis follow.

Lena learned this about how to mindfully understand and be compassionate with herself:

I understand it the way that it is. The main point is just not judging yourself. Even with something like understanding yourself. If you’ve been with yourself for however many years… You’re never gonna completely understand why you do what you do until you calm down and actually consciously attempt to decipher your thoughts.
Lena did not judge herself. This likely led to more positive thoughts of herself as competent and good. Lena and other students learned to see their emotional states and thoughts more clearly. Clarity afforded the students insight about themselves and their situation. Lena and others started to understand that thoughts are just thoughts. They experienced an emotional emancipation to choose their behaviors. Lena and others realized they did not have to remain negative or judgmental about their behavior. Self-knowledge implies clarity about one's emotional states (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Emotional intelligence is a set of skills that “contribute to the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself and in others, the effective regulation of emotion in self and others, and the use of feelings to motivate, plan and achieve in one's life” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 185).

Students developed their emotional intelligence. They displayed improved ability to regulate themselves and take action towards their goals. Students learned to focus on the present moment. Previously, students ruminated, their consciousness absorbed by past events, or engaged in fantasies and anxieties about the future, and this is the opposite of being present and mindful (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 823). Lena shared:

Yeah, it’s with the, like you were talking about with the ball of stress, if you just unwind it and section it off then it’s easier to deal with than to try to find one solution to everything, it’s just not possible.

Mindfulness can be conceptualized as a state of awareness that allows for an observation of mental states without over-identifying with them so as to create an attitude of acceptance (Baer, 2011). Acceptance is akin to "non-judgment towards an experience" (Feldman et. al., 2007), and Bishop (2004) describes acceptance as being open to what is really happening in the moment. Students learned to accept that they had to study for tests and that sometimes they
would not earn the grade they hoped for. They learned not to unskillfully carry the stress from one situation into another situation. They understood the harm that they would inflict on themselves by repeatedly thinking catastrophic thoughts about a disappointing situation after the event had passed.

These examples are illustrative of changes in self-esteem from the students’ perspectives. Many students noticed a change in their self-knowledge and emotional intelligence. The examples illustrate how students changed their view of themselves by using the skills gained from the MBI to see themselves more clearly. The following section details how students’ social resources changed.

Social resources. The theme concerning social resources discussed in Chapter Four was that students "experienced something different." The elements of this theme included the following: a sense that they built community, they had an improved understanding of others, improved relationships, and made new friends. Thoits (2010) explains social support: “Social support refers to emotional, informational, or practical assistance from significant others, such as family members, friends, or coworkers; support actually may be received from others or simply perceived to be available when needed” (p. 46).

What follows are more sentiments from the students describing their social resources.

Some of the participants noted changes in relationships with friends and family members. They spoke about how the skills learned from the MBI allow them to interact differently with others. This new style of interacting improved their relationship with someone. The group provided a form of social resource for the MBI participants. Below is one participant’s perspective of a new view of her mother; someone who can typically be considered a social resource.
Lena said:

I'm now able, instead of just getting upset with someone because they were upset it's like okay, I was able to work through all the problems I had. Everybody has this ball of problems, it's just now I know how to separate them up. So like, instead of getting in a fight about my mom, I'm like just okay, I know you’re stressed about different things than I am. We’re better to calm down and not get mad at each other than to start fighting for no good reason, so.

This example illuminates an example that others may also experience. Perhaps you know someone who has had a bad experience at work leading to uncomfortable emotions arising. Then that person reacts from that place of emotional discomfort which leads to disagreements or fights at home. Lena noticed her typical pattern of relating to her mother, and now she can choose her behavior instead of reacting to aroused emotions. Now she has learned that she can take those emotions as signals to think more clearly about the situation at hand and respond appropriately.

Astin (1999) found that student’s involvement had beneficial effects on several developmental outcomes, including well-being and success. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) report that the frequency and quality of students' participation in activities were associated with several beneficial outcomes, including enhanced self-confidence, increased interpersonal skills, and high educational aspirations. Brown and Johnson (2018) found that students who participated in a sport management club developed connections by making new friends and increased their sense of belonging and relatedness. The participants in this study experienced a similar increase in their development of connections and feelings of relatedness.

The improved understanding of others is something that Beckman, et al. (2012) learned about physicians who had participated in a mindfulness program. Beckman and his associates
(2012) found that physicians improved their ability to connect with patients and reasoned that the physicians improved by listening deeply to patients’ concerns and responding effectively. Kemper and Khirallah (2015) also found that empathy improved among physicians who completed specific modules in an online mindfulness-based intervention.

Symbolic interaction theory discusses how assigning meaning to objects is a social process (McLeod, 2012; Mead, 1934). Lena shared that the MBI structure was beneficial for learning because everyone was involved in the learning process: “So it was learning from an instructor and from other students doing the same thing." The students received informational and emotional social support from each other. Below is Lena's description of an interaction during the check-in period when participants learned from each other:

We were just able to talk about problems that may or may not have to deal with school. Like someone was talking about their roommate problems...like everybody’s been through that, at least in some sort of aspect so we were all able to kind of give advice, like you know, don’t let her bad attitude drag you down you just do what you can do and then she’s gonna go off and do whatever she feels is best…you just have to realize once again you’re two separate people. You each have to go do what you’re supposed to do. It was just nice to be able to talk about somebody who’s had the same or similar problems and figure out how they dealt with it and whether it worked out for them or not.

The changes in behavior did not automatically equate to better relationships. Davisha explains that what she saw as growth was not acceptable or positive in the eyes of some of her friends:

Relationship-wise, everything’s, it’s different. I lost some friends. I’ve gained some friends but, well I guess they wouldn’t technically be friends if they didn’t like the way I
became. I don’t know, I feel like we weren’t that close if you can’t see my difference as a better difference, a better way rather than staying at where I was, so.

Although Davisha lost some friends, she gained social resources from other MBI participants. Davisha learned that she could count on people in the group if necessary for social support or understanding:

Yeah, um Josephine gave me her number, so I’d talk to her if I needed help, whether with meditation or just an issue that I was dealing with cause I feel like she understands. She’s in that same mindset so when I’m stuck in it with an issue, she’d be able to be like oh, well, you should do this or I’m here for you or something along the lines of that.

These examples illustrate the bonds students have with others. Students rely on these relationships for support in times of upheaval. The social support may not be used, but knowing that support is available can be helpful in many circumstances. Next, I will report on how students felt that this group activity was novel and beneficial.

Experienced something different. Research by Astin (1999) informs us that undergraduate students’ involvement in non-academic activities positively impacts their overall well-being, success, and development. It is plausible that some of the benefits participants reported are also related to this phenomenon of group participation. Similarly, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found that the frequency and quality of students’ participation in activities was associated with enhanced self-confidence and increased interpersonal skills. Several of the students also participated in other organizations: Kelsey was a leader in her sorority and other organizations on campus, Lena was a peer mentor/ambassador for the TRiO program, and Hope was in the Honors program. However, they attributed the changes they experienced to the MBI. It is possible there could have been some overlapping benefits from other things they were
participating in. It is more likely that the design of this MBI is structured to take advantage of those types of group participation benefits. Other groups might provide similar benefits, but the MBI was different. When asked to describe what stands out to her about her experiences in the mindfulness workshop at the university, Josephine responded after a moment's pause to reflect: “It was something different.” She went on to share:

Like, I know that they do a lot of stuff on campus that’s like movies on Main Street or yeah, whatever and just like random stuff. I feel like it’s not, like all that stuff isn’t really to get people together or like, calm down in a way… So, I think that was awesome that there was this little group of people kinda got to know each other and it was just very non-judgmental and yeah, I like it… And just like, knowing constantly that these people aren’t gonna judge you no matter what you say… So you can be free and just talk about it and I feel like thanks guys, thanks for listening.

Hope agreed that participating in this MBI was different than participating in other groups because she was able to learn what people think about day-to-day hassles, and that helped her understand herself more clearly. This process was designed in a way that seems to promote personal growth and self-awareness. Hope shared:

Like, yeah, just learning about how people think, it’s how you think but then it’s also how other people think, and then learning like how you’ve changed and seeing, you know what I mean, seeing how like other people in our group have changed and realizing, I don’t know…

Davisha talked about how the group was able to communicate openly due to the group’s size and comfort with one another. Trust in one another was the foundation of the group’s communication norms. Davisha reflects:
We had a good group size, I would say. Everyone was open which made the process better. Someone would talk about it and we would be like, okay, now we can talk about it because they opened up the discussion.

Lena appreciated the sense of community that formed in the four weeks. This sense of connection was possible in part because members felt like they were at the same level of understanding about mindfulness. The MBI experience met Lena and others’ expectations. Lena expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to learn how to manage stress:

Really the sense of community, I think. If I were to try to do it on my own I think it would’ve been a lot harder because I just would’ve felt like it’s you know, just that I wasn’t experienced, I was wasting everyone’s time but because I was in a class full of you know, five or six people who, it was new to them too, it just made me feel a lot better about it, so I was more open to it. So, just meeting the new people was really great and then learning to manage stress of course was what, you know, the original reason I joined.

These examples illustrate changes in social resources. Many students noticed a change in their understanding of others. The examples illustrate how students changed their view of their relationships using the skills gained from the MBI to build better relationships. The following section details suggestions for further study.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to this type of study. Typically, limitations include “restricted sample size, sample selection, data gathering techniques, researcher bias, interviewer power asymmetry, and participant reactivity” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 79).

Several limitations are due to the small number of participants in the study. However, Creswell (2014) suggests 3-10 for phenomenological studies such as this. The MBI creators
suggest 12 students is a beneficial size for this program. The case study nature of this research suggests that a small number is appropriate. Institutions who implement an MBI will learn from their own experiences. The size was appropriate for this institution, and so the program continues to be offered.

The findings of this research "include extensive samples of quotations from participants" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 107) and different types of quotes reported narratively. The research seeks to tell the story of students who participated in a mindfulness-based intervention at a state institution of higher learning situated in a rural setting. The students who participated were primarily from low-income families. The validation process included sending a summary of themes and interpretations to two of the study's participants seeking their feedback, as suggested by Creswell (2009).

The lack of generalizability is the most significant limitation of this qualitative study. Although detailed information was provided to enhance transferability, the use of a relatively small sample of students who all attend the same university suggests the findings do not apply to all students. Further, the study occurred in one location in rural mid-Atlantic site which just happened to have an MBI-certified facilitator and researcher. Creswell (2014) informs us that the uniqueness of site setting combined with particular participants' experiences limits the generalizability of findings.

Attrition rates, including reasons for dropout, were reported to extract relevant information regarding implementation strategies, feasibility, and contraindication. The only male dropped out of the study because he did not have the time to participate due to ongoing family issues. He also dropped out of school at the end of the semester. The absence of a male voice in the findings is similar to other studies about mindfulness, which have more women represented.
Women comprise 65% of the student body at this institution. Future efforts will seek to recruit men, focusing efforts on male sports teams and fraternities. The researcher triangulated measures with quantitative survey data and behavioral measures.

The researcher may bring bias to the study due to an interest in the process and the phenomenon. External review of the questions and data was utilized to minimize the researcher’s bias. The participants may have answered questions in a way that they felt was desirable or pleasing to the researcher instead of giving an honest, critical opinion. However, the findings are consistent with other studies of mindfulness-based interventions. The participants were not receiving any financial or academic benefits for participating.

Individuals selected to participate in this study creating a self-selection bias. It is possible that the students who chose to participate in the study possess a higher level of mindfulness than students who do not choose to participate in a mindfulness-based workshop.

The researcher can direct anyone interested in the manuals used in this study to the appropriate source.

**Directions for Future Research**

Similar studies in the future can gather more information leading to development of a more comprehensive understanding of how undergraduate students’ participation in a mindfulness-based intervention can provide resources to enhance coping with the inevitable stressors students face.

Research by Coffey, Hartman, and Fredrickson (2010) found that students who possess greater dispositional mindfulness have greater ability to manage negative emotions. It would be beneficial to know the change in mindfulness after participating in an MBI. Considering this, perhaps qualitative data could be combined with quantitative data to create a mixed methods
study is beneficial. The research can take data from surveys of mindfulness, perceived stress, and other factors before and after the workshop. The qualitative data can explore more detailed questions about one particular event that all participants experienced. Participants would be required to journal after each session about what they noticed, what they learned and from whom, how they felt, and what they would do differently as a result of this information. The participants’ journaling about each session will help to determine how they made meaning of the event. The study will combine both sets of data to shed light on changes in students’ well-being, emotional intelligence, stress management skills and resources, and mindfulness as a result of participating in an MBI.

A future similar study could include suggestions from McLeod (2012). McLeod (2012) suggests creating a study combining survey and qualitative methods that systematically investigates the extent to which structural or cultural conditions impact students' interpretations of life events and their meaning making process before and after the intervention. For instance, McLeod (2012) suggests asking students what "ideologies, traditions, and commonsense assumptions" they use "to make sense of their objective life circumstances" or to check whether "objective events differ by race, class, gender and other status characteristics” (p. 179).

There are two other studies I would like to see. I want to participate in creating a long-term study to evaluate whether participants continue to practice the mindfulness and meditation skills and to what extent. Second, I want to create a study to determine what improves the recruitment and retention of undergraduate men in mindfulness-based interventions. It will be interesting to determine if results would be similar for male undergraduates who participate in an MBI structured this way.
Although there may not be gender differences in terms of well-being outcomes, there may be more effective means to engage men with mindfulness and meditation practices. It is the act of practicing the skills that generates benefits. Therefore, it is imperative to find a means to engage different types of people.

**Recommendations and Implications for Policy and Practice**

The purpose of this study was to explore with a sample of rural state undergraduate students their experiences of a mindfulness-based intervention offered on campus. The findings from this study flow from the research questions and fall into five themes: (a) enjoyed learning that stopping for 10 minutes can change the rest of your day; (b) found being aware of and appreciating each moment is calming and reduces stress; (c) appreciated the strategy to let it go because it is what it is; (d) indicated it was like insight for myself; (e) experienced something different. Below, I discuss the major findings of this study. The researcher's implications follow this.

**Enjoyed Learning that Stopping for 10 Minutes Can Change the Rest of Your Day**

The first finding of this study is that an overwhelming majority of study participants indicated that learning new skills during the mindfulness-based intervention was enjoyable. This was supported by the idea that the mindfulness practices they enjoyed learning can improve their day. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that undergraduate students enjoy learning new ways to make meaning of their experiences in a structured four-week rigorous mindfulness-based workshop with a small group of students. It can also be concluded that the program is well designed to meet students where they are and effectively engage students in learning mindfulness and meditation practices. Students will utilize the newly acquired skills they find helpful to moderate stressors and reduce anxiety. The students also reported improvements in their patience
and empathy towards others. Students’ patience with themselves and others increased. It is plausible that the increased patience led to improved interactions with other people. Students noticed improvements in their problem solving, prioritizing skills, and academic engagement. Noticing those improvements may have also attributed to students’ enjoyment of the MBI. A further and related conclusion is that some undergraduates enjoy learning about themselves and engaging in a journey of self-improvement. Students appreciate learning coping skills taught this way. Therefore, an MBI may be an ideal vehicle to provide a beneficial activity for students.

**Being Aware of and Appreciating Each Moment is Calming and Reduces Stress**

The second major finding was that most participants learned that being present and aware of their moment-by-moment experience was calming and reduced their stress. Most students found that the practice of focusing their awareness on the present moment instead of ruminating about the past or future was calming. Students reported that focusing on their breath made them feel calmer and helped them to sleep better. It can be concluded that students who practice mindfulness skills will find solace from stress, sleep better, and perform better as a result.

The students described their ability to use the mindfulness practices they learned to regulate themselves during distressing situations. Students experienced increased internal moderation of stress and challenging emotions. It can be concluded that a four-week MBI can provide undergraduate students with skills to focus their awareness on the present moment to help them cope with stressors so that they can navigate college more effectively.

**Let It Go Because It Is What It Is**

The study’s third major finding was that most participants learned to redirect their attention and allow distressing ruminations or wishes that reality was different to fade away. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that learning mindfulness and meditation skills
provides students with the ability to notice their thoughts and the flexibility to assign a constructive meaning to an experience. Students also learned how to apply the concept of acceptance to their daily situations. Students may struggle with situations and assignments and wish that they were different. This may lead to procrastination and poorer outcomes. Students learned to let go of distressing, overwhelming thoughts about stressors; this allowed them the clarity to plan and begin the work necessary, whether it was studying for a calculus test or writing a paper.

**It Was Like an Insight for Me**

The fourth major finding from this study is that students through reflection and dialog developed greater emotional intelligence, self-awareness, self-knowledge, and self-regulation. Students became more aware of situations that “stress them out” and how their body responds under duress, in turn learning they can be more resilient in situations that were previously challenging. This awareness gave them greater ability to regulate their behavior and a greater sense of mastery or control. A conclusion to be drawn from this is that a four-week MBI structured in this format is a useful way for students to enhance their emotional intelligence.

**Experienced Something Different**

Students learned to be comfortable with themselves and others in the group. The students felt connected to each other as they shared their struggles and learned these new skills together. Students’ new-found self-acceptance and self-understanding led to students initiating interactions with others more frequently. These interactions ranged from small interactions like making eye-contact with strangers or waving at acquaintances outdoors/in public, to responding more in class. Students found greater ease at “putting themselves out there” with other students and in the classroom. A conclusion to be drawn is that learning more self-acceptance, comfort with
themselves, and a sense of community/’I’m not alone/togetherness with peers in a small group strengthened students’ ability to be more open with and aware of others.

**Conclusion**

Regehr and colleagues (2012) report that college students report significant levels of stress. Yet, despite their elevated levels of stress, most students do not seek treatment (Downs & Eisenberg, 2012; Regehr et al., 2012). Stupnisky, Perry, Renuad, and Hladkyj (2013) find that students who exhibit less stress and who express positive emotional patterns typically receive higher grades. This can be interpreted as an indication that the wellbeing of university students is critical to their academic success. This statement from Bresciani (2016) supports the findings of this study: “Existing research tells us that we can teach students how to regulate stress and other emotions so that they can direct their attention, focus, and other critical thinking dispositions toward enhancing their learning and development (p. 43).”

Therefore, it follows that it is incumbent upon the university to provide resources to help students in a manner that is appealing to them. Thoits (2010) argues the following policy implication, which is applicable to university students:

To reduce the health impacts of major adversities in individuals’ lives, coping and social support interventions that most effectively buffer the effects of stress should be identified, their best practices distilled, and their programs disseminated for wider use by community agencies, voluntary and religious organizations, and employers. (p. S47).

An MBI, such as the one for this study, provides a coping and social support intervention that undergraduate students appreciate and utilize and that can be used by universities. It is a program that universities can follow and integrate into the academic world. It is an affordable and scalable intervention that helps students become more self-aware, regulate stress, reduce
anxiety, act compassionately, engage more with academics, increase a sense of mastery and self-esteem, and cope with chaos and ambiguity in their lives. In addition to the students’ outcomes, several businesses have noticed significant benefits in terms of increased productivity and fewer sick days. It follows that students who are well within total mind and body are more likely to attend class and feel increasingly more focused.

In conclusion, students in this MBI simply learned more about who they are. They felt seen and heard. They connected to a sense of belonging to their world in a more enhanced way. Humans have four fundamental needs of being seen, heard, connected, and feeling the sense of belonging, according to Dr. R. Miller's research with iRest Yoga Nidra Meditation (Personal communication, May 2019). Participants developed a mindful habitus during the MBI possibly because those needs were met, and the format supported their growth and development. Students learned this new way of behaving while actively engaging in the MBI group for four weeks. This current research aligns with other scholars (Pagis, 2015; Summers-Effler, 2002) who described how participation in an MBI group led to changes in most students' standard repertoire of behaviors, changes in their way of meaning making, coping skills, and improved well-being.

Our participants had a great deal of positive comments that align with the current research. Josephine said that she learned that "The world isn’t as bad as I thought." Paris said, "It’s good to know you can trust a stranger,” referring to not only the students in the program but her newfound perspective of the world around her. An example of her changed perspective was her empathy in interacting with a homeless patron. She reported that due to MBI, she took the time to show compassion in giving food and felt a better understanding of their situation. Josephine continues to work hard at applying the skills learned during MBI: “...so, I look, I try, cause it’s hard breaking a habit but I always try to look at the good in a situation or in general.”
When asked how she would describe the MBI, Josephine said, “I get bubbly when I talk about it. Like, I’m excited…Like, it’s great, you should try it. You’ll feel better. Yeah.” The students now put into practice help for others and have increased their sense of self-worth as a result of practicing the mindfulness and meditation techniques they learned in the program.

Learning mindfulness and meditation skills gives students the tools to find shelter amidst the inevitable storms of life. It can provide them with a fount of resources to see themselves and the world more clearly. Gautama Buddha taught insight meditation as part of a process for individuals to free themselves from suffering. C. Wright Mills imagined a world where people had the capacity to see the world in a different light. Perhaps by learning these skills, students will have the capacity to take care of themselves and recognize their connections to others like Paris and Josephine did. Other students who participated in this program also exhibited prosocial behaviors. Perhaps the capacity to be kind or love others extends from the capacity to be able to love our own selves.

Mindfulness allowed these students to accept themselves and their situation with a peaceful attitude and a clear mind. This ability to see what is in the present, nonjudgmentally, provides an evaluation of the situation that motivates someone to take beneficial actions. These actions form the foundation for MBI participants who learn to be here now. They now strive to be the change, first by looking within to resolve anger and fear and then with their practiced learning to inspire others to be more peaceful, empathetic, and compassionate. It is possible that increased self-regulation leads to improved self-motivation, which then leads to an ability to influence others in a non-selfish, non-self-serving way.

The hope is to encourage others to consider implementing MBI within higher education. When students learn to deal with personal struggles, then they may have the capability to “resist
and change the *structural* sources of that stress and injustice” (Forbes, 2019, p. 180). Learning mindfulness skills helps individuals become resilient, thereby enabling individuals, and the organizations they are and will become a part of, to thrive. Bresciani (2016) argues that if students, educators, and stakeholders participate in an MBI program, it may help to transform higher education into a more effective and relevant learning and development organization. Perhaps these mindfulness skills will give emerging adults the civic mindfulness to work with others to rise against unjust systems in order to transform the world. My own dream in promoting MBI is that these contemplative efforts can help create the foundation to collaboratively promote just and equitable systems, peace within our world, a better understanding of those around us, and ultimately increased self-worth. If we give young students the skills to think outside of their own struggles and to see the bigger world around them, if we give them the tools to deal with negative energy and in turn find the positivity within all situations, if we teach them to work with one another, no matter what their backgrounds and beliefs are, then perhaps we can create a world where people see the beautiful ways of being and doing for everyone.
References


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doi:10.1017/CBO9780511984945.013


doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2010.03.005


Appendix A

Work Plan

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*S=started; H=on hold; C=completed*
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

UNIVERSITY AFFILIATION: I University and X University

STUDY TITLE: Undergraduates’ Experiences with Mindfulness Practice: A Qualitative Study of the Stress Process Model

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Joseph Croskey, University, jcroskey@x.edu, workshop facilitator Kathleen E, 800-867-5309, faculty advisor Dr. Valerie G, valg@xxx.edu (800-867-5309).

DESCRIPTION: I understand that I have been asked to participate in this research project which is a study of students’ experience with the Koru Mindfulness workshop at X University. I will participate in a four-week mindfulness based workshop followed by a focus group meeting and individual interview (six meetings total). The weekly material for the four weeks include various mind-body exercises taught in a classroom for 75 minutes. The skills I will learn include: mindfulness meditation, eating meditation, walking meditation, and guided imagery. I will also be asked to practice the exercises and practice meditation for at least 10 minutes daily for the four-week workshop (30 days). I will track my daily practice in a journal or a mobile application (Koru Mindfulness). The journal will also provide space for me to write goals and two things for which I’m grateful. I will be required to read portions of The Mindful Twenty-Something: Life Skills to Handle Stress and Everything Else by Holly Rogers (2016). I can purchase the book or read chapters that will be copied and placed in the library and the program D2L (Learning Management System) site. I understand the teacher will be video recorded and all attempts to keep me off of the video will be made. I will be asked to complete a semi-structured questionnaire to ensure my voice is heard and accuracy in collecting data. The questions I will answer include: “How satisfied were you with the workshop?” “Which sessions did you find most relevant?” “What was the most important thing(s) you learned during this workshop?” “How has mindfulness and meditation impacted your life?” “How can we improve this mindfulness training program for student’s?” “How do you feel about being part of this Koru community?” I will be a part of a study that expands the research base of knowledge concerning a mindfulness workshop and how students’ at a public university experience the practices.

RISK AND BENEFITS: There are no known risks associated with participating in this research study. The information gleaned from the study group and interviews will increase our understanding of students’ experience with a mindfulness workshop.

COST AND PAYMENTS: There is no payment for participating in the study. There are no required costs. I have the option to purchase the text, The Mindful Twenty Something: Life Skills to Handle Stress and Everything Else by Holly Rogers for $9.99 (Kindle version) or a paperback for $16.95. The book is available in the library. Copies of the required reading will be available online via D2L and in the library.

CONFIDENTIALITY: I understand that any information about me obtained from this research will be kept strictly confidential. Information will be kept on a researcher-owned external hard drive to which only the investigator will have access. It has been explained to me that my identity will not be revealed in any description(s), presentation(s),
or publication(s) of this research. After collection, compilation, and analysis of the obtained data, any identifying information will be destroyed. Therefore, I consent to publication for scientific purposes.

**DISCLOSURE:** I understand that any information about me obtained from this research may be disclosed. Information will be stored. It has been explained to me that my identity will not be revealed in any description or publication of this research. Therefore, I consent to publication for scientific purposes.

**RIGHT TO REFUSE OR END PARTICIPATION:** I understand that I may refuse to participate in this study or withdraw at any time. I can withdraw by informing Professor Joseph Croskey jcroskey@x.edu (800-867-5309) or the workshop instructor Kathleen E (800-867-5309). You can also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Valerie G, v@xxx.edu (800-867-5309). I also understand that I may be withdrawn from the study any time by the investigator(s).

Signature of Subject: __________________________________________________________

Signature of Investigator: _____________________________________________________

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE 7730). 17-195
Appendix C

Recruitment Letter and Flyer

Would you like to learn mental fitness skills to calm and focus your mind? This fall we are offering the first free Koru Mindfulness® workshop that teaches these skills and more. The workshop is limited to the first 20 registrants so sign up quickly by responding (‘Yes, I want to learn more’) to this email (). These mental fitness skills have helped Super Bowl athletes, doctors, movie stars and everyday folks like me improve their game. The Koru program originated at Duke University and has helped many students there.

My name is Joseph Croskey and I am a student in the Administration and Leadership doctoral program at I University. I am also the Director of University at X University. I have been working the last several years to help C students be more successful. I have come to believe that your success requires more than just study skills. I am conducting a research study to explore the perspective of students at X University involved in a mind-body skill based program. This fall I will be running a four-week, free workshop for up to 40 undergraduates to explore students’ experiences with mindfulness techniques. Participants will attend a workshop once a week, where they will be provided with instruction and guidance in breathing and visualization techniques. I will study workshop participants are part of my doctoral dissertation research.

I am inviting you to take part in this study because you are a fulltime undergraduate student. I am hoping to learn more about how undergraduate students effectively navigate college life and explore life’s deeper questions of meaning and maybe learn why Henry David Thoreau went to the woods to learn to live deliberately. If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to:

- Provide demographic information to establish a profile of the research study participants.
- Participate in a group workshop that will include guided breathing meditation sessions and other mind-body practices once per week for a total of five weeks (i.e., five sessions, 75 minutes each).
- Practice the skills that are taught on a regular basis
- Participate in a 45-minute interview after the fifth week of the study.

There are no monetary rewards for choosing to participate. However, you may appreciate learning the skills that can help you be more effective and happy. In addition this study will help others because you and all of the other study participants will provide knowledge that will inform higher education professionals about the experience of students at a public university participating in a mindfulness based mental fitness training program.

If you are interested in participating in the study, I’ll send you the Informed Consent Form to review. Then you can sign and return it letting me know your intent to participate. Join me for a program on Oct 3rd at 5pm in the Chapel to further explain the study and answer questions. Refreshments will be provided for you while we discuss the study. You can also ask me questions through email (), on the telephone (), or you can drop by my office (419 Hall). You can also check out these Youtube videos for more information about the scientific power of meditation https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aw71zanwMnY how and why you should meditate https://youtu.be/UfJumx0mOHM by Cornelia Grimsmo or 10 reasons why you should never meditate https://youtu.be/IZ9_jWV2YTM by Infinite Waters.

Thank you in advance for your consideration!
Sincerely,
Joseph Croskey
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF X INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE ).

Flyer example
Appendix D

Intake Survey

KORU MINDFULNESS WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE

Your answers are confidential and will be seen only by the Koru Mindfulness Workshop facilitator Kathleen E and researcher Joseph Croskey.

Name: ____________________________ 
Phone Number: ______________________ 
Ok to receive text messages from workshop instructor or researcher: Y / N 
University Email: ______________________ 
Date of birth: _________________________
Gender: M  F Trans  Prefer not to disclose  Other____________________

How did you hear about the course?

Why are you interested in doing this course?

Do you have any physical problems or disabilities, or any history of mental health problems?

Are you on any medication and if so what for?

Have you had any recent significantly stressful changes in your life?

Have you had any previous experience of meditation, yoga or mindful movement?

The course asks you to undertake 10 to 15 minutes of home practice per day (as best you can), as well as some other shorter practices through the week. Are you prepared to engage with this level of commitment?

If you have something specific you would like to discuss with the teacher before you register, please let us know some options of days/ times to speak and we will arrange a phone chat.
Appendix E

Focus Group Questions

What was the most important thing you learned during this workshop? Just feel free to interject. How did you apply what you learned in the workshop to your daily life situations?
Describe a stressful situation and how you deal with it now that you have these tools. How would you have handled a stressful situation before the Koru experience? How did stressful situations affect you before the Koru experience?
Did everybody appreciate that gratitude exercise?
How useful was this workshop for you? BECAME On a scale from 1-5, how might you rate this workshop as being useful for you? If we went around, how many people would say, if 1 to 5, 1 is bad, 3 is ok, and 5 is awesome?
How are outcomes from stressful or other situation(s) different now that you have these tools?
BECAME Do you think you’re having different outcomes in your life because of these practices?
How do the practices impact outcomes in your life?
What new information have you acquired about yourself as a result of participating in Koru?
How does this insight affect your sense of self? How can you use this learning?
What resources (family, friends, attitudes, actions) help you deal with/navigate college?
How did you remain curious and open minded during this time?
Share the moment that you felt like ‘you got this’ or mindfulness works? How did this training click for you?
How was it learning mindfulness practices within a group setting?
How was it helpful to have a group/community to learn these practices?
How was it harmful/distracting to have a group/community to learn these practices?
How do you feel about being part of this community?
How did you feel about the check in process at the beginning of each session?
How was it to learn that others had similar questions as you about the practices?
How would you like to continue to practice mindfulness?
How can we improve this mindfulness training program for our student’s?
How can we work together to encourage others to participate in the program?
In what ways will you commit to continuing to practice mindfulness?
How were the tools the program provided, mobile app, journal, meditation recordings?
How can mindfulness skills be a resource for students? How will it help them?
How can mindfulness training best be implemented as a resource for students?
How did you feel about participating in the workshop? Did you feel ‘pressure’ not to participate or continue participating?
FINAL QUESTION – Have we missed anything? What else would you like to share about this experience?
Appendix F

Interview Script and Questions

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today. As you know, my name is Joseph Croskey and I will be facilitating the interview. We will be spending the next 45 minutes or so talking about your experiences with the Koru program taught by Kathleen Ellwood (Kathy). I really want to know if you have noticed any changes in their life, differences in the way you handle stress, if you’re reacting differently to challenging situations, any difference in your level of patience, any insights into how your mind works, any more happiness or positive shifts in relationships, etc? and whether or not you think learning the mind-body skills is a useful strategy to enable undergraduate college students to be more successful and find the college experience more fulfilling. I am especially interested in hearing anything you are comfortable sharing about your personal thoughts and stories related to the questions I will be asking. There are no right or wrong responses and all of your comments will remain confidential. I am conducting several interviews and no names will be attached to identify statements made by individual people. It is also important to understand that your responses will have no bearing on your standing at the university; I am simply interested in what you think about the Koru curriculum as it relates to the undergraduate experience at X. I will be listening and, with your permission, I would also like to audiotape our interview to capture all of the details of your answers. I will take some notes so I do not miss nonverbal cues that cannot be captured on an audio recording. Is it ok to record?

During the interview you have the right to refuse to answer any question without consequence or even to end the interview. The audio recording will be transcribed and about one week after the interview you will receive an email with your interview transcript. You will be asked to provide feedback to help assure the accuracy of your responses and to give you the opportunity to provide additional meaning, as necessary.

Are there any questions before we begin?
Please describe what stands out to you about your experiences in the mindfulness workshop at X University.
What was it like participating in the workshop?
What did you tell your family, friends, others about the workshop experience?
Where you able to practice mindfulness meditation regularly?
Did you ever set practice goals?
Did you find it hard to practice?
How was your level of attention?
Did you engage in the practice or daydream/mindwandering most of the time?
How often do you find yourself preoccupied with the past, with what has already happened, or with a future that hasn’t arrived yet?
What do you think of the journaling exercises?
How did it feel to write down what you were grateful for every day?
Have you ever done anything like that before?
How likely is it that you will continue with the practices?
What would help you keep up the practices?
What was your favorite mindfulness activity to use on your own?
How did you find the recordings?
Did you use the recordings to guide your meditation?
What resources help you deal with/navigate college?
Do you have a sense that you understand yourself differently?
Do you have a sense that you understand social interactions differently?
Do you have a sense that you understand the world differently?
What experiences have you previously had with meditation or yoga?
What are the differences you experienced before and after attending mindfulness training?
What are the thoughts, impressions, and ideas that come to mind as you think about the workshop training?
What is your experience with other participants related to mindfulness practice?
What did you experience in relation to learning and mindfulness?
How was your classroom experience different?
What is your experience in relationships with family, friends, classmates?
What stressors do you experience and to what extent do you believe they influence your well-being?
To what extent do you believe mindfulness meditation skills combat stress?
Which one's in particular?
Will you continue to use mindfulness meditation as a strategy to mitigate stress?
Do you have more skills to deal with college more effectively as a result of this workshop?
Tell me more?
What do you do differently now?
Do you think your academic skills are better as a result of this mindfulness program?
Were you able to notice and label emotions any differently?
Tell me about your ability to be patient?
How have you come to understand the relationships among your emotions, knowledge and behaviors?
What do you understand about the definition of mindfulness? The awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, non-judgmentally in the present moment.
How do you practice it?
How do you experience your emotions? Is it any different after the workshop?
Tell me about your happiness.
Is there anything you would like to add about stress, breathing meditation, or other stress reduction strategies that I have not asked about so far in the interview?
Thank you very much for participating in the interview today. Your insights will help me better understand undergraduate students’ self-perceptions of a mindfulness training program and the benefits it offers.
Appendix G

Semi-Structured Questionnaire

How satisfied were you with the workshop?
How relevant and helpful do you think it was for your job?
How relevant and helpful do you think it was for other aspects of your life?
What were your key take-aways from this workshop?
How satisfied were you with the online platform?
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Belly Breathing]
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Dynamic Breathing]
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Body Scan]
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Walking Meditation]
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Gathas]
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Guided Imagery]
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Labeling Thoughts]
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Labeling Feelings]
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Mindful Eating]
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Check In at beginning of each session]
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Meditation Log/Journal]
Which sessions did you find most relevant? [Personal Practice outside of class]
How satisfied were you with the workshop content?
What was the most important thing you learned during this workshop?
How was it learning mindfulness practices within a group setting?
How (in what circumstances) did you apply what you learned in the workshop to your daily life situations?
How do the practices improve outcomes in your life?
How do the practices help you deal with stress? Specifically?
What will you miss most about this training?
Share the moment that you felt like ‘you got this’ or mindfulness works? How did this training click for you?
How did you remain curious and open minded during this time about the various practices you learned?
Describe a time when you were ‘triggered’/upset and chose to use a mindfulness practice instead of reacting in anger or fear.
How was it to learn that others had similar questions as you about the practices?
How do you feel about being part of this community?
How would you like to continue to practice mindfulness?
How can we improve this mindfulness training program for other university student’s?
How can we work together to encourage others to participate in the program?
In what ways will you commit to continuing to practice mindfulness?
What resources help you deal with/navigate college?
Did this workshop enhance your relationship with someone in a positive way?
Do you see others who participated in this workshop as a resource for dealing with life’s challenges?
Any additional comments regarding the sessions or overall format?
Any overall feedback for the event?
Name (optional)
Appendix H

Codes

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Outlook</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem, feel good about self</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stronger sense of control</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Experience with mindfulness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Trait</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Improvement Ideas</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Moderating Resources</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor, Faculty</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>Stress Moderating Resources - Discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stress Outcome</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding of Mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding of Others, World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Utilization of Mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I

Frequency of Reported Theme Components

Table 1  
*Frequency of Theme Components for the Primary Research Question*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Number of survey responses addressing this theme</th>
<th>Number of interviewees mentioning this theme/# of references</th>
<th>Total quotes related to the theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most participants were not familiar with the skills taught</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6/13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness training improved concentration and focus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6/10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students enjoyed learning the mindfulness and meditation skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6/9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness training improved students’ problem solving and prioritizing skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness training improved students’ patience and empathy towards others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2/5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic engagement increased</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students report improved happiness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6/11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  
*Frequency of Theme 2 Components for Sub-Research Question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of survey responses addressing this theme</th>
<th>Number of interviewees mentioning this theme/# of references</th>
<th>Total quotes related to the theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training helped students reduce stress</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9/27</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training helped students reduce anxiety</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6/19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training increased students’ internal moderation of stress and emotions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4/11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training was relaxing and calming</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8/10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
*Frequency of Theme 3 Components for Sub-Research Question 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of survey responses addressing this theme</th>
<th>Number of interviewees mentioning this theme</th>
<th>Total quotes related to the theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training increased optimism</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9/23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training increased being present and mindful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training increased gratitude /compassion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8/12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training taught serenity, acceptance, “it is what it is”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6/12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training increased students’ growth mindset</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
*Frequency of Theme 4 Components for Sub-Research Question 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of survey responses addressing this theme</th>
<th>Number of interviewees mentioning this theme/# of references</th>
<th>Total quotes related to the theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training improved self-knowledge and emotional intelligence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9/26</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training improved happiness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6/11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training improved self-efficacy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4/8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5

**Frequency of Theme 5 Components for Sub-Research Question 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of survey responses addressing this theme</th>
<th>Number of interviewees mentioning this theme/ # of references</th>
<th>Total quotes related to the theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students built community while participating in the mindfulness-based training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7/19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training improved students’ understanding of others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8/10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training helped students improve relationships and make friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7/9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based training led students to tell others about mindfulness techniques</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5/8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other forms of social support</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>