5-8-2018

How do Mindfulness Practitioners Describe Pausing?: A Qualitative Interview Study

Benjamin G. Feldman

Follow this and additional works at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj

Part of the Psychology Commons

How do Mindfulness Practitioners Describe Pausing?:

A Qualitative Interview Study.

Benjamin G. Feldman

Submitted in Partial Completion of the

Requirement for Departmental Honors in Psychology

Bridgewater State University

May 8, 2018

_____   _____

Dr. Michelle Mamberg, Thesis Advisor   Date

_____   _____

Dr. Theresa Jackson, Committee Member   Date

_____   _____

Dr. Joe Schwab, Committee Member   Date

Abstract

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) has been demonstrated to be an effective adjunct to psychotherapy for reducing distress. An exploration of the MBSR literature was undertaken to examine the concept of pausing. Surprisingly, this process highlighted by MBSR'S creator Jon Kabat-Zinn, was found to be under-researched; when mentioned, it is often not defined. In order to examine the phenomenon empirically, this study used transcripts of interviews ($N = 20$) conducted for a larger study examining how mindfulness practice is learned. A Grounded Theory content analysis examined open-ended interviews to explore how MBSR participants represent taking a pause. The transcripts had been coded for all content, yielding 1,873 Discursive Turns (DTs), a unit of analysis defined as a single speaker's uninterrupted utterance. Focused coding was conducted on a subset of these DTs ($n = 87$) that describe pausing. This allowed an open exploration that stayed close to participants' own words of how mindfulness training helps them to reduce stress reactivity. Analyses revealed two categories: *Taking a Moment* and *Taking Some Space*. Data falling in the *Taking a Moment* category entailed statements in which participants described a temporal buffer between perceiving internal or external stimuli and their subsequent responses. Data falling in the *Taking Some Space* category entailed statements in which participants described broadening their perspective of internal or external stimuli before subsequently responding. Together these categories help clarify the concept of pausing as it relates to mindfulness. This clearer definition is expected to yield better understanding of this process and allow further research into this mechanism of mindfulness.

HOW MINDFULNESS PRACTITIONERS DESCRIBE PAUSING.

How do Mindfulness Practitioners Describe Pausing?:

A Qualitative Interview Study.

Stress is something all of us face in the day to day events of our lives, which at times makes us do things that are regrettable, snapping at a loved one or driving recklessly to get somewhere on time. The literature on stress and stress reactivity tends to focus on the fight or flight reactions we have to stressors, aiming to change thoughts or behaviors to diminish the longevity and magnitude of sympathetic nervous system responses. While we cannot change our physiological stress reaction, we can change our responses to stressors or, in other words, our reactivity. Mindfulness practice is one way of training ourselves to observe our reactivity to stress and choose non-reactive responses. According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness is "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 4). Over the last 30 years, Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) have been developed to teach contemplative practices which aid stress reduction. To better understand how such programs might change our stress reactivity, a literature review was undertaken. Based primarily on the first MBI, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and its philosophical underpinnings, the concept of pausing (rather than changing thoughts or behavior) will be explored, since one must first pause in the midst of a reaction before being able to intentionally choose a different response. Thus far, there has been relatively little research exploring how pausing relates to stress reactivity and mindfulness.

A study of what scholars and mindfulness practitioners (i.e., people who actively practice mindfulness meditation) mean by pausing ought to better clarify this potentially helpful mechanism of stress reduction. The concept of pausing has been taken for granted as

self-evident, and sparsely found in the MBSR scholarly literature. Clarifying this term and how

it could help facilitate managing stress reactivity in everyday life should expand our

understanding of how mindfulness practice works. A literature review examining uses of terms

related to "pausing" is presented, followed by a qualitative study analyzing previously obtained,

in-depth interviews with practitioners. Examining how interviewees describe the phenomena of

pausing was expected to clarify how mindfulness practice enables new responses.

 Stress/Reactivity

Allostasis is the physiological process through which the body achieves optimal heart

rate for any given activity. When these optimal set points are out of balance, the body will try

to restore order, via the stress response. Stress is how we subjectively perceive this imbalance;

the process by which the body is trying to keep at an optimal level or at the allostatic load for

the task at hand (Sapolsky, 2004).   The body has multiple different set points for different

physiological activities (e.g., heart rate varies depending on whether one is awake or asleep).

Anything that sets the allostatic load out of balance is commonly called a stressor. As humans,

our daily lives are filled with minor stressors on a good day, perhaps moderate stressors on a

bad day. Our stress response was originally evolved to handle life-threatening situations, such

as when a zebra is being chased by a predator. Our stress response has not adapted so in modern

life, a low level stressor such as, being late for work, may trigger a stress response similar to

what would be experienced if a lion were attacking. Chronic stress reactions can cause health

problems such as obesity, ulcers, strokes, and heart attacks.

The phenomenon under study, pausing, does not eliminate stressors, but may radically

alter how we confront them by reducing our perceived sense of stress. Pausing provides a gap

between the stressor and subsequent responses. Typically, we are conditioned to react to stressors quickly; the gap between a perceived stressor and one's reaction is brief because our stress response is meant to keep us out of danger (i.e., we need to be faster than our predators). Quick, unreflective responses to stress have been labelled "automatic pilot" by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990). Shifting out of automatic pilot is the primary function of pausing, as he describes: "...the cultivation of mindfulness also gives us a new way of working with what we find threatening and of learning how to respond intelligently to such perceived threats rather than react automatically and trigger potentially unhealthy consequences" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. xxxvii).

While autopilot may sound benign, such stress reactivity can negatively influence interpersonal relations, such as snapping at a loved one after a long day, or the potentially deadly effects of road rage. Reactivity at a cognitive level can lead to chronic stress via rumination. These repetitive anxious or depressive thoughts which re-occur after a stressor maintain reactivity. In such instances, we may not do anything, but we feel plagued by thoughts about what happened, why it happened, what we should or should not have done. Cognitively, pausing clearly would not stop a stressor, but it could help interrupt ruminative thinking. To fully understand pausing and how it does this, one must first understand MBSR and its basic underpinnings.

MBSR

MBSR is an eight-week adjunct to psychotherapy, which was developed to teach meditation to medical and psychiatric patients. It has also been shown to be effective for a wide range of non-clinical distress such as the everyday reactivity described above. MBSR

incorporates various mindfulness meditation techniques originally taught as Buddhist

contemplative practices. The main insights of Buddhism relate to what are called the three

characteristics of existence: *impermanence*, *suffering*, and *nonself* (Olendzki, 2010).

Impermanence refers to the concept that nothing is permanent, and that everything around us

and within us constantly changes. Since everything is always changing, a good situation will not

stay positive, nor will a bad situation stay negative. Clinging to a "good situation," or

attempting to avoid a "bad situation" causes distress. *Dukkha,* or suffering, refers to a general

unsatisfactoriness where we struggle between reality and what we desire reality to be. The

term *non-self* refers to the concept that the human mind (or what we generally call "self") is in

constant flux and is dependent upon the conditions in which it exists. From this view, what we

experience as a stable, permanent self is not an independent entity, it is merely a flow of

experiences in time. This Buddhist psychology delineating the causes of suffering is the

foundation of MBIs, which have shown promise for improving mental health and are becoming

widely used.

The specific processes of MBSR's effectiveness are still under-researched (Grossman,

2011; Mamberg & Bassarear, 2015; Shapiro et al 2006). Theoretically, however, Kabat-Zinn

(1990) described early on how mindfulness entails seven "attitudinal foundations," which he

saw as pivotal to MBSR's benefits. These foundations are: *non-striving, non-judging,*

acceptance, patience, beginner's mind, letting go, and *trust*. The three most relevant of these

for understanding how pausing reduces stress reactivity are *acceptance*, *patience*, and

beginner's mind.

Acceptance can be described as "seeing things as they actually are in the present" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 27). For example, when someone is late for work they may rush to work in a panic but will still be late and might endanger themselves or others en route. It would be better to accept in that moment that being late is inevitable, and while not ideal, speeding to work will not change the reality and may indeed add new problems. Typically, rumination accompanies the act of speeding, while acceptance could reduce negative self talk while waiting to arrive.

Patience, a related concept, "...demonstrates that we understand and accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 22). For example, when cooking one must wait for the ingredients to properly heat and pace oneself accordingly, trying to speed up the process will only lead to undercooked food. In this way, patience refers to staying in the moment, rather than being so caught in a future orientation that we short-circuit the processes leading to our desired goal. *Beginner's mind* is defined as "a mind that is willing to see everything as if for the first time" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 22). For example, at some point one will feel physical discomfort such as being too warm or in pain. It is easy to react with automatic thoughts and actions at these moments, but by simply being with what is actually sensed, one can adopt a more open, even curious, attitude toward the stimuli.

In the MBSR program, these attitudes are cultivated through formal meditation practice, as well as the informal practice of bringing mindfulness into everyday life. *Formal practice* refers to the act of meditating during which one attempts to stay present, meeting each sensation as it arises, to develop the seven foundations . *Informal practice* is the act of bringing mindful awareness to everyday situations by fully engaging the five senses and meeting each new

moment fully. In a sense, meditation enables practitioners to develop the various attitudinal

pillars in stillness and silence, while informal practice enables practitioners to apply those

attitudes intentionally, to any stimuli present in their noisy, busy, stressful life.

The goal of MBSR, perhaps counter-intuitively, is not to eliminate stressors or even

stress itself, as that would be a form of striving. Striving is goal-centered thinking, or needing

something to be a certain way. The stress reduction facilitated by MBSR can be thought of as a

side effect of becoming more accepting of any situations, even those perceived as unpleasant or

uncomfortable. Kabat-Zinn's (1990) text laid out a way to cultivate mindfulness and employed

the concept of pausing . While most readers would understand this sentence and its implicit

definition of pausing, it raises the question of what might be happening psychologically

(cognitively, emotionally, or behaviorally) to create this feeling "of extra time." In other words,

this important phenomenon should be researched directly, rather than using this everyday

concept without exploration. It would seem that pausing is pivotal to developing mindfulness,

but that, too, has been a challenge to define.

Western researchers have tried to operationalize the Buddhist concept of mindfulness.

Explanations of the key psychological components of Mindfulness have centered around

reperceiving, *decentering*, *cognitive distancing*, and a more obscure concept, "experiential

selfless processing"; these will be discussed in turn. *Reperceiving* was first defined in detail by

Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, and Freedman (2006) who laid out three components of mindfulness:

Intention, Attention, and Attitude. *Intention* refers to performing actions in a deliberate way.

Attention refers to being better able to recognize stimuli internally and in one's environment.

Attitude refers to the way in which something is done. Together these mechanisms facilitate the

ability to have better clarity and objectivity of one's moment-by-moment experiences; in this

review they describe a pause as a temporary interruption which allows in-the-moment

processing. Within their model, pausing would be considered an aspect of attention (Madonna,

2017).

Similar to reperceiving is the more traditional cognitive term, *decentering,* which is

characterized by attempting to see things from an outsider's perspective and realizing your own

perspective may not be the full story (Bernstein et al., 2015; Lebois et al., 2015). For example,

a stressed person could attempt to see a stressor from multiple perspectives, expanding beyond

their own personal perspective. *Cognitive distancing* is yet another way to understand the key

psychological effect of mindfulness; here a separation between one's thought and one's

emotions is the focus (Bernstein, et al. 2015). For example, in this model, a stressed person

would not react automatically to a stressor and instead re-frame the stressor as neutral, not

unpleasant.

"Experiential selfless processing" is a relatively new explanation for the benefits of

mindfulness and asserts that the key component is a complete separation between one's

emotions and a situation (Hadash, Plonsker, Vago, & Bernstein, 2016). For example, instead of

saying "I feel anxious" a person would say, "there is a feeling of anxiety arising." That is, rather

than asserting a self who is anxious, many MBSR instructors would encourage practitioners to

use statements which emphasize the momentary experience. While all of these models may

deal with pausing in their own way, only the reperceiving model mentions pausing directly so

this will provide the overarching framework for the following study since it most clearly

connects pausing as integral to developing mindfulness and reducing stress reactivity.

Pausing

Pausing is colloquially understood as an interruption to ongoing action or speech. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (Merriam-Webster, 2018) defines a pause as "a temporary stop." In mindfulness practice, pausing can have a variety of specific meanings. For the purpose of this research study, pausing will be defined as a temporary interruption between the perception of a (usually negative) stimulus and the automatic reaction to the given stimulus. This interruption allows for a more intentional response by facilitating greater cognitive awareness of stress reactivity, which can then be followed by a deliberate cognitive, verbal, or behavioral response, presumably different from the automatic reaction that had begun (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Santorelli, 2000). Such pausing has been asserted to be advantageous because it is correlated with decreased negative reactions to aversive stimuli (Morone, Lynch, Losasso, Liebe & Greco, 2011), but more research is needed to elaborate this process. Pausing has been treated as an obvious, even taken-for-granted, concept in the scholarly literature. No research was found which studied pausing, or how it can be encouraged, in depth. Pausing is mentioned most by the pioneers of MBSR: Jon Kabat-Zinn & Saki Santorelli. Jon Kabat-Zinn writes:

> ...bring[ing] mindfulness to a stressful moment, you can see if, in effect,
>
> it winds up creating something of a pause, a moment in which it feels like
>
> you have a bit of extra time to assess things more completely. By
>
> intentionally orienting yourself in this way to the present moment,
>
> challenging as it may be, you have an opportunity to buffer the
>
> impending effects of a major stress reaction.(Kabat-Zinn 1990, p. 340)

This use of the term pause conveys the concept but is not sufficiently defined for research purposes. Saki Santorelli, Jon Kabat-Zinn's successor at the Center for Mindfulness, asserts that pausing is "...the willingness to stop and be present which leads to seeing and relating to circumstances and events with more clarity and directness" (Santorelli, 2000, p. 12). This states more clearly how pausing affects reactivity. However, this definition focuses entirely on end results and does not explain the process of pausing.

Despite this dearth of research and imprecise definitions, psychological inventories (see Appendix A) used to measure practitioners' degree of mindfulness do mention pausing. Here again, the term is used colloquially, assuming practitioners will know what it means. For example, the widely-used Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown, & Ryan, 2003) alludes indirectly to reacting without awareness and quickly, i.e., without pause, in five separate items. In this way, mindfulness researchers assume that awareness of one's reactivity and the capacity to pause is pivotal to understanding mindfulness, but have yet to define it empirically. Similarly, the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer & Toney, 2006), uses a synonym for pausing twice and indirectly refers to it in three separate times. These inventories further demonstrate how important pausing is to the larger construct of mindfulness. It is necessary that research address this lack of operationalization by studying pausing directly. To achieve this goal it was necessary to select a qualitative methodology, Grounded Theory.

Grounded Theory

The study presented below utilized Grounded Theory (GT), a methodology that examines in-depth reports of first-person, subjective experience to describe a phenomenon in

detail. As Grossman's (2011) argument asserts, many attempts to quantify mindfulness have led

to a misunderstanding of what mindfulness is. This is one of the reasons for utilizing not only a

qualitative approach, but the GT methodology in particular, since it derives categories from

participants' talk, instead of forcing their statements into a preconceived set of categories.

Quantitative studies, in contrast, tend to reduce richly complex subjective experiences to

simplified variables in order to measure, compare and establish relationships between them. GT

is a descriptive, rather than comparative methodology. GT enables the researcher to closely

examine the participants' accounts as indicators of how the phenomenon is experienced in

everyday life. This approach is better able to identify a comprehensive description of pausing.

Since little is known about how mindfulness practitioners experience and utilize pausing, there

are no clear variables to measure or manipulate quantitatively at this time.

GT researchers carefully transcribe participants' talk then analyze small segments of

the transcribed data to identify all thematic content relevant to the research question. In

quantitative research, a hypothesis must be conceptualized prior to collecting the data so that it

can be disconfirmed. In contrast, GT entails ongoing interaction between the data collected and

developing interpretations of participants' meanings, so as to best represent that data. Data

collected using this method must be interpreted. The interpretation process begins with the

researcher carefully detailing how a phenomenon is discussed in the transcripts, these notes are

called memos. Memos are then utilized in the creation of theoretical categories that stay with

the descriptions of what was discussed by the participants rather than fitting them into a

preconceived category or basing them on how many times they were repeated (Charmaz, 1995).

GT fosters rich understanding of what the data is depicting, rather than being constrained by

what the researcher initially expected it to depict; in this way, the researcher's own assumptions

can be called into question.

The GT method begins with reading through each interview transcript carefully. The

researcher will distinguish segments, breaking the mass of data into manageable units, in order

to stay close to the data. These manageable units are called discursive turns (DTs), which is

easily marked every time a new speaker begins to talk. The first process of coding, called open

coding, is contingent on the transcript of the interview being as clear as possible, which means

the researcher must include breaks in speech and other discursive features. Each unit is carefully

coded for all the ideas it contains (Charmaz, 1995). For example, if a participant describes a

time they felt road rage, a researcher may label this DT with the code, "anger." Once the data is

completely coded, the researcher begins a second process called focused coding, which entails

the systematic creation of memos for each DT. Memoing allows the researcher to take a step

back from the participants' coded talk, beginning to interpret themes which can be identified

across multiple participants' data. The fundamental components of Grounded Theory (open

coding, focused coding and memoing) made it an ideal method for this study, which aimed to

clarify how the concept of "pausing" is understood and utilized by mindfulness practitioners.

The research question developed to guide this process was, "How do MBSR practitioners

describe pausing?"

Method

This project builds on a larger study (Mamberg & Bassarear, 2012; 2015) which

conducted semi-structured interviews with former MBSR practitioners and utilized a Grounded

Theory model to analyze the transcripts. The overall study's purpose was to understand how

they described learning to practice mindfulness. The present study focuses on the portion of

that data set in which participants mentioned pausing in any way.

Data Obtained

The participants were students, faculty and staff at a small New England college who

had indicated a willingness to be contacted for research purposes, all of whom had previously

completed the 8-week MBSR course with Dr. Bassarear (one of the co-investigators). Of the

participants ($N = 20$) interviewed, seven of the participants were male and 13 were female.

Participant ages ranged from 21 to 62 (average age: 39.6) years old. Nine of the twenty

participants were students, eleven of the participants were college staff (10) or faculty (1).

Interviews. Dr. Bassarear conducted hour-long, individual semi-structured interviews,

containing ten questions and various follow-up prompts. He conducted the interviews because

his prior experience with participants was expected to increase participant's comfort, while his

shared knowledge of the class was expected to help him elicit full elaboration of their

experiences. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of both Keene

State College and Bridgewater State University, participant confidentiality was ensured.

Demographic data were kept separate from all other data and secured using a

password-protected Microsoft Access database. All participants were given a pseudonym and

any identifying information was changed in transcripts, to assure their confidentiality.

Transcriptions. The interviews were transcribed using typing conventions to capture

every span of silence, laugh, and sound the participants made to assure that the data accurately

portrayed not only what the participants said, but how they said it. These discursive aspects are

sometimes referred to as meta-linguistic features. This meticulous transcription is particularly

important for the given study since talk about pausing may also feature actual pauses in interviewees' speech, which can be captured in text by recording timed silences (see appendix B). Once the data was transcribed for the main study (Mamberg & Bassarear, 2012, 2015), it was then uploaded to Atlas.ti, a qualitative software package, so all content could be analyzed, turn by turn.

Data Analytic Procedures.

Analysis entailed two distinct processes: open coding provided the basis for the focused coding used for this project. The open coding process, conducted by the other principal investigator and my predecessors in the lab, captured all content, while my focused coding was based on a subset of the data that mentioned pausing.

Open Coding. Open coding of the transcribed data was scrutinized by several trained raters who assigned content codes to each discursive turn. The researcher then labeled all content of each speaker's turn, as fully as possible so that each DT may be tagged with numerous content codes. For example, "I just need to cool my head, and re-examine my predicament" wasa DT coded as "reactive" "reperceive" and "cognitive."   To establish inter-rater agreement, each coder used a different database in Atlas.ti, to prevent their being impacted by seeing each other's codes. Each coder independently coded ⅓ of the transcripts. Upon comparison, any disagreements between raters were resolved through discussion until a consensus was reached.   This initial open coding process yielded a total of 993 content codes applied to 1,873 DTs.

Focused Coding. Once rater agreement was reached, focused coding was used to address specific research questions (Cormier, 2014; Field, 2015; Madonna, 2017; Schubert,

2013). The present study began with focused coding, the process of using one's research question to guide the selection of data, based on relevant content codes, then identifying thematic categories across all DTs, across all participants. The first step was to narrow down the data to just that which was coded as related to pausing or failing to pause. To identify which codes were most associated with pausing I began by reviewing all DTs labeled with the following codes: *autopilot, anger, anxiety, breath, breathe, bufferzone, detach, distance, habit, impulse, nonreactivity, panic, pause, reactivity, rumination, space, stepback, stop, stress, and worry*. These codes familiarized me with the data and prior coding to get a better idea of what codes would be most associated with pausing. From this larger group of codes, I identified using the codes more specific to pausing: *anger* (41 DTs)*, autopilot* (15)*, detach* (10)*, distance* (6)*, pause* (51)*, reactivity* (82)*, space* (5), and *stepback (6)*. This lead to a tentative data subset of 176 discursive turns, which was still overly inclusive. Of these 176 DTs, 89 did not actually describe pausing, only 87 were deemed relevant to the research question, these became the final data set for the current study. These DT's were then memoed based on the varying ways participants described pausing and how they used it. The memoing process then allowed me to identify emerging categories.

Analyses

The final 87 DTs selected were read carefully and memos made as to how each related to the guiding research question. Memos were then reviewed and refined to identify common themes which generated two main categories: *Taking a Moment* and *Taking Some Space*. These categories were identified based on the type of pause described by participants. The *Taking a Moment* category utilized pausing in a temporal sense, meaning it facilitated time passing before

reacting. While the *Taking Some Space* category utilized pausing in a spatial sense, meaning it facilitated a buffer zone before reacting. Within each category, two subcategories were identified. Two clear thematic categories emerged from the data *Taking a Moment* and *Taking Some Space*, each of these will be defined in the analyses below.

Category 1: Taking a Moment

Taking a Moment was defined as a temporal buffer between internal or external stimuli and the participants' responses to them. This category encompases 55% (48 of the 87 DTs), all of which discuss moments that they were able to take some time to get ahold of the current situation. Participants discuss this process in terms of a temporal metaphor. This category is further broken into two sub-categories: *Suspending Reactivity* and *Recognizing Habituation*.

Category 1a: Suspending Reactivity. *Suspending Reactivity* is defined by allowing some time prior to responding to stressful stimuli. Some DTs mention a specific anchor which participant turned their attention to during the pause. Some DTs discuss how letting time pass enabled the participant to feel an immediate reduction in reactivity. This subcategory consisted of 44% (38 of the 87 DTs). An example was when the participant Bella says,

> I think I I believe that the stopping and being mindful makes almost everything
>
> better cause cause if it's a really good experience you go deeper richer you're
>
> going to go more into it if it's a horrible experience (.) you can break it down a
>
> little bit (.) and make it less horrible (3) and if it's a (6) and if it's just day to day
>
> stuff THEN it helps me (8) it helps me take that pause and say <vc> wai -- wai --
>
> where was I going with this? <vc>

What makes this quote an example of *Suspending Reactivity* is the use of stopping or pausing to decrease stress and reactivity. The participant here gives an insightful glance into what she experience during a pause. Pausing is not about procrastinating the inevitable nor seeing the world with rose-colored glasses, it a way to become more conscious about one's actions and making obstacles more manageable. This point is further elaborated on by Patty when she says,

> ...so I think that again I've built an awareness of clearing my mind whatever that
>
> might be it might be a big breath it might be stopping for a moment to refocus
>
> but that has been since the class as well…

This quote further elaborates how some people use a deliberate focus on the breath to come back in the moment in a less reactive manner. Here, the participant does not deny the reality of her emotional state; she is not avoiding her feelings, instead pausing brings clarity to 'refocus' and deal with the problem head on.

Category 1b: Recognizing Habituation. The second subcategory of *Recognizing Habituation* is defined by recognition of our process to become unaware of certain repeated stimuli. This subcategory was made of 11% (10 of the 87 DTs). This reduction in habituation leads to a self-reported increased awareness. Habituation here is used in the psychological sense of the word, meaning a process of becoming unaware of certain stimuli when they are repeated often or long lasting (e.g., becoming nose blind to how your house smells). Participants mention becoming aware habituating in a couple of different situations, mainly in times there was a negative perception or a positive perception to which they had become habituated. An example

of a negative perception being habituated can be seen when participant Jordan discussed dealing with unpleasant events,

> I think REALLY (.) even though I have some other questions that have bubbled up AROUND that I think that THAT provided an excellent foundation of which to at least stop (.) recognize what's going on? Kind'of like a stop drop roll thing (h) that it's like <vc> Okay I'm on fire I'm (.) rum::inating I've got a lot of emotions rolling right now. Stop for a second. What are you feeling? <vc> Anger anxiety an::d fatigue. Okay. Focus on those now! Y'know analyze investigate and then eventually try to feel a::nd I've got to a point that I feel like it's separate...

In the form illustrated by Jordan he recognizes that he has become habituated to his emotions and uses this knowledge to gain greater clarity of the topic. Another example of this category is demonstrated by a positive perception being habituated. For example, participant Bella details this,

> Bella: OHH the stopping and appreciating the outside…
>
> Interviewer: mmhm
>
> Bella: there's there's the (2) I'm sure this is from your class… and I probably
>   m::orphed a little bit, the hear five things taste five things and smell five things,
>   feel five things
>
> Interviewer: that wasn't from our class but it fits

> Bella: or something just so when I'm on a walk or something or just to stop and can I
>
> can I identify? Maybe it's not five. Three different sounds three different smells
>
> three different (2) uhmm going through the different sensations

Here Bella discusses how being able to take some time to notice sense perceptions facilitates

her ability to meet the present moment in a mindful way. So we can see here that not only do

people discuss the use of pausing with gaining clarity to negative perceptions, but also positive

perceptions we may be too habituated to realize.

Category 2: Taking Some Space

The category *Taking Some Space* is defined as statements in which participants altered

their idea of a stimulus and created perceived separation between this internal or external

stimuli and subsequent responses. This category had a total 30% (26 of the 87 DTs) and is made

up of two subcategories, *Disconnecting* and *Reframing*.

Category 2a: Disconnecting. *Disconnecting* is defined as detaching from one's

reactive mindset. The participants describe creating space between themselves and their

reactions. This category had 13% (11 of the total DTs), an example can be seen when the

participant Paul says,

> and-- and so maybe detached came to mind because some of the the power of
>
> stepping back is being less attached to the particulars of what's happening…

The participant here uses a spatial metaphor to become less affected by incoming

stressors and this allows a better understanding of the moment. While becoming too

desensitized may seem like avoidance or invalidating their own perception of event, but the

participants do not describe dismissing there previous mindset. They just describe not letting

that mind set trap their views and actions. This process is further highlighted when participant

Kent says,

> what it (.) what it means to me is that I don't have to give that thought or that
>
> emotion um its head that I don't have to then um get caught up in in that

Kent describes this process of desensitizing the initial percepception of the stressor so he

will not be trapped by it. This portrayal characterizes the sub-category of mainly dealing with

reactivity via desensitizing oneself to the stressor.

Category 2b: Reframing. *Reframing* is defined as creating a new perspective. This is

reported to be done by creating a space between oneself and stimulus just enough to get a more

clear and less reactive idea of stimulus. This category had 17% (15 of the total DTs), an

example of which can be shown when participant Jordan says, "So It's sorta like y'know that

nanosecond allows you to see <vc> Oh I have CHOICES <vc> rather than just the automatic

way it allows you to SEE another possibility." The theme of this category is how participants

use pausing to find alternative paths from which to choose. In this case Jordan does mention

time, but it is this time that facilitates a special widening of perspective that facilitates the

creation of a new perspective. This meant realizing that not reacting was a choice he could

make. Another participant Samuel details this process,

> n'yeah and you can and definitely helps you from just banging your head into the
>
> wall over and over and over again kinda take that one second to STOP and be
>
> like oh! maybe I should do this you know like the - for some reason I just
>
> thought of a uh Gary Larsen cartoon where it's like the school for the gifted and
>
> the door says pull but the guy's like leaning up against it pushing on it.

This further illustrates how participants are able to see choices stemming from a reactive state. The importance of this is sometimes people get in their own way. This is in part due to the tendency to become unaware how many choices are available and instead reacting to certain ways, despite their being clearly ineffective. For example, suppose someone is in a heated argument with a loved one over something trivial. It is far more likely that they will become reactive and say mean things to one another in their reactivity than to maintain a diplomatic argument. Participants report these spatial metaphors of pausing as helping them to become aware of other ways to respond.

All of these forms of pausing help clarify the definition of pausing and how it relates to mindfulness. Given the categories developed by this focused coding, we can now expand our definition of pausing to a temporary interruption between the perception of a stimulus and the reaction to the given stimulus which may be described as temporal (time out) or spatial (widened perspective).

Discussion

Originally, when focused coding began, I expected that participants would discuss the timing of pausing rather than how they paused. I presumed participants would discuss when they paused in their reactive process, times they forgot to pause until it was too late, or times they did not pause at all but later wished they had. When Kabat Zinn and Santorelli discuss pausing, they mainly mean what was identified in this study as *Suspending Reactivity*. There was no indication by previous theorists that there may be more types of pausing, or that it could function in multiple ways The chosen methodology of Grounded Theory allowed the participants' reports of their experiences of pausing to be heard clearly, contrary to my initial

expectations of some sort of sequential depiction of pausing. A quantitative methodology would have imposed categories prematurely, rather than allow such an in depth understanding of this under-studied process. While another qualitative approach may have not allowed me to work with transcribed data from a former project.The analyses enabled a preliminary definition of pausing which should facilitate much needed operationalizing for future research.

The Grounded Theory analysis lead to identification of two separate categories, *Taking a Moment* and *Taking Some Space*. These categories relate to MBSR as possible mechanisms for reducing both reactivity and autopilot. When pausing is mentioned in research or by theorists, it is typically discussed in the context of *Suspending Reactivity*, simply because pausing is discussed primarily using temporal metaphors and the reduction of reactivity. This made the sub-category *Recognizing Habitation* surprising to see. While participants do discuss in terms of a temporal metaphor, this category was not dependent on reactivity or a more conscious reaction to the stressor, but instead discovering internal and external stimuli that they have become habituated to, regardless of whether they are perceived positively or negatively. Based on the analysis, pausing is a clear concrete mechanism, despite the lack of literature surrounding it. This lack of understanding has led many researchers to see pausing as something that does not need proper operationalization or explanation, such as the case in Shapiro et al., (2006). This research has both helped define this concept, but also aimed to assert the importance of pausing. One important implication of this study relates to the mindfulness inventories, discussed earlier. Both the FFMQ and MAAS utilize pausing as a way of measuring mindfulness, yet they seem to presume only one aspect (suspending reactivity) seen

here. Future research may indicate that such inventories should add items related to the other subcategories identified in this study.

Similarly, books about mindfulness imply the usefulness of pausing is important [cf., *A World of Pausabilities: An Exercise in Mindfulness* by Frank J. Sileo (2017)], yet they too do not differentiate among the types of pauses. Such applications of mindfulness pedagogy, in addition to the lack of studies noted in the literature review, support the need for continued research on this topic.

One limitation of this study is the lack of diversity of participants and the fact that they were all taught by the same instructor. While this ensures that participants have a similar frame of reference and consistency in the data, a study of practitioners who trained with differing instructors should be done to ensure the categories presented here are representative of a broader range of mindfulness practitioners. It is possible that the particular training of these participants led to the perception of pausing found. A second limitation was that the interview questions did not relate directly to pausing. As the larger study was meant to address how participants learned mindfulness, no questions were designed to clarify or bring up pausing. While the data were sufficient for developing preliminary categories, perhaps more detailed representations of pausing would have been obtained if interview questions directly aimed at the concept at pausing. Relatedly, the interviewer would have followed up more carefully when participants alluded to pausing indirectly.

The implications of this study relate to clinical practice, to teaching mindfulness practices, and to research on MBIs. As mindfulness and MBSR continue to be incorporated in clinical settings, more information regarding their usefulness will be needed. By having this

HOW MINDFULNESS PRACTITIONERS DESCRIBE PAUSING.

information clinicians could advise patients more accurately on ways to reduce reactivity in

their lives. Research into mindfulness practice will be helped in a similar way. Further studies

may help practitioners understand different options they have to stay in the moment and better

reduce reactivity. This research study is a leaping off point to both understand mindfulness

better in the context of pausing and to also further understand this complex phenomena in its

own right.

References

Baer, R. A., Smith, G. T., Hopkins, J., Krietemeyer, J., & Toney, L. (2006). Using self report

assessment methods to explore facets of mindfulness. *Assessment, 13*, 27- 45.

Bernstein, A., Hadash, Y., Lichtash, Y., Tanay, G., Shepherd, K., & Fresco, D. M. (2015).

Decentering and related constructs: A critical review and metacognitive processes

model. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 10*(5), 599-617.

doi:10.1177/1745691615594577

Brown, K.W. & Ryan, R.M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in

psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 822-848.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Coding in grounded theory practice. In constructing grounded theory: A

practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Charmaz, K. (1995). Grounded Theory. *Rethinking Methods in Psychology*, 27-49.

doi:10.4135/9781446221792.n3

Cormier, B.(2014.) An examination of perceived increased responsiveness in participation of a

mindfulness based stress reduction program: A qualitative approach. *Unpublished

Manuscript.*

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand

Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Fehrer, F. C. (2002). The awareness response: A transpersonal approach to reducing

maladaptive emotional reactivity. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 63*, 1550.

Field, J. (2015). From Goal-Striving to "Right Intention": A Grounded Theory Analysis of

    Interviews with Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Participants. *Bridgewater State*

    University Undergraduate Review, 58-65.

Freeman, M. (2014). Qualitative Inquiry and the Self-Realization of Psychological

    Science. *Qualitative Inquiry, 20*(2), 119-126. doi:10.1177/1077800413510270

Goldin, P. R., & Gross, J. J. (2010). Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) on

    emotion regulation in social anxiety disorder. *Emotion*, *10*(1), 83-91.

    doi:10.1037/a0018441

Grossman, P. (2011). Defining mindfulness by how poorly I think I pay attention during

    everyday awareness and other intractable problems for psychology's (re)invention of

    mindfulness: Comment on Brown et al. (2011). *Psychological Assessment*, *23*(4),

    1034-1040. doi:10.1037/a0022713

Hadash, Y., Plonsker, R., Vago, D. R., & Bernstein, A. (2016). Experiential self-referential and

    selfless processing in mindfulness and mental health: Conceptual model and implicit

    measurement methodology. *Psychological Assessment, 28*(7), 856-869.

    doi:10.1037/pas0000300

Irving, J. A., Park-Saltzman, J., Fitzpatrick, M., Dobkin, P. L., Chen, A., & Hutchinson, T.

    (2012). Experiences of health care professionals enrolled in mindfulness-based medical

    practice: A grounded theory model. *Mindfulness, 5*(1), 60-71.

    doi:10.1007/s12671-012-0147-9

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. New York, NY: Pub. by Dell Pub., a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Pub. Group.

Lebois, L. M., Papies, E. K., Gopinath, K., Cabanban, R., Quigley, K. S., Krishnamurthy, V., & ... Barsalou, L. W. (2015). A shift in perspective: Decentering through mindful attention to imagined stressful events. *Neuropsychologia*, *75,* 505-524. doi:10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2015.05.030

Madonna, J. (in press). Mindfulness Practitioners Clarify the Concept of "Re-Perceiving": A Qualitative Interview Study. Bridgewater State University *Graduate Review*.

Mamberg, M. H. (2012). Participant Perceptions Following a Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction Program: A Qualitative Interview Study. Faculty and Librarian Research Grants (FLRG). Item 131. http://vc.bridgew.edu/flrg_grant/131

Mamberg, M. & Bassarear, T. (2015). From reified self to being mindful: A dialogical analysis of the MBSR voice. *International Journal of Dialogical Science, 9*(1), 11-37.

Mamberg, M. H., Bassarear, T. & Schubert, A. (2013, April). *"So, how did you learn to practice mindfulness?": A qualitative interview study*. **Poster** presented at the 11th Annual Scientific Conference of the Center for Mindfulness, Norwood, MA.

Morone, N. E., Lynch, C. P., Losasso, V. I., Liebe, K., & Greco, C. M. (2012). Mindfulness to reduce psychosocial stress. *Mindfulness, 3*(1), 22-29. doi:10.1007/s12671-011-0076-z

Olendzki, A. (2010). *Unlimiting mind: the radically experiential psychology of Buddhism*.

Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Pause. 2018. In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved May 8, 2018, from

https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hacker

Salmon, P. G., Santorelli, S. F., Sephton, S. E., & Kabat-Zinn, J. (2009). *Intervention elements*

promoting adherence to mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs in a

clinical behavioral medicine setting. In S. A. Shumaker, J. K. Ockene, K. A. Riekert, S.

A. Shumaker, J. K. Ockene, K. A. Riekert (Eds.) , The handbook of health behavior

change, 3rd ed (pp. 271-286). New York, NY, US: Springer Publishing Co.

Salmon, P., Sephton, S., Weissbecker, I., Hoover, K., Ulmer, C., & Studts, J. L. (2004).

Mindfulness meditation in clinical practice. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice, 11*(4),

434-446. doi:10.1016/s1077-7229(04)80060-9

Santorelli, S. (2000). *Heal thy self: lessons on mindfulness in medicine.* New York: Three

Rivers.

Sileo, F. (2017). A World of Pausabilities: An Exercise in Mindfulness. Washington D.C.:

Magination Press

Sapolsky R. (2004) *Why zebras don't get ulcers.* New York: Henry Holt

Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A., & Freedman, B. (2006). Mechanisms of

Mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 62*(3), 373-386. doi:10.1002/jclp.20237

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.) New York, NY:

McGraw-Hill Education.

HOW MINDFULNESS PRACTITIONERS DESCRIBE PAUSING.

Appendix A.

Pause-Related Items Found in Mindfulness Inventories.

Source	Direct mention of Pausing	Indirect mention of a lack of pausing
MAAS[1]		Item 1. I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until sometime later.
		Item 3. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.
		Item 7. It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing.
		Item 10. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.
		Item 13. I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.
FFMQ[2]	When I have distressing thoughts or images, I 'step back' and am aware of the thought or image without getting taken over by it	
	In difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting	
		I watch my feelings without getting lost in them
		It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing
		I do jobs or tasks automatically without being aware of what I'm doing

[1] MAAS; Brown, & Ryan, 2003
[2] FFMQ; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer & Toney, 2006

HOW MINDFULNESS PRACTITIONERS DESCRIBE PAUSING.

Appendix B.
Discursive Transcription Scheme.[3]

Symbol	Description	Example
Identify speakers		
I:	Interviewer; *Note: one tab after colon before speech.*	I: How regularly do you engage in formal meditation practice?
P:	Participant *(1 tab after)*	P: I really have found meditation very empowering.
Stressed Speech		
CAPS	Amplified speech; usually single word or syllable of a word louder than surrounding speech.	P: I found it VERY helpful
::	Lengthened syllables	P: I re::ally did not like the body scan
?	Rising intonation, raised pitch (not a punctuation mark).	P: and how much I care for my family?
!	Stressed / exclaimed utterance followed by pause.	P: And then wham! it just hit me
Pause Length		
(.)	Just noticeable pause (untimed, ~ 1 sec.)	P: (.) I think I think it was the support of my family
(#)	Timed Pause, given in seconds (>1 sec).	P: Well (4) I don't know, it's hard to explain
.	Full stop, falling intonation contour (ending)	P: I just found myself sitting and watching the sun set.
Interruptions / Overlaps		

---

[3] Mamberg, M. H. (2012)

--	Truncation, self-editing marker where speaker stops abruptly, either to interrupt self or yielding to other.	T: So, I was wondering -- if you don't mind me asking
…	Trailing off.	P: I was going to do it but…
[ ]	Placed at beginning and end of verbal overlap	P: I meditate [and find--] T: [How often] do you meditate?

Meta-transcription Comments

(*text*)	Inaudible words; guess at words	P: I think (*my*) whole, my (*family*) is
( )	Unintelligible speech, transcriber unable to guess	P: I meditate once ( ) but not as often as I would like
[ ]	Non-lexical action which interrupts the text (e.g., [cough] or [knocking])	T: So tell me more about that [cough] experience
<vc>	Voice change; usually indicates speaker is mimicking or quoting someone else – place at beginning and end of stretch of talk that differs from speaker's normal voice	P: So she was like <vc> WHAT?! You so CRAzy! <vc> and so I said…

Audible Breathing

, -h,	Inspiration (In-breath) or any breath (can't discern in vs. out), set off with commas	P: This is hard to talk about, –h, I guess it really bothered me
, h,	Aspiration (Out-breath), set off with commas	P: What a relief, h, that was something I had trouble with
(h)	Small laugh, chuckle; Note: can be placed within a word, as well	T: (h) It sounds like that was quite an exper(h)ience
(h, h)	Laughter	P: I was walking to class when I saw it (h,h)