THE IMPACT OF MINDFULNESS PEDAGOGY ON CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT: A MIXED METHODS STUDY WITH SOCIAL WORK HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT

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This dissertation of Nicole Bodenstab-Lee, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Educational Leadership and titled "The Impact of Mindfulness Pedagogy on Critical Consciousness Development: A Mixed Methods Study with Social Work Higher Education Students," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all my students who have and will grow with me as I learn, at times awkwardly, to teach in ways that help develop their own conscientization. I have deeply appreciated their patience, grace, and bravery as we've struggled with important concepts and values in our class discussions.

ABSTRACT

One accreditation-mandated outcome of social work education is to increase students' understanding of social injustice and prepare them to work to reduce such injustices. This has been called critical consciousness (CC). This study explored the relationship between mindfulness as a pedagogical tool to support CC development in social work students. Mindfulness is a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. This mixed methods convergent design study with higher education social work students (n=138) showed no statistically significant relationship between a mindful disposition and CC, as measured through the Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale and the Critical Consciousness Inventory. However, qualitative analysis of open-ended survey responses (n=128) and semi-structured interviews (n=13) with higher education social work students brought to light ways students identified mindfulness as an important support to their CC development. The conclusions from the study include: (1) Participants saw mindfulness as an important support to their conscientization; (2) Mindfulness, as nonjudgmental attention alone, does not lead to critical consciousness; (3) Students appreciate different types of mindfulness; (4) Students grew into the habit of mindful attention and reflection that was helpful to conscientization; and (5) In order to support CC development, mindfulness should be framed and modeled with external relational components to aid in a clearer understanding of self, others, and the context of the situation. These conclusions add empirical support to the theoretical literature that educators should incorporate mindfulness pedagogies in the classroom to support students' CC development.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In the 2021 film, “MOXiE!,” 16-year-old Vivian grows in awareness about the sexual harassment, bullying, rape, and sexism that occurs in her high school (IMDb, 2021). Over the course of the movie, she develops from a passive, accepting participant in this biased, sexist culture to secretly publishing a zine, or booklet, that calls out the sexism on display in her school. She covertly leaves copies of the zine in the women’s bathrooms around the school. After challenges with authority and tensions among friendships, the movie concludes with Vivian participating in public activism that aimed to reduce the sexist school culture (Fleming, 2019; IMDb, 2021). The process of growing in awareness of injustice that Vivian went through is sometimes called critical consciousness development or conscientization (Freire, 2000; Jemal, 2017; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Watts et al., 2011). Vivian’s school culture included overtly discriminatory and oppressive behaviors from some students and more subtle discriminatory behaviors from some staff. It took the conscientization of a few key students to bring broader awareness to the injustice. These students worked to remedy the situation to provide a safer and more just environment for all students.

Similar to the interruption of injustice that occurred with Vivian and her schoolmates, preparing students to address discrimination, oppression, and all forms of social injustice is a key aim for social work education programs (Council for Social Work Education [CSWE], 2022; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021). Professionals in the field of social work recognize the ethical imperative for social workers to be cognizant of bias, discrimination, and oppression when working with individuals, groups, or communities (NASW, 2021). Bias is an implicit or explicit propensity to hold negative stereotypes or judgments about people

belonging to a certain group, including assumptions about intelligence and motivation (Marcelin et al., 2019; Uzogara, 2019). Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of one group or another based on the group's characteristics (Moreau, 2010; Williams et al., 2019). Oppression is the repeated, widespread systemic injustice, an abuse of power in discriminatory ways that creates barriers for some groups in accessing resources and power (Deutsch, 2006; Prilleltensky, 2003). Oppression often includes domination, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Abberley, 1987; Deutsch, 2006; Prilleltensky, 2003; Young, 2014).

There are multiple theoretical models for teaching bias recognition and discrimination and oppression mitigation within social work education (Abe, 2019; Bransford, 2011; Hall & Theriot, 2016; Lwin & Beltrano, 2020; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). However, there are few empirical studies to provide a solid foundation for the efficacy of such models that promote long-term sustainability and action-oriented outcomes (Featherston et al., 2019; Lwin & Beltrano, 2020; Mehrotra et al., 2017). Further research is needed within social work education to find evidence-based pedagogical interventions that support students to act in ways that reduce bias, discrimination, and oppression (Hall & Theriot, 2016; Mehrotra et al., 2018; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016).

One framework that lends itself to a number of pedagogical interventions to address bias, discrimination, and oppression is that of critical consciousness (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Bransford, 2011; Curtis et al., 2019; Ellison et al., 2021; Freire, 2000; Jemal, 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Puckett et al., 2020; Zaidi et al., 2017). Critical consciousness, used here synonymously with consciousness-raising and conscientization, relates to the developmental process of becoming aware of oppression and injustice and leads to action that mitigates

oppression and injustice (Freire, 2000). This process of growth begins with a “magical” or fatalistic interpretation of social systems and interactions, where the status quo is accepted as the way things are meant to be (Czank, 2012, p. 802; Gucma, 2013; Mahur et al., 2019). Next, people grow to see injustice but in a naive way that tends to blame oneself and others for injustices (Freire, 2000; Mahur et al., 2019). Finally, growth in awareness occurs when one is able to understand the societal and structural aspects of injustice and oppression and feels the responsibility and capacity to act to create more just systems (Freire, 2000; Mahur et al., 2019).

Critical consciousness pedagogies have been applied in multiple community psychology settings and have been shown to be effective in consciousness-raising related to understanding the structures of oppression (Blumenthal-Barby & Krieger, 2014; Heberle et al., 2020; Pillen et al., 2020). However, while the literature aims at action-oriented outcomes, in current empirical research, it is unclear how or how often these methods result in action that addresses systemic oppression (Pillen et al., 2020; Zestcott et al., 2016). To provide best-practice instruction techniques, social work educators should apply pedagogies that are evidence-based and lead to consciousness-raising and action-oriented outcomes, rather than assuming that discussing bias and injustice will lead to action-oriented critical consciousness (CSWE, 2022; Featherston et al., 2019; Mehrotra et al., 2018; NASW, 2021; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Zestcott et al., 2016).

Pedagogical methods can now be more easily tested with the recent meta-analysis that outlines six stages of development within conscientization; these have evolved into a framework for researchers to assess pedagogical effectiveness in incremental growth toward the larger goal of conscientization (Pillen et al., 2020). Individual teaching strategies can now be tested against this framework to ascertain their effectiveness at varying levels of meaningful learning,

providing the research to support social work pedagogies required for educational accreditation (CSWE, 2022; Pillen et al., 2020).

One broadly supported pedagogical tool for supporting varying aspects of conscientization is mindfulness practice (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Doll et al., 2016; Gorski, 2015; Grecucci et al., 2015; Krick & Felfe, 2020; Marlowe et al., 2015; Ransom et al., 2021; Sewell, 2020; Wong, 2004; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). Mindfulness has been applied to help increase self-awareness, reflection, emotional recognition, emotional regulation, and perseverance with difficult tasks, which are all part of the conscientization process (Caldwell, 2020; Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2015; Hafenbrack et al., 2022; Iani et al., 2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Petranker & Eastwood, 2021; Sass et al., 2013; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). The conscientization process is fraught with barriers including distress, discomfort, impatience, fragility, guilt, immobility, lack of a path forward, fear, anger, etc. (Caldwell, 2020; Wallin-Ruschman, 2014; Walsh, 2018; Zinga & Styres, 2019). Mindfulness practice has been shown to be a helpful technique in addressing many of these barriers and acts as an aide in guiding students through difficult emotions (Caldwell, 2020; Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2017; Hafenbrack et al., 2022; Iani et al., 2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Sass et al., 2013). Teaching social work students mindfulness techniques can be a pedagogical intervention to support self-care and self-compassion through difficult cognitive tasks related to bias recognition (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). Being aware of the body in a mindful way can help social workers navigate the discomfort associated with the process of recognizing implicit bias and structural oppression (Wong & Vinsky, 2021). It has also been shown to increase perseverance in difficult tasks (Petranker & Eastwood, 2021).

However, there are varying ways to apply mindfulness and not all of them support consciousness-raising goals (Forbes, 2022; Ishikawa, 2018; Purser, 2021). Mindfulness, as defined in Western literature relates to nonjudgmental attention to the present moment (Bodhi, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Some scholars have criticized this narrow view of mindfulness, stating that divorcing the mindful attention from its original Buddhist context misses an important relational element that connects the internal experience to external factors (Forbes, 2022; Purser, 2021). It is possible that mindfulness, if taught as merely nonjudgmental attention, may not be enough to support action-oriented critical consciousness which is intrinsically concerned with the societal impact of systems of power (Anālayo, 2020; Davis, 2015; Sentot, 2017; Stanley, 2015). It is also important to recognize there are populations that find mindfulness itself uncomfortable and unhelpful (Berila, 2016; Dobkin et al., 2012). While mindfulness is often cited as a pedagogical tool to be used in conscientization education, further empirical research is needed to provide an encompassing picture regarding how mindfulness practice affects the consciousness-raising process in social work students, including whether or not it aids in leading students toward oppression-reducing action (Berila, 2016; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Wong & Vinsky, 2021).

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between mindfulness practice as a pedagogical tool and critical consciousness development that results in action to reduce oppression. The researcher examined the relationship between a mindful disposition and critical consciousness, how mindfulness practice related to social work students' emotional reactions, and how it affected their development through the stages of conscientization, including action that disrupts discriminatory and oppressive behaviors. These results add to the body of knowledge regarding efficacious pedagogical practices that assist social work students not only toward the recognition of bias, but also toward actions that reduce discrimination and oppression.

Statement of the Problem

A critical view of the history of social work practice reveals that harm can happen when social workers neglect to apply self-reflection to their justice-oriented actions, bringing to light examples of when social workers contributed to the marginalization and oppression of vulnerable people (Sloane et al., 2018). This was broadly the case when social work transitioned from a grassroots effort to a profession with a focus on the social worker becoming the expert, claiming to know solutions for client situations (Morris, 2008). This movement transitioned the social worker involvement from collaborative problem-solving for collective wellbeing toward acts of charity with a power dynamic that included a professional helping a client (Sloane et al., 2018). More specifically, social workers have participated as oppressors in the area of involuntary sterilization when the National Association of Social Workers collaborated with eugenics groups and promoted eugenics as a positive solution to poverty (Anastas, 2011). Social workers were also involved with oppressive systems as part of the Japanese internment process (Park, 2008). It can be helpful for social workers to review biases, discrimination, and oppression within the history of the profession to see more clearly how current interventions and roles may include biases and perpetuate injustices rather than interrupt them (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). Social work students should also be taught how to recognize their own biases in order to grow in conscientization toward actions that interrupt injustice (NASW, 2021). This study will explore the conscientization development process for social work students through the lens of mindfulness practices.

Background

Distressing emotions are pervasive throughout the conscientization process, from initial experiences that open one's eyes to injustice all the way through to anti-oppressive actions that

addresses these injustices (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Lai et al., 2016; Vollhardt & Twali, 2016; Vuletich & Payne, 2019; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018; Walsh, 2018; Zestcott et al., 2016). Strong emotions such as anger, guilt, or sadness can occur during the process of learning about oppression, particularly for people with dominant social identities (Mirick & Davis, 2021; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). Bias mitigation strategies can sometimes produce an increase in defensiveness and a denial of bias (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Zestcott et al., 2016). There are also emotional barriers that prevent some people from engaging in or sustaining anti-oppression activism such as hatred, anger, guilt, anxiety about imperfection, and burnout (Hernández Cárdenas & Méndez, 2017; Vollhardt & Twali, 2016; Walsh, 2018). Alternatively, anger can also be a motivating emotion to engage in anti-oppression activism (Borders & Wiley, 2019; Ford et al., 2019; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Recognition of emotions and emotional regulation is a key piece of growing through the conscientization process; however, it must be clear that the personal work of emotional regulation is not the end goal of conscientization but a step toward reducing structural injustices (Martín-Baró, 1994; Vollhardt & Twali, 2016).

The 2022 version of the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards of Social Work Education increased the emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion from previous versions (CSWE, 2022; Williamson, 2020). It sets a standard that social work education programs are expected to teach students to reflect and be aware of personal biases in order to reduce discrimination (CSWE, 2022). When a social worker is unaware of biases they hold, they can misperceive reality by incorrectly judging a situation or assigning attributes to a client when they are not applicable (Rogerson et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2017). Without an awareness of bias, social workers can provide limited options to their clients or make discriminatory decisions

based on client identities such as race or gender (Brodie et al., 2014; Bruster et al., 2019). Examples of micro-level social worker-client interactions show that unrecognized bias leads to poor decision-making when intervening on behalf of a client (Rogerson et al., 2021; Spratt et al., 2015). This has been shown in child welfare research when African American families are unnecessarily reported to the child welfare system (Chibnall et al., 2003). It has also occurred in situations where social workers presumed gender role expectations of fathers of color who were involved in social services and provided them with options different from those provided to mothers (Brodie et al., 2014). Harm and oppression can occur within social worker-client relationships when bias recognition and discrimination-mitigating action are not applied and researchers are calling for social work programs to increase their efforts to teach toward these aims (Brodie et al., 2014; Brown et al., 2019; Bruster et al., 2019; Mehrotra et al., 2018).

The updated CSWE standards also include text regarding how social workers are to demonstrate anti-oppressive practice at all levels of intervention including organizations, communities, and state and federal governance (CSWE, 2022). A core aspect of social work is to advocate for individuals and groups who have limited power and work to increase equitable access to resources and opportunities, intervening at community and organization levels (Bransford, 2011; CSWE, 2022; NASW, 2021). Social workers should be cognizant of the unjust structures of power that envelop their clients and work to reduce those injustices (CSWE, 2022; NASW, 2021; Specht & Courtney, 1995). When social workers focus solely on the individual-level process of well-being it reinforces hegemonic structures by neglecting the impact of systems on personal well-being, therefore reducing all problems to personal problems rather than systemic issues (Martín-Baró, 1994; Vollhardt & Twali, 2016).

Social work educational programs tend to include bias mitigation curriculum in diversity coursework, which are often integrated, multi-modal, and long-term (Mehrotra et al., 2017; Pitner et al., 2017). However, there is a lack of evidence within social work education as to whether conscientization efforts are effective, leading to sustained bias mitigation and oppression-reducing actions (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Bruster et al., 2019; Featherston et al., 2019; Heberle et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2016; Lwin & Beltrano, 2020; Mehrotra et al., 2017; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Three recent systematic reviews of empirical studies regarding aspects of bias mitigation have noted the lack of empirical evidence regarding efficacious interventions toward bias recognition and mitigation (Featherston et al., 2019; Heberle et al., 2020; Mehrotra et al., 2017). A qualitative analysis of 27 syllabi of social work courses on diversity and social justice from geographically representative institutions across the United States found an overarching assumption in the syllabi that empirically teaching about themes related to bias, self-awareness, oppression, and social justice would lead to bias mitigation without having measures to ascertain if these concepts were integrated into practice (Mehrotra et al., 2017). Scholars call for further research within social work education to find evidence-based pedagogical interventions that lead to action aimed at oppression mitigation (Hall & Theriot, 2016; Mehrotra et al., 2018; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016).

A helpful way to assess increased awareness of bias (reflection), as well as effecting change in discriminatory or oppressive behaviors and systems (action), is to utilize a conceptual framework that ties these elements together with a developmental lens (Bransford, 2011; Pillen et al., 2020; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). Critical consciousness is one such framework (Freire, 2000; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005). The critical consciousness model is taught with a cyclical and iterative process of reflecting and acting to increase the conscientization of a person’s awareness

of bias, oppression, and injustice to produce more egalitarian behaviors and systems (Freire, 2000; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Watts et al., 2011). In the film, "MOXiE!," referenced at the beginning of the chapter, Vivian shows this iterative process of reflection and action as she engages in brave action-oriented behaviors at each step of her development. These behaviors include participating in discussions about sexism, designing and publishing the zine, interrupting sexist action, and protesting outside her school (Fleming, 2019; IMDb, 2021).

Though it is theoretically appropriate to apply a critical consciousness framework to the development of social work students' bias recognition and mitigation, it has typically been practically applied to youth of a homogenous, marginalized identity (Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Diemer, 2012, 2020; Heberle et al., 2020; Oosterhoff et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2019; Seider et al., 2019). Researchers caution that applying the conscientization framework with a heterogenous population, such as social work students, will require adjustments to the previously studied methods (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). One pedagogical method that shows promise toward conscientization within heterogenous populations is the incorporation of mindfulness practice into social work content courses (Berila, 2016; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Lavoie, 2020; Wong, 2004; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). Social work students have reflected on mindfulness practice, identifying that it has supported their critical reflection on thoughts, feelings, and visceral reactions (Wong & Vinsky, 2021). The pause and awareness that comes with mindfulness practice can disrupt the "automaticity" in response and allow the practitioner to assess more accurately (Gawronski et al., 2020). There is plentiful empirical evidence supporting mindfulness as a pedagogy to support self-reflection and emotional regulation (Davis & Hayes, 2011; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Krick & Felfe, 2020; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Wong, 2004). However, there is critique in the literature that mindfulness can be applied in ways that will not

lead to the confrontation of injustice and oppression, and may perpetuate colonization or cultural appropriation; further research is needed to determine how and if mindfulness can be appropriately applied to support anti-oppressive work (Berila, 2016; Hyland, 2016; Ishikawa, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Critical consciousness development, or conscientization, is a theoretical framework originally proposed in the 1960s by Brazilian educator, Paolo Freire (2000). The framework is rooted in Marxist theory regarding dismantling the interpersonal and systemic structures of oppression for the liberation of the working class (Allman, 1994; Au, 2007; Freire, 2000). It poses a developmental model of growth in which the subject expands their awareness of oppression to reach the point where they recognize and then act in ways to reduce oppression (Diemer et al., 2016; Freire, 2000). Critical consciousness has been proposed as an apt model for social work educators to use when teaching toward the ethical and accreditation-required standards of social work educational programs (Bransford, 2011; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). It is also a framework that addresses the bias and oppression that can occur in interpersonal relationships, such as social worker-client relationships, as well as within community or institutional oppression (Bransford, 2011; Jemal, 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). Critical consciousness is a concept that incorporates both critical self-reflection and oppression-reducing action (Diemer, 2020; Diemer et al., 2021; Jemal, 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005; Thomas et al., 2014; Watts et al., 2011). It is defined as “the process of continuously reflecting upon and examining how our own biases, assumptions, and cultural worldviews affect the ways we perceive differences and power dynamics” (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005, p. 441). Critical consciousness also includes “action to address social injustice” (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016, p. 2).

One of the benefits of using a critical consciousness model is that it has been studied for over 40 years (Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Diemer, 2012, 2020; Diemer et al., 2016; Heberle et al., 2020; Martinez-Brawley, 1980; Minkler & Cox, 1980; Oosterhoff et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2019; Seider et al., 2019). There is evidence this model is effective in increasing the conscientization of youth and young adults in oppression-related situations including undergraduate students grappling with social-gender relations and varying social justice beliefs (Thomas et al., 2014; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018) and Latinx youth leaders confronted with racism (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016). Critical consciousness development has been taught with a variety of curricula and methods including content instruction regarding oppression (racism, sexism, classism, etc.), power and privilege activities, experiential learning that exposes the student to diverse people groups, reflection writing assignments, and group discussions (Bransford, 2011; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Wallin-Ruschman, 2014; Wong, 2004). Pillen et al. (2020) performed a meta-analysis on 20 empirical studies related to the development of critical consciousness and found six stages in the developmental process: (1) priming of critical reflection, (2) information creating disequilibrium, (3) introspection, (4) revising frames of reference, (5) developing agency for change, and (6) acting against oppression. With this as a model to follow, social work researchers can now test methods that effectively support students' development through these stages that result in action (Pillen et al., 2020). However, it is highly likely that, due to the complex and individual identities of social work students, there will not be one curriculum or methodology that will work for everyone to progress along the conscientization process (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). Many curriculums and methodologies should be empirically tested to learn more about who benefits from each model, when they can best be applied, and how they prompt growth through critical consciousness development (Featherston et al., 2019; Lwin & Beltrano,

2020; Mehrotra et al., 2017). In this study, the theoretical framework of critical consciousness was applied to the research methods and analysis, as well as the implications and discussion. One of the primary constructs being measured quantitatively was critical consciousness and the instrument used was supported by this theory. In the qualitative data analysis process, the qualitative codes were informed by Pillen et al.'s (2020) stages of critical consciousness development. Key words from the participants were grouped according to stage development in order to evaluate how or if they showed typical behaviors or beliefs from the stages.

Recent research on mindfulness supports that regular mindfulness practice may aid in the conscientization process through navigating discomfort and helping students persist through difficult tasks (Albrecht, 2021; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Garland et al., 2015; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). However, the direct relationship between mindfulness practice and critical consciousness development has not yet been studied to ascertain where, how, and to whom mindfulness might be helpful or detrimental. This study explored the relationship between mindfulness practice and critical consciousness development, particularly focusing on how students navigate the uncomfortable and strong emotions inherent in the conscientization process, including the emotions related to oppression-reducing-action.

Research Questions

Critical consciousness is a fitting framework related to the development of bias recognition and agency to act to reduce oppression, both vital aspects of ethical social work practice (CSWE, 2022; NASW, 2021; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). Utilizing the empirically supported six stages of critical consciousness development described by Pillen et al. (2020), this study contributes to the literature regarding the efficacy of mindfulness practice in supporting the critical consciousness development process. The questions guiding the research study are:

1. What is the relationship between trait mindfulness and critical consciousness in social work students?
2. How do social work students perceive mindfulness practice to impact their response to the emotions inherent in the critical consciousness development process?
3. How do social work students perceive mindfulness practice to impact their progression through Pillen et al.'s (2020) six stages of critical consciousness development?

Description of Terms and Acronyms

Many terms and acronyms are used throughout social science literature to describe the aspects of recognizing and mitigating injustice and oppression. The following concepts are defined to help the reader understand and differentiate between these terms and acronyms as they are used throughout the discussion.

Bias. An implicit or explicit propensity for holding negative stereotypes or judgments about people belonging to a certain group, including assumptions about intelligence and motivation (Marcelin et al., 2019; Uzogara, 2019).

BIPOC. Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

Critical Consciousness Inventory (CCI). A nine-item Guttman scale tool used to measure awareness of social dominance and stigma (Thomas et al., 2014).

Conscientization or Critical Consciousness. The process and product of recognizing oppressive social systems, including the recognition of how our worldviews contribute to our perception of the level of justice within power dynamics, systems, and differences. Critical consciousness includes the ability and motivation to resist oppression and act to interrupt injustice, engaging in anti-oppressive action (Heberle et al., 2020; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005).

Contemplation. The practice of thoughtful observation; of being aware or mindful; used here synonymously with mindfulness (Oberski et al., 2015; Schaarsberg, 2021).

Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The accrediting body for social work education programs.

Cultural humility. The continual process of reflecting upon and critiquing one's biases, such as "unintentional and intentional racism, classism, and homophobia" (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 120). This also includes working to fairly restore power imbalances and promote "mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships" with others, particularly those relationships between a professional and client/patient (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 123).

Discrimination. The unfair or prejudicial treatment of one group or another based on the group's characteristics (Moreau, 2010; Williams et al., 2019).

Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). A document published by the CSWE outlining educational standards for social work education programs (CSWE, 2022).

Implicit Association Test (IAT). An online, public survey to test a person's unconscious associations between such concepts as race, evaluations, and stereotypes (Sukhera et al., 2019).

Implicit bias. The assumptions, attitudes, and stereotypes held unknowingly that might cause discriminatory behavior, even against one's stated values (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006).

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). A Likert-scale tool to assess trait mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Macro social work. Social work practice with communities, organizations, or policy development (Austin et al., 2016).

Micro social work. Social work practice with individuals such as children and adults in a variety of fields (mental health, case work, aging, etc.) (Austin et al., 2016).

Mindfulness. A practice of paying intentional attention to the current moment, without judgment; used here synonymously with contemplation (Bodhi, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Oppression. The repeated, widespread systemic injustice; an abuse of power in discriminatory ways that creates barriers for some groups in accessing resources and power. Oppression often includes domination, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Abberley, 1987; Deutsch, 2006; Prilleltensky, 2003; Young, 2014).

Paternalism. Behaviors and beliefs that interrupt the self-determination and freedoms of an individual stemming from an impression that one is limiting those freedoms for the benefactor's good (Reamer, 1983).

Reflexivity. A critical posture of professional social work practice that questions how we know what we know. It also includes reflection on the influences of power on mainstream assumptions and knowledge (D'Cruz et al., 2007).

Trait Mindfulness. A disposition or personality associated with regular attention and awareness in a person's daily habits, including open and receptive awareness (Kiken et al., 2015).

Significance of the Study

A primary goal of a social worker is to reduce discrimination and oppression (CSWE, 2022; NASW, 2021). Critical consciousness has been called the antidote to oppression (Jemal, 2017). Through critical consciousness development, also known as conscientization, a social worker can recognize their own biases to more ethically recognize and value the worldviews of the client, therefore, reducing paternalism and discrimination within the social worker-client

relationship (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Ransom et al., 2021). A critically conscious social worker is also able to recognize the inherent injustice within systems and structures and act to disrupt oppressive systems and structures (Bransford, 2011; Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). These are important skills that should be addressed within social work education with evidence-based methodological practices (CSWE, 2022). This study is primarily significant for social work educators in that it addresses best practice methods of how to navigate the emotions related to the process of bias recognition, discrimination mitigation, and action to reduce oppression as opposed to assuming that addressing bias in a diversity course will lead to such action (Mehrotra et al., 2018). Addressing bias often provokes discomfort in students and can lead to a denial of bias (Heron, 2005; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Zestcott et al., 2016). Inhibitory emotions and the response to emotions can also be barriers to the activism process (Borders & Wiley, 2019; Ford & Feinberg, 2020; Ford et al., 2019; Solak et al., 2021; Walsh, 2018). Social work education programs must comply with accreditation standards to show their course activities are evidence-based and teach students helpful strategies to navigate emotions to lead toward bias mitigation and action that interrupts and reduces oppression (CSWE, 2022).

Mindfulness is one method that has empirical support to facilitate the necessary reflection and action that accompanies conscientization (Davis & Hayes, 2011; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Klein et al., 2020; Krick & Felfe, 2020; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Wong, 2004; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). The fields of psychology, counseling, and social work have recognized the myriad benefits of mindfulness practice and mindful dispositions (Albrecht, 2021; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Garland et al., 2015; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). However, no empirical studies have researched the connection between mindfulness and development through the stages of critical consciousness, particularly recognizing, validating, and addressing the emotions that

occur in this process as students grow toward action that reduces oppression (Pillen et al., 2020; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018). This study contributes to the literature surrounding educational methodologies that work to promote students' awareness and mitigation of their own bias as well as recognize and navigate the emotions present in working to reduce oppression in the micro and macro systems in which they work and live.

Overview of Research Methods

The following mixed methods study gathered quantitative and qualitative data to measure and explore the relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness development (Anguera et al., 2018). The model used was a convergent research design where the quantitative and qualitative data were gathered simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then compared and interpreted for corroborating or contradicting results (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The mixed method convergent design was intentionally applied in order to understand the phenomenon of inquiry with multiple types of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). By triangulating the results of quantitative and qualitative analysis, the interpretation includes fewer weaknesses than merely using one type of data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012). Mixed methods research provides a rigorous approach to understanding complex social issues and is becoming more and more common within social science research (Anguera et al., 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

The researcher set a purposive, homogenous sampling frame of social work students exposed to mindfulness in their social work courses. This sampling frame was selected to provide a best-fit sample to the research questions of inquiry (Rai & Thapa, 2015). The researcher gained permission to access these students by contacting their course instructors or

program administrators. The instructors or administrators then provided the students with the information and link to the online survey.

The researcher gathered both quantitative and qualitative data through an online survey that included a 15-item Likert scale tool related to trait mindfulness, the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), that assessed daily mindful characteristics (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Participants also completed a nine-item Guttman scale tool, the Critical Consciousness Inventory (CCI), which measured awareness of social dominance and stigma (Thomas et al., 2014). Students then responded to four open-ended, short-answer prompts which provided qualitative data. These questions related to students' emotions when learning about bias, injustice and oppression; their emotions when acting to reduce or interrupt bias, injustice, or oppression; their participation in mindfulness practices; and their perception of how or if their mindfulness practices affected their emotions. The survey concluded with ten demographic and follow-up questions.

The researcher gathered further qualitative data by inviting thirteen participants from the survey sample to individual, semi-structured interviews. These ten participants were selected through purposive sampling techniques to provide a representative sample based on age, gender, and ethnicity. The interview participants responded to questions about their emotional reactions to social work course content, their experiences and emotions related to mindfulness practices, as well as their perceptions related to how or if mindfulness practice affected their progression through stages of critical consciousness development.

According to the convergent research design, the three groups of data (survey quantitative, survey qualitative, interview qualitative) were each analyzed separately (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The theoretical framework of critical

consciousness was applied to the analysis of each data set, and data were interpreted through the lens of the conscientization stages (Freire, 2000; Pillen et al., 2020). All the results, including quantitative relationships and qualitative themes, were then compared, and the differences and similarities were interpreted. The following chapters of this dissertation more specifically describe the background and context of this study through a review of the literature, a detailed account of the research methods and analytical procedures, as well as the results of that analysis, and finally, a discussion on the implications of those results.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

A key role of a professional social worker is to increase justice and reduce oppression within systems and organizations (Austin et al., 2016; NASW, 2021). Therefore, social work students should become competent in recognizing injustice in order to act justly within their professional social work interactions as well as develop skills and efficacy in ways that allow them to act to decrease oppression (CSWE, 2022). Unrecognized and unmitigated biases can perpetuate discrimination in individual interactions as well as contribute to unjust societal inequities (Bruster et al., 2019; Charles et al., 2017; Davis & Mirick, 2021; Featherston et al., 2019; Kang & Garran, 2018; Nakaoka & Ortiz, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Torino & Sisselman-Borgia, 2017; Zheng, 2018). Social work educators have implemented a variety of frameworks and pedagogies in order to teach students an awareness of bias, discrimination, and oppression and provide them opportunities to engage in oppression-reducing action (Bransford, 2011; Goode et al., 2021; Jemal, 2017; Kang & Garran, 2018; Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Rosen et al., 2017; Wahler, 2012; Watts, 2019). One theoretical framework that fits these aims is critical consciousness (Freire, 2000; Jemal, 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). The theory of critical consciousness posits an iterative process of reflection and action to aid a person in a growing awareness of personal biases and systemic oppression that leads to a felt responsibility and ability to act to reduce oppression (Freire, 2000; Jemal, 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Watts et al., 2011).

This critical consciousness, or conscientization, process is fraught with emotions and at times these emotions can present as a support or barrier to the process (Christens et al., 2013;

Halperin & Gross, 2011; Reygan & Francis, 2015; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018). At the beginning of the conscientization process, exposure to information about bias and injustice can trigger discomfort, grief, guilt, defensiveness, and sadness (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Mirick & Davis, 2021; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020). Near the end of the process, engaging in anti-oppressive actions can often include anger, fear, grief, hope and hopelessness (Christens et al., 2013; Reygan & Francis, 2015; Wlodarczyk et al., 2017). Further research is needed regarding how to help students recognize and navigate their emotions in ways that spur them on toward conscientization rather than prevent them from growth (Berila, 2016; Reygan & Francis, 2015; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018). Mindfulness practice is one suggested way to help students recognize and appropriately regulate their emotions (Caldwell, 2020; Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2017; Hafenbrack et al., 2022; Iani et al., 2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Miao et al., 2018; Sass et al., 2013; Teal et al., 2019; Wong & Vinsky, 2021).

Using the pedagogical approach of applying mindfulness practices to the conscientization process arises time and time again within the literature (Beachum & Gullo, 2020; Berila, 2016; Burgess et al., 2017; Edwards et al., 2017; Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022; Hanley et al., 2015; Lillis & Hayes, 2007; Lueke & Gibson, 2016; Ngnoumen, 2019; Oyler et al., 2022; Scheps & Walsh, 2020; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Wong, 2004; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). There is ample research on mindfulness that supports its integration into the process of self-reflection (Davis & Hayes, 2011; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Krick & Felfe, 2020; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Wong, 2004). There is also evidence that mindfulness is effective to aid in emotional regulation and coping with distress (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2017; Iani et al., 2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). Both of these aspects,

self-reflection and distress, are embedded aspects of the critical consciousness process (Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020). However, mindfulness practice itself is not a panacea and can be applied in ways that harm participants or even perpetuate and support oppression (Berila, 2016; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Ishikawa, 2018). Empirical research is needed to better understand how and when mindfulness practices are helpful to the critical consciousness process (Gockel & Deng, 2016; Krick & Felfe, 2020; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

In the following literature review, the reader will become familiar with the theoretical framework of critical consciousness that guides this study. The framework will lead into current pedagogical practices that support or inhibit the development of critical consciousness. Next, the reader will be exposed to best practice methods of applying mindfulness, as well as known limitations to mindfulness practice.

Theoretical Framework

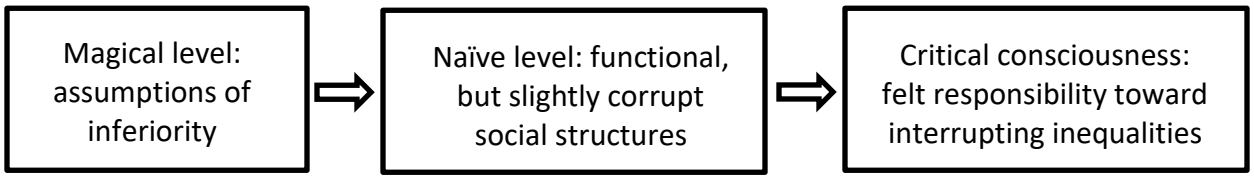
The researcher applied the theory of critical consciousness to the conceptual framework guiding the study. A conceptual framework is a cohesive argument for why a research study and its questions matter; it integrates the myriad theories and literature related to the research topic (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (2000) developed a theoretical framework in the 1960s that he called *concientização*, also known as conscientization or critical consciousness, which involves learning to recognize unjust and oppressive contradictions in social, economic, and political interactions and acting to transform the social constructs that perpetuate said oppressive conditions. His theory is deeply rooted in Marxism and social revolution in that its primary goal is to transform the current social conditions in ways that liberate the oppressed (Allman, 1994; Au, 2007; Schugurensky, 1998). Freire's work is primarily associated with education, but his ideas relate to social activism in that Freire recognizes the

dialectical contradiction within the teacher-student relationship and aims to do more than merely improve the condition of the subordinate student (Allman, 1994; Micheletti, 2010). Freire's theory posits that the dominant-subordinate relationship be abolished altogether (Allman, 1994; Beckett, 2013). Each educator has a decision regarding whether they are working to domesticate their students into accepting the current social reality, or whether they intentionally prepare students to collectively work toward their own liberation (Allman, 1994; Au, 2007). Freire's writing provides a delicate balance of critique of the current social order, as well as hope for how change could occur (Au, 2007; Schugurensky, 1998). In his educational theory, Freire does not propose that teachers tell their students what to think, but support them to learn to think critically, through which they can grow in conscientization while the teacher continually returns to being a learner (Allman, 1994; Au, 2007; Beckett, 2013; Micheletti, 2010).

This conscientization process addresses a recognition of contradictions within personal beliefs (bias), as well as within systems (structural inequities and oppression) (Jemal, 2017; Mustakova-Possardt, 1998; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). Freire (2000) describes three levels of consciousness he recognized within people who have experienced or witnessed oppression. These three levels are shown in graphic form in Figure 1. The concept of developmentally shifting paradigms is not unique to critical consciousness, as shown through similar stage models in scientific research and spiritual development (Fowler, 1981; Kuhn, 1962). However, what makes this structure distinct is its relationship to social power, social systems, and oppression (Freire, 2000).

Figure 1

The Process of Conscientization



Note: Sources: Freire, 2000; Gucma, 2013; Mahur et al., 2019

The lowest level (magical) is indicated by assumptions of inferiority in social interactions or a fatalistic view of life (Gucma, 2013; Mahur et al., 2019). Behavioral indicators of this level were helplessness, silent acceptance, and passive adaptation (Freire, 2000). The second level (naïve) is indicated by a perception of functional but slightly corrupt social structures in which change happens at individual levels (Freire, 2000; Gucma, 2013). Behavioral indicators of this stage include blaming self and/or peers for their contributions to the inequalities (Freire, 2000; Mahur et al., 2019). The third level (critical consciousness) is indicated by an awareness of the interconnectedness of individual and society that create the impact of injustice, which leads to a felt sense of responsibility toward interrupting or complying with the inequalities (Freire, 2000; Gucma, 2013). Freire (2000) reports the use of an iterative process of reflection and action to help people develop through these three stages (Diemer et al., 2021; Jemal, 2017).

While there seems to be no specific theoretical suggestions, nor empirical evidence, related to the length of time it takes to grow through these stages, it is suggested that this type of growth takes sufficient time in order to fully reflect on the myriad systems related to oppression, address the difficult emotions inherent in the process, and move toward action (Garcia et al., 2009; Heberle et al., 2020; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005). Many efficacious conscientization interventions last months or years and some are embedded within educational programs (Baker &

Brookins, 2014; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Diemer et al., 2006; Furumoto, 2001; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016; Osajima, 2007; Peet, 2006; Thomas et al., 2014; Wallin-Ruschman, 2014). In addition to community interventions and medical education, this framework has been applied within social work higher education (Aqil et al., 2021; Barak, 2016; Nicotera & Kang, 2009; O'Neill, 2015; Peet, 2006; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Suárez et al., 2008). Critical consciousness theory is integrated through continually applying the dual aspects of reflection and action, as well as through the application of developmental stages from initial priming experiences of observing or experiencing discrimination and oppression that leads to action that interrupts oppression and inequalities (Diemer et al., 2021; Watts et al., 2011; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). These developmental stages have been empirically studied and broken down into observable behaviors and experiences (Pillen et al., 2020). Within this current study, the researcher applied the conscientization developmental stages to research on mindfulness practice to more fully develop the conceptual framework (Lotan et al., 2013; Petranker & Eastwood, 2021; Sass et al., 2013; Watts et al., 2011; Wong, 2004). This framework was used in the analysis of the data. The researcher applied the critical consciousness theoretical framework by overlaying the developmental stages, including associated beliefs and behaviors, to the qualitative and quantitative responses. Through this framework, the researcher was able to recognize themes from the data that correspond with the stages and interpret where participants may be in the developmental process, aiding in the interpretation of how mindfulness practice affected the participant's development of conscientization.

Critical Consciousness

The 40-year history of critical consciousness research has typically been focused on groups of people experiencing explicit oppression (Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Diemer, 2012, 2020;

Heberle et al., 2020; Oosterhoff et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2019; Seider et al., 2019). The participants were often adolescents and adults of marginalized identities who were exposed to an intervention to move them from an internalization of the oppression (stage one: magical) through behaviors of blaming (stage two: naïve) toward an awareness of their capacity to interrupt systems of inequality (stage three: critical consciousness) (Au, 2007; Carlson et al., 2006; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Diemer, 2012, 2020; Gucma, 2013; Oosterhoff et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2019; Seider et al., 2019; Windsor et al., 2014). One example of this type of application is a study regarding adults with marginalized ethnic identities along with a history of incarceration and substance use who were exposed to a critical consciousness pedagogy. The curriculum emphasized building an internal sense of power to address personal and systemic oppression. Participants engaged in critical dialogue regarding oppression related to substance abuse and incarceration and led to an increase in developing personal goals and engagement in community projects related to social change (Windsor et al., 2014). Another example is when a group of Black adults, members of a low-socioeconomic community, were exposed to a curriculum regarding creative photography and written reflection that addressed discrimination and oppression within their neighborhood. This led to an increase of awareness of the system-related issues in their community and facilitated motivation to act to address the injustice (Carlson et al., 2006).

Despite the history of critical consciousness being primarily applied to homogenous groups, fields of higher education, namely in medicine (Ellison et al., 2021; Halman et al., 2017; Zaidi et al., 2017) and social work (Goerdt, 2011; O'Neill & del Mar Fariña, 2018; Suárez et al., 2008), have also recognized the potential of applying this framework as a method of transforming a heterogenous group of helping professionals. Social work educators have applied

this framework with pedagogies related to identifying social identities and positionality, using standpoint and feminist theories (Bransford, 2011; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). Reflective journaling is used, particularly paired with intentional reflection on biographical and cultural histories (Bransford, 2011). Problem-posing and critical dialogue are also suggested as strategies to implement (Knipe, 2020). However, the connection between critical consciousness and social work education is fairly new to the academic literature and few, if any, empirical studies have been completed to measure the effectiveness of these types of intervention on the conscientization of social work students (Knipe, 2020; Mehrotra et al., 2018)

In order to broaden the scope of the literature that is applicable to critical consciousness development within social work education, it can be helpful to include similar and related constructs such as *bias mitigation* (Brodie et al., 2014; Bruster et al., 2019; Charles et al., 2017; Rogerson et al., 2021), *reflexivity* (D'Cruz et al., 2007; Lay & McGuire, 2010; McCusker, 2022; Watts, 2019), *cultural competence* (Hall & Theriot, 2016; Luger, 2011; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Sue et al., 1992), and *cultural humility* (Abe, 2019; Gottlieb, 2020; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). Bias mitigation relates to recognizing implicit or unconscious bias and acting to reduce bias for more fair and egalitarian practice (Charles et al., 2017). Implicit biases are assumptions, attitudes, and stereotypes held unknowingly that might cause discriminatory behavior, even against one's stated values (Bruster et al., 2019; Bussey et al., 2021; Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). This bias poses a problem in social worker-client interactions as it can exacerbate the dominant-subordinate relationship antithetical to critical consciousness (Bruster et al., 2019; Bussey et al., 2021; Freire, 2000). Reflexivity is a critical posture of professional social work practice that questions how one knows what one knows. It also includes reflection on the influences of power in mainstream assumptions and knowledge (D'Cruz et al., 2007). Cultural

competence indicates having awareness, knowledge, and skills related to the intersectional cultures of a client or client group and is related to an awareness of bias in one's own beliefs and cultural perspective (Sue et al., 1992). Cultural humility is a stance of self-reflection and non-judgment to reduce power differentials between social worker and client (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). This requires the professional social worker take the humble stance of a learner as opposed to the competent perspective of an expert (Ortega & Faller, 2011). The critical consciousness framework includes and addresses these related constructs of bias mitigation, reflexivity, cultural competence, and cultural humility and research related to each area contributes to the overall discussion. Many theorists connect these concepts in their publications and research related to these constructs are applied in the following discussion to provide a full picture of how critical consciousness pedagogies may be best implemented within social work education (Abe, 2019; Bañales et al., 2021; Carlson et al., 2006; Christens & Dolan, 2011; Clark & Seider, 2017; Oosterhoff et al., 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Wallin-Ruschman, 2014; Windsor et al., 2014).

Reflection and Action within Critical Consciousness

Freire (2000) describes both reflection and action as crucial parts of the conscientization process. Reflection, in this context, includes examining biases, beliefs, and assumptions; recognizing latent interests and benefits in societal assumptions about class, gender, race, or other intersectional identifiers; and recognizing historical impacts on current social assumptions (Diemer et al., 2006; Jemal, 2017; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Watts et al., 2003). Reflection is long regarded to be an important aspect of consciousness raising (Ash & Clayton, 2004; D'Cruz et al., 2007; Diemer et al., 2021; Ellison et al., 2021; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Heron, 2005; Howard et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2019; Jemal, 2017; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Moeder-Chandler,

2020; Morley, 2015; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020; Rosen et al., 2017; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018; Watts, 2019). This reflection can be distressing (Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005; Wong, 2004). More than merely reflecting on biases, stereotypes, and assumptions, it is also recognized that critical consciousness includes action to reduce the unjust barriers that people face due to those assumptions and embedded systemic biases (Diemer et al., 2016; Diemer et al., 2021; Jemal, 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Schugurensky, 1998; Watts et al., 2003). It has been argued that true awareness of the injustice requires some sort of involved action, and that true liberation occurs only with the incorporation of action (Corcoran et al., 2015; Freire, 2000; Schugurensky, 1998; Watts et al., 2003).

Critical action includes behaviors that disrupt the status quo, which may look like participating in protests to change social or institutional policies that maintain inferiority for marginalized people, advocating for access to sexual health education, or working to eradicate barriers to safe and healthy housing within policy (Diemer et al., 2021; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Nicholas et al., 2019; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Actions such as volunteering at a soup kitchen or participating in civic duties would not be considered critical action as they do not critically analyze and interrupt the hegemonic systems (Diemer et al., 2021). There are many benefits of critical action, which include higher grades, higher career expectancies and occupational attainment, better mental health, and increased leadership skills (Frost et al., 2019; Rapa et al., 2018; Seider et al., 2019; Serrano, 2020). However, participating in critical action includes possible risks such as physical, psychological, and legal costs or being arrested, facing hostility, or ageism (Gordon & Taft, 2011; Morgan & Chan, 2016). There is also the possibility of burnout or disillusionment with the slow pace of change (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Black students have been shown to have faced increased microaggressions, stress, and anxiety due to

their critically-active engagement, although this may not be the same for all marginalized ethnic populations (Hope et al., 2018). Critical action requires large amounts of energy, and self-care is needed for sustaining these types of actions (Kirshner, 2015).

While some behaviors are clearly considered critical action, there is a bit of ambiguity regarding where the line can be drawn between critical reflection and critical action. Freire (2000) explicitly states that reflection and action are not two distinct stages where reflection occurs prior to action, and at one point, states that “critical reflection is also action,” meshing two potentially distinct behaviors into one (Freire, 2000, p. 128). In the published literature, scholars have tended to focus more heavily on the reflection piece of conscientization (Diemer et al., 2021; Heberle et al., 2020). Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) described critical consciousness as “the process of continuously reflecting upon and examining how our own biases, assumptions, and cultural worldviews affect the ways we perceive differences and power dynamics" (p. 441) and then 11 years later added, “Moreover, this continuous self-reflection should be accompanied by action to address social injustice” (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016, p. 2). Indeed, Freire himself was criticized for emphasizing reflection over action and adjusted his subsequent writing (Schugurensky, 1998). Critics of the critical consciousness research have indicated that action has been a neglected focus (Diemer, 2020; Diemer et al., 2021; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015).

Similar to how Freire posits an iterative cycle of critical reflection and critical action, critical consciousness has been described as both a process and an objective related to how one becomes more and more aware of one’s own assumptions and biases that shape their worldview (Watts et al., 2003). It is an evolving awareness of one’s own lens, as well as an ability to step outside one’s lens to view a situation from another perspective (Lay & McGuire, 2010). Utilizing

the critical consciousness process, a person recognizes other perspectives and worldviews, noting how some systems and opportunities are more or less available to them and others (Diemer et al., 2016). This wider perspective recognizes oppression, which is a lack of access to power based on a socially-constructed characteristic (Paradies, 2006). Freire (2000) used the term *conscientization* as both a verb and a noun, indicating the dual aspects of process and objective. Watts et al. (2011) theorize three stages to this process which are as follows: (1) "critical reflection," that relates to an awareness and rejection of injustice, (2) "political efficacy," a perception that change is possible and the person is capable of participating in that change, and (3) "critical action," where the person participates in behavioral methods toward disrupting systems of oppression. However, perhaps realigning with Freire's point that reflection and action are not distinct stages, Jemal (2017) suggests that these stages are continually developed and a person begins the process again when faced with a new environment or new experience of oppression. There is a cyclical and yet evolving iteration between reflection and action where reflection on a worldview or perspective leads to action, which leads to further reflection and subsequent action (Diemer et al., 2006; Freire, 2000). With a broad perspective that recognizes oppression, a critically conscious person analyzes how their behaviors and choices perpetuate the oppressive status quo or, with intentionality, act to interrupt it (Brown, 2015; Carlson et al., 2006; Diemer et al., 2016; Jemal, 2017). The critically conscious person, then, sees themself as an empowered agent to make changes in an environment that they feel is unjust or oppressive (Diemer et al., 2006). They can then take responsibility for the actions that work toward or against the oppression (Carlson et al., 2006; Freire, 2000).

Critical Consciousness within the Social Worker-Client Relationship

Inherent in the social work role is practitioner engagement with clients (CSWE, 2022). The client system can be an individual (micro), a group of individuals (mezzo), or even a large organization or community (macro) (Austin et al., 2016; Hutchison, 2017). Oppression is integrally part of the practitioner-client relationship due to a perception that the practitioner is seen as the expert and the client as the learner (Dominelli, 1996; Hopkins, 1986). Similar to how Freire (2000) sees the teacher-student relationship as problematic, this relationship dynamic presents an ironic twist since a central aim of social work is to *reduce* oppression and interpersonal discrimination (NASW, 2021). However, critical consciousness can be used to address the dominant-subordinate relationship within social worker-client interactions (Lwin & Beltrano, 2020). Both provider and client can use conscientization to become aware of their interactions and reduce projection or assumptions of values or biases (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005). A critically conscious practitioner will attempt to equalize the relationship by recognizing and valuing the worldview and experiences of the client and not position themselves as the complete expert (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). This process requires an openness and curiosity about the client, as well as a non-judgmental attitude toward the client's worldview (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005).

Using critically conscious behaviors, a social work practitioner can model a more egalitarian interaction where the practitioner and client learn from each other to find solutions that fit the need (Bransford, 2011; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005). One of these behaviors is termed *one-downing*, which is when the practitioner intentionally steps away from the role as an expert and takes a learner stance recognizing the value and expertise in the client's perspective (Gottlieb, 2020; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). This style can be very empowering for clients

(whether micro, mezzo, or macro) and follow the social work objective of being strengths-based in that the client is seen as having expertise on her or his life and can and should bring solutions to the table (Peterson, 2014; Prati & Zani, 2013). By applying a framework of critical consciousness, it becomes possible that the practitioner-client relationship could move toward becoming an anti-oppressive practice and model (Christens et al., 2016).

The importance of critical consciousness as it applies to the dominant-subordinate relationship between social workers and clients can be illustrated in a case study (Suárez et al., 2008). The case study focused on a social worker who interacted with a newly arrived client family that triggered a bias within the social worker. The bias led to responses of anger and blame toward the father in the client family system. However, intentionally stepping down from a position of expertise, the social worker sought to learn more about the intersectional identities of the clients (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005; Suárez et al., 2008). Through the process of conscientization, the social worker was able to move their perspective from the father as the "villain" (Suárez et al., 2008, p. 416) to empathetically recognize his own experiences of oppression and his loss of a cultural role and identity through the process of emigration. With this new empathetic perspective, the social worker was able to authentically engage with the client family to find solutions together rather than retain expertise as solely belonging to the social worker (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Suárez et al., 2008).

For social work educational programs to adequately prepare their students for ethical service, it is proposed that critical consciousness be utilized as an ordering framework with which to apply curriculum, course activities, and assessments (Bransford, 2011; Jemal, 2017; Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). To apply this framework, a developmental approach that lends itself to guiding students through stages will be discussed.

Stages of Critical Consciousness Development

Critical consciousness development is a well-studied phenomenon (Byrd, 2017; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Clark & Seider, 2017; Delia & Krasny, 2018; Diemer, 2012; Diemer et al., 2006; Heberle et al., 2020; Ngai & Koehn, 2011; Oosterhoff et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2019; Seider et al., 2019). A recent metanalyses of empirical critical consciousness research has provided more detailed developmental stages than Freire's (2000) original theoretical three stages and Watts et al.'s (2011) theoretical three stages (Pillen et al., 2020). These six stages can be applied to social work courses to give a clearer structure regarding appropriate curriculum and tools that will best support and assess conscientization (Byrd, 2023; Cadenas & McWhirter, 2022; Pillen et al., 2020; Thogmartin, 2021). The six stages include priming of critical reflection, information causing disequilibrium, introspection, revising frames of reference, developing agency for change, and acting against oppression (Pillen et al., 2020). These stages can be seen in graphic form in Figure 2.

The first stage is the *priming of critical reflection*, which relates to factors that led participants to a place of readiness for reflection. This stage includes participants' personal history of experiencing or observing oppression, their unmet psychological needs, or their early or current belief systems that recognize social injustice (Cooper Stein et al., 2018; Kairson, 2009; Pillen et al., 2020;). The second stage, called *information creating disequilibrium*, reflects an exposure to new perspectives that conflict with the participant's current perspective which may include observing or experiencing acts of oppression that jar one's sense of justice (Landreman et al., 2007; Saheli, 2003). It may also include exposure to the perspectives of non-dominant groups that causes one to question the dominant narrative or an immersive experience in a culture other than their own (Landreman et al., 2007; Osajima, 2007; Pillen et al., 2020). This

exposure to new information creates dissonance and often discomfort and students may have difficulty navigating this stage due to the level of discomfort (Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020). An example of this would be the concept of color-blindness, when students are presented with information regarding racism but maintain the belief that they don't see race nor hold racist views (Achilleos et al., 2021).

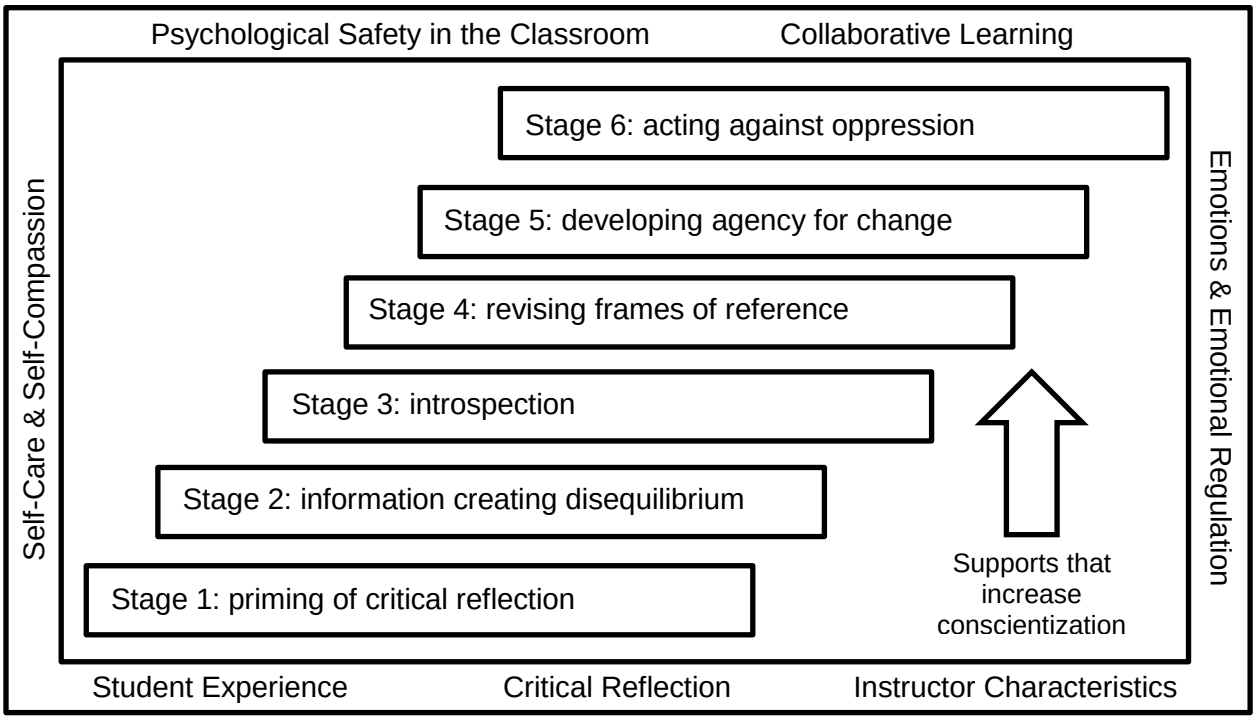
The third stage is *introspection,* which indicates the participant's ability to self-reflect on their systems of value and motivations for their original belief/worldview. Often this self-reflection includes an analysis of how their behavior conflicts or fits within their belief system as an extension of the experiences they had that caused disorientation (Pillen et al., 2020). This stage can be initiated through an experience of social action as much as through discussion (Pillen et al., 2020; Scott, 1991). The fourth stage, *revising frames of reference,* describes two important changes in perspective. One relates to the disruption of an assumption that social systems are fair and just (Goerdt, 2011; Osajima, 2007; Pillen et al., 2020). The second disruption was to the belief that people in power respond adequately to people with marginalized identities (Baker & Brookins, 2014; Pillen et al., 2020). This stage included a clearer awareness of intersectional identities and how those identities change (Landreman et al., 2007; Peet, 2006). The fifth stage, *developing agency for change*, indicates the student's sense of felt responsibility to do something about injustice (Pillen et al., 2020). This can be facilitated by group discussion to help the participant find and refine ways to act from this new framework or perspective (Wallin-Ruschman, 2014). The final stage, *acting against oppression,* includes actions such as interrupting a group setting where there were oppressive group behaviors when one acts as an "upstander," or someone who stands up against injustice, as opposed to a "bystander," who sees the oppression but remains passive (Mirick & Davis, 2021; Pillen et al., 2020). This stage can

also include critical action as individuals or within groups (Pillen et al., 2020; Wallin-Ruschman, 2014). While the developmental stages are presented as linear, some theorists posit that this development is continual (Freire, 2000; Jemal, 2017). They advocate that the conscientization process is not completed after one cycle and argue that critical consciousness continues to develop as the person experiences or learns about new situations of oppression (Freire, 2000; Jemal, 2017).

With this more detailed framework, social work educators can now begin to implement and study intentional pedagogical methods to facilitate conscientization for the needs of each stage; this is an important aspect of providing evidence-based curriculum to enhance student growth (CSWE, 2022; Mehrotra et al., 2018; Pillen et al., 2020). Research has provided some evidence regarding curriculums and methods that support conscientization, but has also provided warnings about barriers to conscientization (Allan & Iverson, 2003; Bransford, 2011; Horst et al., 2019; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Shaia, 2019).

Figure 2

Empirical Stages of Critical Consciousness Development with Supports



Note: Schematic figure of the stages of conscientization, surrounded by researched areas of support. Sources: Allan & Iverson, 2003; Bransford, 2011; Horst et al., 2019; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Pillen et al., 2020; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Shaia, 2019

Supports and Barriers to Critical Consciousness Development.

There is theoretical and empirical literature regarding what should be helpful to the conscientization of higher education students and social work educators can apply this information when curating curriculum (Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Jemal, 2017; Mehrotra et al., 2018). The supports of critical consciousness development in the social work classroom include psychological safety in the classroom; instructor characteristics; collaborative learning; student

experience; critical reflection; emotions and emotional regulation; self-care and self-compassion. Barriers to conscientization have also been discussed in the literature. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of factors that support growth through these six stages.

Psychological Safety in the Classroom. The environment in which bias and oppression are addressed is important to the facilitation of the conscientization process (Bransford, 2011; Delia & Krasny, 2018; Dunn et al., 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2019; Mirick & Davis, 2021; Sukhera & Watling, 2017). It is important that participants feel a sense of belonging, safety, welcome, and connection in a non-threatening learning context (Bransford, 2011; Delia & Krasny, 2018; Sukhera & Watling, 2017). The instructor should use intentional language and mindful approaches when facilitating discussions (Bransford, 2011; Rogerson et al., 2021). There should be sufficient time to engage in difficult discussions as students will need to be asked to be brave and vulnerable, and confidentiality of the content of these discussions should be addressed and protected (Dunn et al., 2014; Sukhera & Watling, 2017). Students should have a say regarding how they prefer to engage with controversial or difficult topics (Dunn et al., 2014). It is important to teach students to set boundaries regarding emotions related to guilt, shame, and inferiority as an aspect of maintaining safety in classroom discussions and protecting peers who identify with marginalized identities (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). Students with minority identities may lack a sense of safety if diverse identities are not represented (Gonzalez et al., 2019). Assigning flexible due dates to student work may increase student determination and foster an environment of conscientization (Achilleos et al., 2021). While student behavior certainly impacts the classroom environment, the creation and maintenance of an inclusive and safe learning environment is primarily within the responsibility of the instructor (Mirick & Davis, 2021).

Instructor Characteristics. Classroom instructors should take the primary role and intentionally facilitate the conditions in a classroom in which students feel cared for (hooks, 1994). This includes students' perception that the instructor is approachable (Sukhera & Watling, 2017). The instructor should also maintain the stance of a learner, open to the narratives and experiences of the students to inform the class content, direction, and discussion (Bransford, 2011). There are steps that instructors can take to increase the likelihood of a safe, inclusive, and unbiased classroom, which includes professional development workshops, their own self-reflection, and dialoguing with colleagues for consultation (hooks, 1994; Mirick & Davis, 2021; Rogerson et al., 2021). Supporting the critical consciousness development of students requires discussions on difficult topics and the instructor is key in facilitating such dialogues (Nicotera & Kang, 2009). Instructors should use a *one-down* approach where the instructor steps down from the role of expert and allows the students to bring their own experiences into the conversation (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005). Instructors should use a posture of collaboration, liberating students from being passive learners, and creating an environment where students and instructors co-create learning (Freire, 2000; Lay & McGuire, 2010). However, instructor discomfort with a difficult topic may trigger the instructor to take back an expert position for their own sense of safety (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). This can be addressed by instructors regularly participating in their own self-reflection and self-awareness of biases and worldviews to be prepared to guide such discussions (Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Rogerson et al., 2021). Instructors should also have a willingness to learn from their mistakes when they become aware of instances in which they have failed to challenge injustice in the classroom (Mirick & Davis, 2021). Instructors can also increase conscientization by responding in depth to student papers, giving feedback and asking questions that prompt the student to deeper self-reflection, particularly regarding their worldview

as well as the power dynamics that are embedded in their assumptions (Lay & McGuire, 2010; Shaia, 2019).

It is also possible, and perhaps likely, that social work instructors will perpetuate injustice in the classroom through microaggressions (Davis & Mirick, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). These microaggressions may include dismissal of student experience, shutting down viewpoints, reinforcing stereotypes and making assumptions, as well as misusing their positional power, which can all lead to a decrease in the sense of safety and an increase in anxiety and depression for the students (Kang & Garran, 2018; Mirick & Davis, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Students report that instructors can remediate this breach in safety by responding positively when they are alerted to the microaggression, which may include behaviors of attentive listening and gratitude for the feedback, apologizing, and changing future behavior (Mirick & Davis, 2021). Another mitigation strategy to reduce the likelihood of microaggressions perpetuated by the instructor would be to increase the number of faculty present in the courses that are high in conscientization to facilitate further support during discussions that may trigger the instructor (Achilleos et al., 2021).

Collaborative Learning. Partner, team, and group-based learning has been highlighted as a key element of conscientization pedagogy (Bransford, 2011; Horst et al., 2019; Nicotera & Kang, 2009). Grouped in small teams, students are able to reflect honestly and vulnerably on their learning experiences and students have identified that team-based service-learning provoked dissonance which led to self-examination and increased compassionate professional behavior (Horst et al., 2019). Small group discussions can help students identify their own cultural norms and assumptions, particularly as they are juxtaposed against the experiences of others in the group (Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Zaidi et al., 2017). The psychological safety of the

team-based learning and reflection is a supportive aspect of conscientization growth (Horst et al., 2019). Alternately, groups of students with varying intersectionalities may become unsafe as, for example, White-identifying students may feel confusion, cognitive dissonance, and look for external validation from their BIPOC peers in inappropriate ways therefore racial and ethnic affinity groups may be important as well (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021).

Student Experience. Student experience can be both a benefit and a barrier to critical consciousness development (Horst et al., 2019; Lay & McGuire, 2010). Students who have experienced support from key mentors or role models to challenge injustice tend to be more able to reflect critically on oppression and injustice (Diemer et al., 2006). A longitudinal study with 217 urban adolescents found that higher levels of exposure to structural oppression increased their likelihood to participate in critical action (Roy et al., 2019). An instructor can recognize the experiences and intersectional identities of a student and highlight examples that provide a connection to the conscientization process (Clark & Seider, 2017). A study with 98 urban youth found females more likely than males to feel socially supported to challenge sexism (Diemer et al., 2006).

Some student experiences may reinforce biases or stereotypes that contradict social work values and ethics (Clark & Seider, 2017; Lay & McGuire, 2010). The implications are that if students' intersectional identities do not correspond with oppressed populations, there is a possibility of less social support and less proclivity to engage in critical action opposing that type of oppression (Roy et al., 2019). These students may benefit from exposure to contradictory information and examples that piques a curiosity to examine their previously held biases and beliefs (Clark & Seider, 2017; Lay & McGuire, 2010).

Critical Reflection. When students question their own thoughts and assumptions they can then begin to question how others think as well (Lay & McGuire, 2010). More than mere reflection, which is the act of serious thought, critical reflection challenges the foundational assumptions of why the thought or behavior occurred (Watts, 2019; Wong, 2014). This can lead from individual bias recognition to the recognition of overarching power differentials and societal assumptions (Brookfield, 1995). The critically reflective process might be initiated through activities such as taking the Implicit Association Test and pairing it with a reflection activity (Sukhera & Watling, 2017). It can be done through writing exercises or through having students narrate their stories, leading to reflection on growth (Bransford, 2011; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Fullana et al., 2016; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Nicotera & Kang, 2009). One can also use safe peers to engage in discussion when wrestling with the recognition of biased reactions (Gottlieb, 2020). These peers (be it a therapist, a friend, or a mentor) can bring to light areas of bias that students are not able to see themselves (Gottlieb, 2020). If these peers have broader or different worldviews, all the better, as they will be able to provide a differing perspective to jar the students' perspective (Gottlieb, 2020). Classroom instructors should also verbally model reflexivity (reflecting on the moment) by recognizing and describing their own bias and reflective process (Rogerson et al., 2021). This personal application can facilitate authentic discussions and help students recognize the power of critical self-reflection (Rogerson et al., 2021). This in-the-moment activity also can increase students' sense of power and collaboration in the curriculum, which reduces the power differential that is often inherent to the classroom setting (Rogerson et al., 2021). Tools such as journaling, brave classroom spaces, and sharing narratives can be used as methods to elicit feedback from peers and instructors in order to bring to students' awareness the process of reflection; this process helps students de-center and view

scenarios from others' perspectives (Bransford, 2011; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Rogerson et al., 2021).

Emotions and Emotional Regulation. Scientific studies on emotions may add clarity to the impact of positive and negative emotional experiences on the critical consciousness development process. Positive emotions support performance on cognitive-heavy tasks (Iordan & Dolcos, 2017). They have been shown to impact the reward centers in the brain leading to greater well-being, as well as have been shown to broaden one's perspective (Fredrickson, 2001; Ricard et al., 2014). Negative emotions, on the other hand, help a person process conflicting information (Kanske & Kotz, 2010; Zinchenko et al., 2015). They can also reduce a person's empathy, keeping them focused on their own personal needs and goals (Qiao-Tasserit et al., 2018). What defines an emotion as negative or positive can have hormonal, cognitive, neurological, and muscular elements (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson, 2001). However, in general, positive emotions are those feelings that we are drawn toward and are pleasurable (Cacioppo et al., 1993; Sauter, 2017). Negative emotions are those feelings that are not pleasurable and not desired (Schrauf & Sanchez, 2004; Solomon & Stone, 2002).

Emotions have been frequently overlooked in the critical consciousness literature regarding how they affect the developmental process (Wallin-Ruschman, 2018). However, in the last ten years, a feminist perspective on critical consciousness development has described how emotions play a role in student growth toward critical action (hooks, 1994; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Olcoń et al., 2021; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018). The recognition of social identities of disempowerment can trigger feelings of discomfort and in-class dialogue regarding topics such as racism, sexism, classism, or other "isms" and may trigger cognitive dissonance (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005; Wong, 2004). Participants in a critical consciousness education program

reported initial distress in viewing images relaying oppression (Windsor et al., 2014). This has been called a *pedagogy of discomfort* and not all students will respond with open inquiry toward themselves and others (Nadan & Stark, 2017).

Courage and overcoming fear can also be part of the conscientization process, and the dichotomy of holding out hope and falling into hopelessness requires a delicate balance; both excitement and exhaustion can be embedded in the process of growth and self-reflection (Wallin-Ruschman, 2018; Wlodarczyk et al., 2017). Anxiety and exhaustion may inhibit conscientization in college students (Wallin-Ruschman, 2018). Providing students with temperature-check activities to teach them how to recognize their emotional discomfort may be helpful in avoiding defensiveness or emotional shut down (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). Emotional regulation can help mitigate the barrier of emotions such as anxiety and exhaustion (Sewell, 2020). Activities that support emotional regulation include sharing with others about emotions, reflective journaling exercises, and utilizing case studies that elicit emotional responses (Sewell, 2020). Other supports include mindful breathing exercises, grounding practices, attunement activities, simulations, role play, and the use of field placements (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Sewell, 2020). These types of practices can be helpful in reducing discomfort surrounding difficult topics and lead to more developed conscientization (Wong, 2004).

At the same time, emotional regulation, when it becomes emotional suppression or reappraisal, can be an obstacle to social change (Ford et al., 2019; Solak et al., 2021). Negative emotions can be strong motivators to participate in collective social action and are an important part of sustaining a functional democracy (Ford et al., 2019; Solak et al., 2017). When people feel angry they are often more willing to participate in collective social action (Borders & Wiley, 2019; van Zomeren et al., 2008). The emotional regulation strategy of rumination on anger can

sustain the motivation to maintain engagement in social action (Borders & Wiley, 2019). When looking to engage in political action where compromise is necessary, mindfulness and cognitive reappraisal have been shown to help participants reduce anger and support conciliatory policies (Alkoby et al., 2017).

Self-Care and Self-Compassion. With the expectation that conscientization inherently causes dissonance and often causes discomfort, it is important to promote a posture of self-care and self-compassion to help students navigate these distressing emotions (Bransford, 2011; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020). This may include the awareness and expectation of feelings of inferiority, guilt, shame, anger, and potentially feeling out of control for students who hold predominantly privileged identities (Coulter et al., 2013; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). "Some students may not have coping skills for losing control; some White-identifying students will never have experienced problems without solutions as adults, as their privilege has allowed them to consistently have their needs met" (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021, p. 47). Students with more marginalized identities may experience microaggressions, which could lead to withdrawal or detachment (DeCuir-Gunby, 2020).

Self-care strategies can include mindfulness techniques, grounding exercises, increased social connections, healing therapies, sharing collective meals, or participating in creative art and dance (Dye et al., 2020; Hernández Cárdenas & Méndez, 2017; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). Students can learn self-compassion through the modeling of the instructor, particularly when conversations become too distressing and disengagement may be a helpful self-care strategy (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). White-identifying students might be helped through encouragement and reassurance regarding ambiguity, abstract concepts, and a desire for perfectionism (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). Students learn ethical professionalism through the modeling of their

instructors and this real-time learning can help promote healthy self-care routines and habits (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Rogerson et al., 2021). Compassionate self-awareness and inquiry are recommended as social workers move toward self-reflection on their own socially constructed worldview, their biases, and their first reactions to a situation (Gottlieb, 2020; Lianekhammy et al., 2018). An open and curious, self-compassionate stance should be applied when recognizing this first layer of reaction, as reacting with shame may hinder a person from further exploration, limiting their ability to accurately assess the client's worldview (Gottlieb, 2020).

When moving toward developing agency for change and acting against oppression, it may also be helpful to revisit self-care strategies that relate to burnout (Hernández Cárdenas & Méndez, 2017; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). Self-care at this stage may include recognizing the signs of burnout, making intentional plans to incorporate rest and renewal, utilizing support systems, and relying on spiritual or religious practices (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Moore et al., 2021). The subject of emotions brings us back to the awareness that the goal of conscientization is not mere *reflection* and awareness of injustice and bias, but *action* that changes social structures and interactions to reduce injustice.

Barriers to Action. When professional therapists and anti-oppression workers were interviewed about the barriers to their anti-oppression work and activism, they cited a variety of internal and external reasons that prohibit them from participation (Jordan & Seponski, 2017; Walsh, 2018). External barriers included a lack of time, legal restraints, and workplace issues, where time was cited by 84% of the participants as the number one obstacle (Jordan & Seponski, 2017). Internal barriers include a lack of knowledge regarding how to intervene, a lack of interest in intervening, and the lack of efficacy seen from interventions (Jordan & Seponski, 2017).

When anti-oppression workers were surveyed about what inhibited them in their work, they cited many more internal barriers such as a fear of making mistakes, being hesitant to accept feedback, the inability to see their own bias, and not being open to new learning (Walsh, 2018). Other reasons cited by community members regarding their lack of sociopolitical involvement include a lack of motivation, fear of being associated with extremists, a lack of sympathy for the movement, as well as structural barriers (Solak et al., 2021).

Again, social work educators should be developing evidence-based methods for facilitating critical consciousness that lead to oppression-reducing action (CSWE, 2022; Mehrotra et al., 2018) An awareness of how previous research in the areas of psychological safety in the classroom; instructor characteristics; collaborative learning; student experience; critical reflection; emotions and emotional regulation; and self-care and self-compassion can influence social work educators in how they build, implement, and test pedagogical methods that best facilitate critical consciousness development (Bransford, 2011; Clark & Seider, 2017; Mirick & Davis, 2021; Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005; Sukhera & Watling, 2017; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018).

Critical Consciousness Pedagogy vs. Traditional Pedagogy

When building a curriculum to support critical consciousness development it is important to recognize the differences between a critical consciousness pedagogy and traditional pedagogy (Ngai & Koehn, 2011). Freire's critical consciousness pedagogy differs from traditional pedagogy at a fundamental level in that it moves away from the dichotomy of the teacher as the expert and the learner as the passive recipient of knowledge (Allman, 1994; Freire, 2000; Schugurensky, 1998). A traditional pedagogy tends to be authoritarian in that students are thought to arrive with a tabula rasa (blank slate) and the instructor must deposit content

knowledge; Freire called this the banking system of education (Freire, 2000; Schugurensky, 1998). Critical pedagogy is fundamentally liberatory in which teachers and learners engage in a dialogical relationship and focus on critical thinking and the transformation of society (hooks, 1994; Schugurensky, 1998). Rather than lecturing, the instructor poses problems and facilitates dialogue, starting with the perspective and worldview of the learner (Schugurensky, 1998). A critical consciousness pedagogy includes the goals of empowering those who have marginalized identities to participate in their educational process (Berila, 2016; Freire, 2000; hooks, 1994). It recognizes that traditional educational institutions work against the interest of most students by conditioning them to adopt the beliefs, interests, and social norms of those at the top of the social hierarchy (Berila, 2016; hooks, 1994). A critical pedagogy also recognizes that marginalized groups often do not succeed in educational systems in which they are systematically disenfranchised; this is coined as resistance theory (Berila, 2016).

A critical consciousness curriculum differs in many ways from a traditional content curriculum. Whereas traditional content is taught from the perspective of the majority, critical consciousness curriculum might teach from perspectives of a marginalized social location (Freire, 2000). This could include teaching from texts such as Howard Zinn's, "*A people's history of the United States*." It might also include intentional discussion of controversial topics related to cultural identities and social location, prompting students to identify their own positionality and the concept of normative identities (Bransford, 2011; Ngai & Koehn, 2011; Nicotera & Kang, 2009). There is often a broadening of the client-level or case study discussion to system-level barriers and the effects on the case study (Bransford, 2011). Critical consciousness curriculum also often includes opportunities that evoke emotional or affective

learning as well (Bransford, 2011). This might include service-learning, poetry, film, and narrative stories (Bransford, 2011; Horst et al., 2019).

In one study, applying a traditional content curriculum has shown students retain higher content knowledge such as the geographic location of Native tribes, however, students who were taught with a critically conscious curriculum were more likely to orient themselves toward personal connections with Native people (Ngai & Koehn, 2011). If the goal of education is to move past "intellectual enrichment" and increase a sense of personal connection to foster critical democracy, then using a critical consciousness approach to education is likely to be more effective (Ngai & Koehn, 2011, p. 265).

Activities related to critical consciousness development are currently integrated into many social work classrooms, including those that address bias recognition, self-reflection, reflexivity, cultural competency, and critical action (Mehrotra et al., 2018; Pitner et al., 2017; Wahler, 2012). These activities are often embedded in diversity and justice courses, field placements (internships), reflective seminar courses, as well as within policy, practice, and theory courses (Bransford, 2011; Mehrotra et al., 2018; Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Pitner et al., 2017; Wahler, 2012). However, there are overarching assumptions embedded in social work syllabi that teaching about bias, injustice, oppression, and self-reflection inherently leads to student competency in acting to reduce oppression (Mehrotra et al., 2017). Social work educators and researchers should continue to assess the assumptions and the effectiveness of social work courses and programs as to whether they lead to outcomes of conscientization, including oppression-reducing action (Bransford, 2011; Mehrotra et al., 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). Critical consciousness interventions have been empirically studied for over 30 years in multiple disciplines including education (Bajaj et al., 2017; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Clark & Seider, 2017;

Ngai & Koehn, 2011), medicine (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Kumagai et al., 2007), sociopolitical development (Nicholas et al., 2019; Seider et al., 2020), social development (Oosterhoff et al., 2017) and community psychology (Byrd, 2017; Delia & Krasny, 2018; Diemer, 2012; Diemer et al., 2006; Roy et al., 2019). This quantity of research has provided evidence to support specific methodologies that are effective (Heberle et al., 2020; Pillen et al., 2020). However, the vast majority of conscientization education has occurred with populations that primarily identify with a collective marginalized or oppressed social identity, such as U.S. urban adolescents of color, rural El Salvadorian adolescents, Latinx high school students, and Asian-American college students (Baker & Brookins, 2014; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016; Osajima, 2007). More research is needed to ascertain whether these intervention models will be effective in a higher education social work setting with a variety of intersectional identities claimed by the students (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). Some social work students self-identify with primarily marginalized social locations and others with primarily privileged social locations (CSWE, 2021). Applying a pedagogy of mindfulness has been suggested as a method to facilitate critical consciousness growth with a heterogenous group of individuals, such as in a higher education classroom (Berila, 2016; Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022; Wong & Vinsky, 2021).

Mindfulness

One support toward conscientization that is prolific in the literature is the practice of mindfulness (Albrecht, 2021; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Garland et al., 2015; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Klein et al., 2020; Krick & Felfe, 2020; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Sukhera & Watling, 2017; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Wong, 2004; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). Mindfulness is typically described in Western academic literature as the non-judgmental awareness of the present

moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). It can be practiced through a variety of activities including yoga, body-scanning, meditation, and breath work (Bishop et al., 2004; Napoli & Bonifas, 2013). Mindfulness practice can be used as a form of self-care during discomfort and as a support to emotional regulation when experiencing difficult emotions such as anger, guilt, and shame (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2017; Iani et al., 2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). It has also been described as a method to pause and reflect, rather than react out of habits, stereotypes, or biases (Goh, 2012; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). Research has shown that defensiveness, anxiety, and shame can result when participants are exposed to conscientization pedagogy and it is important for social work educators to implement evidence-based practices that help students navigate the emotions surrounding the disequilibrium that occurs in the conscientization process (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; NASW, 2021; Zestcott et al., 2016).

In Western society, the term mindfulness is typically applied to behavior in which a person is intentionally focused on the here and now, without judgment (Davis & Hayes, 2011; Dye et al., 2020; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness can be achieved during an intentional moment, perhaps in meditation, which is considered to be state mindfulness. When someone has a personality style and disposition that leads them to be regularly mindful in their daily habits, they are considered to possess trait mindfulness (Ding et al., 2020; Kiken et al., 2015). Repeated meditation practice has been shown to lead to a change in disposition that is less distressed and more mindful (Ding et al., 2020; Kiken et al., 2015). Therefore, continued states of mindfulness can lead to trait mindfulness (Kiken et al., 2015). Those who possess trait mindfulness seem to continuously possess the ability to reflect and be aware in the moment, without regular intervention (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Trait mindfulness relates to a disposition that is aware,

continually monitoring both inward and exterior occurrences, and attentive, focusing and sustaining that awareness (Kiken et al., 2015). An aspect of openness and receptiveness has been identified as part of this attention and awareness (Brown & Ryan, 2003). There are mindfulness interventions, such as the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) curriculum, that have been shown to increase trait mindfulness and lead to psychological benefits (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). There is also evidence that there is a significant inverse relationship between trait mindfulness and feelings of discomfort (Petranker & Eastwood, 2021).

Origins and Applications of Mindfulness

Mindfulness originated within the Eastern Buddhist tradition (Bodhi, 2011; Hick & Furlotte, 2009; Singla, 2011). According to a review of the oldest collected works of Buddhist literature, the Pàli Canon, both mindfulness *(sati)* and clear comprehension *(sampajaṅña)* are components in the practice of satipaṭṭhána, a central practice of Buddhism (Bodhi, 2011; Dreyfus, 2011; Dunne, 2015; Sharf, 2015; Stanley, 2015). Both mindfulness and clear comprehension are needed to lead to insight and liberation (Bodhi, 2011). Mindfulness can be viewed as "bare attention" for a novice as it represents a single-minded awareness toward what is happening in one's body or in the moment using the five senses (Dorjee, 2010; Sharf, 2015; Stone & Zahavi, 2022). This bare attention is thought to be a pathway to remove judgment of a situation by intentionally moving away from impressions and meaning, but strictly focusing on the sensed facts of the moment (Bodhi, 2011; Dorjee, 2010). There has been criticism of the use of the word "bare" to describe this style of attention as it is recognized that every act occurs embodied in a person dependent upon their biology, history, and personality (Bodhi, 2011; Sharf, 2015). Each act also occurs embedded in an historical, social, and cultural context that orients the act. However, "bare attention" has been viewed as an important step to bring an experienced

moment into a field where distorted impressions and judgments can be stripped away and a moment can be experienced and attended to through the physical senses (Bodhi, 2011; Sentot, 2017).

The second aspect of satipaṭṭhána is clear comprehension, or sampajaṅña (Bodhi, 2011; Dreyfus, 2011). This can be seen as an investigation to understand the origin of feelings in order to recognize their impermanence and leave behind those that lead to suffering (Bodhi, 2011; Dreyfus, 2011). Buddhist texts give examples of feelings that do not serve humans such as lust, ignorance, drowsiness, ill will, and doubt (Bodhi, 2011). Where mindfulness can aid in removing judgments and help to bring a practitioner to experience the present moment, clear comprehension allows that same person to examine the moment, including the associated feelings and reactions and examine them with curiosity (Dreyfus, 2011; Hewawasam, 2022). This curiosity asks questions about the reaction in order to discern where it came from, which often connects the personal reactions to the political environment (Forbes, 2022; Purser, 2021). This stance of curiosity, rather than judgment, allows the clearly comprehending practitioner to then make decisions out of the understanding of those origins (Bodhi, 2011). Together both mindfulness and clear comprehension bring a person to a liberated state where experiences can be recognized and understood (Bodhi, 2011; Dunne, 2015).

This distinction between the two components of satipaṭṭhána is important due to the fact that mindfulness pedagogies in Western contexts often neglect the second component, clear comprehension (Dreyfus, 2011; Lee, 2018). The curiosity, personal liberation, and compassion for all beings that accompany the marriage of mindfulness and clear comprehension are important to the social justice aims embedded in social work practice (Forbes, 2022; Hick & Furlotte, 2009; NASW, 2021; Purser, 2021). Some social work practitioners have more broadly

defined mindfulness in a way that includes both components, a) maintaining attention on immediate experience, and b) adopting a curiosity, openness, and acceptance toward the present moment (Bishop et al., 2004; Hick & Furlotte, 2009). However, utilizing the original context of mindfulness allows more space for the practitioner to move beyond awareness of the internal experience to more fully understand the external factors that are impacting the internal (Anālayo, 2020; Hick & Furlotte, 2009; Purser, 2021).

It is possible that mindfulness can be applied in ways that increase the oppression of marginalized individuals, particularly when it is used to assist practitioners to maintain their compliance with hegemonic or authoritarian systems (Anālayo, 2020; Berila, 2016; Proulx et al., 2018). The ways that mindfulness is incorporated into course activities should be adapted to meet the needs of diverse populations in order to avoid assumptions and microaggressions (Napoli & Bonifas, 2013; Proulx et al., 2018; Watson et al., 2016; Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014). Students who have previously experienced trauma may find great discomfort in participating in embodied practices (Cunningham, 2004; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Mishna & Bogo, 2007). It is important to incorporate and apply mindfulness practice in ways that allow for student choice and control in order to mitigate further marginalization and oppression (Berila, 2016).

Current Western Application of Mindfulness. Since the publication of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) curriculum by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the 1990s, there has been a plethora of research on the benefits of mindfulness, defined as nonjudgmental attention, on health, substance dependence, creativity, emotional regulation, cognitive capabilities, age-related decline, behavior, and attention (Albrecht, 2021; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2017; Iani et al., 2019; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019;

McLaughlin et al., 2019; Vieten et al., 2018). The scientific field of neuroscience has shed light on brain changes that occur due to mindfulness meditation practice, such as strengthening the connection of the insula (Farb et al., 2015; Sharp et al., 2018). This research has shown that mindfulness increases interoception, which is the ability to notice what is happening within your body (Farb et al., 2015; Sharp et al., 2018; Wiens, 2005). An increase in interoception aids in self-regulation, mental health, motivation, social connections, and well-being (Farb et al., 2015; Sharp et al., 2018). Researchers are also beginning to investigate the effects of mindfulness on changes of states of altered consciousness (Vieten et al., 2018).

Mindfulness practices have become very popular in the West, particularly to achieve happiness, stress reduction, and psychological well-being (Arthington, 2016; Sass et al., 2013). Mindfulness interventions have been shown to significantly reduce distress even after five sessions (Sass et al., 2013). They have also been shown to improve distress tolerance (Lotan et al., 2013). There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between trait mindfulness and discomfort (Petranker & Eastwood, 2021). Mindfulness practices have been shown to aid participants in emotional differentiation as well as is associated with fewer emotional difficulties and less emotional exhaustion (Hill & Updegraff, 2012; Hülsheger et al., 2013). The benefits of increased emotional regulation, as moderated by mindfulness, include reductions in depressive behaviors (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Pickard et al., 2016).

Despite the plethora of researched benefits, there has been criticisms of some Western applications of mindfulness (Forbes, 2022; Purser, 2021; Smallen, 2019). Critics originally applied the term “McMindfulness,” purporting that some popularized Western mindfulness therapies apply mindfulness techniques that reinforce oppressive beliefs and systems, such as the patriarchy, authoritarianism, individualism, and neoliberalism (Forbes, 2022; Ishikawa, 2018;

Smallen, 2019). These frequently brief modalities teach mindfulness techniques for well-being and self-soothing, but lack any connection to societal structures that impact suffering (Purser, 2021). The mainstream version of mindfulness frequently teaches the practitioner to be more tolerant of their oppressive situation by being more efficient or reducing stress, rather than to recognize the systemic injustices and increase their capacity to act against those injustices (Ishikawa, 2018; Sellman & Buttarazzi, 2020). These critics point to the historical traditions of Buddhism where the personal is connected to the political and builds an understanding of the self as an impermanent social construction (Forbes, 2022; Purser, 2021).

Rebuttals to the McMindfulness label tout that awareness to the present moment is not the absence of thoughts, nor does it necessarily encourage the practice of avoiding critical thinking (Anālayo, 2019). By splitting the discussion on mindfulness into the dualism of either secular or Buddhist is a false dichotomy, which in and of itself is reaffirmation of neoliberal beliefs (Walsh, 2016).

Mindfulness within Contemplative Science

Contemplative science is the field in which mindfulness is studied (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Contemplative science is relatively new, which contributes to terminological unclarity and a lack of an overarching theory (Dorjee, 2016). Many definitions are proposed for contemplative science including it being simply the study of the contemplative mind (Farb et al., 2015; Komjathy, 2017; Sparby, 2017). It has also been described in more nuance as the "interdisciplinary study of the metacognitive self-regulatory capacity of the mind and associated modes of existential awareness modulated by motivational/intentional and contextual factors of contemplative practices (Dorjee, 2016, p. 1). Contemplative science systematically studies contemplative practices and their effect on the mind and behaviors (Sparby, 2017). The field

includes the terms of contemplation and mindfulness as synonyms, which is a relationship accepted by both scholars and practitioners (CMind, 2021; Dorjee, 2016). The field also includes the study of other related constructs such as meditation, insight, and compassion (Dorjee, 2016). Contemplative science incorporates and acknowledges the rich lineage of spiritual traditions that frequently align these terms with religious beliefs (Dorjee, 2016; Sparby, 2017; Vieten et al., 2018; Wahbeh et al., 2018).

Types of Mindfulness or Contemplative Practices. There are varying practices that fall under the umbrella of contemplation or mindfulness. Zen yoga practitioner and academic researcher, Maia Duerr, conceptualized a Tree of Contemplative Practices that encompasses a wide variety of methods in which to practice mindfulness (CMind, 2021). The tree image includes movement-based practices, silence-based practices, relational practices, and others that all aim at an intentional awareness of the current moment and maintain connection to that with which we are observing (Duerr, 2015). Rather than focusing solely on the form of the practice, the roots of contemplation rely on the intention behind the practice, which Duerr posits as both awareness alongside communion and connection (Duerr, 2015). The tree image can be seen in its entirety in Figure 3.

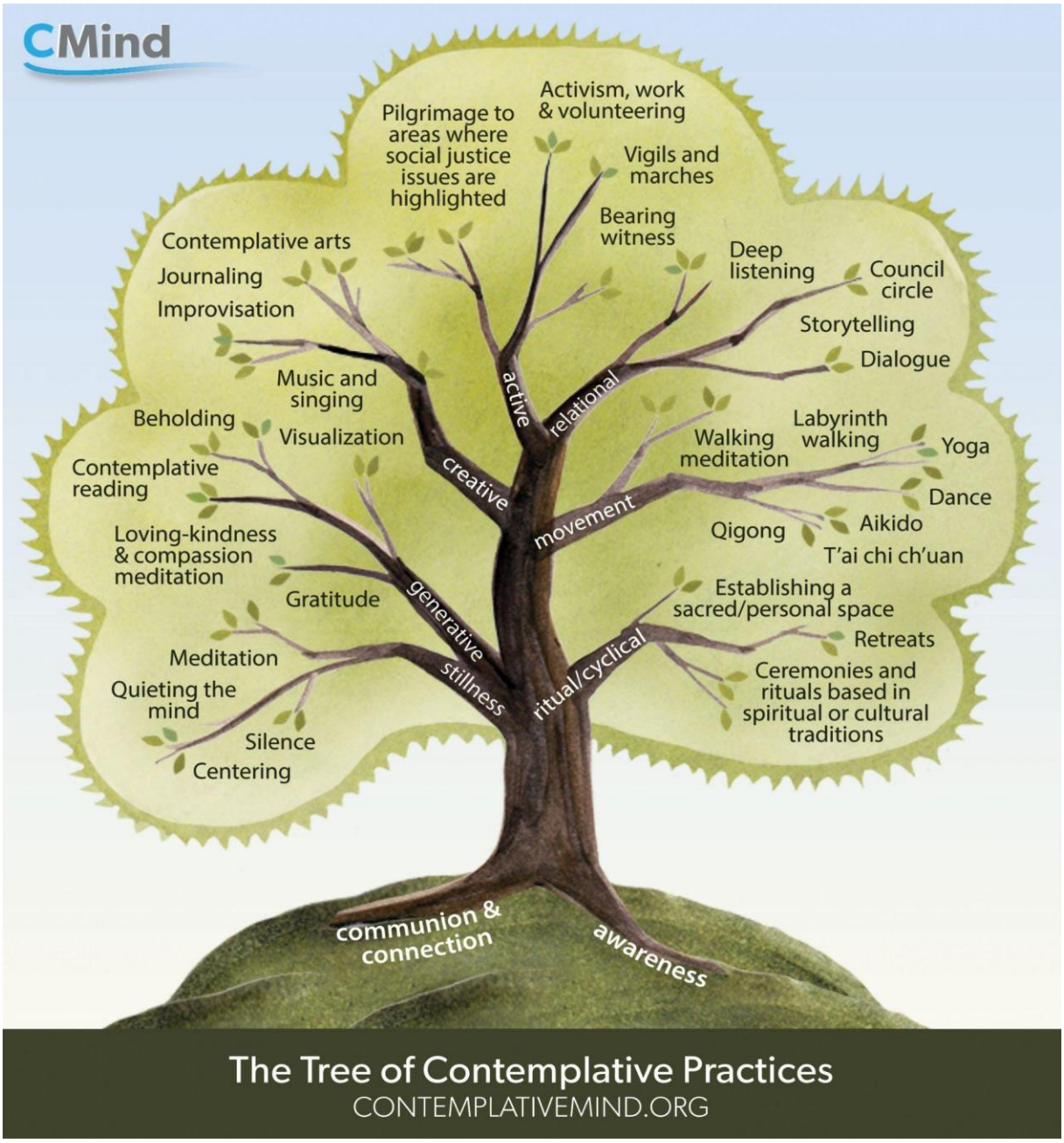
Meditation is one method of mindfulness practice. Meditation is often related to spiritual beliefs, but has been secularized to be used in clinical settings (Vieten et al., 2018). Transcendental Meditation is one such method of secularized meditation and has been well-researched (Vieten et al., 2018). Meditation has been shown to promote a sense of non-duality, in which the practitioner perceives a sense of oneness between the observer and the observed; this has been described as the dissolution of the dualistic relationship between subject and object or between in-group and out-group (Vieten et al., 2018).

Mindfulness Practices and Critical Consciousness Development

Instructors who pair mindfulness with critical consciousness-related work suggest numerous practices and pedagogies that they have used to facilitate an increase in consciousness related to social justice (Berila, 2016; Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022). One major goal of social justice education is to challenge the deep ideological convictions that students' hold, which takes a skillful balance of posing questions to disrupt their assumptions while also recognizing that students may disengage from learning if the discomfort becomes too much (Berila, 2016; Freire, 2000). Students must not only unlearn unjust behaviors, but also unjust thinking patterns that have become normalized (Berila, 2016). The tools for this type of self-inquiry and self-questioning include contemplative or mindful practices. Intentional awareness of the moment can help students begin the process of critical self-reflection (Berila, 2016).

Figure 3

The Tree of Contemplative Practices



Note: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Attribution to: The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. (Concept & design by Maia Duerr; illustration by Carrie Bergman)

One step in this process of critical self-reflection can be to aid students in creating a gap between their reaction and response (Berila, 2016) A mindfulness practice of being aware of the body, including emotions and sensations, can help a student recognize when they are experiencing a reaction to their environment (Wong & Vinsky, 2021). Mindfulness practice can help them accept the feelings as they are, apply discernment to the feeling to more clearly understand its origins, and finally, intentionally decide how one wants to act in response (Berila, 2016). One specific way to help a student recognize and pause in that gap between reaction and response is with a mindfulness check-in (Berila, 2016). A mindfulness check-in could include creating a quiet, undisturbed space, pausing with a few calming breaths, and then asking oneself what one is feeling in the present moment. Ask oneself if there are emotions present, and if so, where they might be located in the body. Remember not to judge those emotions or feelings, but be attentive to them. This simple practice allows one to become more aware of how their body reacts (Berila, 2016). Other mindfulness practices include reflective journaling, writing about the emotions one is currently experiencing (Berila, 2016; Bransford, 2011; Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Rogerson et al., 2021; Sewell, 2020).

Being present to one's body and aware of the sensations in the body is a key aspect of mindfulness practice as applied to critical consciousness education (Berila, 2016). Mindfulness practices related to bodies could include a body scan as well as movement-based practices such as yoga, tai-chi, and qigong (Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022). Instructors have applied body-based practices to address justice issues that may provoke feelings of grief, such as eco-grief or native colonization (Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022)

Mindfulness has been shown to be effective in supporting emotional regulation when experiencing discomfort (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2017; Iani et al., 2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019). Because dissonance can trigger defensive coping mechanisms, it is possible that students who are able to use mindfulness as a positive coping mechanism may be able to better navigate through critical consciousness development (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Petranker & Eastwood, 2021; Pillen et al., 2020; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018).

Mindfulness can also be applied to critical consciousness development as it can facilitate the recognition of implicit bias (Burgess et al., 2017; Goh, 2012; Lueke & Gibson, 2014; Ransom et al., 2021; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). A social worker can utilize mindfulness to notice their visceral reaction to an environment in which otherwise they may rely on stereotypes and implicit bias to assess safety (Wong & Vinsky, 2021). Mindfulness can become an embedded intervention and practice in the mitigation of implicit bias as it brings awareness to the automatic sensations and thoughts of the person (Lueke & Gibson, 2014; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). The origins of mindfulness practice are rooted in a goal of wise attention, where the practitioner is aware of feelings and thoughts and curiously attends to where they come from and how they affect behavior, which can include the social, historical, and cultural impacts of their implicit bias (Bodhi, 2011; Dreyfus, 2011; FitzGerald et al., 2019; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). Mindfulness can also be applied as a method to address internalized oppression (Berila, 2014; Ransom et al., 2021). Colorism, which is the internalized oppression related to one's skin tone, manifests itself as an implicit bias and mindfulness practice can be applied to increase awareness of colorist behaviors and beliefs (Ransom et al., 2021). One can mindfully learn to witness one's reactions

and provide a nonjudgmental, curious awareness in order to intentionally choose a new narrative to believe (Berila, 2014).

There is theory and burgeoning research that mindfulness practices can, at times, support agency, participation, and efficacy in actions that promote systemic justice (Ferrin & Zern, 2021; Hick & Furlotte, 2009; Scafuto, 2021). Research has shown that mindfulness increases a person's ability to notice what is happening in the body, which increases one's sense of agency, or ability to effect change (Farb et al., 2015; Wiens, 2005). Mindfulness practices, when intentionally coupled with curiosity and a sociopolitical framework, have been theorized to increase global citizenship (Ferrin & Zern, 2021; Hick & Furlotte, 2009). Emotional work that includes discernment, reflection, de/recentering emotions, and identifying affirmative emotions has been shown to be an important part of participating in collective action (Fernández & Watts, 2022). At the same time, mindfulness practices have been criticized for their emphasis on passive acceptance, which can lead to emotional reappraisal that diminishes one's motivation to participate in social action (Ford et al., 2019; Purser, 2021; Solak et al., 2021; Stone & Zahavi, 2022).

Mindfulness Practice and Pillen et al.'s (2020) six stages of CC Development. There is plentiful theoretical support to apply mindfulness as a method of facilitating growth through Pillen et al.'s (2020) six stages of critical consciousness (Berila, 2016; Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Wong, 2004; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). Many scholars suggest mindfulness practices as methods for students to navigate the discomfort that arises with new information and mindfulness practices can aid or be part of the introspection process (Beachum & Gullo, 2020; Berila, 2016; Burgess et al., 2017; Edwards et al., 2017; Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022; Hanley et al., 2015; Lillis & Hayes, 2007; Lueke & Gibson, 2016;

Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Ngnoumen, 2019; Oyler et al., 2022; Scheps & Walsh, 2020; Sukhera & Watling, 2017; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Wong, 2004; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). However, there is tension in the literature regarding the impact of how mindfulness is framed (Anālayo, 2020; Forbes, 2022; Purser, 2021; Toledo, 2016). Some scholars suggest that mindfulness, as taught in the West as merely nonjudgmental attention is not enough to facilitate critical consciousness (Anālayo, 2020; Davis, 2015; Sentot, 2017; Stanley, 2015).

One remaining problem is whether or not mindfulness practices contribute to growth in the later stages as students grow to revise their frames of reference regarding socio-political justice, if mindfulness aids in their ability to develop a pathway and agency to create change, and if finally, mindfulness practice plays a role in students' ability to act against oppression. The following research study focused primarily on gathering data regarding the relationship between mindfulness practice and student growth through critical consciousness development in order to add to the body of literature regarding efficacious pedagogies that support social work students in acting to reduce oppression.

Conclusion

Critical consciousness is a conceptual framework appropriate for social work education to develop students' ability to recognize their bias, reduce acts of discrimination, as well as to act in ways that interrupt oppression (Barak, 2016; Bransford, 2011; Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Suárez et al., 2008). Social work educators can use the empirically supported six-stage developmental model to promote student growth through the conscientization process (Pillen et al., 2020). Evidence-based methodologies appropriate for supporting growth through each stage should be used, with an overarching classroom environment and teaching style conducive to safety, co-learning, and open dialogue (Delia &

Krasny, 2018; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005). Not all methodologies will work for every student due to the myriad intersectional identities and experiences (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). Research has shown that many emotions are part of the conscientization process (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018). Some barriers to the process include defensiveness, anxiety, and shame when participants are exposed to conscientization pedagogy and it is important for social work educators to implement evidence-based practices that help students navigate the emotions surrounding the disequilibrium that occurs in the conscientization process (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; NASW, 2021; Zestcott et al., 2016). Empirical literature supports mindfulness practice as a benefit to the conscientization process (Beachum & Gullo, 2020; Berila, 2016; Burgess et al., 2017; Edwards et al., 2017; Hanley et al., 2015; Lillis & Hayes, 2007; Lueke & Gibson, 2016; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Ngnoumen, 2019; Oyler et al., 2022; Scheps & Walsh, 2020; Sukhera & Watling, 2017; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Wong, 2004; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). Mindfulness can help practitioners apply emotional regulation strategies to discomfort (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Iani et al., 2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019). It can also help practitioners sustain their attention in difficult tasks (Petranker & Eastwood, 2021). However, there is not yet research exploring the relationship between mindfulness and the specific stages of the conscientization process, particularly as emotions and mindfulness play a role in oppression-reducing action.

Social work educators need evidence-based methods to support social work students in their conscientization process (Mehrotra et al., 2018). The current theoretical combinations of course content, teaching styles, learning tasks, and field experience that are being used to address conscientization need empirical evidence that shows they are effective (Featherston et al., 2019;

Lwin & Beltrano, 2020; Mehrotra et al., 2017). With empirical evidence of methodologies that support these specified stages of critical consciousness development, social work programs can embed these methodologies into their curriculum to provide evidence-based pedagogies (Jemal, 2017; Mehrotra et al., 2018; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005). This research study aims to support the efforts toward empirically assessing what provides support or create barriers to social work students' ability to develop conscientization. Specifically, this study assessed the relationship between mindfulness practice and the development of conscientization within social work students and how students perceive mindfulness to affect their conscientization.

Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

Critical consciousness is a framework used to describe the process and product of becoming aware of injustice, oppression, and power inherent in interactions and systems. This includes a critical reflection of how one's worldviews shape one's understanding of justice. Critically conscious awareness and reflection leads to action aimed at reducing injustice and oppression (Carlson et al., 2006; Diemer et al., 2021; Freire, 2000; Jemal, 2017; Watts et al., 2011). It is a framework theoretically compatible with social work education as social workers are ethically held to recognizing and interrupting discrimination and oppression in micro, mezzo, and macro situations (CSWE, 2022; NASW, 2021; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005). There is vast research to support critical consciousness development with homogenous groups of marginalized identities (Baker & Brookins, 2014; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Chronister & McWhirter, 2006; Diemer, 2012; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Diemer et al., 2006; Furumoto, 2001; Heberle et al., 2020; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016; Osajima, 2007; Roy et al., 2019; Saheli, 2003; Seider et al., 2019). However, there is limited research on pedagogical methods to facilitate critical consciousness development within heterogenous groups, such as in higher education, and further research is needed in order to ascertain empirically supported interventions that will lead to action-oriented transformation, as opposed to assuming that providing information regarding bias and injustice will lead to transformation and change (Bransford, 2011; Featherston et al., 2019; Hall & Theriot, 2016; Lwin & Beltrano, 2020; Mehrotra et al., 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). The following mixed methods study was designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data from higher education social work students regarding the relationship between mindfulness and

the development of critical consciousness. This section provides a description of the study including the type of mixed methods research design, the participants involved in both phases, how data was collected and analyzed, as well as the limitations of the research.

Research Questions

The mixed methods study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness in social work students?
2. How do social work students perceive mindfulness practice to impact their response to the emotions inherent in the critical consciousness development process?
3. How do social work students perceive mindfulness practice to impact their progression through Pillen's six stages of critical consciousness development?

Research Design

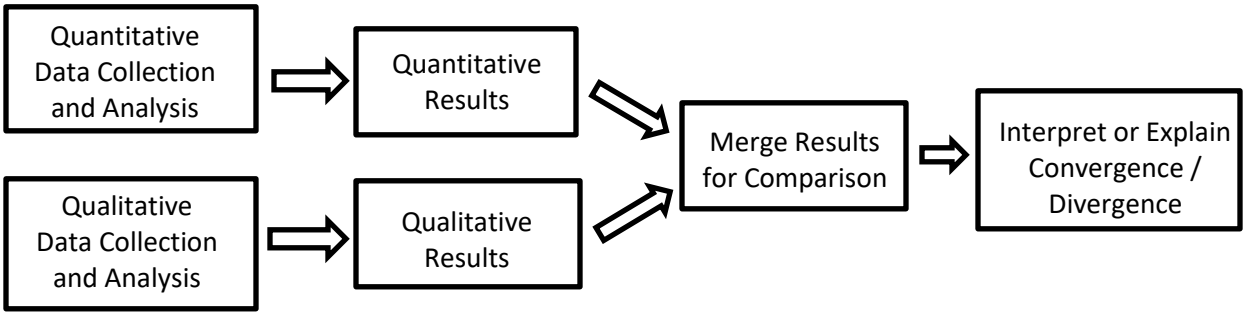
The purpose of this study was to research the relationship between mindfulness and the development of critical consciousness. This relationship was measured and explored through both quantitative and qualitative methods in a mixed method convergent design. A convergent design, also called triangulation, is one in which both qualitative and quantitative data are gathered simultaneously and analyzed separately as can be seen in Figure 4 (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The results of the analysis are then compared and the similarities or differences are interpreted (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012). Both the qualitative and quantitative data hold equal weight in the convergent design (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012). The mixed methods convergent design was intentionally applied in order to more fully understand the phenomenon of inquiry (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012). The triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative data aids in the mitigation of the weaknesses of

each type of data by applying the strengths of the other (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012). The quantitative data allows for a larger sample size and more accurate generalizability while the qualitative data provides more detail about the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

The researcher collected data through closed questions on an online survey with reliable and valid instruments to measure trait mindfulness and critical consciousness development. These data were analyzed quantitatively. On the same survey, the researcher also simultaneously collected open-ended data through four reflective essay questions that related to participants' emotions, mindfulness practices, and their perceptions of the relationship between emotions and mindfulness. Some of this open-ended data were coded and analyzed quantitatively through frequencies; some of the open-ended data were coded and grouped into themes through qualitative analysis. The researcher simultaneously gathered more in-depth qualitative data through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. One type of data alone would not have fully answered the three research questions guiding this study which asked about the relationship between the two constructs of mindfulness and critical consciousness; therefore a mixed methods design was the most appropriate for this study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012). The specific mixed method convergent design of this study is shown visually in Figure 5.

Figure 4

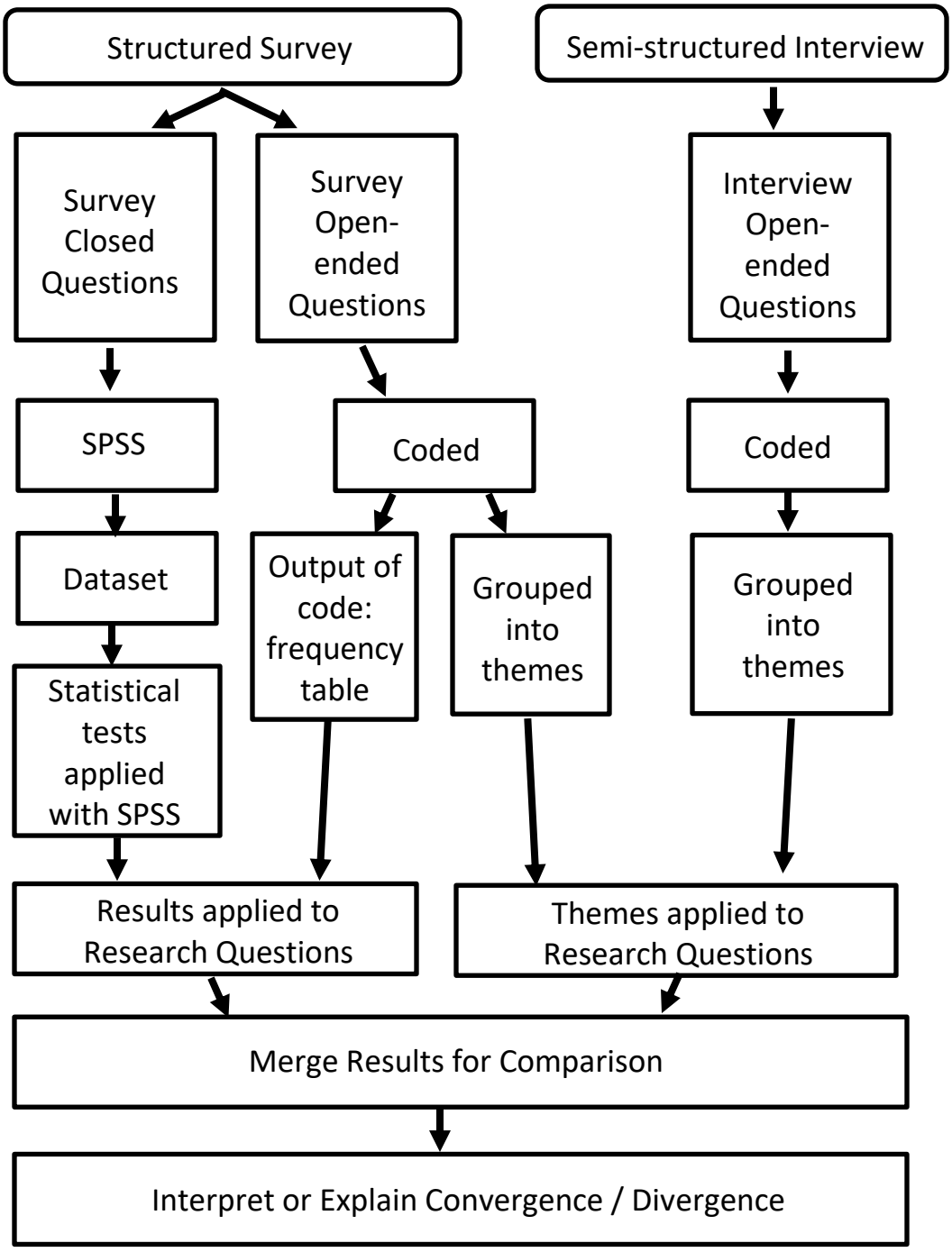
Basic Mixed Methods Convergent Design



Note. Source: Creswell & Guetterman, 2012

Figure 5

Mixed Methods Convergent Design in Current Study



Participants

Selection and Setting

The target population of this study was higher education social work students. The purpose of the research was to explore the relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness that results in action to reduce oppression in order to inform pedagogical methods for social work education. Participants in this study were social work students who had been exposed to mindfulness practices within their social work course content. Higher education social work students were an appropriate sample population for this study in that critical consciousness research has been completed with higher education students in previous studies with success, finding this to be an appropriate environment for critical consciousness development (Goerdt, 2011; Osajima, 2007; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018).

The researcher used purposive, homogenous sampling techniques to set a sampling frame of appropriate participants who have shared characteristics (Rai & Thapa, 2015). The characteristics desired were that social work students had been exposed to mindfulness practices in conjunction with their social work course content. The sampling frame included social work students from 17 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada. Each of these institutions included a social work course or courses that embedded mindfulness pedagogy. These institutions were located in one of four ways: 1) through their faculty membership in the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE); 2) a faculty member who had published literature related to mindfulness in social work education; 3) through an online search of "school of social work mindfulness course;" or 4) through snowball sampling from the previous three groups. Multiple faculty responded to inquiry emails with a referral of another social work instructor who embedded mindfulness at a different institution. The ACMHE is a

group that focuses on facilitating contemplative, or mindful, pedagogy in higher educational settings. Within this sampling frame of schools of social work that identify with mindfulness pedagogy, all students of these social work programs who were exposed to mindfulness pedagogy within social work education were potential participants for the study. This sampling method provides a best-fit sample of participants to increase the relevance of the results to the context of the research (Rai & Thapa, 2015).

A total of 17 higher education institutions were represented in this study, six of which were private and 11 public. Fourteen of the institutions were located in the United States and three in Canada. The full list of participating universities can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Participating Universities (n=17)

University	Type	Location
University A	Private	Eastern US
University B	Public	Midwest US
University C	Public	Eastern Canada
University D	Public	Midwest US
University E	Public	Western US
University F	Public	Western Canada
University G	Public	Western US
University H	Private	Southwest US
University I	Public	Southwest US
University J	Public	South US
University K	Private	Eastern US
University L	Public	Eastern US
University M	Public	Eastern Canada
University N	Private	Midwest US
University O	Public	Southern US
University P	Private	Eastern US
University Q	Private	Northwest US

Online Survey Participants

Between September 1, 2022 and January 31, 2023 there were a total of 156 submissions to the online survey. Of the 156, 138 responses had sufficient data to be included in the research. Responses were excluded when "Yes" was not marked on the informed consent (n=1) or if all questions were left blank after the informed consent page (n=17). The majority of the participants who responded to the online survey were female (83.7%), which is similar to 2020 U.S. national social work data (85.1% of master's level social work students identify as female) (CSWE, 2021). The racial diversity of the participants differed heavily from U.S. national average with far fewer African American/Black students represented in the study at 3.8%, where 20.0% of the national average of master's level social work students identify as African American/Black (CSWE, 2021). More detailed descriptions of participant demographics are located in Table 2.

Table 2

Online Survey Participant Demographic Data (n=138)

	Frequency	Percent	U.S. Ave. in SW Master's program[a]
Gender Identity (n=129)			
Female	108	83.7%	85.1%
Male	15	11.6%	13.3%
Non-binary/3rd gender	6	4.7%	
Racial/Ethnic identity (n=130)			
African-American/Black	5	3.8%	20.0%
American Indian/Native Alaskan	1	0.8%	0.8%
Asian	3	2.2%	3.4%
Hispanic/Latinx	8	6.2%	15.8%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0%	0.2%
White (non-Hispanic)	97	74.6%	50.8%
Two or more races	13	10%	3.1%
Other/Unknown	1	0.8%	5.9%
Prefer not to answer	2	1.5%	
Age (n=128)			
Under 22	4	0.3%	1.5%
22-24	25	19.5%	22.5%
25-29	37	28.9%	31.0%
30-34	22	17.2%	15.9%
35-44	23	18.0%	16.2%
45 or older	17	13.3%	10.4%

Note: [a] Source: Council on Social Work Education, 2021. Used with permission. See Appendix A.

Semi-structured Interview Participants

Seventy students responded affirmatively to the opt-in section of the online survey indicating interest in completing a semi-structured interview. The researcher applied a purposive sampling technique and selected thirteen participants who were representative of varying genders, ages, and ethnicities. The researcher intentionally applied this sampling technique in order that the sample be as representative of the population as possible in order to more accurately describe the population (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012). This increases the transferability of the research results (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Of the sixteen email invitations for interviews, thirteen students responded and completed the semi-structured interview. The researcher interviewed the participants virtually via Google Meetings, at a time that was convenient for the participant. Each participant selected their own pseudonym which is included with their demographic descriptions in Table 3.

Table 3

Interview Participant Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Educ. level
Joanne	F	54	White	MSW
Blair	F	40	White	MSW
Catherine	F	28	Bi-racial	MSW
Olivia	F	23	White	MSW
Scott	M	36	White	PhD
Charlie	M	53	White	MSW
Ruth	NB/3rd	29	White	MSW
Jordan	F	36	African-American/Black	MSW
Juan	M	33	Hispanic/Latinx	PhD
Stockton	F	43	Bi-racial	MSW
Mo	M	30	White	MSW
Dawn	F	31	White	MSW
Stacy	F	35	White	MSW

Data Collection

In order to more fully understand the phenomenon of how mindfulness relates to critical consciousness, the researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously according to the mixed method convergent research design (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Institutional Review Board Approval was gained in July, 2022 (See Appendix B). The researcher collected data between September 1, 2022 and January 31, 2023. The sample frame was set through purposive homogenous sampling (Rai & Thapa, 2015).

Potential faculty were contacted between July 2022 and January 2023 via three purposive sampling areas. The researcher sent inquiry emails to 20 U.S. or Canadian social work faculty members who were members of ACMHE, to 28 researchers who had published on social work and mindfulness, and to 12 schools of social work who had an online hit related to a query of "school of social work mindfulness course." A fourth group of faculty was recruited by snowball sampling methods via faculty from the first three groups. The inquiry email briefly described the study and requested the faculty member's collaboration in disseminating the survey to their students (See Appendix C). When faculty responded with interest, the researcher sent a formal letter of invitation (See Appendix D), a script to be shared verbally with students in class or via their learning management system (See Appendix E), and the link to the survey. Students were told in the script that there was an optional raffle with five $25 awards for completing the survey.

Participants were invited by their social work course instructor with a script and directed to a webpage with Qualtrics Data Analysis survey software where participants provided survey responses with both closed and open-ended responses. The survey respondents were asked at the end of the survey if they were interested in participating in a one-hour follow-up interview that came with a remuneration of $25. The invitation framed the sample population for interview participants to be students who self-identified as having experienced emotions when learning about injustice or acting to increase justice and also applied mindfulness practices to those emotions. This intentional sampling frame was set in order to increase the likelihood of hearing detailed descriptions of how students apply mindfulness to their critical consciousness development (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To gain an understanding of the types of mindfulness practices that participants were exposed to, the researcher gathered data via a follow up email to the participating faculty. This

email inquired about the types of mindfulness practices the instructor used in their course(s) that the participants would likely have been exposed to. Five faculty members responded with brief descriptions of mindfulness pedagogy, such as starting each class with a brief guided meditation, leading breath meditations or grounding meditations, somatic-based meditations, movement-based mindfulness such as qigong and mindful walking exercises, mindful eating exercises, and loving-kindness meditations. Two of the faculty responded that they use a book to facilitate and support their mindfulness conversation. One faculty member responded that they follow the mindfulness practice with a group verbal reflection and/or discussion (See Table 4).

Table 4

Faculty Mindfulness Pedagogies (n=5)

Faculty Member	Mindfulness pedagogy
Faculty 1	Begins each class with mindfulness practice. These include Somatic Tibetan Vajrayana, walking meditation, visualization, Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mountain Meditation, Shamatha and Vipassana, movement (Qigong)
Faculty 2	Begins each class with a 5-10 minute guided meditation from various sources. (These include breath meditation, grounding meditation, loving-kindness, Tonglen, visualization, etc.). Following the practice, discusses the experience with personal or professional applications. Ties the daily lecture in with the mindfulness practice. Uses a book, "Trauma Stewardship: An everyday guide to caring for self while caring for others" by Laura Van Dernooty Lipsky. Used small learning circles to go through the book.
Faculty 3	Begins each class with a 5-minute guided meditation
Faculty 4	Begins class with a short mindfulness exercise
Faculty 5	Uses a book, "Facilitating Mindfulness: A guide for human service professionals" by Diana Coholic

Online Survey

After confirmation of their desire to collaborate, the researcher sent faculty a link to the survey along with a script to be read when they introduced the study to the students (Appendix E). The script was to increase standardization and reduce bias in the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012). Faculty members were given the option of reading the script aloud in class and then providing the link electronically via their online learning platform or sending their students an email with the script and link included. In order to provide participants with anonymity, the researcher did not gather information on the survey regarding which specific instructor nor specific institution the participants were affiliated with.

Survey Instrument Description. The online survey was hosted through online Qualtrics software that was licensed through the supporting university, Northwest Nazarene. The survey began with a three-sentence description of the study and then moved to the informed consent page (See Appendix F). The students were able to select "Yes, I'd like to continue with the study" or "No, I do not want to participate in the study." If participants did not click "Yes" they were excluded from the study. Those who elected to participate were then directed through four consecutive sections. The four sections of the survey included two quantitative measures, four short-essay open-ended questions, eight demographic questions, and two follow-up options (one for participation in the raffle and one for further participation in an interview). The verbiage of the demographic questions can be seen in Appendix G, the open-ended survey questions in Appendix H, and the follow-up questions in Appendix I. The quantitative section began with a Likert-scale tool called The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) which can be found in its entirety in Appendix J (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The researcher received permission from the authors to use this scale (See Appendix K). The MAAS relates to a person's tendency toward

focused awareness in the present moment and measures day-to-day experiences related to being present and aware. It is a 15-item tool where respondents indicate their frequency of experiencing the statement described. One example is, “I rush through activities without being really attentive to them” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 826). Participants are prompted to respond on a scale between one and six, where one indicates “almost always” and six indicates “almost never” (Brown & Ryan, 2003). For each question, a higher score indicates higher mindfulness. The MAAS is a valid and reliable self-report measure related to a person’s trait mindfulness, having been tested with undergraduate students with tests of internal consistency showing an alpha score of .82. It has also been tested with community adults, showing an alpha score of .87 (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Both of these sample populations are appropriate for this current research study.

Next on the survey was the Critical Consciousness Inventory (CCI) which can be viewed in its entirety in Appendix L (Thomas et al., 2014). The researcher received permission from the author to use this inventory (See Appendix M). The CCI provides sequential descriptions of beliefs and behaviors related to fairness, equality, respect, and prejudice. The response options are written according to a Guttman scale, which provides the participant with four sentence options per scenario. One example of an item is the following: “5a. I think all social groups are respected; 5b. I think the social groups that are not respected have done things that lead people to think badly of them; 5c. I think people do not respect members of some social groups based on stereotypes; and 5d. I am respectful of people in all social groups and I speak up when others are not” (Thomas et al., 2014, p. 494). For each of the nine questions, the participant was prompted to select the option that fit them best. The CCI was developed to assess critical consciousness at all levels of development, where critical consciousness is hypothesized to be a contributor to activism toward reducing oppression (Thomas et al., 2014). The items on the CCI were not

modified for use in this study, and the instrument was used in its entirety. The Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure (CCCM) was considered as an optional tool to be used in this study, but the wording may not have been understandable or relatable for younger, undergraduate students who were in the early years of their social work education. In order to be inclusive of this population, the CCI was selected as a more appropriate tool. The CCI has been validated with adolescents and young adults resulting in alpha scores of .87 for the items and .61 for the participants (Thomas et al., 2014). A Cronbach alpha score above .70 is considered to be acceptably reliable (Urdan, 2017).

After submitting their responses to the MAAS and CCI items, participants were directed to the next page of the survey, which included four short-answer essay questions (See Appendix H). These four questions related to the second research question of this study, which was "How do social work students perceive mindfulness to impact their response to the emotions inherent in the critical consciousness development process?" The first of these open-ended questions on the survey was, "If you have attended courses that address bias, injustice, or oppression, what types of emotions have you felt during those learning experiences?" This question was written according to the guiding theoretical framework of critical consciousness development, in which Pillen et al. (2020) labeled stage two of this process as *information causing disequilibrium*. In order to answer the research question, the researcher wanted to gather data on the types of emotions felt in what the literature would support as a common curricular moment in the social work education curriculum that causes disequilibrium (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Mirick & Davis, 2021; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020). Similarly, in the second open-ended question, participants were asked, "If you have participated in actions/behaviors aimed at reducing bias, injustice, or oppression, what

types of emotions have you felt during those experiences?" This question gathered data regarding the emotions experienced during stage six of Pillen et al.'s (2020) critical consciousness model, *acting against oppression*. This stage was intentionally selected in order to learn more about supports and barriers to student growth toward action, an integral and often neglected aspect of the conscientization process (Diemer et al., 2016; Diemer et al., 2021; Jemal, 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Schugurensky, 1998; Watts et al., 2003).

The third open-ended question was, "Do you participate in any mindfulness practices? (Yes/No). If yes, please describe what type(s) of mindfulness practice you participate in and how frequently you engage in them." This dual-part question gathered data surrounding how many of the participants intentionally engaged in mindfulness practices and at what regularity. The fourth and final question was, "Has mindfulness practice impacted your emotions when learning about or acting against bias, injustice, or oppression during your courses? If so, please describe how." This question provided explicit data related to participant perception of the impact of mindfulness on these two particularly salient stages in the critical consciousness development process. Definitions and examples of mindfulness and bias/injustice/oppression-reducing actions were included on the same webpage as the open-ended essay questions (see Appendix H).

These short-answer reflective essay questions are recognized as an unintentional type of intervention as they prompt reflection on the students' emotions due to the course material and its relationship to the mindfulness practice (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The potential exists for these reflective essays to trigger pain and further discomfort, which is an ethical issue to consider (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In the informed consent verbiage, the researcher identified the possibility of this harm occurring. The informed consent provided options for the participants to discontinue their participation in the study or speak with a professional if they felt

uncomfortable, both options increasing the ethical rigor of this research. It is also possible that participants who contributed data to the semi-structured interview would have given biased responses due to their exposure to the online survey (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The researcher attempted to mitigate this biased response by allowing multiple days between the completion of the online survey and performing the semi-structured interview.

The third section of the survey included eight demographic questions. The researcher intentionally placed the demographic questions after the Likert and Guttman scaled questions as well as after the short essay response questions. There is debate among scholars regarding whether demographic questions should be placed at the beginning or the end of surveys as some studies have found certain demographic questions to be related to stereotype threat, affecting the responses to content questions that follow the demographic questions (Kiefer & Sekaquaptewa, 2006). Other studies have found that placing demographic questions at the beginning of the survey increases the rate of participants responding to the demographic questions (Teclaw et al., 2012). However, in general, it is recommended to place demographic questions at the end of the survey if the survey contains any sensitive topics or socially desirable outcomes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012; Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). Due to the potentially sensitive nature and perceived social desirability of the CCI questions, the researcher placed the demographic questions after the quantitative questions and reflective essay questions to reduce the possibility of stereotype threat (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012; Kiefer & Sekaquaptewa, 2006; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Following the demographic questions there was verbiage regarding the researcher's gratitude for the participant's response to the survey. It is important to recognize and be sensitive to the efforts of the research participants, which can be addressed through remuneration or

reciprocity (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In order to show gratitude in a tangible way, the researcher offered the participants the chance to enter into a raffle for one of five $25 prizes which, they were told, would be determined after the data collection window closed in the spring of 2023. If the participant chose to be included in the raffle, they had the opportunity to enter their email address into a text box as a point of contact. Entering this raffle decreased the participant's anonymity as their responses would then be associated with an email address. The protection of client confidentiality was addressed by allowing them to input any email address of their choosing, as well as by reminding them that neither their responses nor their email addresses would be shared with their instructor (See Appendix I).

Following the raffle verbiage, the researcher also invited the participants to indicate interest in an optional, one-on-one virtual interview. The criteria for this interview were for participants to have felt emotions when learning about injustice or acting to increase justice and have applied mindfulness in relation to those feelings. Interested potential participants were told that only some individuals would be selected for this follow-up interview, but that those who were selected and able to participate would be guaranteed $25 in remuneration for that hour of their time. Those who wanted to participate in the interview were asked to enter their email address and first name into separate text boxes below (See Appendix I).

At the end of the webpage, there was a "submit survey" button that rendered their responses into the data pool. The final page of the survey included a brief "thank you" message. Selection criteria for inclusion in the study were an age of 18 or older, electronic signing of the consent form, partial or complete submission of the MAAS and CCI measures, and partial or complete submission of the online reflection essays. A total of 138 participants met the inclusion criteria.

Raffle Prize Drawing. One hundred twenty-four students responded to the raffle inquiry with their email addresses. The researcher performed five drawings of the randomized raffle on January 31st, 2023 with 124 email addresses. A random number generator website was used to determine the five winning participants. The five winners were sent an email that same day thanking them for their participation in the survey and offering them the raffle prize, which would require a Venmo or PayPal name or a physical address to be mailed one of the $25 VISA gift cards. All five winners responded within one week and were sent their $25 prize.

Semi-structured Interviews

In order to select interview participants, the researcher reviewed the demographics of the survey participants as they were submitted. The researcher used purposive sampling to gather a sample of participants who were representative based on age, gender, and ethnicity. The researcher sent individual emails to each of the potential participants of this interview sample and interviews were scheduled according to the availability of the participants (See Appendix N). The researcher conducted thirteen interviews between October 8, 2022 and January 30, 2023. The interview length ranged between 28 minutes and 68 minutes. Upon joining the virtual meeting, the researcher asked permission to video and audio record the interview and did not begin recording until the interviewee had responded verbally in the affirmative. Once recording, the researcher reviewed the informed consent (See Appendix O), which included consent for the interview as well as consent (again) for the video and audio recording. Next, the researcher described that parameters for remuneration, that the participant had to attend the interview at least through the informed consent, description of the study, and selection of a pseudonym. The researcher then gathered information regarding how the participant would like to receive their $25 remuneration. The participant was also asked to select their own pseudonym, which is one

way to provide participant control in the research process (Wallin-Ruschman, 2014). Next, the researcher utilized the semi-structured interview protocol to guide the interview questions, but also asked clarifying or follow-up questions as necessary (see Appendix P). Included in these questions was a script that the researcher used to define mindfulness and oppression and describe the stages of critical consciousness development. The researcher shared her screen during the interview so the participant could follow along and see the visual that accompanied the stage description. See Appendix Q for the full graphic and descriptions that were shared. The interview concluded with a member-checking summary of the interviewees' responses and the participants were asked for clarification if any of the summary felt inaccurate to their experiences. After completion of the interview, the remuneration of $25 was sent electronically via Venmo/PayPal or in the mail in the form of a VISA gift card. All remunerations were sent within one week of their interview. One interview participant requested that his $25 be sent to a charity of the researcher's choice, which was also completed within one week of that interview.

To increase the internal validity of the qualitative results the researcher additionally sent the 13 interview participants a respondent validation email after analysis of the interview data (Torrance, 2012). The researcher included a nine-page document that described the themes from the interviews which included quotations from the participants. The email asked the participants to read the document and respond if they felt that the analysis accurately captured their experience and truthfully portrayed their responses. Nine of the 13 participants responded to the email and all nine of them verified that the results were accurately representative of their experience.

Analytical Methods

The convergent research design that supports this mixed methods study led to analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data separately, then comparing and interpreting the results after analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). There were three sets of data to analyze which included the quantitative ordinal responses from the Likert and Guttman scale questions on the survey, the four short essay open-ended responses on the survey, and the qualitative semi-structured interview responses. The researcher analyzed each of the sets of data through the lens of the theoretical framework guiding this study. The theoretical framework of critical consciousness, or conscientization, suggests that individuals grow through stages to reach a form of consciousness that recognizes oppression and power dynamics within personal and structural interactions (Freire, 2000; Pillen et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2011). The researcher applied this lens of staged growth to the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The quantitative data was gathered from the MAAS and CCI questions. This data addressed the first research question of this study, which explored the relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness. The MAAS and CCI are traditionally scored by taking the mean of the composite score for each scale. The mean score is an interval score and the mean MAAS and mean CCI were paired per participant. These aspects led the researcher to apply the Pearson's product-moment correlation statistic as the appropriate test for the data and research question (Tanner, 2012; Urdan, 2017). The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to apply the Pearson product-moment correlation test to analyze the data.

The short answer essay responses included open-ended responses that ranged between one word and six sentences in length. Although the method of data gathering allowed for variable

responses, the first three questions were analyzed quantitatively by coding the responses and determining frequencies and percentages (Driscoll et al., 2007; Nassaji, 2015). The fourth open-ended question on the survey was analyzed qualitatively. The fourth question from the survey and the interview transcripts were analyzed separately, yet both were analyzed through a process of seven steps (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher first started with the organization of the data, which included placing all essay responses in one searchable spreadsheet that included demographic information and allowed for the data to be organized into manageable categories during subsequent steps (Maxwell, 2013). The second step was for the researcher to immerse herself in the data by reading through all essay responses. This step included taking notes and led to the third step of identifying potential themes, connections and relationships within the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). The fourth step was to code the data which included the creation of a codebook and used *a priori* and *in vivo* coding. The codebook included the names of the codes, definitions of the codes, as well as examples for each code. This codebook helped provide consistency to the analysis process and increased trustworthiness and rigor (Roberts et al., 2019). *A priori* codes were terms that previous research had shown to relate to mindfulness practice and critical consciousness development. These codes can come from the body of empirical and theoretical literature, from the conceptual framework, as well as from pilot studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Some examples of these *a priori* codes were discomfort, reflection, and anger. The *in vivo* codes arose through the review of the data and included terms such hopeful, inspired, compassion, awe, and surprise. The researcher used colored pencils to circle the words according to their codes and a chart to tally the number of times each code arose in the data. With the interview data, these codes were tallied by participants in order to determine the dispersion of codes throughout the participant pool. The codes were then grouped together

into themes, which is often called axial coding (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The codes were grouped and arranged in ways that facilitated feasible relationships and connections. For example, the codes “pause” and “stay present/sit with it” were grouped into an axial code called “initial awareness” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These themes were related back to the original data narratives to test for a good fit.

The fifth step of analysis was to interpret the data by writing analytic memos (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). These memos were written throughout the reading and coding process which led to the sixth step which was to compare the memos and themes with the literature to find the fit and dissonance. This step also included reflection on the part of the researcher to recognize where her story related to the themes found in the data. Finally, the seventh step was that the researcher wrote up the findings and applied the thematic narratives to the research questions as well as how they fit into the current body of literature (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Due to the convergent design of the study, the interview data was analyzed separately from the short-essay responses. In order to attempt to keep the analysis separate, the researcher wrote analytic memos throughout the analysis process regarding potential similarities and differences between the interviews and the short-essay responses. The analysis from the interviews included more “emic” categories, which are categories that arise directly from the participants’ own meanings and understandings (Maxwell, 2013). This was likely due to the detailed description from this data. The researcher attempted to continually organize data into theoretical categories, deriving from the theoretical framework of critical consciousness. With large quantities of qualitative data, it is important to move beyond mere organizational categories and rely more heavily on substantive or theoretical categories (Maxwell, 2013). When analyzing the data, it was also important for the researcher to identify her own experiences, beliefs, and

theories relating to the themes that were arising from the data. This was addressed through challenging the researcher's assumptions and looking for literature that disagreed with the coding and analysis themes in step six (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This process was aided by regularly writing memos regarding researcher reflection and member checking with interview participants.

Role of the Researcher

There are ethical considerations when completing survey research that the researcher must be aware of, including how data is collected, how the results are analyzed, and how the results are reported (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012). The researcher has a role to remain committed to ethical behavior in each of these areas. Ethical considerations were addressed in the following ways: confidentiality of participant response and results reported were reflective of the entire data set (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012). Researcher reflection is also an important piece of the methodology design (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This includes the researcher becoming aware of their own perspectives, assumptions, and sensitivities that relate to the research topic and participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher recognized her own professional role as a social work educator and how she attempts to develop critical consciousness within her students. The researcher has seen firsthand how defensive responses from students can create a barrier to their learning, and at times evoking such emotional responses that students have walked out on class. This concept is not purely academic for the researcher, but has implications for her day-to-day life at work. With six years of social work teaching experience, and hundreds of hours spent reading related literature, the researcher has some assumptions and biases related to what types of students tend to become defensive, as well as what types of interventions seem to work to reduce defensiveness and help students progress to reflection. The researcher has also experienced her own emotions when working to interrupt

injustice and has applied mindfulness to those emotions. She recognizes a bias that the relationship between mindfulness and critical action is a personal area of importance to her own development. Throughout the research process, the researcher wrote memos and field notes and discussed her perspective out loud to recognize her own worldview and assumptions to reduce the possibility of bias (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Maxwell, 2013).

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness within social work students. The researcher took steps to reduce error in this study, however there are some limitations to this research that were unable to be addressed. The limitations to this study include at least the following:

- A limitation of this study lies in the inference transferability of the results. The non-random sampling method may lead to coverage error (Schonlau et al., 2009). The researcher made efforts to garner representative participants from diverse geographic, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic groups by including diverse university settings. However, there is a possibility of non-respondent bias (Sackett, 1979), where social workers who completed the survey were those who more positively identified with mindfulness practice or critical consciousness ideology. The social work students who found the measure items or essay questions uncomfortable may not have completed or submitted their responses, therefore rendering the results biased toward those who identified with critical consciousness and mindfulness. This was addressed by having the social work educator introduce the study, normalizing participation, yet not requiring it.
- A limitation of the study relates to how participants apply their mindfulness and reflection. While the trait mindfulness measure shows consistency, it is possible that the

environment affects the participants' ability to access those mindful and reflective traits. This limitation should be addressed in future research.

- A limitation included inconsistencies in the types of mindfulness practices that students were exposed to and for how long. Some students brought in a history of mindfulness practice and others were only newly exposed in their social work courses.
- A limitation in this study was the lack of a validation of the combined MAAS, CCI, and demographic instrument. While both the MAAS and CCI have been tested as reliable and valid on their own, their reliability and validity may have been compromised as they were used in a combined instrument.
- A limitation of this study was the lack of racial and ethnic diversity. The ethnic diversity of survey participants was more homogenous than the CSWE sample, with over 74% of the survey respondents identifying as White. Due to the convergent design of the study, the researcher was interviewing participants at the same time that participants were completing the survey. Between September 1, 2022 and January 9, 2023, only one Black, indigenous, or person of color (BIPOC) had completed the survey which limited the ethnic diversity of interview participants until the final three weeks of data collection. The results of this study may not be transferable to an ethnically diverse population. Further study on mindfulness and critical consciousness development should be completed with more ethnically diverse populations.
- A limitation of this study was that it was designed to be inclusive of undergraduate social work students, with particular selection of the CCI instrument over the CCCM. Respondents to the survey were overwhelmingly MSW students, meaning the CCCM

may have been a more appropriate instrument to have used. Further research should be completed with the CCCM tool and graduate social work students.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

Ethical and accreditation standards for social work educational programs include that social work students should be taught to demonstrate anti-oppressive practice at all levels of intervention, from micro to macro engagements (CSWE, 2022; NASW, 2021). Social work students should be exposed to and aware of the unjust structures of power that impact their clients and intervene in ways that address injustices (CSWE, 2022; NASW, 2021; Specht & Courtney, 1995). While significant attention has been given to how social workers address bias through self-reflection within their micro interactions, social work education should support the student in growing into the ability of acting to reduce systemic injustice and oppression as well (Jemal, 2017; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Stopping short of supporting student engagement in systemic reform, and being satisfied with micro interventions reinforces oppressive structures by avoiding the impact of systems on individual wellbeing, therefore reducing social problems to individual shortcomings (Martín-Baró, 1994; Vollhardt & Twali, 2016). Social work education programs should be applying evidence-based methods for teaching the knowledge and skills related to acting against systemic injustice, as well as evaluating whether or not students are actually learning the skills necessary to address these systemic issues (CSWE, 2022; Bransford, 2011; Featherston et al., 2019; Hall & Theriot, 2016; Lwin & Beltrano, 2020; Mehrotra et al., 2017; Mehrotra et al., 2018; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016).

One theoretical lens that can help social work educators frame, teach, and assess the growth needed to understand and act against systemic injustice is the theory of critical consciousness (Bransford, 2011; Freire, 2000; Jemal, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020; Pitner &

Sakamoto, 2005). Freire's (2000) theory posits that people grow in awareness of injustice based on exposure to unjust situations as well as education about the injustice. The six stages of growth within critical consciousness development include: priming of critical reflection, information creating disequilibrium, introspection, revising frames of reference, developing agency for change, and acting against oppression (Pillen et al., 2020). Various emotions are inherent to the critical consciousness process, from the experiences that "prime" one to become aware of injustice, to the discomfort that accompanies learning which jars one's original perspective, to participation in actions that addresses injustices (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Lai et al., 2016; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Vollhardt & Twali, 2016; Vuletich & Payne, 2019; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018; Walsh, 2018; Zestcott et al., 2016). Emotional recognition, emotional regulation, and using emotion as motivation are key pieces of growing through the critical consciousness process (Fernández & Watts, 2022; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018).

One strategy that supports recognizing and regulating emotions is to learn and apply mindfulness techniques (Davis & Hayes, 2011; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Krick & Felfe, 2020; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Wong, 2004). However, there is not yet sufficient evidence related to how mindfulness contributes to supporting oppression-interrupting actions or perhaps contributes to the perpetuation of colonization; further research is needed in this area (Berila, 2016; Hyland, 2016; Ishikawa, 2018).

The purpose of this convergent-design, mixed methods study was to examine and explore the relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness development within social work students. Quantitative data were gathered through an online survey. Simultaneously, qualitative

data were gathered through an online survey as well as through semi-structured interviews. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What is the relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness in social work students?
2. How do social work students perceive mindfulness practice to impact their response to the emotions inherent in the critical consciousness development process?
3. How do social work students perceive mindfulness practice to impact their progression through Pillen et al.'s (2020) six stages of critical consciousness development?

These questions were answered through mixed methods, as both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to provide a fuller, more comprehensive picture of the topic. Integrating the two types of data in the analysis process can increase triangulation, which can help corroborate results (Burt, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). In this case, the qualitative data can help elaborate or clarify results from the quantitative data (Burt, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In this chapter, the results of the quantitative survey data, the qualitative open-ended survey responses, and the semi-structured interview responses will all be presented as they pertain to the research questions.

Participant Profile

In this study, all participants were part of a purposive homogenous sampling frame of social work students who had been exposed to mindfulness practices in their social work course curriculum (Rai & Thapa, 2015). There was a total of 138 survey participants and a total of 13 interview participants. The interview participants were a subsample of the survey participant pool.

Survey Participants

After being introduced to the survey by their course instructor or social work program coordinator, the students self-selected to participate by completing the online survey. The students who self-selected were mostly female (83.7%) and White (74.6%). The age range was fairly diverse, with 51.6% in their 20s, 27.3% in their 30s, 15.6% in their 40s, and 5.5% in their 50s. The youngest participant was 20 years old and the eldest, 54. The geographic location of the university that students are attending was more heavily weighted toward the Western half of the U.S, with some representation from the eastern half of the U.S. and Canada. Based on the student report, 23.8% of students were enrolled in a university in the Northwest U.S., 20.0% in the Southwest U.S., 33.8% in the Midwest U.S., 3.1% in the Southern U.S., and 2.3% in the Eastern U.S. Also, 0.8% identified Western Canada as the location of their university, and 2.3% identified Eastern Canada. The range of time spent in the social work field was fairly diverse, with the most common length of time being 1-2 years (31.5%) and 3-4 years (22.3%). Many students identified being currently enrolled in a course that included mindfulness (41.6%) or having been enrolled within the last year (32.4%). The exact frequencies of these demographics can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5

Survey Participant Data (n=138)

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Gender Identity (n=129)		
Female	108	83.7
Male	15	11.6
Non-binary/3rd gender	6	4.7
Racial/Ethnic identity (n=130)		
African-American/Black	5	3.8
American Indian/Native Alaskan	1	.8
Asian	3	2.2
Hispanic/Latinx	8	6.2
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0
White (non-Hispanic)	97	74.6
Two or more races	13	10
Other/Unknown	1	.8
Prefer not to answer	2	1.5
Age (n=128)		
20s	66	51.6
30s	35	27.3
40s	20	15.6
50s	7	5.5
Geographic location of current university		
Northwest US	31	23.8
Southwest US	26	20.0
Midwest US	44	33.8
Southern US	4	3.1
Eastern US	3	2.3
Western Canada	1	.8
Eastern Canada	3	2.3
Unknown/Other	10	7.7
Not currently enrolled	8	6.2
Degree currently pursuing (n=130)		
Bachelor's Degree	2	1.5
Master's Degree	113	86.9
No Degree/Other	15	11.5
Length of time in social work practice (n=130)		
Less than 1 year	18	13.8
1-2 years	41	31.5
3-4 years	29	22.3
5-9 years	24	18.5
10+ years	18	13.8

Interview Participants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to provide more depth to understanding the relationship between mindfulness, emotions, and critical consciousness development. All of the semi-structured survey participants were selected from the online survey participant pool. Students indicated a desire to participate in an interview and were selected through purposive sampling techniques that allowed for as much diversity in demographics as possible. There were 13 participants in the semi-structured interviews in which the majority (n=8) identified as female (61.5%), four participants (30.8%) identified as male and one participant (7.7%) identified as non-binary or of a third gender. Racial and ethnic diversity in the interview participants was representative of the larger survey sample, but not of the population sample. Of the 13 interview participants, nine (69.2%) identified as White, two (15.4%) as bi-racial, one (7.7%) as African-American/Black and one (7.7%) as Hispanic/Latinx. There was representation in age as three of the participants were in their 20s, six in their 30s, two in their 40s, and two in their 50s. Full interview participant demographic data is listed in Table 6, including the length of time each participant had been working in the social work field, the approximate geographic location of their university, and their education level.

Table 6

Interview Participant Data (n=13)

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race	Length of time in SW	Location of Univ.	Educ. level
Joanne	F	54	White	< 1 yr	NW US	MSW
Blair	F	40	White	10+ yrs	MW US	MSW
Catherine	F	28	Bi-racial	3-4 yrs	E Canada	MSW
Olivia	F	23	White	1-2 yrs	MW US	MSW
Scott	M	36	White	10+ yrs	MW US	PhD
Charlie	M	53	White	3-4 yrs	Sou. US	MSW
Ruth	NB	29	White	3-4 yrs	Sou. US	MSW
Jordan	F	36	African-Amer.	10+ yrs	MW US	MSW
Juan	M	33	Hispanic/Latinx	10 + yrs	SW US	PhD
Stockton	F	43	Bi-racial	10+ yrs	MW US	MSW
Mo	M	30	White	1-2 yrs	NW US	MSW
Dawn	F	31	White	5-9 yrs	W. Canada	MSW
Stacy	F	35	White	3-4 yrs	NW US	MSW

Data Collection Instruments

Survey Instrument

The online survey instrument included two closed-option measures, four open-ended questions, eight demographic questions, and two follow-up questions. The 15 MAAS questions, nine CCI questions, and eight demographic questions were used to solicit quantitative data regarding mindfulness, critical consciousness, and participant descriptive data. The four open-ended questions solicited qualitative data about emotions and mindfulness practices. The MAAS questions included Likert-scale response options from 1 to 6, where 1 indicated “Almost Always” and 6 indicated “Almost Never” (Brown & Ryan, 2003) See Appendix J for the entire

list of 15 questions and see Appendix K for the permission granted to use this instrument within this research. The CCI included nine Guttman scale questions with four response options, ranging from a precritical response to a critically conscious response, therefore ordinal in nature (Thomas et al., 2014). A Guttman scale has ordinal response options in which the later options subsume the earlier ones (Thomas, et al., 2014). An example of this includes 2a, "I believe that all people are treated equally," to 2d, "I work to make sure that people are treated equally and are given equal chances." The eight demographic questions included multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and select-all-that-apply response options. See Appendix L for the entire list of nine questions and see Appendix M for the permission granted to use this instrument within this research.

Interview Protocol Instrument

The semi-structured interview protocol included a description of the research and informed consent, open-ended questions, a scripted description of critical consciousness and mindfulness, and member-checking questions. There were 14 open-ended questions in the protocol that related to the participant's mindfulness practice; exposure to course learning about bias, injustice, and oppression; anti-oppressive behaviors; emotions experienced; and perceived relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness growth (See Appendix P). The researcher compiled these questions from the literature on social work education, critical consciousness, emotions, and mindfulness (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020). Interviews were conducted via Google Meetings, a virtual platform, and were audio and video recorded.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability of a data collection instrument relates to its ability to consistently measure what the instrument says it is measuring and not random error (Rubin & Babbie, 2016; Salkind, 2008). Various types of reliability of an instrument can be measured, including internal consistency, parallel forms, test-retest, and interrater reliability (Salkind, 2008). The type of reliability that is most pertinent to an instrument depends on how the instrument will be utilized (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). For this study, internal consistency is an appropriate measure of reliability for the instrument as participants will be responding in self-report just once, but to multiple items on the same instrument (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). Validity is the measure in which an instrument is actually measuring what it is believed to be measuring (Salkind, 2008). There are three common types of validity when determining whether or not the instrument accurately assesses what it is intended to assess: content, criterion, and construct validity (Rubin & Babbie, 2016; Salkind, 2008). Content validity determines whether the instrument accurately assesses the entirety of the topic; criterion validity tests for the relatedness or predictive ability of one measure to another; and construct validity is the measure for whether or not an instrument accurately assesses a psychological construct. Content validity is typically shown through expert review, while criterion and construct are shown through correlation coefficients (Rubin & Babbie, 2016; Salkind, 2008).

Quantitative Instrument Reliability and Validity. The 15-item MAAS questionnaire was used in its entirety. It has been tested for internal consistency reliability using a confirmatory factor analysis and has shown an alpha of .82 within a sample of 327 university students, as well as has shown an alpha of .87 within a sample of 239 adults (Brown & Ryan, 2003). A similar reliability coefficient was confirmed in a separate study with similar, but larger sample of 711

university students, producing a coefficient alpha of .89 (MacKillop & Anderson, 2007). Coefficient alpha scores of internal consistency that are above .90 are considered to be excellent, and scores between .80 and .89 are considered to be good (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). These 15 questions have also been shown to be valid in measuring mindfulness as they were tested for concurrent criterion validity through associations with a number of well-being variables such as the Trait Meta-Mood Scale of emotional intelligence with a correlation coefficient of .37, the Mindfulness/Mindlessness Scale with a correlation coefficient of .33, and the Rosenberg self-esteem scale with a correlation coefficient of .43 (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The MAAS was tested against measures hypothesized to be negatively correlated, such as the Self-Consciousness Scale, in which the correlation coefficient was -.36 (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Each of these correlations was statistically significant at the $p < .0001$ level. When testing against other measures, the goal is to be similar, but not the same as other related constructs (Mayer, 2000). A correlation is considered small at $r = .10$, medium at $r = .30$, and large at $r = .50$ (Cohen, 1988).

The CCI has been tested with youth and young adults and has shown item reliability with an alpha of .87 (Thomas et al., 2014). The validity of the instrument was tested by breaking down the CCI scores into precritical, beginning critical, critical, and postcritical categories. These four categories were tested against measures of social dominance and social stigma. Correlation coefficients between precritical responses and social dominance beliefs were .38 and statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. Correlation coefficients between social stigma and postcritical beliefs were .17 and statistically significant.

Qualitative Reliability and Validity. Validity within qualitative data collection methods is often dealt with differently than quantitative data (Maxwell, 2013). Where quantitative data methodology plans ahead to control threats by incorporating randomization and testing for

statistical significance, qualitative inquiries are often unable to apply randomization to their sample population and cannot test for statistical significance (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, threats to validity are often dealt with in the midst of data collection or in the interpretation of data (Maxwell, 2013). Two major threats to validity in qualitative research are researcher bias, how the researcher applies their own lens to the interpretation of a situation and researcher reactivity, how the researcher influences the participants or situation (Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Researcher reactivity is particularly salient in an interview process, as the interviewee is "always influenced by the interviewer" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125).

In an attempt to address the threats to the validity of the interview responses, the researcher first used experts to review the semi-structured interview protocol to remove any leading questions and was intentional about not ad-libbing leading questions during the interviews. Secondly, the researcher used verbatim transcriptions of the interviews for qualitative analysis (Maxwell, 2013). Next, the researcher used respondent validation, also known as member checking, at the end of the interview and after the analysis was completed to provide the interviewee the chance to correct any misinterpretations the researcher took from the interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher intentionally sought out discrepancies in the conclusions drawn from the qualitative data (Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher also reported thick and meaningful data from the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, the researcher reflected on the influence she may have had on the interviewees as well as the potential bias in the conclusions and shared these reflections in this chapter (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Maxwell, 2013).

Reliability in data collection and analysis indicates how replicable these findings are (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher applied three methods to support reliability in the qualitative research: 1) completed pilot interviews and used an expert panel to ensure clarity of interview questions; 2) used a consistent semi-structured protocol for interviewing; and 3) used a consistent interviewer (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The short-answer essay questions on the survey as well as the semi-structured interview protocol were reviewed by two experts for face validity. One of the experts is a social work faculty member with expertise in research. The other is a social work faculty member with expertise in mindfulness. Both faculty members reviewed the questions with small suggestions for improving the relationship between the instrument questions and the research questions. One such suggestion was to adjust the first two open-ended questions in the survey by broadening the question from "discomfort" to "emotions". This allowed for a broader range of student responses and gave a fuller picture of students' emotional responses.

***Pilot Surveys and Interviews*.** Both the survey and the semi-structured interviews were piloted with a convenience sample of three social work students including one undergraduate and two graduate students. Their demographics can be seen in Table 7. Pilot interviews are an important method of identifying the validity of a questionnaire (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Pilot participants provide feedback regarding the proposed strategy of gathering data, problems in the wording of the questions, resistance to question content or recording methods, as well as can help highlight researcher bias (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The piloting process aided the researcher in how to quickly build rapport with research participants. The researcher compiled analytic memos during these pilot interviews and adjusted the open-ended questions on the interview protocol to provide additional clarity, per pilot participant feedback.

Table 7

Pilot Survey and Interview Participants

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Program-type
Pilot Participant 1	Female	White	BSW
Pilot Participant 2	Female	White	MSW
Pilot Participant 3	Female	White	MSW

Survey Results

Quantitative Results for Research Question 1: Relationship Between Mindfulness and CC

In order to assess the association or correlation between mindfulness and critical consciousness, the researcher tested for a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The Pearson product-moment correlation measures the relationship between two variables (Salkind, 2008). Assumptions of the Pearson product-moment correlation are that the data include two continuous variables and the two variables are paired (Urdan, 2017). The data gathered from the MAAS and CCI were ordinal in nature, however, these instruments are traditionally scored by taking the mean of the composite responses. Therefore, calculating the mean score of both scales results in one continuous variable each.

The MAAS included 15 items with six Likert scale response options each. A score of "1" indicated "Almost Always" and on each item referred to a less mindful stance. A mean score of 1 on the MAAS would indicate a low trait mindfulness in the participant, whereas a mean score of 6 would indicate a high trait mindfulness score. In the participant sample for this research, the average MAAS mean score was 3.42.

The CCI includes nine items with four Guttman scale response options. Each question has response options of a, b, c, or d, where they build on each other. A response of "a" indicates

precritical beliefs, “b” indicates beginning critical, “c” indicates critical beliefs, and “d” indicate postcritical beliefs (Thomas et al., 2014). In order to run the analysis in SPSS, each response option was given a numerical value, where a=1, b=2, c=3, d=4. The mean score of all nine responses is found to produce one overall mean CCI score for an individual. In the participant sample for this research, the average mean CCI score was 3.52, indicating that this participant pool shows consciousness at the “critical” level, nearing “post critical” (Brown & Ryan, 2003). See a complete list of mean MAAS and mean CCI scores broken down by participant demographic in Table 8.

Table 8

Mean MAAS and CCI Responses

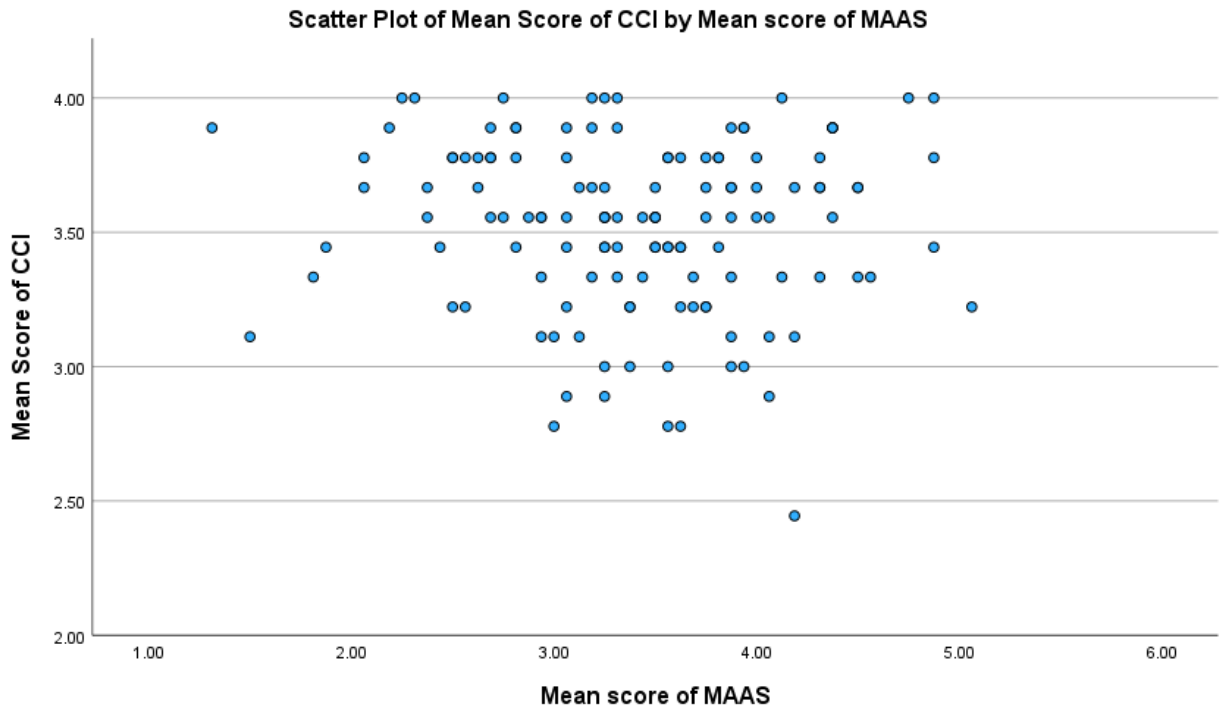
Demographics	Number of participants	Mean MAAS	Mean CCI
Total Participants	132	3.42	3.52
Gender identity (n=127)			
Female	107	3.38	3.51
Male	14	3.67	3.45
Non-binary/3rd gender	6	3.16	3.69
Racial/Ethnic identity (n=130)			
African-American/Black	5	3.34	3.56
American Indian/Native Alaskan	[a]		
Asian	[a]		
Hispanic/Latinx	8	3.56	3.42
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0		
White (non-Hispanic)	97	3.39	3.52
Two or more races	12	3.34	3.58
Other/Unknown	[a]		
Prefer not to answer	[a]		
Age (n=128)			
20s	32	3.39	3.51
30s	51	3.28	3.51
40s	27	3.61	3.56
50s	5	3.51	3.52

Note: [a] If participant count was 3 or fewer, the results were not reported.

A Pearson product-moment correlation was applied to the paired overall mean MAAS and mean CCI scores of the 132 participants who fully responded to all 24 questions. This test was applied in order to understand the quantifiable relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness. The null hypothesis of this test was that the correlation coefficient between the mean MAAS score and the mean CCI score is equal to zero in the population, H_0: $r = 0$. There was no statistically significant correlation between mindfulness and critical consciousness, $r(130) = -.07$, $p = .403$. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. A scatterplot of the data can be seen in Figure 6, which shows a lack of correlation within the data.

Figure 6

Scatterplot of Mean CCI by Mean MAAS



Quantitative Results for Research Question 2: Student Perception of Impact of Mindfulness on Emotions in CC Process

To gather data for this question, the researcher embedded open-ended questions into the online survey that asked about emotions experienced, mindfulness practices, and the perceived relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness. The four questions were as follows: 1) "If you have attended courses that address bias, injustice, or oppression, what types of emotions have you felt during those learning experiences?;" 2) "If you have participated in actions/behaviors aimed at reducing bias, injustice, or oppression, what types of emotions have you felt during those experiences?;" 3) "Do you participate in any mindfulness practices? If so, please describe what type(s) of mindfulness practice you participate in and how frequently you engage in them;" and 4) "Has mindfulness practice impacted your emotions when learning about or acting against bias, injustice, or oppression during your courses? If so, please describe how."

Open-ended Question One. This question related to the types of emotions participants experienced during stage two of critical consciousness development, *information creating disequilibrium;* this stage relates to the exposure to new information or experiences that jar one's worldviews and beliefs (Pillen et al., 2020). One hundred and twenty-nine participants responded to this question. Their responses ranged in length from a single word to a five-sentence paragraph. Some participants responded with a list of emotion words while others responded with full or partial sentences. In the responses, a total of 479 emotion words were listed. Negative emotion words accounted for 75% of those listed, positive emotion words accounted for 19%, and neutral emotion words accounted for 5%. Although there is debate in the literature, in general, positive emotion words are those that represent feelings that people are drawn toward while negative emotion words represent feelings that are not desired and are considered

unpleasant (Cacioppo et al., 1993; Sauter, 2017; Schrauf & Sanchez, 2004; Solomon & Stone, 2002). Examples of negative emotion words include sadness, guilt, anger, stress, discomfort, overwhelmed, frustration, hopelessness, and shame. Positive emotion words included hopeful, empowered, compassion, motivation, determined, inspired, and excitement. Neutral words included surprised, introspective, normal, and reflective. See Table 9 for a list of the frequency of the emotion words that participants used to describe their responses to learning about bias, injustice, or oppression in their courses.

Table 9

Frequency of Positive, Negative, and Neutral Emotion Words In Stage Two (Learning About Bias, Injustice, Oppression)

Types of emotions words	Examples	Frequencies	Percent
Negative	Anger, annoyed, anxiety, ashamed, awkward, concerned, defeated, defensive, despair, disappointment, disbelief, discomfort, discouraged, disgust, distressed, embarrassed, enraged, exasperation, exhaustion, fear, frustration, guilt, hopelessness, horrified, humility, hurt, inundated, lament, mad, naive, nervous, offended, outrage, overwhelmed, pessimistic, powerless, rejection, sadness, shame, shock, sorrow, stress, uncertainty, uncomfortable, uneasiness, unsatisfied, upset, vulnerable	361	75.4%
Positive	Awe, catharsis, compassion, curious, determination, drive, empathetic, empowered, enlightened, enthusiasm, excitement, gratitude, happiness, heard, hopeful, inspired, interested, joy, motivation, passion, proactive, relief, solidarity, validated	98	20.5%
Neutral	Aware, eye-opening, introspective, normal, reflective, surprised	20	4.2%

When describing the emotions experienced when learning about bias, injustice, and oppression, 57 (44.2%) participants used only negative emotion words. Some of these responses included:

- “I have felt frustrated that they weren’t taught earlier in my education.”
- “Anger at the systems in place. Sadness that there is so much wrong with our society”
- “Guilty and sad that people have been treated unfairly”

Eight participants (6.2%) used both negative and neutral words with statements such as “guilty, frustrated, angry, hopeless, introspective.” Two participants used only positive emotion words with responses such as, “empowered to be a change agent” and two participants used only neutral language such as “eye-opening” or “normal.” No participants used only positive and neutral words. Fifty-two participants (40.3%) used both positive and negative emotion words in their description with responses such as:

- “I have felt motivated to help with the process of change while also experiencing discomfort, pain, anger, shock, frustration, hopelessness, hopeful, determined, and intentional.”
- “anger, but sometimes hope, given the stories of resilience by clients/marginalized groups”
- “ANGER, frustration, and sometimes motivation for change”

An additional eight participants (6.2%) incorporated positive, negative, and neutral words such as “empowered, hurt, heard, curious, surprised.” Some participants indicated changes in emotions over time, one responding “At first I felt ignorant and naive, and then guilt.” Another responded with, “I felt shame, anger and later, energized and optimistic.” See Table 10 for a complete list of

frequencies and percentages of types of emotions experienced within individual participant responses.

Table 10

Types of Emotion Words Experienced Per Participant During Stage Two (Learning About Bias, Injustice, Oppression) (n=129)

Types of emotions experienced	Frequency	Percent
Negative emotions only	57	44.2%
Positive emotions only	2	1.6%
Neutral emotions only	2	1.6%
Negative and Neutral emotions	8	6.2%
Positive and Neutral emotions	0	0.0%
Negative and Positive emotions	52	40.3%
Negative, Positive, and Neutral emotions	8	6.2%

Open-ended Question Two. This question related to the emotions that participants experienced during stage six, *acting against oppression*; this stage relates to the active behaviors that interrupt discrimination and oppression, such as speaking up when someone makes a racist joke or advocating for a just policy (Pillen et al., 2020). One-hundred twenty-two participants responded to the question about the types of emotions they felt during their participation in actions or behaviors that aimed at reducing bias, injustice, or oppression. Responses ranged from a single emotion word to a six-sentence description. Participants responded with a total of 374 emotion words. Of these words, 161 (43%) were negative and 213 (57%) were positive. See Table 11 for examples of the types of positive and negative words. No neutral words were used by participants in this question.

Table 11

Frequency of Positive and Negative Words Related to Emotions Felt During Stage Six (Acting Against Bias, Injustice, Oppression)

Types of emotions words	Examples	Frequencies	Percent
Negative	Anger, annoyance, anxiety, awkward, challenged, defensive, dejected, disappointment, embarrassed, exasperated, exhaustion, fear, frustrated, grief, helpless, hopeless, imposter, impotence, inadequate, intimidated, irritated, nervous, overwhelmed, panic, sadness, scared, self-conscious, small, stressed, tense, trepidation, uncertain, uncomfortable, unsure, vulnerable, worry	161	43.0%
Positive	Accepted, appreciation, attuned, awe, belonging, brave, compassion, competence, confident, connected, content, determination, driven, encouraged, energized, enlightened, enthusiasm, excitement, focused, freedom, good, grateful, gratitude, hopeful, insistent, inspiration, invigorated, joyful, light, meaningful, passionate, perseverance, pleasure, powerful, pride, protective, purposeful, relief, resolution, rewarding, seen, solidarity, strength, success, supported, supportive, sure, thankful, unity, uplifted, whole	213	57.0%
Neutral		0	0.0%
Total		374	

Eighteen participants reported feeling only negative emotions (15%) with responses such as “stressed” or “The feelings I experience most are helplessness and hopelessness.” Forty-one participants reported feeling only positive emotions (34%). These responses included statements such as “empowered that change can happen” and “courage, assertiveness, hopeful.” Half of the participants (n=63; 51.6%) responded that they had felt both negative and positive emotions when participating in actions to reduce bias, injustice or oppression. These responses included:

- “Sometimes fear for being assaulted (when I participated in BLM protests/rallies), anger, inspiration for change”

- "Confidence, self-righteousness, impotence, energized. A mixed bag of things depending on [the] situation, my involvement and outcome"
- "…I have felt proud, excited, accepted, brave, scared, hesitant, empowered, seen, happy, and content"

One participant described their perceived relationship between negative and positive emotions as growth-oriented when they said, "Sometimes frustration at the system, but I used that as motivation to achieve my goals…" Another participant described the change in their emotions based on the process. They said, "Excitement and determination at the start. Hopeless sometimes during the process when a project/initiative gets tough. Inspired at the end." See Table 12 for a list of frequencies and percentages regarding the types of emotions experienced when participants acted against bias, injustice, or oppression.

Table 12

Types of Emotions Felt During Stage Six (Acting Against Bias, Injustice, Oppression) (n=122)

Types of emotions experienced	Frequency	Percent
Negative emotions only	18	14.8%
Positive emotions only	41	33.6%
Negative and Positive emotions	63	51.6%

Open-ended Question Three. This question had three parts, whether or not the students participated in mindfulness practices, how often this occurred, and which type of practices they used. A total of 131 participants responded clearly regarding whether or not they participate in any mindfulness practices. One-hundred nineteen participants responded "yes" and 12 participants responded "no". Only 73 participants responded clearly about the frequency of

mindfulness practiced. When participants used vague terms for the frequency of their mindfulness practice, the researcher quantified it by using the context of the sentence. A "few times per week" or "several times a week" was recorded as "Multiple times per week." Responses such as "often" or "rarely" were recorded as "unspecified." Of the 73 participants who reported frequency, 35 of them report participating in mindfulness at least daily (26.7%) and 27 reported participating multiple times per week (20.6%). Eleven participants reported practicing mindfulness once a week or less often (8.4%). The remaining 46 participants described their practices, but reported vague or no frequency (35.1%). See the frequencies of how often mindfulness is practiced in Table 13. Of the 119 participants who indicated that yes, they participate in mindfulness, 117 of them included descriptive responses regarding the type of mindfulness they practiced. The responses were grouped into eight practice areas. The most common type of mindfulness practice reported was "meditation," with 58 mentions. The second most common practice noted was a variation of a breathing practice with 47 mentions. The third most common was yoga, with 33 mentions. In Table 14, the frequencies of all eight groups of mindfulness can be seen in further detail.

Table 13

Frequency of Engagement in Mindfulness Practice

Frequency of mindfulness practice	Frequency	Percent
Yes, daily	35	26.7%
Yes, multiple times per week	27	20.6%
Yes, once per week	11	8.4%
Yes, but unspecified	46	35.1%
No, does not practice mindfulness	12	9.2%
Total	131	

Table 14

Types of Mindfulness Practices Reported

Type of mindfulness practice	Frequency	Percent
Meditation	59	22.7%
Mindful Breathing	47	18.1%
Yoga	33	12.7%
Mindful Walking/Hiking/Running/Exercise	30	11.5%
Mindful Awareness/Body Scan	26	10.0%
Journaling/Reflection	28	10.8%
Other (prayer, grounding, dance, singing, tapping, tarot cards, music, silence, reading, painting, creating art, affirmations, writing, social justice engagement, photography)	21	8.1%
Mindful daily activities (cooking, eating, showering)	14	5.4%
Total	260	

Open-ended Question Four. This open-ended question had two parts which addressed whether or not participants saw mindfulness practice impacting their emotions when learning about or acting against bias, injustice, or oppression during their courses, as well as how they saw an impact. This helped the researcher understand the perceived relationship behind mindfulness and the emotions inherent in the critical consciousness development process for participants, which addressed the second research question of the study. A total of 120 participant responses were included in the analysis of this question. Ninety-four participants clearly reported that they saw an impact between these two constructs (78.3%). Nineteen indicated that they saw no impact (15.8%). Their responses included, “Nope,” “Not really,” and “Not that I’ve noticed.” Seven participants (5.8%) were unsure of an impact between their mindfulness practice or gave answers that depicted a potential relationship, even if they had not intentionally applied mindfulness in

these instances. These responses included: “Not really? Apart from soothing my central nervous system when it gets worked up. But I don’t really have much emotional response in classes because they’re classes and I’m kind of used to thinking about this stuff anyway,” “No. I should have utilized mindfulness during those courses as it would have been helpful,” and

> “I have not linked the two before, so I am not sure. I think it has the potential to impact my emotions, particularly to reduce some of the hopelessness, stress and frustration. I have not been aware of this up to this point though.”

Three other participants responded to the question with answers too vague to determine whether or not they saw an impact of mindfulness on their emotions and were excluded from the results. Those responses included, “It’s a learning process but I try to do what I can to change the world for the better,” and “Mindfulness is difficult for me to do, but based on personal and professional experience, I know that mindfulness is a very positive tool and I encourage everyone to practice these skills at some point.” Table 15 includes the frequency of the responses.

Table 15

Saw Impact of Mindfulness on Emotions in CC Development

Saw an impact	Frequency	Percent
Yes	94	78.3%
No	19	15.8%
Unsure/mixed messages	7	5.8%
Total	120	

Qualitative Results for Research Question Two: Student Perception of Impact of Mindfulness on Emotions in CC Process

Qualitative analysis was completed on the second part of the open-ended question number four, regarding how the participant saw an impact of mindfulness on critical consciousness development. The researcher analyzed the data according to a seven-step qualitative data analysis procedure (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher organized and read through the data, took notes, and jotted down potential codes, themes, and relationships. The researcher read through the responses again, and underlined words and phrases. Next, the researcher created a code book. The researcher read through the responses a third time, this time coding the underlined responses according to the code book. The codes were collapsed into themes and then compared to the literature. The researcher reflected on her own story within the themes and looked for contradictions within the data and the literature. Finally, the researcher wrote up a narrative, relating the themes to the research questions.

Nineteen codes arose from the analysis of the open-ended survey question four, “How has mindfulness practice impacted your emotions when learning about or acting against bias, injustice, or oppression? These 19 codes were collapsed into five themes: Initial Awareness, Regulating, Reflection, Shift Thoughts and Behaviors, and Preparation and Action. See Table 16 for a list of codes and frequencies related to each theme.

Table 16

Themes, Codes, Frequencies of Themes of How Mindfulness Impacts Emotions During CC Development

Theme	Codes	Frequency	Total Frequencies in this theme	Percentage
Initial Awareness	Aware of feelings and emotions	20		
	Pause/slow down	2		
	Recognize body response	6	45	27.6%
	Stay present/sit with it/focus	17		
Regulating	Emotional Regulation	39		
	Increase ability to talk about injustice/awareness of injustice	3	52	31.9%
	Increased anger/anxiety	3		
	Reduce defensiveness/guilt/shame	5		
	Settle nervous system	2		
Reflection	Recognize bias/challenge bias	8		
	Reflect and process emotions	16	24	14.7%
Shift Thoughts & Behaviors	Accepting feelings/self-compassion	4		
	Increase empathy and open-mindedness	7	23	14.1%
	Respond rather than react	12		
Preparation & Action	Recognize areas of control	3		
	Regain energy/continued action for social justice	2	19	11.7%
	See larger picture/new perspective	3		
	See connection between all things	3		
	See path forward/hope/what will work	9		

As the researcher began grouping the codes she recognized a similarity to some of the developmental stages of the guiding theoretical framework. Due to the large quantity of qualitative data, it was helpful to apply theoretical categories rather than mere organizational

categories (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher recognized similarities with Pillen et al.'s (2020) stages and grouped codes into stage-similar themes when it made sense to do so.

The first theme of "Initial Awareness" related to the participants' application of mindfulness to become aware of their emotions and physical responses. Participant responses in this theme included:

- "It [mindfulness] gave me more awareness of my feelings"
- "Presence and awareness, both of my own feelings that come up and to the situations that exist"
- "…mindfulness practice has helped me to become more aware of my feelings and reactions within/without my body."
- "It [mindfulness] helped me realize how my body reacts"
- "I try to practice mindfulness to identify emotions…"

A second theme of "Regulating" related to the participants use of mindfulness to bring their body back into a regulated state for a variety of reasons. Some wanted to stay engaged in the conversation about injustice. Others applied mindfulness to reduce negative emotions, Participant responses that related to the theme of "Regulating" included:

- "Yes, it [mindfulness] has been helpful to have a way to counteract those overwhelming feelings of frustration and shame."
- "Yes, it [mindfulness] helps me regulate and recenter myself"
- "Mindfulness will make it easier to cope with negative emotions that arise when learning about these topics."
- "Lessens impact of strong feelings"

- "I believe mindfulness practice has helped with emotional regulation and being able to breathe through anxiety, frustration, or anger that I may be feeling to center myself again."

A third theme was "Reflection" where participants applied mindfulness in order to reflect on their emotions or personal bias. The responses in this theme included:

- "…mindfulness allows me the space to think through my privileges in life…"
- "…it [mindfulness] helps me to be more aware of biases…"
- "Mindfulness has helped my ability to self-reflect…"
- "It [mindfulness] has allowed me to process easier…"
- "It [mindfulness] helps me process my emotions in a healthy way rather than getting stuck in the immediate emotional response."

A fourth theme was "Shift Thoughts and Behaviors" which related to how mindfulness impacted the participants' adaptation in thoughts and behaviors. This theme included responses such as:

- "When I encounter someone frustrating, I use meditation to fully feel those feelings and practice compassion towards those I disagree with."
- "[I] try to integrate mindfulness…so that I can respond instead of react, mindfulness helps me build a sense of empathy for myself, the situation, and those around me."
- "able to think and respond to instances of injustice in a calm, less emotional way"
- "Mindfulness supports interconnectedness – helps me break down my own "othering" or tribalness. It has been a key to my own personal development and growth. Loving Kindness meditation – intentionally sending goodwill and warmth toward others – has been especially helpful for me."

- "…being aware of the context of another human being. I find myself being more patient when someone demonstrates some initial bias. I try to remember what it feels like to learn something completely new, and I try to empathize with someone who is maybe biased because of their upbringing"
- "…I can think about what I want to say before I say it"

The fifth theme was "Preparation and Action." This related to how mindfulness impacted the participants' abilities to see areas they could address injustice and prepare themselves to be able to do so. Responses related to this theme included:

- "With mindfulness, I am able to attempt to see a situation from a third-party view instead of an impacted individual to then understand what further action needs to take place"
- "The regular mindfulness practices (yoga, meditation, prayer) help me regain the energy to keep working for greater representation and equality."
- "I am able to take a deep breath so I no longer feel overwhelmed and feel that I can make a change."
- "Perhaps it allows me to hold space for hope and what is good."
- "I believe that mindfulness has helped me realize that the solution does not have to happen today. It helps me not feel overwhelmed and instead focus on the process (one step at a time). Before I would just feel like there was no use, but now I can see that a small act of kindness can have a great impact and that you should never give up or stop trying in the fight for what you believe in."

Interview Research Findings

Thirteen participants were interviewed throughout the five months of data collection. These interviews were all completed by the researcher who used a semi-structured interview protocol to guide the conversation. The 13 interviews were recorded and full transcripts were created through the help of a contracted transcriptionist. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality form to protect participant information (See Appendix R). The researcher analyzed the transcripts using a seven-step process of qualitative analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher first organized the data by printing the transcripts; next she immersed herself in the data by reading through each transcript and taking notes on words and phrases that stood out, third, the researcher identified potential relationships, connections, and themes from the transcripts, jotting them down in analytic memos. The researcher then moved into the fourth step of analysis, which was to code the data. The researcher used a combination of codes that emerged from the first readings as well as codes that had emerged from the literature. After the transcripts were coded, the codes were grouped into themes that were guided by the theoretical framework of the study. Next, the themes were compared with the literature and contradictions were sought out. The sixth step was that the researcher reflected on her own story and how that fit into the themes of the analysis. Finally, the researcher wrote up the findings and applied the themes to the research questions of the study.

Five themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the 13 interview transcripts. Those five themes include Self-awareness, Emotional Regulation, Clearer Understanding, Adapting to Mindfulness, and Intentional Actions for Justice. Each theme included between four and seven codes of the overall 26 codes for the analysis. The associated codes with themes and number of participants who indicated these themes can be seen in Table 17.

Table 17

Five Themes and Codes of Interviews

Theme	Participant Frequency	Total Frequency of Codes in this Theme	Codes
Self-awareness	11 of 13 participants	40	Intersectional identities Other than mindfulness Reflection and processing Without mindfulness
Emotional Regulation	13 of 13 participants	42	Discomfort Emotional regulation Grounding Self-care
Clearer Understanding	12 of 13 participants	64	Applied later Attn to body Attn to thoughts/emotions Curious/understanding Pause/slow down Non-judgmental awareness
Intentional Actions for Justice	12 of 13 participants	37	Advocacy Client care Empathy Recognizing areas of control Recognizing bias Recognizing power dynamics
Adapting to Mindfulness	12 of 13 participants	50	Beginning Explicitly taught Framing Growth Habitual Likes/dislikes Neural pathways

Discussion of Emergent Themes

The five themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews are arranged here, not in order of highest frequency, but according to the guiding theoretical framework of this research

study. The researcher intentionally applied a lens of critical consciousness development in the grouping of codes into themes. Four of the themes are described here in a developmental progression, not only in how participants described their mindfulness practices and experiences, but also in a way that moderately parallels Freire's (2000) and Pillen et al.'s (2020) stages of developmental growth. The fifth theme related to how participants adapted to Mindfulness and is discussed last.

Self-awareness. The theme of Self-awareness emerged as participants responded to questions about how their understanding of bias, injustice, and oppression had come about. This theme included the codes of "intersectional identities," "reflection and processing," "without mindfulness," and "other than mindfulness." Participants discussed how their own recognition of their intersectional identities helped them see the injustice that other people faced. Eleven of the 13 participants identified some aspect of their own identity or of a close friend that helped them better understand discrimination and oppression. For Charlie, it was his identities as an LGBTQ White male. For Jordan, it was her identities as a Black woman with financial privilege. For Stockton, it was her fair skin tone and cultural heritage and identity as a Chicana woman. In her interview, Stockton said, "I have both sides…it's hard to hold the entitlement and the privilege that a light-skinned individual has and to see the…pain and suffering in front of you, your own family." Other aspects of the theme of Self-awareness came through comments on the importance of reflection, which often came as a result of mindfulness practices. Ruth discussed growing up in a theater space and how "body scans, these types of things were utilized all the time…[which] I think probably influenced a lot of that self-awareness…" Dawn discussed the connection between mindfulness and self-awareness in this way, "…it's just kind of something

that's circular because they help each other. So when I engage in any type of classes or social justice work…I have a fairly good awareness to my own emotions and what's happening."

At times, the interview participants mentioned what their conscientization process would be like without a mindfulness practice. Stacy referred to the importance of mindfulness when she was participating in social justice action. She said that without mindfulness, "I would burn out so fast." Juan, responding to the similar stage of action, said that

> "If I didn't practice mindfulness or some sort of exercise or practice like that, it might just be overwhelming and I just, just wouldn't want to continue doing what I'm doing even, but just facing some of those issues would just be hard."

Students also mentioned this self-awareness as being supported by things other than mindfulness. Four students mentioned a supportive community as important. Stockton mentioned the benefit of navigating the difficult emotions of stage two with her instructor in class. She said, "My professor actually was really supportive in processing why it was so emotional." Dawn discussed the importance of community as she navigated stage three, introspection, when she said, "maybe [mindfulness] was helpful but it was the relationships with people that were supportive that were a hundred percent what helped me at that time." Juan shared about a group of BIPOC social work students who helped each other navigate interrupting microaggressions within his MSW classrooms. He said,

> "So in my MSW program I helped start a group for students of color and our MSW just to discuss and talk about some of the issues that were going on or just what's happening with ourselves and more of the, I don't usually use this term, but 'safe space' for folks to, to connect really and just to create some sort of community. Because again, that was a PWI (Primarily White Institution) right?"

Other than community, Catherine mentioned self-care and setting boundaries as important to her ability to engage in social justice-oriented action. Students sometimes applied mindful awareness or reflection to these elements as well, but they indicated that the experience or behavior was crucial beyond mere mindfulness.

Emotional Regulation. A salient theme arose related to how and why participants applied mindfulness practices. This theme is "Emotional Regulation" and included multiple codes such as "grounding," "self-care," and "staying with discomfort." All 13 participants discussed mindfulness as it relates to emotional regulation. Many discussed how talking about bias, injustice, and oppression was triggering and they applied mindfulness practices to regulate themselves in order to be able to stay engaged in the conversation. Stacy discussed, "…in one of my classes…we had a triggering conversation about domestic partner violence and…I can't remember what technique I used. Just something to ground. I'm not sure if I did 'five senses' or I just traced my fingers while I was breathing or something to get back in the room and not dissociate." Olivia mentioned, "…I have to do journaling after a class…after a triggering subject for me…after we discuss suicide prevention or things like that." Joanne recognized that, "the mindfulness that I participate in helps me to regulate my nervous system so that I can interact with folks in a way that is not coming from a place of an activated nervous system. So, like, I'm bringing a calm into the room with me…" Charlie said,

> "I do a lot of grounding for myself. Like if I feel some, you know, racing thoughts or a little agitation or something like that, I can be aware of it, I'll kind of put my hands on my knees or my things or I'll just put one hand in the other hand and just kind of bring it back so that it doesn't keep going away from me like that."

This theme also included how participants responded to discomfort in the conscientization process. Ruth was talking about gathering information about how to support Indigenous people on campus and getting negative feedback. She said,

> "No matter what, I'm realizing that no matter what I do, not everyone is going to be happy about it. But that doesn't mean that I shouldn't do something…so sort of sitting in a place of trying to be comfortable with that. Comfortable with the discomfort and trying to move away from some of the, like, people-pleasing tendencies that I have."

Mo talked about applying mindful reflection to discomfort when he said,

> "…if a client is telling you something and it's rubbing up against something inside you and then you can either in the moment notice it, or maybe after in supervision or on your own reflect on why that was kind of rubbing up on something inside of you and causing you some sort of inner conflict or discomfort."

Clearer Understanding. The next theme is "Clearer Understanding," which is the theme that arose the most often in the interviews. This theme includes the codes of "pausing/slow down," "paying attention to my body," "recognizing thoughts and emotions," "non-judgmental awareness," "curious," and "applying mindfulness later." This theme speaks to how participants use mindful behaviors to learn more about themselves or a situation in order to understand it better. Among the interview participants, 12 of the 13 described a relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness as applying nonjudgmental attention and curiosity to better understand themselves, others, and the situation better. Scott talked about the importance of pausing to get to clearer understanding when he discussed,

> "It's that most individuals just kind of have the thoughts and have the emotions and then kind of naturally respond and don't really like stop and slow down and think about what

> else might be going on. And so I think that mindfulness has really made me really aware of my thought process, of what might be triggering my emotions…"

Dawn brought up that as a pre-teen she "was not at all connected to my body" and "started to engage in disordered eating behaviors." She discussed how going into inpatient therapy helped her learn how to mindfully pay attention to her body and what it needed. Catherine discussed her mindfulness practice as a way of "being aware of what the feeling is" by "sitting with it and just reflecting with it, and processing it." Stacy applies mindfulness to gain clearer understanding when she's acting against oppression. She says,

> "I think I realize that emotions are waves, they come and go. So knowing that, like knowing that if my nervous system feels a little heightened or I feel like my heart rate is increasing or like a flush in the face or starting to sweat. Like, in those nervous moments, I think I can acknowledge that it won't last forever and just lean into that…try to be curious about why I feel that way. And ask, 'Is that something about me? Is it about the person I'm conversing with? Is it that I didn't feel confident in what I'm sharing or saying?' Like, just looking at all of that non-judgmentally."

Charlie talked about mindfulness as part of his

> "awareness of these different kind of things that were in action. And also just to…either not feel really bad about myself or feel really bad about the other person involved. Like I could see what was going on without judging it."

Mo discussed his curiosity after taking the Implicit Association Test in class, he said that mindfulness relates to how a person is

> "looking within yourself for kind of reasons for things, it inevitably will impact how you view situations moving forward and give a little rationale of maybe, oh, 'Why did I think that?' 'Why did I feel that?' 'Why did I judge that situation this way or that way?'"

Juan discussed applying mindfulness in order to be more curious about a situation when it was very triggering. He said,

> "that's when I remember taking a moment to breathe and like, 'Alright, what is she really saying?' like, 'What do I know about her experience? Could that be true?' And so it turned me, after taking a second to breathe and to focus and I think through some of that, it turned into me asking more questions and inquiring, rather than… 'attacking' is a strong word, but kind of attack."

Intentional Actions for Justice. The fourth theme from the interviews relates to how mindfulness was integrated into the participants' "Intentional Actions for Justice." The codes in this theme were "recognizing bias," "increasing empathy," "client care," "recognizing areas of control," "recognizing power dynamics," and "advocacy." This theme relates to how participants applied mindfulness in order to reduce their own bias in client interactions and increase their ability to participate in larger-scale, justice-oriented actions. Olivia talked about how mindfulness helps her "see things through other people's perspective" which has "been very beneficial to becoming a social worker." She says that, regarding her clients, she tries to "see what they're going through every day and seeing how the world affects them." Scott talked about his belief that

> "we have all these preconceived notions about how the world works and we've been exposed to all these different lived experiences that create these filters for us. And so, you know, …from a clinical standpoint, you start to see individuals come in who might

> present a certain way, you start jumping to conclusions in terms of how they're presenting and like, start to process what kind of diagnosis might be …and it can become really dangerous. …I try to focus on the individual stories, I don't try to jump to conclusions, I really just try to live the experience…I think that's a big piece [of mindfulness] is just turning off that automated process."

Ruth talked about recognizing power differentials within their classroom environment. They said, "Okay, hey we all have these different levels of power over each other in different ways." Ruth applies mindfulness to understand and regulate her emotions as she advocates for social change. Ruth said,

> "You're gonna piss people off if you're trying to advocate for positive social change in any capacity, like there are going to be people along the way that aren't happy with you. And coming to terms with that has not been, that's like not an easy thing for me."

When asked how Ruth responded to that discomfort, they replied,

> "I do think mindfulness comes into play there…being able to mindfully recognize how that feels and stop and instead of just getting stuck in the feeling, question and ask, 'What? Okay. Why does that feel bad?' then grapple with that and move forward as opposed to just getting stuck in that feeling."

Stockton discussed how reflecting on an unjust situation was "where I got stronger [in] understanding what I had control over and what I could do." Stacy mentioned being mindful of other people's discomfort and "filtering that out and knowing, like, they have their own discomfort, I don't have to pick that up, I don't have to hold that for them." She also sees a relationship between mindfulness and her ability to act against oppression. She says,

> "I think it goes back to look at all of this without judgment… I tend to feel like I can get overwhelmed quickly by thinking, like, 'There's so much to change in the world. How can one person, how can one, even one group, one nonprofit, one sector, like, how can we really make a change?' And I think being mindful through those kids of conversations helps me to quiet that overwhelm and just be present in the moment and know, like, I can't solve anything if I'm stressed and overwhelmed. But if I can settle that down and just be like, 'Well, what can I do today? What can I do in this moment?' And trust that."

Jordan also applied mindfulness as she was participating in justice-oriented actions. When she went to advocate for a client who had diverse needs due to her cultural beliefs she said, "I had to speak to county council… I felt very anxious…because of who they are, judges and lawyers." Jordan responded that she applied mindfulness in this scenario by "paying attention to my body, just what I was eating during that time…I was eating, like, junk food a lot more because that is a soothing technique for me." Stockton applied mindfulness during advocacy efforts. She talked about learning to "acknowledge the feelings, to really think about where they're coming from and what they're about rather than being reactive…And so it's kind of that same idea when talking with peers or doing anything for advocating against oppression. I have to maintain that stability otherwise there is no chance that they're going to hear me."

Related to this was also the idea of how mindfulness techniques were applied in order to be able to maintain participation in an unjust system. Olivia mentioned leading a client through breathing techniques to help her calm down after an oppressive interaction because she "was worried that the next day when I wasn't with her [the client], she would go in there and make a scene and get herself in more trouble." Juan described in length how he struggles with how to engage with the current oppressive system. When discussing the potential harm of applying

mindful emotional regulation and reflective techniques to stay engaged in an advocacy role, he said,

> "It depends on your theory of change. …Like, I think about critical race theory and interest convergence, and if that's really how things have to change, by really appealing and catering to folks in power, more or less. For myself, sometimes, well, like, this hurts and I don't enjoy this. But if it's in service to actually creating the change that I want to see…like it's worth it. But then personally, you get to that point too, where you're like, 'Why do I have to do this?' 'Why can't people just hear me or other people of color?' And I just sometimes get really sick of it. And I just don't want to do it because it hurts...And if I need to change within the system…that's how I have to operate, but I'm still figuring out if that's what I want to do long term."

Adapting to Mindfulness. A final theme from these interviews related to the participants' process of "Adapting to Mindfulness." They discussed how they were introduced to mindfulness and how their perceptions and applications of mindfulness changed over time. The codes that collapsed into this theme included, "framing," "explicitly taught," "likes/dislikes," "beginning," "building neural pathways," "growth," and "habitual." Stockton mentions being introduced to formal mindfulness practices as self-care and Jordan was introduced to mindfulness for her physical health. Mo was introduced to mindfulness as an intervention to use with clients. Participants also discussed how mindfulness was explicitly taught to them in their social work courses. Blair talked about how a professor in her Master of Social Work program embedded mindfulness throughout their entire course, leading two-minute practices to start each class session. Ruth's course instructor used a book called, "Real World Mindfulness for Beginners," edited by Brenda Salgado, and had students lead short lessons on mindfulness

practices as an assignment. Joanne and Mo also mentioned student-led mindfulness practices as assignments. Charlie was introduced to mindfulness as part of a "White Awake" class on implicit bias.

Many participants shared types of mindfulness that they liked or didn't like. Jordan mentioned a practice of journaling that was part of her field course. When the researcher asked her about how she felt about journaling, Jordan responded, "I don't like it at all. No, it's really not for me… It feels forced." Ruth discussed the class assignments and book related to mindfulness. They said,

> "…it was nice to have intentional space in that class carved out to get into the habit of doing this [mindfulness] and we would do, you know, throughout class one or two activities, mindfulness activities, every class. So, just helping to instill that practice and taking a moment for that type of reflection, and I think was really useful."

However, Ruth discussed a guided meditation on forgiveness in which she said,

> "My head started spinning a bit and …I end up judging myself a little bit if I can't think of something and then it sends me into this other spiral, which maybe is part of the exercise, right? That might be part of the point because then you catch your judgment and what do you do with that? But yeah, so I think those are a little tricky for me."

Ruth preferred sensory mindfulness, like lying in the grass or body scans. Joanne felt uncomfortable with a student-led laughing mindfulness exercise, where they stood facing each other. When asked what types of mindfulness she prefers, she said, "Things that are moving. So, if I'm walking and observing quietly, that's better for me." Mo discussed the likes and dislikes of mindfulness when he talked about his classmates' responses. He said,

> "I know that a lot of my classmates don't like to be told, necessarily, you know, notice your thoughts and then let them go because a lot of our minds are racing so, so frantically that it becomes frustrating to hear someone propose the idea of letting your thoughts go."

Blair mentioned that she really appreciates mindfulness in her classes, but recognizes that not all of her classmates do. She said, "I've heard, you know, some people have said, oh you know, they think it's kind of foo-foo stuff and, you know, some people have said that, like some of the classmates."

Other responses in this theme spoke to how the participant's relationship with mindfulness changed from initial introduction over time. Olivia mentioned that, at first, practicing mindfulness in class "was weird, because I hadn't been introduced to [it], but now it's something, especially breath work like box breathing, I use that a lot with my clients that I work with, which I've noticed has helped a lot." Joanne mentioned, "I am a beginner in mindfulness...I don't think I've practiced anything enough for it to be like that muscle memory or not so effortful yet." Scott talked about how his mindfulness has changed over time. He said,

> "…very intentional practices, like the journaling and meditation and things like that, I did with a high degree of frequency at the beginning…it was like it was teaching my brain some new neural pathways and kind of learning a new normal for how to process my world. And so now compared to where I was before, I don't do as much formal mindful practices, though I do some…So, it's almost become a more automatic neural cognitive experience as opposed to very formal meditative practices."

Charlie had been practicing mindfulness for eight years. Early on, he didn't like self-compassion types of mindfulness meditation, but now those are his preference. He also now prefers only to do longer meditations, around 20 to 30 minutes. Ruth talked about how mindfulness practices

have been a fairly regular thing in their life for the past 12 or 13 years, but that it's "one of the first things that kind of gets bumped on my list when I don't have time for it."

Researcher Reflection on Interviews

After the interviews, the researcher spent some time to reflect on how she may have impacted the respondents. While she intentionally attempted to set the participants at ease with clear verbal and written communication about how they could discontinue the study at any time and still receive the remuneration, it is possible that the remuneration put pressure on the participants that impacted response bias. The researcher recognizes that she engages in a regular mindfulness practice of meditation and reflective journaling and has found that to be very helpful to processing difficult emotions that arise in her conscientization journey. The researcher did not share any of her own story to the participants, but it is possible that her expression changed when participants identified similar aspects of their response to mindfulness. It is also possible that, unintentionally, the researcher provided more affirming non-verbal cues such as head nods or smiles when participants shared information that showed a direct relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness, which may have subtly influenced the participants to seek out more connections than they would have otherwise. Although all 13 participants described a connection between mindfulness and their conscientization, at least two participants responded to the question about a relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness with slow, drawn-out replies, indicating that they had not necessarily connected these two aspects on their own prior to this interview. While this does not negate the connections they described, it does bear noting that their response could have been influenced by the researcher.

Conclusion

The mixed methods convergent design of this study indicated that both quantitative and qualitative data be gathered simultaneously, analyzed separately, and the results merged for comparison after analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2012). A total of 138 participants were included in the survey data and 13 participants in the interview data. The survey tool included two valid and reliable instruments, the MAAS and the CCI, and the survey in total was assessed for face validity by two experts. The researcher applied multiple methods of reliability and validity checking on the interview protocol with pilot interviews, expert review, and member-checking. The first research question was tested with quantitative data. Applying a Pearson product-moment correlation statistical test, the quantitative data showed no significant correlation between trait mindfulness and critical consciousness in the sample of social work students tested. The second research question was tested with quantitative and qualitative data, showing that 78.3% of participants did see an impact of mindfulness on their emotions in the critical consciousness development process. Qualitative analysis brought forth five themes regarding how mindfulness impacted the participants' emotions. Those five themes included Initial Awareness, Regulating, Reflection, Shift in Thoughts and Behaviors, and Preparation and Action. The third research question was assessed through qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. The five themes that arose included Self-awareness, Emotional Regulation, Clearer Understanding, Intentional Actions for Justice, and Adapting to Mindfulness. These themes were supported with participant responses. How the interview themes relate to the research questions will be discussed in Chapter V.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

This research study addressed the relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness development within social work higher education students. This topic is particularly salient to social work higher education faculty as it pertains to evidence-based practices that guide social work students toward increased self-awareness, recognition of injustice, and action-oriented behaviors that reduce injustice. These types of skills and behaviors are important to the process of becoming a competent and ethical social work professional (CSWE, 2022; NASW, 2021). Social work educators should apply evidence-based methods to achieve action-oriented outcomes rather than assuming that teaching about bias and diversity will translate into action (Bransford, 2011; Featherston et al., 2019; Hall & Theriot, 2016; Lwin & Beltrano, 2020; Mehrotra et al., 2017; Mehrotra et al., 2018; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016).

The process of developing critical consciousness leads to action that reduces injustice (Diemer et al., 2021; Jemal, 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Watts et al., 2003). This process includes exposure to new information, reframing of worldviews, and participation in justice-oriented actions that are all associated with varying emotions (Fernández & Watts, 2022; Heron, 2005; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020; Wallin-Ruschman, 2014; Zestcott et al., 2016). How one responds to those emotions can create barriers or support to the conscientization process (Borders & Wiley, 2019; Fernández & Watts, 2022; Ford et al., 2019; Ford & Feinberg, 2020; Solak et al., 2021; Walsh, 2018). One pedagogical tool that has been applied to support aspects of the critical consciousness development process, including increasing self-reflection and navigating emotions, is mindfulness (Albrecht, 2021; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Garland et al.,

2015; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Klein et al., 2020; Krick & Felfe, 2020; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Sukhera & Watling, 2017; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Wong, 2004; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). Mindfulness can increase self-awareness and self-reflection (Gockel & Deng, 2016; Goh, 2012; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). It has also been shown to help participants navigate disequilibrium and discomfort (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2017; Iani et al., 2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019). There is also theoretical support and burgeoning empirical evidence of the benefit of mindfulness on anti-oppression behaviors (Berila, 2016; Ferrin & Zern, 2021; Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022; Hick & Furlotte, 2009; Scafuto, 2021). However, mindfulness practices have also been reported to increase passive acceptance which can be related to a reduction in motivation to act against injustice (Ford et al., 2019; Purser, 2021; Solak et al., 2021; Stone & Zahavi, 2022). More empirical research is required to better understand how mindfulness impacts critical consciousness growth and development in social work students, which was the impetus for this particular research study. This study assessed the relationship between mindfulness and social work students' critical consciousness development, attempting to learn more about the benefits and detriments of applying mindfulness pedagogy to the conscientization process within higher education. The research questions that guided this study included:

1. What is the relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness in social work students?
2. How do social work students perceive mindfulness practice to impact their response to the emotions inherent in the critical consciousness development process?
3. How do social work students perceive mindfulness practice to impact their progression through Pillen et al.'s (2020) six stages of critical consciousness development?

The following sections of this chapter include a discussion of the results from the survey and interview data as applied to the research questions within the theoretical framework. The theory of critical consciousness as described by Paulo Freire (2000) and further clarified by Pillen et al. (2020) includes a developmental path toward anti-oppression and sociopolitical action. This developmental lens is applied throughout the discussion to help augment the data analysis, leading to meaning and application for social work educators.

Summary of the Results

This research study was performed according to a convergent, mixed method design where quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the topic of inquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The triangulation of multiple types of data can help increase the validity of the results (Burt, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately and the results were compared to find corroboration or contradiction (Burt, 2015). There were two data-collection techniques, an online Qualtrics survey as well as audio and video-recorded virtual semi-structured interviews. The online survey captured both quantitative and qualitative data and the semi-structured interview captured qualitative data. A total of 138 higher education social work students participated in the online survey and a total of 13 higher education social work students participated in the semi-structured interviews.

The researcher applied the Pearson product-moment correlation statistical test to measure the relationship between the participants' trait mindfulness and critical consciousness development. These two constructs were measured through the Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Critical Consciousness Inventory (CCI) (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Thomas et al., 2014). Both instruments are scored by calculating the mean of the total

items. The researcher applied the Pearson correlation to the paired mean scores. This analysis revealed no statistically significant correlation between the paired data (n = 132, r = -.07, p = .403).

Quantitative data was gathered regarding the types of emotions students experienced during two particular stages of critical consciousness development. In stage two, when students are presented with information that creates disequilibrium, approximately half of the students reported feeling only negative or negative and neutral emotions (50.4%). Approximately half of the students reported feeling a mix of negative and positive or negative, positive, and neutral emotions (46.5%). Regarding stage six, when students were asked about the emotions experienced while acting to address oppression, 14.8% of the students responded with negative emotions only, 51.6% with negative and positive emotions, and 33.6% reported experiencing only positive emotions.

Survey participants were asked about their mindfulness practice, which solicited data regarding type and frequency of practice. Of the 131 respondents to this question, 90.8% indicated that “yes,” they did practice mindfulness and 9.2% indicated “no,” they did not practice mindfulness. Of the 131 students, 26.7% practice daily, 20.6% practice multiple times per week, and 8.4% practice once per week or less often. Approximately one-third (35.1%) of the participants did not provide a frequency. A total of 260 types of mindfulness practices were mentioned by the survey participants. The most common types were meditation (22.7%), mindful breathing (18.1%), yoga (12.7%), and other movement-based activities (11.5%).

Participants of the online survey were asked about whether they saw an impact of mindfulness on the emotions they felt during the critical consciousness stages. One-hundred twenty students responded to this question and 94 of them (78.3%) clearly saw an impact of

mindfulness on their emotions. Nineteen students (15.8%) did not see an impact. Seven students (5.8%) were unsure of an impact. Participants were also asked to respond regarding how they thought mindfulness impacted those emotions. The researcher analyzed this data through a seven-step qualitative methodology in which she immersed herself in the data, coded the data, arranged the coded data into themes, and applied the results to the research question (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher collapsed the 19 codes from these responses into five themes: (a) Initial Awareness, (b) Regulating, (c) Reflection, (d) Shift Thoughts & Behaviors, and (e) Preparation & Action.

The semi-structured interviews included questions that related to all three of the research questions. The researcher conducted these interviews at the same time that the online survey was open. The interviews were virtual, held via Google Meetings, and were audio and video recorded; they ranged in length from 28 to 68 minutes. The researcher hired a transcriptionist to transcribe the interviews verbatim. The researcher analyzed this data through qualitative methods, using the same seven step method applied with the open-ended survey question data. These seven steps, in more detail, included: (1) organize the data, (2) immerse in the data, (3) identify potential relationships and connections, jotting them down in memos, (4) code the data and group into themes, (5) look for contradictions in the literature, (6) reflect on researcher's own story, and (7) apply the results to the research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Five themes also emerged from this interview data regarding how social work higher education students see a relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness development. Those five themes were as follows:

- Self-awareness
- Emotional Regulation

- Clearer Understanding
- Adapting to Mindfulness
- Intentional Actions for Justice

Research Question #1: Summary of Results and Discussion

The first question to guide this study was, "What is the relationship between trait mindfulness and critical consciousness in social work students?" This question had not, as of the publication of this study, been explicitly explored in the literature. However, trait mindfulness has been shown to be related to less distress, an ability to reflect, and an increased awareness of the moment (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kiken et al., 2015; Petranker & Eastwood, 2021). Trait mindfulness is the habituation of being mindful in day to day activities and can be built through repeated mindful activities (Kiken et al., 2015). This is different than state mindfulness, which can be achieved during an intentional moment, such as through meditation (Garland et al., 2015). Those who possess trait mindfulness are able to reflect and be aware in the moment, continually monitoring both inward and exterior occurrences with openness and receptiveness (Brown & Ryan, 2003). There is also research that suggests mindfulness practice supports agency, participation, and efficacy in actions oriented toward dismantling injustice (Ferrin & Zern, 2021; Hick & Furlotte, 2009; Scafuto, 2021). These types of outcomes are fitting for navigating the stages of critical consciousness development (Bransford, 2011; Jemal, 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005, 2016). In the literature, mindfulness practice is frequently discussed as a support to critical consciousness which led the researcher to explore whether or not there was a correlation between trait mindfulness and critical consciousness (Bransford, 2011; Jemal, 2017; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). These two constructs, trait mindfulness and critical consciousness, were measured with two valid and reliable instruments. The Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale (MAAS) was

used to assess trait, or dispositional, mindfulness and the Critical Consciousness Inventory (CCI) was used to assess critical consciousness (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Thomas et al., 2014). The measures were each scored by calculating the mean of the items in each instrument. The two mean scores were paired per participant and analyzed for a potential correlation. The Pearson product-moment correlation test was applied and did not show a statistically significant relationship between these two constructs in the participants of this study, $r(130) = -.07$, $p = .403$.

One benefit of a mixed methods study is that quantitative and qualitative data can be applied to the same question to better understand a research problem, sometimes different types of data provide corroborating or contradicting results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). For this research question, the statistical analysis of the quantitative data showed a lack of a relationship between dispositional mindfulness and critical consciousness; however, analysis of the qualitative data showed a valuable relationship between mindfulness and critically conscious behaviors and attitudes. These results included a rich application of mindfulness to critically conscious beliefs and actions. One of the five themes of the interview data related to how participants described the integration of mindfulness into their "Intentional Actions for Justice." This theme relates to the fifth and sixth stages in Pillen et al.'s (2020) stages of critical consciousness development. In these latter stages of conscientization, people learn ways to act against oppression and engage in those actions (Pillen et al., 2020).

Participants clearly described the benefits of mindfulness in relation to acting against oppression. Scott described a connection between his practiced mindful thinking habits and the advocacy he's done at the legislative level. When asked to describe his mindfulness, he says,

> "I feel myself kind of automatically pumping my brakes when I feel my brain kind of starting to kick into auto-pilot. It just feels like there's a different shift now than what it was before. …I'll feel myself having a behavior reaction that is not aligned with the kind of person I want to be. And like my brain, much, much faster now than in the past, slams on the brakes and it's like, 'Whoa, whoa, whoa. You're chasing a false idea right now.' And so you just need to pump the brakes and ask yourself, like, what is actually going on here?"

When asked about how or if that mindfulness plays a role in his advocacy, he says,

> "Here's where I always try to land is that, this is what I've always thought has been helpful in any sort of advocacy roles is that you also have to…appreciate someone's experience being their experience…they're a victim of the systems that they've been a part [of] and what they've been exposed to in their education. It doesn't make them a bad person; it doesn't mean that they actually don't want to help people. …you've got to find the common ground and if you see things from someone else's perspective, then you're more likely to make progress."

Another interview participant, Juan, similarly applies mindfulness techniques in order to be able to creatively find converging interests with the groups of people in power in order to move anti-oppression work forward. While he saw the direct relationship between mindfulness and participation in critically conscious actions, he also recognized that how he participated, by finding interest convergence, in and of itself felt like an oppressive practice. Ruth described the beneficial application of mindfulness to be comfortable with the discomfort during anti-oppressive action. Ruth said,

> "No matter what, I'm realizing that no matter what I do, not everyone is going to be happy about it. But that doesn't mean that I shouldn't do something…so sort of sitting in a place of trying to, trying to become comfortable with that, comfortable with the discomfort and trying to move away from some of the like, people-pleasing tendencies that I have…you're gonna piss people off if you're trying to advocate for positive social change in any capacity, like there are going to be people along the way that aren't happy with you."

Eight of the 13 interview participants described some sort of beneficial mindfulness application to their social justice actions, and 12 of the 13 described applying mindfulness to how they prepare for social action. Stacy said,

> "I think I tend to feel like I can get overwhelmed quickly by thinking, like, there's so much to change in the world. How can one person, how can one, even one group, one nonprofit, one sector, like, how can we really make a change? And I think being mindful through those conversations helps me to quiet that overwhelm and just be present in the moment and know, like, I can't solve anything if I'm stressed and overwhelmed. But if I can settle that down and just be like, well, what can I do today? What can I do in this moment? And trust that."

At first, the qualitative analysis seemed contradictory to the quantitative results, but after reviewing the results of both the quantitative and qualitative analysis alongside the current literature and the guiding theoretical framework, the researcher was able to draw some conclusions about the research question that provided more depth than merely "Is there a relationship or not?" but contributes to answering, "What is the relationship between these two constructs?"

During the literature-gathering phase of this dissertation process, the researcher communicated with an expert in critical social work education and mindfulness, Dr. Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, via a Google Meeting conversation. Dr. Wong is a professor in the school of social work at York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. She has written and published numerous articles and book chapters on the relationship between contemplative pedagogy and critical social work education (York University, 2021). In the conversation the researcher asked if mindfulness alone was enough to bring about critical consciousness. Dr. Wong replied that, no, it is not, when mindfulness is divorced from its foundation of relational ethics in Buddhist onto-epistemology and interpreted simply as paying attention non-judgmentally in the present moment as popularized in the West. She gave an example that a sniper can be very "mindful" (as in the popularized version of mindfulness) to get the most accurate shot (Y.-L. Wong, personal communication, February 22, 2022). See Appendix S for the email with Dr. Wong's clarification of her statement and permission to publish. The relational ethic of Buddhism has to do with how Buddhist principles are applied externally to others and the environment as much as they are applied internally (Anālayo, 2020; Stanley, 2015). Like Dr. Wong, many scholars have noted the separation that Western applications of mindfulness have created between the self-soothing benefits of mindfulness and the original ethical foundation of applying awareness to a better understanding of the cultural context including how one's behaviors impact those around them (Duane et al., 2021; Monteiro et al., 2015).

Merging the quantitative and qualitative data related to Research Question #1, we see a relationship that supports the assertion that a mindful disposition in and of itself does not have a direct relationship to critical consciousness, but that mindfulness techniques must be intentionally applied to a situation with an outward focused, justice-oriented lens. There was not

a direct relationship between a mindful disposition and critical consciousness among the quantitative data from the survey participants. However, among the sample interviewed, 12 of the 13 participants described a relationship when they applied nonjudgmental attention and curiosity to better understand themselves, others, and the situation better. Eight of the 13 interview participants described applying mindfulness to engage in anti-oppression action. This relationship came through in the open-ended survey responses as well. One survey participant responded,

> "It [mindfulness] has been instrumental for me to notice and hold space for myself and others when oppressive thoughts, language or actions show up. I've been able to develop compassion for myself and others. I've also come to realize that my own freedom/liberation is directly tied to the freedom/liberation of all beings. So my contemplative practice and social justice work have in many ways become one."

This response identifies an external dimension to mindfulness that is not always present in Western application of contemplative practice (Anālayo, 2019). For social work educators to support their students in developing conscientization, this research suggests that mindfulness must be framed as more than nonjudgmental attention, but must include an external, relational aspect.

Research Question #2: Summary of Results and Discussion

The second research question was, "How do social work students perceive mindfulness to impact their response to the emotions inherent in the critical consciousness development process?" The critical consciousness development process can include emotional barriers such as anger, confusion, discomfort, distress, fear, fragility, guilt, immobility, and impatience (Caldwell, 2020; Wallin-Ruschman, 2014; Walsh, 2018; Zinga & Styres, 2019). It can also

include emotional supports such as hope and love (Fernández & Watts, 2022). Mindfulness practice has been shown to be a helpful technique in mitigating many of the emotional barriers and can help participants navigate difficult emotions (Caldwell, 2020; Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2017; Hafenbrack et al., 2022; Iani et al., 2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Sass et al., 2013). In order to fully answer this research question, the researcher analyzed multiple sets of quantitative and qualitative data. The survey captured data regarding the emotions students experienced during stages two and six in the conscientization process, the types of mindfulness practices that the students applied, and whether or not they saw a direct relationship or impact of their mindfulness practices on their emotions. Stage two relates to when people are presented with information that creates disequilibrium, something that jars their current beliefs and worldview. Stage six relates to when people are acting against oppression. These two stages were intentionally chosen to be included in the survey due to support from the literature. Stage two, labeled "information creating disequilibrium" inherently includes an element of cognitive dissonance, where new information is presented that jars against current beliefs which frequently provokes feelings of discomfort (Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020; Wong, 2004). Knowing that uncomfortable emotions are often barriers to conscientization, this stage was specifically included in the survey to gather data regarding the students' experiences (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Lai et al., 2016; Vollhardt & Twali, 2016; Vuletich & Payne, 2019; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018; Walsh, 2018; Zestcott et al., 2016). Stage six, labeled "acting against oppression," was intentionally selected because critics have pushed back on critical consciousness literature focusing primarily on reflection and neglecting the action component of critical consciousness (Diemer et al., 2021;

Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). This stage was selected to better understand the emotional barriers and supports to action.

In stage two, students reported experiencing far more negative emotions than positive emotions. This is in alignment with the literature (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020; Vollhardt & Twali, 2016). Of the overall words listed, 75.4% were negative. Of the individuals, about half experienced (48.4%) only negative or negative and neutral emotions in this stage. The other half of the participants (46.5%) experienced a mix of negative and positive or negative, positive, and neutral emotions in this stage. According to this data, stage two tends to solicit more negative emotions than positive emotions.

When asked about stage six, the time when people are engaged in action against oppression, the emotions survey participants experienced were more polarized as there were no neutral emotions listed and the emotions identified leaned slightly more positive. Negative emotion words were listed 43.0% of the time and positive words 57.0% of the time. No neutral words were used in the responses to this question. Per individual respondents, 14.8% reported only negative emotions in this stage, 51.6% reported both negative and positive emotions, and 33.6% reported only positive emotions in this stage.

According to the survey data, students experienced more negative emotions near the beginning of their conscientization journey. Interview participants gave a variety of examples of how they experienced negative emotions throughout the stages. Jordan talked about negative emotions early on, when she was exposed to new learning about racial disparities in health care during an integrated health class. She said,

> "…we were watching a video on forced sterilization that happened in L.A. … it was specifically to 10 Hispanic women. They had babies and then they were sterilized. And

> so my initial reaction was shocked and but I questioned myself because I was wondering, 'Was I this, was I this upset and shocked as a black women?'…I was questioning my own reaction only because I'm wondering, like, am I upset because I'm a person of color. I know that this happened to, this happens to black women as well… And so just the whole, the video was, I believe an hour and a half and I was really just upset the entire time."

In the interview, the researcher asked Jordan if she applied any sort of mindfulness to those emotions she was feeling. Jordan responded,

> "Yes, I was really mindful of how my body was reacting…which was that I became really tense. Um, I started to feel neck pain, back pain…and that night I had difficulty sleeping. The mindful reflecting, I guess I would say that, I think I was just more aware of just how me learning about injustice is really upsetting to me. And I think it's more upsetting, just because for one, I wasn't really aware of all that has been happening. And so now I'm learning."

This exchange depicts how Jordan applied a mindful, nonjudgmental awareness and curiosity to her emotions that helped her understand them better, which led to an integration of the new information rather than a rejection.

Dawn described her childhood as,

> "really strict, super fundamentalist, small Dutch community with this Calvinist religion where we didn't go to public school…we did not get TV or radio, or we didn't engage in any typical holidays like Christmas or anything. We had very specific dress…my worldview growing up was very black and white….and when I went to college, it was like everything was blown wide open for me."

She described the distressing emotions of stage three, the time of reflection on worldviews and beliefs, when she said,

> "I went straight out of high school into college. And then I did find myself questioning and I was always like, I remember even then feeling like there's a lot of injustice…but I really struggled, actually, just to regulate and everything…I really think the trouble was being unable to really sit in that introspection without a high level of distress. Because there was so much fear and basically it was because the threat was connection to all of the people in the community, right? And not only that, it was that if I left [her faith belief/worldview], I would like, I would go to hell…I look back and I struggled for so many years, but it was actually through good supports and new connections and developing my own sense of identity, and mindfulness being a huge piece of that process, that kind of finally made the whole…set of stages feasible."

These survey and interview responses are aligned with the literature; new information that jars a person's current beliefs and worldviews can cause dissonance and discomfort (Nadan & Stark, 2017; Pillen et al., 2020; Zestcott et al., 2016). Sometimes, if the discomfort is too high, the new information is rejected as false (Zestcott et al., 2016). To help social work students navigate these difficult emotions, mindfulness can be applied to recognize the emotional responses without judgment and become curious about their origins. According to the data, social work students may need more support in recognizing, regulating, and becoming curious about emotions near the beginning of their conscientization journey as more negative emotions were described early on. However, distressing emotions were reported throughout, so the skills related to emotional regulation should be revisited, modeled, and applied often. One survey participant described this when they said,

> "Mindfulness …helps remind me that I am only in control of myself and my actions. I can act justly and I can control my emotions. Mindfulness helps me keep that awareness and keep level-headed and calm when faced with oppression and justice."

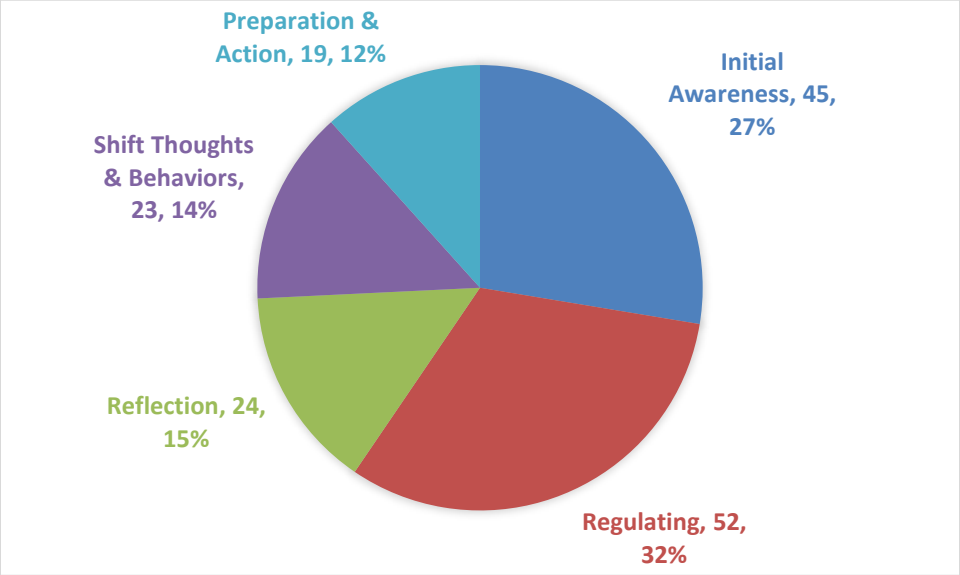
The data related to this research question also included the types of mindfulness practices that students preferred and participated in. The vast majority (90.8%) of the students who responded to the survey participate in mindfulness practices and the most common practices include meditation, mindful breathing, yoga, and other movement-based practices. It is important to note that students identified yoga and other movement-based mindfulness practices because some research indicates that movement-based mindfulness practices may provide increased benefits over seated mindfulness practices (Caldwell et al., 2010; Schmalzl et al., 2014; Schmalzl & Kerr, 2016).

When asked whether or not they saw an impact of mindfulness on their emotions in the conscientization process, 78.3% indicated that they did and the analysis of the open-ended survey responses led to more clarity on how. The five themes regarding how students apply mindfulness to their critical consciousness development were: Initial Awareness, Regulating, Reflection, Shift Thoughts & Behaviors, and Preparation & Action. As shown in the chart in Figure 7, about a quarter of the responses (27.6%) were that participants applied mindfulness to become more aware of their emotions (Initial Awareness). About a third of the responses related to regulating emotions (31.9%). About an eighth of the responses (14.7%) had to do with applying mindfulness to facilitate reflection on emotions, processing them and aiding in recognizing bias associated with those emotions. An additional eighth of the responses (14.1%) related to mindfulness facilitating a shift in the students' thoughts or behaviors related to their emotions. This type of impact had to do with self-compassion, increasing empathy, or even

intentionally choosing how to respond rather than reacting to the emotions. Finally, one-ninth of the responses (11.7%) related to applying mindfulness to prepare for or participate in social justice actions by recognizing areas of their control, seeing things in a bigger perspective, seeing a path forward, or even renewing their energy and desire to participate in social justice. These responses show that students applied mindfulness in a variety of ways to address their emotions.

Figure 7

How Mindfulness Impacts Emotions in Critical Consciousness Development



Some responses related clearly and singly to one theme, such as this response coded as Initial Awareness, “Yes [mindfulness] helped me realize how my body reacts.” This response related singularly to the theme of Regulating, “Mindfulness will make it easier to cope with negative emotions that arise when learning about these topics [bias, oppression, injustice].” However, many participants included a combination of themes in their description to show a progressive, or multi-faceted approach to mindfulness. Many responses included the connection

between Awareness and Regulation, such as, “It [mindfulness] gave me more awareness about my feelings so I could work on self-regulation” and, “It [mindfulness] helps me regulate and center myself, remembering I cannot fix everything myself and not feel guilty about not having all the solutions.” This participant connected Initial Awareness, Regulation, and Reflection, “Yes, it has helped me to feel the emotions in my body when they arise so I can learn from them. It also helps me be much more present in the moment, rather than numbing or distracting myself when something feels uncomfortable.” Some participants connected the themes of Shift Thoughts and Behaviors with Preparation and Action. Two examples of this connection were, “With mindfulness, I am able to attempt to see a situation from a third-party view instead of an impacted individual to then understand what further action needs to take place.” and, “…it [mindfulness] makes me less defensive and able to think and respond to instances of injustice in a calm, less emotional way.” These connected and layered responses showed a development or growth in how students engaged with and applied their mindfulness.

The researcher applied the theoretical framework of critical consciousness to these responses which organized the data in a developmental progression. If one were to view the pie chart in Figure 7 as a clock, the order of application progresses developmentally. At “noon”, students begin by applying mindfulness to become aware of their emotions. Next, they apply mindfulness to regulate those emotions. After regulation, students apply mindfulness to reflect on the emotion. This leads to a mindful shift in thoughts and behaviors related to their emotions. Finally, the participants applied mindfulness to prepare for and engage in sociopolitical and anti-oppressive behaviors. The clock analogy is helpful here because reaching “midnight,” doesn’t indicate that the process is complete, but leads again into initial awareness and the cycle continues. This falls in line with Freire (2000) and other theorists who claim critical

consciousness development is not a linear progression, but an iterative cycle where the practitioner engages in action which leads to further reflection and more action (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016; Watts et al., 2011).

These social work students, who were by and large MSW students, seem to apply mindfulness primarily to recognize and regulate their emotions, suggesting it is an important way to frame and model the application of mindfulness techniques. This is in line with the literature, as mindfulness has been shown time and time again to aid in emotional regulation (Davis & Hayes, 2011; Doll et al., 2016; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Guendelman et al., 2017; Hill & Updegraff, 2012; Iani et al., 2019; Krick & Felfe, 2020; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). However, social work educators should not neglect the framing of mindfulness as it relates to curious reflection, brave shifting of thoughts and behaviors, and creative preparation and action against injustice. For students to reach action-oriented outcomes, mindfulness application seems to needs to move beyond a mere initial awareness of the present moment, but be framed and modeled in ways that lead to regulation, reflection, shifting thoughts and behaviors that aim at a justice-related goal and end up in action (Forbes, 2022; Gockel & Deng, 2016; Hick & Furlotte, 2009; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; Wong & Vinsky, 2021). The cyclical nature of these applications is also important, where mindfulness related to action will likely lead back to mindfulness for initial awareness of emotions (Freire, 2000; Jemal, 2017; Watts et al., 2011).

Research Question #3: Summary of Results and Discussion

The third research question asked, “How do social work students perceive mindfulness to impact their progression through Pillen et al.’s six stages of critical consciousness development?” This question was addressed through the semi-structured interviews. One of the

themes of these interviews was “Adapting to Mindfulness.” Perhaps outside of the developmental framework suggested by Freire (2000) and Pillen et al. (2020), this theme speaks to how students were able to access mindfulness as a tool to their critical consciousness development. This theme incorporated participant responses around how mindfulness was framed when it was taught to them or how they teach it to others. Stockton recalled being taught mindfulness as self-care, and Charlie described the framing of mindfulness in two dimensions, awareness and compassion. Some students were exposed very regularly to practices at the beginning of a class period, others were exposed to textbooks about mindfulness, others had assignments in which students led mindfulness practices with their peers. The interviewees talked about how their likes and dislikes about mindfulness changed over time, reporting that some class practices, like laughing meditation, provoked self-consciousness or that silent meditation was very hard at the beginning. Both Mo and Blair mentioned that some of their peers didn’t enjoy the application of mindfulness, one mentioned hearing a classmate call it “kind of foo-foo.” Scott discussed how specific mindfulness practices were really important to him at the beginning of his mindfulness journey, over ten years ago, but now he is able to be mindful in the day-to-day moments and is much quicker at catching his emotional reactions. Ruth addressed an eventual comfort with mindfulness by saying, “It’s having a skill set that once it’s there it’s kind of ingrained.” This theme relates to the importance of how mindfulness is introduced if social work educators want to include it as a pedagogical tool in the classroom. Different students will appreciate different mindfulness techniques. Multiple options should be presented. Also, instructors should frame the purpose of mindfulness in varying ways. Third, students should be coached to the possibility of growing into mindfulness practice. This may not be something that each student appreciates at the beginning. These results deviated from the literature in that no

participant in this study discussed mindfulness as harming. Some scholars suggest this as a possibility, particularly for students who have marginalized identities, have experienced trauma, or have difficulties with mental health (Berila, 2014; Dobkin et al., 2012; Hanley et al., 2016). It is possible that students who did not positively identify with a mindfulness pedagogy opted not to complete the survey.

The following four themes fit well within the guiding theoretical framework of critical consciousness as they partially parallel Pillen et al.'s (2020) stages of growth. While similar to the themes from the survey, these themes and the responses that formed them, provide more detail to how mindfulness impacts conscientization. A theme of Self-awareness arose through the responses in ways that had less to do with explicit mindfulness practices and more to do with how life experiences and intersectional identities brought about an awareness of injustice. The codes in this theme were: intersectional identities, other than mindfulness, reflection and processing, and without mindfulness. This theme relates closely to Pillen et al.'s (2020) first stage, the priming of critical reflection, regarding how one was set up through experiences and education to be aware of injustice. Nine of the 13 participants described reflecting on the positions of privilege and marginalization within their own intersectional identities as important to their conscientization. Two additional participants described having grown up with close friends with marginalized identities that led to their critical consciousness development. Jordan identified as a Black woman with socioeconomic privilege and described her reflection on an assignment she completed in class about the disparities in access to medical care for impoverished people of color during the Covid-19 pandemic. She said,

> "I had never thought about that, because, although I'm a person of color, I am a person of privilege. And so I don't have to think twice about Medicare, medical and all things like that because I have access to it."

Some participants also talked about other experiences that supported their conscientization, such as being part of a supportive community or implementing self-care and setting boundaries. Important to this theme was participant discussion on reflection. They described how these experiences helped them be more aware of self which helped them grow in their critical consciousness. This theme is supported by the literature, as many scholars have described how justice-related experiences combined with justice-oriented education impacts how ready one is to understand structural injustice and oppression (Auditore, 2021; Barrera et al., 2017; Delia & Krasny, 2018; Pillen et al., 2020; Zaidi et al., 2017). This has implications for social work educators regarding how they support students in recognizing and reflecting on previous oppression-related experiences. One student mentioned a class activity on identifying aspects of intersectionality and positionality. This has been suggested in the literature as a way to facilitate critical reflection on aspects of self and identity (Aqil et al., 2021; Fritzsche, 2021; Mattsson, 2014; Siliman & Kearns, 2020; Takacs, 2002).

Another theme was Emotional Regulation. This theme seemed to be directly related to intentional and explicit mindfulness practices. Participants discussed applying intentional practices such as grounding techniques or breathing techniques in order to stay in a conversation or situation that was triggering. Olivia mentioned journaling after a class that brought up suicide, and Stacy traced her fingers and applied deep breathing after a class conversation about intimate partner violence. Many of these emotional regulation responses related to stage two, information creating disequilibrium, which has implications for social work educators who will be exposing

students to information in their courses that jar their current beliefs and worldviews. These participants indicate that mindfulness is an important tool to help students navigate the distress that comes with social work course content. If students are not taught coping skills, they may reject the new, challenging information (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015). Mindfulness framed as a tool for emotional regulation seems to be a way to keep students engaged in the conversation rather than disengaging, which one survey participant clearly states, "As a person of color, I am often triggered during discussions around these topics in class, so I try to use mindfulness to check in with myself and re-regulate before engaging with the moment."

However, mindfulness as a tool for emotional regulation was also described as important in other stages, as well. Participants experienced distressing emotions throughout the conscientization process. Charlie applied mindfulness to regulate his emotions in stage three, introspection, when he reflected and regulated the discomfort he had been feeling in oppressive situations. He was able to reframe his discomfort as "adaptive stress" when looking at it mindfully and non-judgmentally. Some responses indicated that emotional regulation was needed in stage six, acting against oppression. Joanne recognized that, "the mindfulness that I participate in helps me to regulate my nervous system so that I can interact with folks in a way that is not coming from a place of an activated nervous system. So, like, I'm bringing a calm into the room with me…" Joanne discussed applying mindfulness to regulate her nervous system after going door-knocking for political advocacy. Participants clearly supported the pedagogical implementation of teaching mindfulness as emotional regulation, and were able to apply it at all stages of critical consciousness development. Emotional regulation is a well-researched outcome and benefit of mindfulness practice and social work educators should continue to frame, apply,

and model mindfulness as an emotional regulation tool (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2017; Iani et al., 2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). Contrary to the literature, these participants did not discuss emotional regulation strategies as leading to emotional suppression which has been seen to be an inhibitor to social action (Borders & Wiley, 2019; Ford et al., 2019; Solak et al., 2021; van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Another theme is Clearer Understanding. Participants connected mindfulness to their ability to recognize and understand their body/thoughts/emotions, other people, and broader situations better. This theme was often discussed in conjunction with stage three, introspection (Pillen et al., 2020). Stacy discussed explicitly applying mindfulness to pay attention to her body and reflect on an increased heart rate and Catherine regularly applied mindfulness to be aware of her feelings and sit with them, reflecting and processing. Other responses fit across later stages. Mo discussed applying mindfulness to become more aware of what was truly going on in a situation that helped him reframe, an aspect of stage four, revising frames of reference. He said,

> "looking within yourself for kind of reasons for things, it inevitably will impact how you view situations moving forward and give a little rationale of maybe, oh, 'Why did I think that?' 'Why did I feel that?' 'Why did I judge that situation this way or that way?'"

Juan applied mindfulness to slow down and be more curious about a triggering comment, trying to not judge what was going on. He said, "that's when I remember taking a moment to breathe and like, 'Alright, what is she really saying?' like, 'What do I know about her experience? Could that be true?' His application of mindfulness helped him understand the situation better and come up with a response that would lead to increased justice, which indicates stage five, developing agency for change.

Almost as if they are layering applications of mindfulness in these scenarios, the participants use mindfulness to recognize their emotions, regulate them, then become curious about the situation, asking "What is actually going on here?" in order to understand it better. This theme resonates strongly with the two components of Buddhism in which mindfulness originated, mindfulness *(sati)* and clear comprehension *(sampajaṅña)* (Bodhi, 2011; Dreyfus, 2011; Dunne, 2015; Sharf, 2015; Stanley, 2015). These participants, whether they were exposed to the Buddhist foundations or not, seem to have connected the two aspects and found benefit in their relationship. This supports critics of Western mindfulness who say that nonjudgmental attention is one piece of right mindfulness, and the ethical application of mindfulness is lost without the connection to clear understanding (Anālayo, 2020; Davis, 2015; Sentot, 2017; Stanley, 2015). If the goal of social work education is to support students' conscientization that leads to action, this data would support that both components are necessary. Students should be taught and modeled how to use mindful, nonjudgmental attention to get to clear comprehension, or clear understanding, in order to know themselves and the context better (Schmid & Taylor Aiken, 2021).

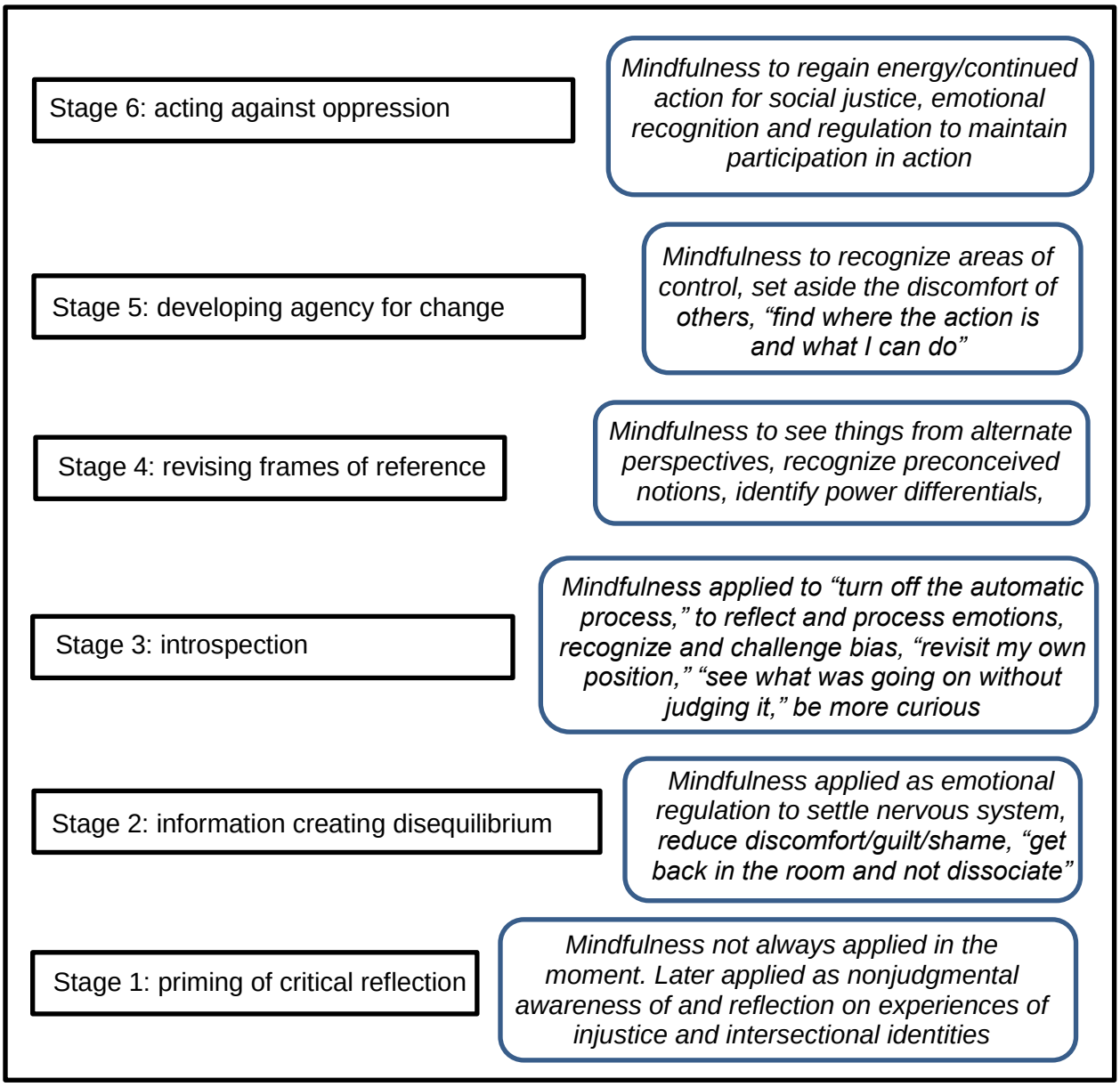
The final theme from these interviews was Intentional Actions for Justice. This theme was applied to Research Question #1, but it also contributes to Research Question #3 as it sheds light on how mindfulness helped the participants grow into stages four, five, and six. Stage four relates to when participants revised their view of the world from fair and just to recognizing how systems are set up to benefit those already in power. Stage five is when participants developed ideas and agency to impact injustice, and stage six relates to when participants engaged in anti-oppression work (Pillen et al., 2020). Ruth applied mindfulness to recognize power differentials, which relates to stage four. Stockton applied mindfulness to stage five when she intentionally

reflected on an unjust situation. She said, "…I got stronger [in] understanding what I had control over and what I could do." Also applicable to stage five, Stacy applies mindfulness to filter out other people's discomfort and intentionally chooses areas to act. The students' qualitative responses gave context and clarity to how mindfulness impacts their critical consciousness development within Pillen et al.'s (2020) six stages.

In order to succinctly describe how participants described their application of mindfulness to their conscientization, the researcher created a graphic display with summary statements and participant comments regarding this relationship (See Figure 8). This graphic is limited as it seems to portray conscientization as linear, culminating at stage six. However, theorists would strongly suggest a cyclical nature to this process, where action against oppression leads back into reflection impacting future action (Diemer et al., 2006; Freire, 2000).

Figure 8

Impact of Mindfulness on Stages of CC Development



Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the results of this study. These conclusions will be framed within the theory of critical consciousness as proposed by critical educator, Paolo Freire (2000). These conclusions include: (1) Participants saw mindfulness as a support to their

conscientization; (2) Mindfulness, as nonjudgmental attention alone, is not sufficient to bring about critical consciousness; (3) Students appreciate different types of mindfulness; (4) Students grew into the habit of mindful attention and reflection that was helpful to conscientization; and (5) Mindfulness should be framed and modeled with external relational and contextual components to aid in clearer understanding.

First, the vast majority of participants saw a clear impact of mindfulness on their critical consciousness development. Over 78% of survey participants reported an impact and many discussed not only where they saw benefit, but where there might be barriers had mindfulness not been applied. One interview participant, Jordan, said, "I do see mindfulness as the growth that I'm doing. Because I'm more aware…that there is injustice going on in the country and how it affects, not just me, but the community in which I serve and live in." Mindfulness was shown as helpful throughout the conscientization process, even in supporting continued anti-oppressive action. Juan said, "If I didn't practice mindfulness or some sort of exercise or practice like that, it might just be overwhelming and I just, just wouldn't want to continue doing what I'm doing…" One student poetically connected mindfulness to their conscientization when they said,

> "It [mindfulness] has been instrumental for me to notice and hold space for myself and others when oppressive thoughts, language or actions show up. I've been able to develop compassion for myself and others. I've also come to realize that my own freedom/liberation is directly tied to the freedom/liberation of all beings. So my contemplative practice and social justice work have in many ways become one."

Mindfulness pedagogy, according to these participants, is helpful to their critical consciousness. Very few empirical studies have been completed regarding mindfulness as a support to conscientization. This conclusion adds empirical support to the theoretical literature that strongly

suggests mindfulness as a pedagogical tool in this area (Berila, 2014; Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022; Hick & Furlotte, 2009; Wong & Vinsky, 2021),

Second, mindfulness alone, as defined in this study as a practice of paying intentional attention to the current moment without judgment, does not seem to be sufficient to bring about action-oriented stages of conscientization. The quantitative data did not support a direct relationship, nor did the student report. Students described additional elements such as intersectional identities, experiences of injustice, supportive community members, and exposure to new information that helped bring about critical consciousness growth. Students applied nonjudgmental awareness and reflection to these varying experiences, which led to curiosity, a deeper understanding, and sometimes action. This conclusion aligns with critics of Western applications of mindfulness that divorce an internal, personal aspect of mindful attention from an external, relational application to how one is situated in a context (Anālayo, 2019; Arthington, 2016; Forbes, 2022). This data supports the pedagogical framing of mindfulness that connects the personal to the political if it is to facilitate conscientization (Freire, 2000; Hick & Furlotte, 2009; Jemal, 2017).

Third, how participants engaged with mindfulness varied. Participants indicated an affinity for mindfulness meditations (22.7%), breathing practices (18.1%), yoga (12.7%), and other movement-based practices (11.5%). They found some practices less compatible with completing together in a classroom setting, like laughing yoga. Others appreciated sensory-related practices such as tracing their fingers along a maze or going outside the classroom walls to be mindful of nature. Social work educators should provide and model multiple types of mindfulness practices in order to make them accessible to a variety of students. Even though there may be barriers in a classroom, movement-based mindfulness practices may provide

increased benefits over seated mindfulness practices (Caldwell et al., 2010; Schmalzl et al., 2014; Schmalzl & Kerr, 2016).

Fourth, interview participants discussed growing into mindfulness. Many of the participants reported that mindfulness practices were uncomfortable or difficult at first, but with time, they found the practices easier to implement. This is in line with neuroscience research that indicates repeated mindfulness practice builds neural pathways to help facilitate more regular mindful attention (Doll et al., 2016). Joanne mentioned, “I am a beginner in mindfulness...I don't think I've practiced anything enough for it to be like that muscle memory or not so effortful yet.” Participants with high conscientization showed the habitual application of mindful reflection to emotional reactions. Participants who had engaged with mindfulness practices for longer reported regularly catching their emotional responses or biased reactions and reflecting on them to better understand their origins and what to do about them. These participants were able to pause and reflect when personally experiencing emotional distress or confusion while acting against oppression. This led to intentional actions regarding how to adapt or re-engage. Social work educators should set up an expectation of growing into mindfulness.

Finally, participant responses highlighted the importance of framing and modeling mindfulness in multiple ways. One way was to frame mindfulness as a method of recognizing emotions by paying attention to the body. This framing supported many participants’ introduction to the metacognitive process of conscientization. A second frame was as a tool for emotional regulation. Participants utilized this application of mindfulness throughout their conscientization process in order to reduce their discomfort and move into reflection. This framing was particularly important for participants who were newly experiencing information about bias, injustice, and oppression. A third framing was to connect the internal response to the

outer context in order to more clearly understand. This framing included not only understanding personal interactions, but more clearly understanding cultural and systemic context as well, through recognizing power differentials, assessing areas of control, and making intentional responses rather than reactions. These frames helped participants better understand effective ways to engage in sociopolitical action. This aspect of clear understanding, also known as clear comprehension, is an integral part of a Buddhist application of mindfulness (Bodhi, 2011; Dreyfus, 2011; Dunne, 2015; Sharf, 2015; Stanley, 2015). From a Buddhist perspective, it is said that the coupling of mindful attention and clear comprehension leads to insight and liberation (Bodhi, 2011). One participant identified the importance of multiple frames for mindfulness when they said,

> "I believe that mindfulness has helped me realize that the solution does not have to happen today. It helps me not feel overwhelmed and instead focus on the process (one step at a time). Before I would just feel like there was no use, but now I can see that a small act of kindness can have a great impact and that you should never give up or stop trying in the fight for what you believe in."

Participants indicated that the framing and modeling of mindfulness in these distinct ways supported their critical consciousness development.

It may be helpful to provide two single case studies here to showcase how participants embodied many of these conclusions about the relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness. The first case study is about Ruth who described working through many of the stages of conscientization before they attended graduate school for social work. Ruth's story, then, shows how mindfulness can be helpful to reach the action stage of conscientization. The second case study is about Jordan, whose story seems to indicate that she entered graduate school

at earlier stages of conscientization and was exposed to information that caused disequilibrium in her classes. Jordan's case shows how mindfulness might be initially applied as a pedagogical tool for emotional regulation. Her story also showcases the response of students who may enter into mindfulness practice with more hesitancy.

Ruth is an MSW student who identifies as White, queer, and non-binary. Ruth grew up acting and in theater and remembered being exposed early on to body scans and learning to focus on breathing; Ruth began attending yoga classes as a high schooler. Ruth reports those practices as important in building their own self-awareness. Ruth discussed growing up in a diverse community that exposed them to varying perspectives, one being that their grandfather was gay and had a male partner that she knew. Ruth reports that her exposure to diversity was foundational to how they were able to move into a time of revising their political worldview around their mid-20s. Ruth was working in a café and started engaging in dialogue with co-workers about capitalism and politics in ways that stretched some previously held beliefs. Ruth reported being able to pause and question beliefs about communism that had seemed like common sense in the past. Ruth mentioned that their own experience of coming out as queer during that time also impacted their ability to radically shift beliefs. Soon after, Ruth began a job at a homeless shelter, which jarred Ruth's preconceived notions about homelessness. Ruth said, "My entire world was really just like shaken up. All of the things that I had just sort of believed and not really ever stopped to question…realizing my own biases for things, even regarding to, regarding to race even." This led to Ruth participating in protests in 2020 and getting more involved in political action. Ruth discussed the intention behind attending grad school was to find more ways to develop agency to change. Ruth said,

> "…the last number of years I've been thinking and talking and reading and I, you know, I have a set of beliefs, but what do I do with that? So, I think that one of the reasons I'm pursuing an MSW is because I want some hard skills to do something with it."

Ruth discussed some opportunities for engagement in action at their current university. Ruth said a big struggle with engagement relates to some fear around not having all the answers. Ruth said,

> "I'm trying to unlearn some habits of needing to know, like, the end goal before starting…So I don't need to have all the answers, and…I don't need to perfectly understand how to do everything before I start doing it. So, I'm trying to, like, step into a place of courage to start taking action about things…"

Ruth was very capable of describing their progression through the stages of conscientization, but it wasn't explicitly clear how mindfulness impacted that progression, if at all. When asked directly whether Ruth saw a connection, Ruth responded,

> "Um, yeah. I think in the way in the sense of, really, like noticing how I'm responding to certain things. I do think mindfulness comes into play there. You know, we are, for example, within this indigenous sovereignty work, it's like we have, it you know, it doesn't feel good to be told like I, you know, 'You're doing this wrong,' when you're trying to do good. Like that feels bad. Being able to mindfully recognize how that feels and stop and instead of just getting stuck in the feeling, question and ask, 'What, okay, why does that feel bad?' Then grapple with that and move forward as opposed to just getting stuck in the feeling. I think mindfulness has helped give me some tools, even if they're not active tools that I'm applying in the moment, to have this sort of compassionate, but critical reflection on my own reactions to things, in a way that can help me move forward."

When the researcher asked Ruth what kinds of mindfulness practices they engage in, Ruth responded,

> "Going on walks and dancing and doing yoga. When I do it and all these things, it's like that if that is a constant, like, kind of current that's always running through my life in some capacity. I do think that, you know, those, that sense of mindfulness is cultivated, it does come into play, even if I'm not stopping and doing a body scan in the moment."

Ruth's example of applying mindfulness to ask themselves, "What? Okay, why does this feel bad?" to move into compassionate self-reflection shows applying mindfulness as a tool to recognize and become curious about physical reactions that occur throughout the conscientization process. Although Ruth did not intentionally apply a structured mindfulness practice, such as deep breathing, in those moments of distress, they spoke to the habitual nature of being mindful of one's body.

Jordan identifies as a female African American student who is also in an MSW program. She did not share specific experiences that primed her critical consciousness, but she did say, "I am subject to prejudice and racism on a daily basis and I am, I see it, I feel it." Jordan mentioned recent exposure in her classes to information about poverty and oppression. She also discussed a recent assignment about racial disparities regarding who was able to access health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jordan reported that these classes and assignments prompted tough conversations and emotional reactions. She and her classmates watched a video on the forced sterilization of Hispanic women that provoked extreme discomfort. She said,

> "They had babies and then they were sterilized. And so my initial reaction was shocked and but I questioned myself because I was wondering, "Was I this was I this upset and shocked as a black woman?" So, that was really interesting and so how I felt was really

> upset and shocked… I was questioning my own reaction only because I'm wondering, like, am I upset because I'm a person of color. I know that this happened to, this happens to black women as well."

This statement shows how Jordan was able to recognize her reactions and become curious about them, moving into the stage of introspection. Jordan self-identified with the stage of introspection. She said, "I wouldn't say I'm at the end part of that spectrum. I would say I'm more still in the, 'There needs, there's change that needs to happen. There's reflection, I'm reflecting. But I still have a ways to go."

When asked if Jordan saw an impact of mindfulness in how she's approaching her current reflection, she responded, "Yes, I do see mindfulness as the growth that I'm doing. Because I'm more aware. More aware that there is injustice going on in the country and how it affects, not just me, but the community in which I serve and live in." The researcher asked Jordan about how she was exposed to mindfulness and what she finds helpful and unhelpful. Jordan found few classroom-based practices helpful. She didn't enjoy reflective journaling as an assignment because it felt forced. She, however, did journal at home in the evenings sometimes, which she found helpful. Jordan mentioned that reflection discussions in class are "okay." She said,

> "What I like is just hearing when others talk to hear their perspective about what's going on in their field placements. And then there are some similarities that end up being disclosed so I can relate. And what I don't like is that there's a vulnerable side to it. And it allows people, other people into possibly really deeper emotions about what's going on. And that's hard for me to share in general."

Jordan mostly appreciates mindful walking and mindful eating. She was recently exposed to mindful eating outside of academia. She has found this practice helpful. Jordan's story shows

how many students do not eagerly jump into mindfulness practices, even if they are able to see a benefit. The example that Jordan gave about reflecting on the video on sterilization shows an ability to connect a mindful awareness of her reaction with a curiosity about the external factors – where the reaction came from and why. She used this curiosity to form a clearer understanding of not only what was going on in her body, but how the cultural and social context was impacting her.

Limitations

There are some aspects of the study that may have limited the transferability of the results. The researcher provides them now to support future researchers. The first relates to the instrument used to measure critical consciousness. The researcher intentionally selected the Critical Consciousness Inventory (CCI) as the instrument to measure critical consciousness, however, in the preliminary stages of this study, the Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure (CCCM) was the top contender for measuring this construct (Shin et al., 2016). The CCCM was dismissed for two reasons. The first was that the researcher hoped to gather data from undergraduate students and the CCI was created and tested with youth and young adults. This instrument uses more understandable vernacular for students who may not have been exposed to the nuances of social work jargon. Also, the CCCM uses specific language about racism, sexism, and heterosexism. As the political environment of 2021 unfolded, many state legislations, including the home state of the researcher, were banning the teaching of critical race theory in public universities. In order to avoid the possibility of being denied Institutional Review Board permission to access public universities in these states, the researcher used the tool with more moderate language. Surprisingly, only two undergraduate students completed the survey, which eliminated one rationale for using the CCI over the CCCM. After the survey data

were collected, the mean scores of the CCI questions were not normally distributed but were negatively skewed. There is a higher mean CCI score in this sample than in the general population of young adults, where the mean for this sample was 3.52, ranging from 1.56 to 4.00. In the original research, the mean CCI score of the college undergraduates, who were predominantly freshmen, was 2.86 (Thomas, et al., 2014). It is possible that an instrument validated with older adults, more closely aligned with the ages in this sample, would provide a more valid measure of critical consciousness. The sample population included in this study had an average age of 34 years old. It is possible that due to their age, this older sample may have naturally increased their conscientization due to time. They were also all social work students, with some having worked in the social work profession for ten years. These two factors likely led to the higher CCI mean score in this population. Because the CCI was written, tested, and validated with a younger population than this study's sample, it may not have been the best measure of critical consciousness for these participants.

A second limitation of this study was related to the variation in mindfulness exposure of the participants. The participants were gathered from multiple social work programs and had been exposed to a wide variety of mindfulness frameworks and practices. Many of them had been exposed to mindfulness years before they began their social work education. The responses from these participants were influenced by those variable backgrounds and not one single mindfulness pedagogy is being tested in this study. The conclusions drawn from the data may not be transferable to all higher education social work students but should be applied recognizing this limitation.

A third limitation was within the ethnic and gender diversity of the survey and interview participants. According to national data regarding social work higher education students, 20% of

the students identify as African American or Black, almost 16% identify as Hispanic or Latinx, and 50% identify as White (CSWE, 2021). In the survey sample, White-identifying students were overrepresented, contributing to nearly 75% of the sample population, whereas Black and Hispanic participants were underrepresented at 4% and 6% respectively. This ethnic underrepresentation should be taken into consideration when transferring the results from the quantitative and qualitative data gathered by the survey.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study brought about multiple new questions for the researcher and led to areas of further research. They are suggested here as follows:

- Further research on mindfulness and critical consciousness should use different criteria for selecting interview participants. If the study design was adapted to an exploratory sequential design, interview participants could be selected by extremely high or extremely low critical consciousness and mindfulness scores (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Those types of interviews might provide more extreme data regarding how mindfulness contributes or does not contribute to critical consciousness.
- The researcher recommends completing this study with another tool, such as the CCCM, in order to gather more normally distributed data regarding critical consciousness levels. A valid and reliable tool to measure critical consciousness in social work graduate students may provide more normally distributed data and allow for more accurate relationship assessment between critical consciousness and mindfulness.

- Further research should be completed on how students were originally exposed to mindfulness and their understanding of what mindfulness means. As the researcher began analysis of the qualitative data, it became clear that some students had been exposed to mindfulness through more Eastern influences, such as yoga-teacher-training or Buddhism. Those students described aspects of mindfulness that included elements of compassion and connectedness. Since mindfulness as "nonjudgmental awareness" alone does not seem to relate directly to critical consciousness, it is recommended to study the relationship between critical consciousness and a mindfulness that specifically includes the ethics of an Eastern framework.
- Further research should be conducted on individual mindfulness curriculum that connect the internal experience with the external dimension, such as described by Clark and Seider (2017) and Ferrin and Zern (2021).
- Further research should be conducted with a reliable and valid instrument that measures an external/relational component of mindfulness. Assessing this factor may help researchers better understand the relationship between critical consciousness and mindfulness.
- Further research should be conducted on potential moderating factor of students' experiences that primed their critical reflection. The pervasive prevalence of the eleven interview participants explicitly identifying some aspect of their intersectional identities or having a childhood best friend with a marginalized identity brings to light a question about whether or not those types of personal experiences are foundational to critical consciousness development. More research is needed regarding how or if mindfulness would differ when taught to students with less

blatant identities of marginalization (Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016).

- Further research should be conducted on the potential moderator of a supportive community on critical consciousness development. Unsolicited, four interview participants mentioned supportive community members as important to their conscientization process. Further research is needed to better understand this element.

Implications for Professional Practice

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of mindfulness pedagogy on social work students' critical consciousness development. One accreditation-mandated outcome of social work education is to support students to engage in anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion action (CSWE, 2022). Evidence-based pedagogies should be implemented in order to reach such aims (CSWE 2022; NASW, 2021, Mehrotra et al., 2018). A critical consciousness pedagogy leads to action aimed at dismantling oppressive systems that perpetuate racism and supporting those that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (Jemal, 2017; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005; Wallin-Ruschman, 2018). However, a critical consciousness pedagogy inherently includes emotional barriers that can be difficult to overcome (Hernández Cárdenas & Méndez, 2017; Vollhardt & Twali, 2016; Walsh, 2018). Implementing a mindfulness pedagogy can help students navigate the emotions in this process and facilitate conscientization (Caldwell, 2020; Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2017; Hafenbrack et al., 2022; Iani et al., 2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Sass et al., 2013). However, more empirical research is needed to discern how and when it is helpful, particularly within the context of social work higher education. This study provides empirical data regarding the relationship between mindfulness and critical consciousness development. Social work educators can use the results

and conclusions from this study to begin to implement or adapt their implementation of mindfulness pedagogy to their social work curriculum in ways that support critical consciousness development in their students. Four specific implications for social worker educators will be discussed.

First, if social work educators are not already implementing a pedagogy of mindfulness to support student conscientization, they need to start. The vast majority of participants in this study acknowledged mindfulness as a tool to facilitate and support their critical consciousness development. Some even said that without a mindful approach to their anti-oppressive action, they would burn out. Empirical research is relatively new in this field (Scafuto, 2021). However, there is plentiful theoretical and anecdotal support for this pedagogy (Berila, 2016; Ferrin & Zern, 2021; Fritzsche, 2021; Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022; Hick & Furlotte, 2009; Kahane, 2009). Although participants in this study did not discuss many harmful impacts of mindfulness, it is important for social work educators to also be open to how mindfulness may not be an appropriate intervention for some students; giving students options and exposing them to a wide variety of mindfulness interventions may increase compatibility (Berila, 2014; Dobkin et al., 2012; Hanley et al., 2016). However, in general, the results of this study support that if social work educators want their students to engage in critical action, mindfulness is a helpful, if not necessary, tool for this process.

Second, when introducing mindfulness to social work students, it is important to discuss an expectation of growth in how students might respond or relate to these practices. Setting up an expectation of awkwardness at the beginning may help students be open to growing into these practices. This might also include introducing varying types of mindfulness practices. Students indicated that meditation was a common practice, but many mentioned their affinity for

breathing practices and movement-based practices. Social work educators should make sure they are making mindfulness as accessible to as many students as possible by modeling multiple types of practices. Movement-based mindfulness practices may provide increased benefits over seated mindfulness practices (Caldwell et al., 2010; Schmalzl et al., 2014; Schmalzl & Kerr, 2016)

A third implication is that mindfulness should be framed and modeled as a tool for emotional regulation early on in students' social work education, as students report experiencing negative emotions when learning about bias, injustice, and oppression. Emotional regulation tools may be particularly salient for those with marginalized identities that may feel triggered or angry when exposed to topics in class and yet wanted to remain engaged in the conversation in an emotionally safe way (Berila, 2014; Dobkin et al., 2012; Hanley et al., 2016). It is also important for students who have primarily privileged identities and may feel shame and guilt when difficult topics are presented; emotional regulation allows them to stay open to new learning (Coulter et al., 2013; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021). The social work classroom can be intentionally structured to provide safety for students to mindfully regulate and reflect on emotions related to difficult topics of bias, injustice, and oppression (Bransford, 2011; Delia & Krasny, 2018; Dunn et al., 2014; Rogerson et al., 2021; Sukhera & Watling, 2017; Williams et al., 2016)

A fourth implication is that, in order to facilitate critical consciousness, mindfulness should be framed and modeled as a way to more clearly understand the context of a situation. Student examples included a better understanding of the roots of their own physical or emotional responses as well as these responses in others. Student responses indicate that activities related to identifying and reflecting on intersectional identities may be helpful here (Aqil et al., 2021; Fritzsche, 2021; Mattsson, 2014; Siliman & Kearns, 2020; Takacs, 2002). Students reported the

benefit of applying mindfulness to more clearly understand the dynamics of a system, to prepare for social justice-oriented action by recognizing power differentials, to assess areas of control, and to help in how to make intentional responses rather than reacting. To reach these aims, social work educators may need to couple mindfulness practices with an intentional connection to external issues, such as through a joint pedagogy of sociopolitical curiosity and mindfulness (Clark & Seider, 2017; Ferrin & Zern, 2021). Students frequently mentioned that they were introduced to mindfulness as self-care, but their narratives indicated that mindfulness supported oppression-reducing action when it was framed as awareness and regulation that led to curiosity and clearer understanding.

Overall, this research, set within the current literature and guiding theoretical framework, provides important information for social work educators. Teaching mindfulness as merely the nonjudgmental awareness of the moment does not seem to facilitate critical consciousness in higher education social work students, but participants discussed how mindfulness was helpful to their conscientization when it was intentionally applied to bring about clearer understanding and awareness of justice issues. Students reported mindfulness as helpful throughout the critical consciousness development process, even as a tool for emotional regulation in action-oriented work. Rather than assuming that teaching about bias and diversity will translate into oppression-reducing action, social work educators should apply evidence-based methods to support their students in navigating the difficult emotional barriers inherent in the conscientization process (Bransford, 2011; Featherston et al., 2019; Hall & Theriot, 2016; Lwin & Beltrano, 2020; Mehrotra et al., 2017; Mehrotra et al., 2018; Mitchell & Binkley, 2021; Pitner & Sakamoto, 2016). This study provides empirical evidence that a mindfulness pedagogy, when coupled with

an external element of more clearly understanding the context of a situation, does support social work higher education students to engage in anti-oppressive, critical action.

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APPENDIX A

Permission to Use CSWE Data

Nikki Bodenstab Lee <nbodenstablee@nnu.edu>

Permission to publish CSWE Data from 2020 Statistics Report

Amml Hussein <ahussein@cswe.org> Thu, Jun 1, 2023 at 10:07 AM
To: Kelle Brown <kbrown@cswe.org>, "nbodenstablee@nnu.edu" <nbodenstablee@nnu.edu>

Good afternoon, Dr. Bodenstab-Lee. Thank you for your email. Please feel free to cite the 2020 annual report in your publications. The suggested citation is:

Council on Social Work Education. (2021). 2020 statistics on social work education in the United States. https://www.cswe.org/Research-Statistics/Research-Briefs-and-Publications/2020 -Annual-Statistics-on-Social-Work-Education

I would be interested in reviewing your publication when it is ready.

Best wishes,

Amml Hussein, Ed.D., LMSW

She/her/hers

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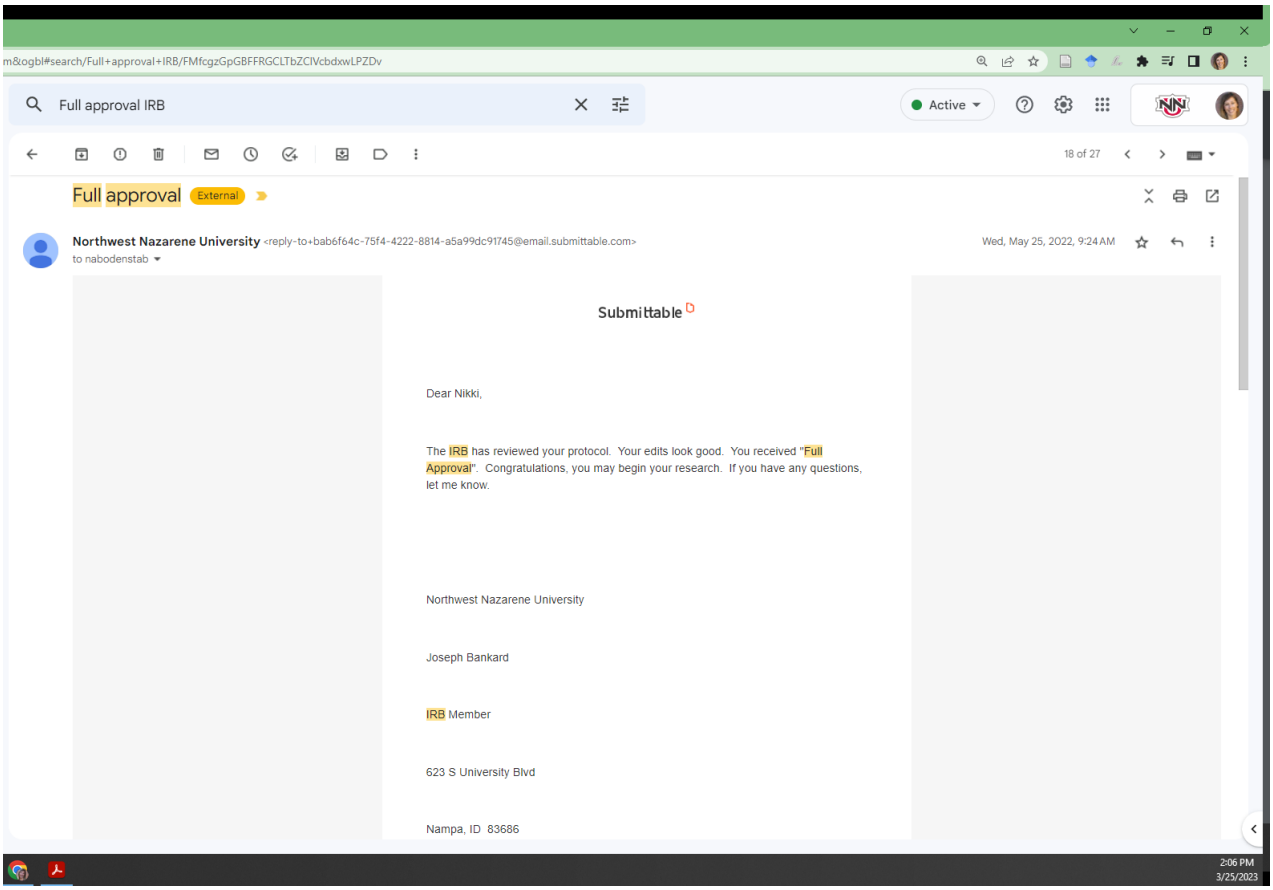
Alexandria, VA 22314

Email: Ahussein@CSWE.org

COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

APPENDIX B

Institutional Review Board Approval



APPENDIX C

Inquiry Email to Potential Participating Faculty

Dear Dr. _____

I am a current PhD student working on a dissertation related to mindfulness/contemplation and its relationship to navigating anti-oppression/social justice work. I'm looking for a pool of undergraduate and graduate students who are taking classes related to social justice or anti-oppression work. Within these social justice courses, students will have been taught the option of using mindfulness or contemplation as a tool to navigate the often difficult and uncomfortable process of recognizing and interrupting injustice and oppression.

If you embed contemplation or mindfulness into your courses in conjunction with social work content, **would you be interested in sharing my survey with students in your program?** I am particularly looking for students who have been taught the tools of mindfulness, contemplation and reflection as a way to navigate their way through social justice or anti-oppression work.

The survey itself takes between 10 and 25 minutes to complete and can be anonymous, unless the student desires to have their first name and email address entered into a drawing for a gift card. There is also an option for students to elect to participate in a one-on-one interview at a later date if they are interested.

This study has passed the Institutional Review Board at the hosting institution, Northwest Nazarene University. The certificate of such is attached.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Nikki Bodenstab-Lee, LMSW
PhD student

Northwest Nazarene University
623 Holly Street
Nampa, ID 83686
208-467-8075

APPENDIX D

Formal Letter of Invitation to Potential Research Sites

Nikki Bodenstab-Lee
School of Social Work
Northwest Nazarene University
623 University Blvd
Nampa, ID 83686

[Name of Educator],

I've sincerely appreciated our communication over email. Though we've talked about this informally, this letter is a formal invitation and request for your university to be a site in my upcoming research study, titled "Paying Attention to Emotions: How Mindfulness Pedagogy Affects Critical Consciousness Development in Social Work Curriculum".

The study was approved by the Northwest Nazarene University Institutional Review Board on June 30, 2022. This research partnership would include some actions/choices on your part.

Those actions and choices include:

1. Designate a pool of students who have participated (or are currently enrolled) in a course where mindfulness/contemplation was taught as it relates to anti-oppression or social justice curriculum.
2. To this pool of students, share the description of the study verbally in class or send an email with the information. The description/email verbiage is included in an attached document.
3. Provide the corresponding URL address to the research website or post the weblink on your learning management system.
4. If the students you have designated are currently enrolled in the course where mindfulness/contemplation is taught, it is recommended to share this weblink with them midway or later through the course, to allow them time to learn, practice and apply the mindfulness material.
5. Students who have previously participated in the course where mindfulness/contemplation was taught may complete the survey anytime between September 1, 2022 and January 31, 2023
6. It is not required that you allow time in class for this survey, although it should take students between 10 and 25 minutes to complete, depending upon the length of their open-ended responses.

The actions I commit to as part of this research partnership include the following:

1. I will maintain complete confidentiality of student written submission and responses to the essay questions. Some student quotes may be used in the final printing of the dissertation report or journal articles, but only pseudonyms will be used if differentiating between student quotes is necessary. Some demographic information will be reported (gender, age, race/ethnicity, etc.).
2. I will maintain confidentiality of your institution's participation in the public reporting of these research findings. While my dissertation committee and professors will be aware of your institution's involvement, I will use a generic descriptor, such as "A private university in the Western region of the United States" to describe this research site.
3. Participants of the web survey will be invited to participate in a longer, one-on-one interview with the researcher for further gathering of data. This will be done through an opt-in link at the end of the web survey. If students elect to participate in the interview, I will have access to their names, but will keep that information confidential, available only to the researcher, transcriptionist, and academic advisor.
4. I will provide timely and respectful communication in every effort to facilitate a smooth and non-disruptive procedure. Please feel free to contact me via email or phone with any questions or concerns.

In an effort to show my gratitude for how this will impact your teaching practice I would like to offer you a copy of the finalized research in the form of my dissertation, should that be of interest to you.

I look forward to hearing from you regarding whether or not you have the capacity to accept this invitation and participate as a site in my upcoming research.

Sincerely,

Nikki Bodenstab-Lee, LMSW
PhD Student
Northwest Nazarene University
nbodenstablee@nnu.edu
nabodenstab@nnu.edu
(208) 467-8075

APPENDIX E

In Person or Email Script for Students

Email: Hello, my name is Nikki Bodenstab-Lee and I am working on a research project. The research study has to do with mindfulness or contemplative practice and its relationship to navigating anti-oppression and social justice work. You have been identified as an undergraduate or graduate student who has participated in a course where mindfulness and/or contemplation have been taught as tools to navigate the process of recognizing and interrupting oppression and injustice. I would like to invite you to participate in my research.

I have a survey that takes between 10 and 25 minutes to complete and can be anonymous unless you would like to have your email address entered into a drawing for $25. There will be five winners from the pool of approximately 150 participants. Additionally, there is also an option to elect to participate in a one-on-one interview at a later date if that is of interest to you as well.

Here is a link to the web survey if you are interested in completing it. [survey url here]
Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Nikki Bodenstab-Lee
nbodenstablee@nnu.edu
(208) 467-8075

Northwest Nazarene University
623 University Blvd.
Nampa, ID 83686

In person: A PhD student is working on a research project related to mindfulness practice and navigating anti-oppression and social justice work. We have been invited to participate in her research since this is a course where mindfulness or contemplation are taught as tools to navigate the often difficult process of recognizing and interrupting oppression and injustice.

The opportunity to participate is completely voluntary and includes a survey that will take between 10 and 25 minutes to complete. Your responses can be anonymous unless you would like to have your email address entered into a drawing for $25. There will be five winners from the pool of approximately 150 participants. Additionally, there is also an option to elect to participate in a one-on-one interview at a later date if that is of interest to you as well.

I will share the link to the web survey through [email or online learning management system] if you are interested in completing it.

If you have questions, the researcher can be contacted via email or phone, which are both listed on the introduction page of the web survey. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

APPENDIX F

QUALTRICS INFORMED CONSENT FORM - Web Survey

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Nikki Bodenstab-Lee, a doctoral student in the Department of Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study with higher education students who are involved with social justice and anti-oppression courses. The topic of the study regards the relationship between mindfulness and the development of critical consciousness in students.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are currently or have been recently enrolled as a student in a course that relates to social justice/anti-oppression and were also taught about mindfulness or contemplative practices.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to agree to an Informed Consent Form, volunteering to participate in the study.
2. You will be asked to complete a Likert-type survey with 24 questions.
3. You will be asked to respond to three open-ended essay questions.
4. You will be asked to complete a set of demographic questions at the end of the survey.

These procedures will occur through a secure web survey tool and will take approximately 10 to 25 minutes.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. Some of the likert or essay questions may be uncomfortable to think about, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.
2. For this project, the researcher is requesting demographic information. However, if you are too uncomfortable to answer any of these questions, you may leave them blank.
3. Anonymity and Confidentiality: You have the option for these responses to be completely anonymous with no connection to your name or email. However, if you would like to be included in a raffle drawing for $25 you can elect to submit your email address along with your responses. If you choose to submit your email address, participation in this research may involve a partial loss of privacy, however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or

publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, surveys, and spreadsheets will be kept on a password protected computer. Backups of the data will be kept in a lockbox. In compliance with the Federal-wide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

4. Only the primary researcher, the research supervisor, and the transcriptionist will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, all parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

D. BENEFITS

As a thank you gift for your participation, after your completion of the survey, you will be provided the option to be entered into a raffle for one of five $25 Visa gift cards by submitting your email address. The raffle will be completed between January and April, 2023. The winners will be contacted through the provided email address to set up delivery of the prize.

E. PAYMENTS

There are no payments for participating in this study.

F. QUESTIONS

If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the researcher. Nikki Bodenstab-Lee can be contacted via email at nbodenstablee@nnu.edu or via telephone at 208-467-8075. If for some reason you do not wish to do this you may contact Dr. Michelle Van Beek, Professor at Northwest Nazarene University, via email at mvanbeek@nnu.edu, via telephone at 208-467-8802, or by writing 623 S. University Blvd, Nampa, Idaho 83686.

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this online survey, you should contact your own health care provider.

G. CONSENT

You may print this consent at any time for your own records.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at Northwest Nazarene University.

By clicking on the survey link below, you are providing consent to participate in this study:

APPENDIX G

Demographic Questions

1. "What gender do you identify as?"

   A. female
   B. male
   C. non-binary / 3rd gender
   D. prefer not to answer.

2. “Which ethnicity do you identify as?"

   A. African-American/Black
   B. American Indian/Alaska Native
   C. Asian
   D. Hispanic/Latinx
   E. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   F. White (non-Hispanic)
   G. Biracial (two or more races)
   H. Other/Unknown
   I. Prefer not to answer

3. "What is your age?"
   - Fill in the blank

4. “In what part of the country is the college or university that you currently attend?”
   - Northwest U.S.
   - Southwest U.S.
   - Midwest U.S.
   - Southern U.S.
   - Eastern U.S.
   - Western Canada
   - Eastern Canada
   - Unknown or Other
   - I am not currently attending a college or university

5. Which degree are you currently pursuing?
   A. Associate's degree
   B. Bachelor's degree
   C. Master's degree
   D. No degree / Other

6. What type of educational program are you enrolled in?

   A. Anti-oppression
   B. LGBTQ/Queer Studies
   C. Racial Studies
   D. Social Work
   E. Women's Studies
   F. Other
   G. None

7. Which response best describes the courses you have taken/are taking that incorporate mindfulness or contemplative practice? (Select all that apply)
   a. I am currently enrolled in a class that incorporates mindfulness/contemplation.
   b. I was enrolled in a class that incorporated mindfulness/contemplation practice sometime within the last calendar year.
   c. I was enrolled in a class that incorporated mindfulness/contemplation sometime longer than one year ago.
   d. I have never been enrolled in a class that incorporated mindfulness.

8. "Thank you for completing this survey. If you would like to be entered into the raffle drawing for one of five $25 awards (either through a mailed VISA gift card or a Venmo transfer), please enter your email address here. Your email address will not be shared with anyone and will only be used to communicate with you about the gift card winners. That drawing will be held in spring of 2023. You can expect to receive an email whether you won or not before March 1, 2023. If you choose not to enter the drawing you may leave this box blank."
   - Fill in the blank text box

"Please confirm your email address again"
   - Fill in the blank text box

9. "In addition, if you have found yourself feeling emotions (either positive or negative) when learning about injustice or acting to increase justice AND have applied mindfulness practice in

relation to those emotions, I would appreciate interviewing you more in-depth to get to know what that looks like.
If you would be interested in meeting with me virtually for about an hour I would greatly appreciate it. It is not required that you participate in this interview and by not indicating interest, you are not jeopardizing your opportunity to participate in the raffle. Your course instructor will not be aware of whether or not you participate in the interview, nor will they be aware of your responses.

I am looking for a broad range of participants and will only be selecting ten interviewees. Not everyone who volunteers will be selected. However, if you are selected and participate in an interview, I will provide you with a guaranteed $25 VISA gift card or $25 sent to your Venmo account for your time and energy. If you are interested in this opportunity, please enter your contact information below:"
"First name"

- Fill in the blank text box

"Preferred email address"

- Fill in the blank text box

"Please confirm your email again"

- Fill in the blank text box

APPENDIX H

Open-ended Survey Questions

The following questions relate to your emotional responses to learning about bias, injustice, and oppression as well as your emotional responses regarding acting to interrupt or reduce bias, injustice or oppression.

Mindfulness practice is being aware of the present moment, which can include being aware of your surroundings as well as your physical and emotional reactions. Any number of practices can be considered "mindfulness," but some common practices might include meditation, yoga, journaling, verbal reflection, body scans, mindful walking, mindful eating, etc.

Actions that reduce bias, injustice, or oppression: Some examples include interrupting someone who is telling a racist joke, attending a sit-in or rally for a social justice cause, calling potential voters on behalf of a candidate who supports social justice initiatives, or advocating for just policies in your school or work.

1. If you have attended courses that address bias, injustice, or oppression, what types of emotions have you felt during those learning experiences?
2. If you have participated in actions/behaviors aimed at reducing bias, injustice, or oppression, what types of emotions have you felt during those experiences?
3. Do you participate in any mindfulness practices? (Yes/No). If yes, please describe what type(s) of mindfulness practice you participate in and how frequently you engage in them.
4. Has mindfulness practice impacted your emotions when learning about or acting against bias, injustice or oppression during your courses? If so, please describe how.

APPENDIX I

Survey Follow-Up Questions

This is the final section of the survey. It includes two opportunities:

1. To enter your email address for a raffle

2. To indicate interest in participating in a virtual interview about the topic of mindfulness and social justice.

"Thank you for submitting this survey. As a thank you for your time and energy I would like to offer you the opportunity to participate in a raffle for a monetary prize. No matter how much of the survey you completed, you are still eligible to be entered into a raffle drawing for one of five $25 awards (either through a mailed VISA gift card or a Venmo transfer). If you'd like to be entered, please submit your email address below. Your email address will not be shared with anyone and will only be used to communicate with you about the gift card winners. That drawing will be held in February of 2023. You can expect to receive an email whether you won or not by February 20, 2023. If you choose not to enter the drawing you may leave this box blank."

"Please enter your email address for the $25 raffle here"

- Fill in the blank text box

"Please confirm your email address again for the $25 raffle"

- Fill in the blank text box

10. "In addition, if you have found yourself feeling emotions (either positive or negative) when learning about injustice or acting to increase justice AND have applied mindfulness practice in relation to those emotions, I would appreciate interviewing you more in-depth to get to know what that looks like.

If you would be interested in meeting with me virtually for about an hour I would greatly appreciate it. It is not required that you participate in this interview and by not indicating interest, you are not jeopardizing your opportunity to participate in the raffle. Your course instructor will

not be aware of whether or not you participate in the interview, nor will they be aware of your responses.

I am looking for a broad range of participants and will only be selecting ten interviewees. Not everyone who volunteers will be selected. However, if you are selected and participate in an interview, I will provide you with a guaranteed $25 VISA gift card or $25 sent to your Venmo account for your time and energy. If you are interested in this opportunity, please enter your contact information below:"

"Type your first name if you are interested in participating in an interview for $25"

- Fill in the blank text box

"Enter your email address if you are interested in participating in an interview for $25"

- Fill in the blank text box

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

Your response has been recorded.

APPENDIX J

Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale

Day-to-Day Experiences

Instructions: Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1-6 scale below, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Almost Always	Very Frequently	Somewhat Frequently	Somewhat Infrequently	Very Infrequently	Almost Never

I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.	1	2	3	4	5	6

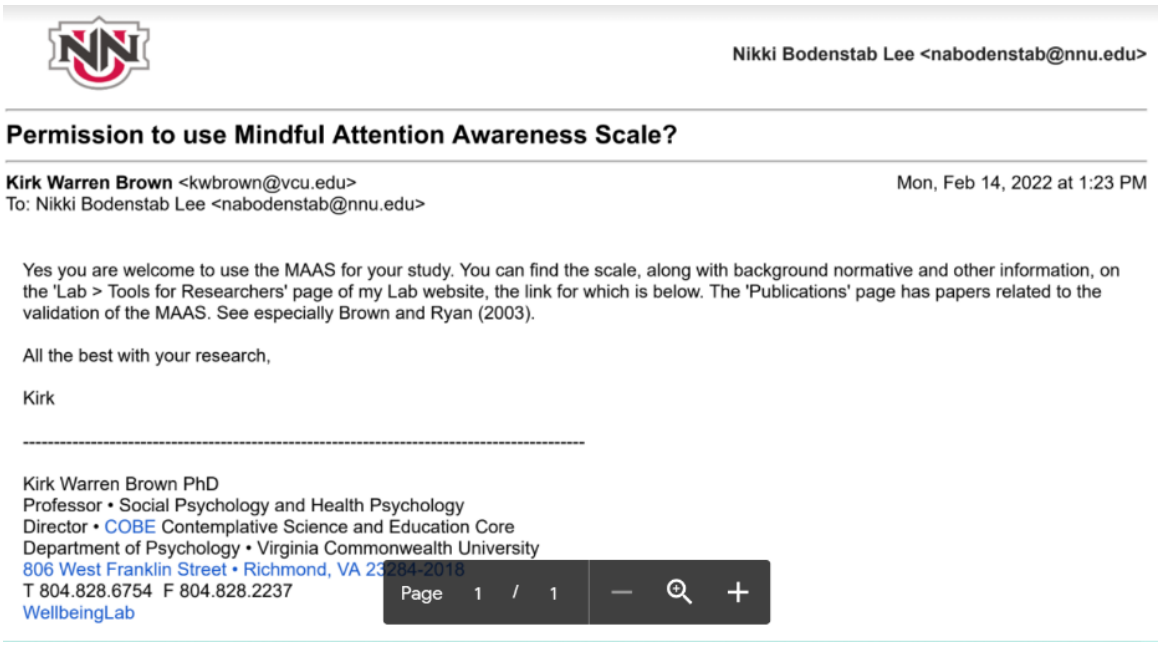
I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find myself doing things without paying attention.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I snack without being aware that I'm eating.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Revised date (4 October 2006)

Note. Source: Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 826. Used with permission. See Appendix K.

APPENDIX K

Permission to Use the MAAS



Nikki Bodenstab Lee <nabodenstab@nnu.edu>

Permission to use Mindful Attention Awareness Scale?

Kirk Warren Brown <kwbrown@vcu.edu> Mon, Feb 14, 2022 at 1:23 PM
To: Nikki Bodenstab Lee <nabodenstab@nnu.edu>

Yes you are welcome to use the MAAS for your study. You can find the scale, along with background normative and other information, on the 'Lab > Tools for Researchers' page of my Lab website, the link for which is below. The 'Publications' page has papers related to the validation of the MAAS. See especially Brown and Ryan (2003).

All the best with your research,

Kirk

Kirk Warren Brown PhD
Professor • Social Psychology and Health Psychology
Director • COBE Contemplative Science and Education Core
Department of Psychology • Virginia Commonwealth University
806 West Franklin Street • Richmond, VA 23284-2018
T 804.828.6754 F 804.828.2237
WellbeingLab

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APPENDIX L

Critical Consciousness Inventory

Assessing critical consciousness in youth and young adults

The Critical Consciousness Inventory

For each question, select which of the four options fits you best.

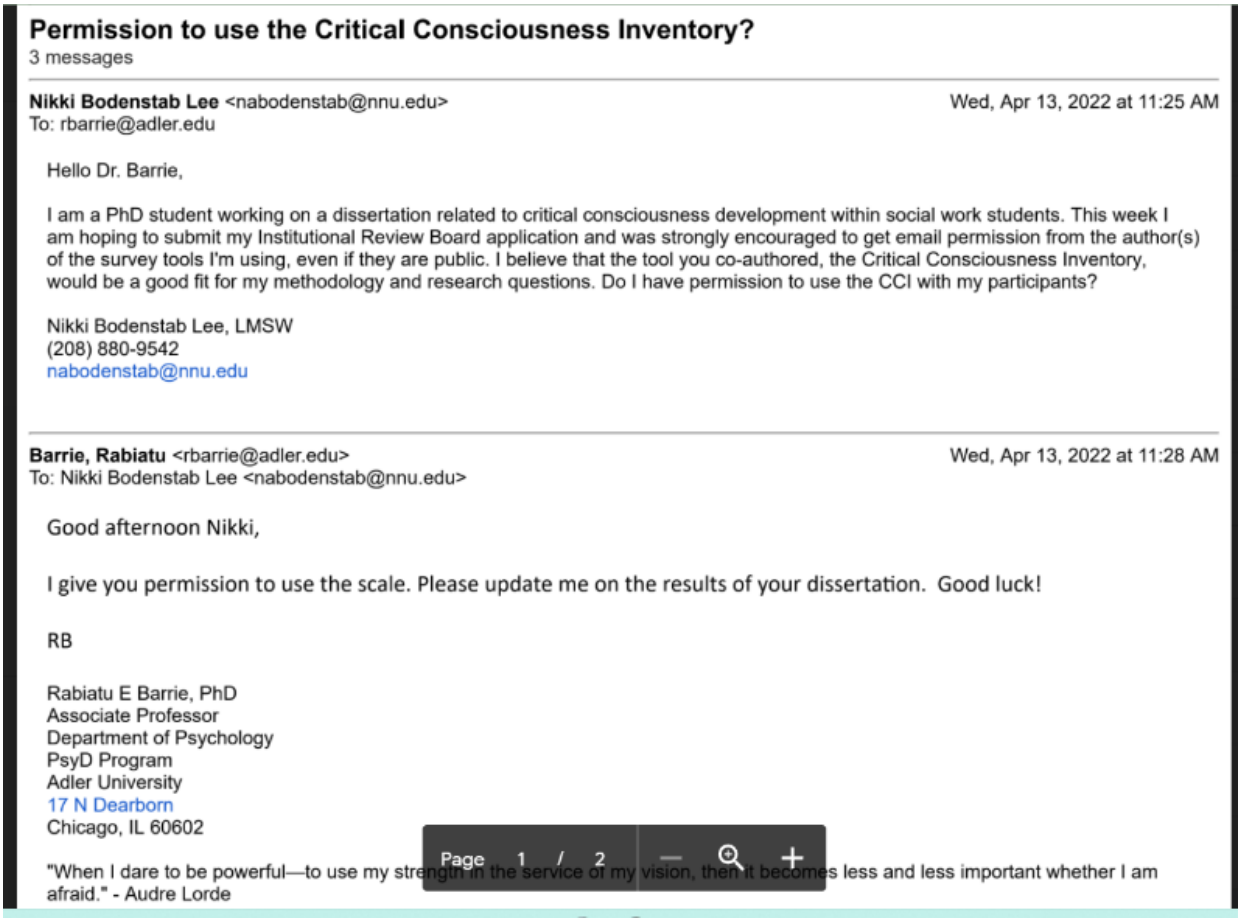
1a I believe that the world is basically fair. 1b I believe that the world is basically fair but others believe that it is unfair. 1c I believe that the world is unfair for some people. 1d I believe that the world is unfair, and I make sure to treat others fairly.
2a I believe that all people are treated equally. 2b I believe that some people don't take advantage of opportunities given to them and blame others instead. 2c I believe that some groups are discriminated against. 2d I work to make sure that people are treated equally and are given equal chances.
3a I think that education gives everyone an equal chance to do well. 3b I think that education gives everyone who works hard an equal chance. 3c I think that the educational system is unequal. 3d I think that the educational system needs to be changed in order for everyone to have an equal chance.
4a I believe people get what they deserve. 4b I believe that some people are treated badly but there are ways that they can work to be treated fairly. 4c I believe that some people are treated badly because of oppression. 4d I feel angry that some people are treated badly because of oppression and I often do something to change it.
5a I think all social groups are respected. 5b I think the social groups that are not respected have done things that lead people to think badly of them. 5c I think people do not respect members of some social groups based on stereotypes. 5d I am respectful of people in all social groups, and I speak up when others are not.
6a I don't notice when people make prejudiced comments. 6b I notice when people make prejudiced comments and it hurts me. 6c It hurts me when people make prejudiced comments but I am able to move on. 6d When someone makes a prejudiced comment, I tell them that what they said is hurtful.

7a When people tell a joke that makes fun of a social group, I laugh and don't really think about it. 7b When people tell a joke that makes fun of a social group, I laugh but also feel uncomfortable. 7c When people tell a joke that makes fun of a social group, I realize that the joke is based on a stereotype. 7d I tell people when I feel that their joke was offensive.
8a I don't see much oppression in this country. 8b I feel hopeless and overwhelmed when I think about oppression in this country. 8c I feel like oppression in this country is less than in the past and will continue to change. 8d I actively work to support organizations which help people who are oppressed.
9a I don't feel bad when people say they have been oppressed. 9b I feel sad or angry when experiencing or seeing oppression. 9c I often become sad or angry when experiencing or seeing oppression, but I find ways to cope with my feelings. 9d I work to protect myself from negative feelings when acts of oppression happen.

Note. Source: Thomas et al., 2014, pp. 494-495. Used with permission. See Appendix M.

APPENDIX M

Permission to Use the CCI



Permission to use the Critical Consciousness Inventory?
3 messages

Nikki Bodenstab Lee <nabodenstab@nnu.edu> Wed, Apr 13, 2022 at 11:25 AM
To: rbarrie@adler.edu

Hello Dr. Barrie,

I am a PhD student working on a dissertation related to critical consciousness development within social work students. This week I am hoping to submit my Institutional Review Board application and was strongly encouraged to get email permission from the author(s) of the survey tools I'm using, even if they are public. I believe that the tool you co-authored, the Critical Consciousness Inventory, would be a good fit for my methodology and research questions. Do I have permission to use the CCI with my participants?

Nikki Bodenstab Lee, LMSW
(208) 880-9542
nabodenstab@nnu.edu

Barrie, Rabiatu <rbarrie@adler.edu> Wed, Apr 13, 2022 at 11:28 AM
To: Nikki Bodenstab Lee <nabodenstab@nnu.edu>

Good afternoon Nikki,

I give you permission to use the scale. Please update me on the results of your dissertation. Good luck!

RB

Rabiatu E Barrie, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
PsyD Program
Adler University
17 N Dearborn
Chicago, IL 60602

"When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." - Audre Lorde

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APPENDIX N

Invitation Email to Interview Participants

Date:

Dear (First Name),

I am Nikki Bodenstab-Lee, a doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University, studying mindfulness and anti-oppressive/social justice work. Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study! I appreciate you completing the web survey and look forward to getting to know more about how your mindfulness/contemplative practice affects your emotional reactions to the social justice and anti-oppressive work you are learning about.

The next step is scheduling an interview. I have planned a semi-structured, audio-video recorded interview utilizing Google Meet. The interview will take between 45 minutes and one hour to complete. I would like to conduct this interview with you as soon as it is convenient for you.

Please respond to this email with your preferences for an interview. Would you prefer a weekday, evening or weekend? Is there a day and time you would prefer? The process is completely voluntary, and you may select to suspend your involvement at any time. You may select to answer only the questions you are comfortable answering. You are not obligated to answer all of the questions. I am also happy to address any clarifying questions.

At the conclusion of the interview I will gather your mailing address and send you a $25 VISA gift card as a thank you for the hour you spend with me. Or if you prefer, I can transfer $25 into your Venmo account.

The Institutional Review Board has approved my research at NNU. If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, are welcome to speak with me first via email at nbodenstablee@nnu.edu or phone at 208-467-8075. My faculty supervisor, Dr. Michelle Van Beek, Professor at Northwest Nazarene University, via email at mvanbeek@nnu.edu, via telephone at 208-467-8802 or by writing to 623 S. University Drive, Nampa, Idaho 83686.

Thank you again for your participation!
Nikki Bodenstab-Lee, LMSW
Doctoral Student Northwest Nazarene University
623 S. University Blvd.
Nampa, ID 83686
nbodenstablee@nnu.edu
208-467-8075

APPENDIX O

INFORMED CONSENT FORM - Semi-Structured Interview

Recorded Verbal Consent

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Nikki Bodenstab-Lee, a doctoral student in the Department of Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study with higher education students who are involved with social justice and anti-oppression courses. The topic of the study regards the relationship between mindfulness and the development of critical consciousness in their students.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are currently or have been recently enrolled as a student in a course that relates to social justice/anti-oppression and have been taught mindfulness or contemplative practice skills. You have indicated that you have experienced discomfort (grief, guilt, sadness, frustration, anger, fear, etc.) when learning about this content and that a mindfulness or contemplative practice has helped you navigate the discomfort.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this interview, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to verbally agree to an Informed Consent Form, volunteering to participate in the interview.

2. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions related to your emotional responses and mindfulness practices.

3. The interview will be video and audio recorded through the virtual Google Meet platform.

4. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. Some of the interview questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. Anonymity and Confidentiality: Your responses to these questions will be kept confidential. You will be able to select a pseudonym to be used in the research publication should specific quotes or responses from your interview be used. No actual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, surveys, and spreadsheets will be kept on a password protected computer. Backups of the data will be kept in a lockbox. In compliance with the Federal-

wide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

3. Only the primary researcher, the research supervisor, and a transcriptionist will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, all parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

D. BENEFITS

As a thank you gift for your participation, after your completion of the interview you will be provided a $25 Visa gift card that will be mailed to the address of your desire. This gift card will be placed in the mail within one week of the interview. Or, if you prefer, $25 will be transferred into your Venmo account.

E. PAYMENTS

There are no payments for participating in this study.

F. QUESTIONS

If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the researcher. Nikki Bodenstab-Lee can be contacted via email at nbodenstablee@nnu.edu or via telephone at 208-467-8075. If for some reason you do not wish to do this you may contact Dr. Michelle Van Beek, Professor at Northwest Nazarene University, via email at mvanbeek@nnu.edu, via telephone at 208-467-8802 or by writing 623 S. University Blvd, Nampa, Idaho 83686.

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this interview, you should discontinue the interview and contact your own health care provider.

G. CONSENT

You will be emailed this consent for and may print it at any time for your own records.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at Northwest Nazarene University.

By verbally responding on the interview recording by saying, "I consent" you are providing consent to participate in this study:

This interview will be recorded via the Google Meet virtual platform and downloaded onto the researcher's password protected computer. Do you consent to being recorded?

By verbally responding on the recording by saying, "I consent to being recorded" you are providing consent for the interview to be recorded.

APPENDIX P

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Intro	Review payment information: Review Informed Consent. Review the purpose statement. Review definitions of mindfulness, discomfort, bias, injustice, and oppression.
Q1	Which pseudonym would you like me to use in the research?
Q2	Describe the types of mindfulness/contemplative practice you have been exposed to in this program.
Q3	How have these practices resonated with you? Do you enjoy them, do they annoy you, do they fit into your worldview and schedule?
Q4	In your classes, have you been exposed to information specifically about bias, injustice, or oppression? What is one brief example that you can recall?
Q5	Have you ever experienced any discomfort (grief, guilt, sadness, frustration, anger, fear, etc) or defensiveness due to information you've been exposed to in your courses? Describe what that has been like.
Q6	On your web survey, you indicated that you participate in the following mindfulness practices. [Review web survey response.] Is that accurate?
Q7	Do you apply mindfulness/contemplative practices in relation to what you're learning in your classes? Can you describe that?
Q8	(Show stages of CC development chart. Describe that you will be asking about their own experiences in each stage. Explain each stage.) When you look at this chart regarding the stages of critical consciousness development, do you recall any times in your life where you recall experiencing this stage?

Q9	Does it resonate with what you've been learning in your course work? Can you tell me about that?
Q10	Do you identify with the "information causing disequilibrium" part? If so, can you describe any examples where information caused disequilibrium for you?
Q11	Do you see a relationship between mindfulness practices and your progression through these stages of critical consciousness development? If so, please describe how.
Q12	Have you found ways to act against oppression? Can you describe those?
Q13	What emotions do you experience when you've thought about, attempted, or participated in acting against oppression? Can you describe that?
Q14	Has mindfulness played a role in the actions of the emotions related to acting against oppression? Can you describe that?
	Do you have any additional comments or stories to share?
	Member check: Review themes of participant's responses. Ask for clarity.
Conclusion	Thank you for your participation in this study. After I have an opportunity to analyze the data, I will e-mail you with the results and ask for feedback. The email is to ensure that I captured the essence of our discussion, accurately portraying our discussion and your thoughts. The data-gathering portion of the study will conclude on February 15, 2022 and I can make adjustments up until that point. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, you may contact me via email at nbodenstablee@nnu.edu or telephone at 208-467-8075. You may also contact Dr. Michelle Van Beek, Professor at Northwest Nazarene University, via email at mvanbeek@nnu.edu or via telephone at 208-467-8802. Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this research.

APPENDIX Q

Definitions and Stages of Critical Consciousness Visual

For Semi-Structured Interview

Purpose of the Interview: To learn how higher education students perceive their training in mindfulness practice to impact their discomfort in learning about bias, injustice, and oppression?

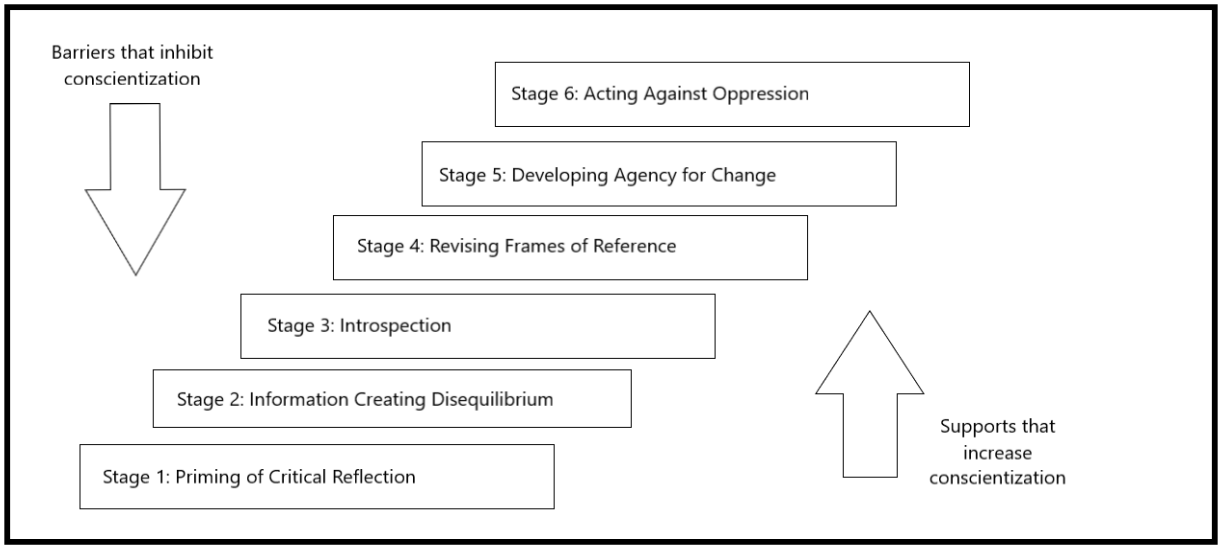
Mindfulness (including embodied mindfulness, critically-reflective mindfulness),

Mindfulness practice is being aware of the present moment, which can include being aware of your surroundings as well as your physical and emotional reactions. Embodied mindfulness practice or embodied mindful reflection relates to one's awareness of their own physical reaction (embodied - in your body). This may include recognizing tension in their shoulders or heaviness in their stomach. Critically-reflective mindfulness relates to thinking (or writing or talking to others) about why those reactions occur. Any number of practices can be considered "mindfulness", but some common practices might include meditation, yoga, journaling, mindful walking, mindful eating, etc.

Anti-oppression and social justice work

Learning about injustice and inequalities and working to equalize and mitigate those inequalities. These practices hold the belief that everyone deserves equal rights and opportunities.

Stages of critical consciousness development.



1. The first stage is the *priming of critical reflection,* which relates to factors that led participants to a place of readiness for reflection. This stage includes participants' personal history of experiencing or observing oppression, their unmet psychological needs, or their early or current belief systems that recognize social injustice.
2. The second stage, called *information creating disequilibrium,* reflects an exposure to new perspectives that conflict with the participant's current perspective. This exposure creates dissonance and often discomfort.
3. The third stage is *introspection,* which indicates the participant's ability to self-reflect on their systems of value and motivations for their original belief/worldview. Often this self-reflection includes an analysis of how their behavior conflicts or fits within their belief system. This stage is often perpetuated by an experience as much as through discussion.
4. The fourth stage, *revising frames of reference,* describes a change in perspective from viewing social systems as fair and just to recognizing power differentials and the framing of social constructs that protect the privileged and powerful groups.
5. The fifth stage, *developing agency for change,* often includes/requires group discussion to help the participant find and refine ways to act from this new framework or perspective.
6. The sixth and final stage, *acting against oppression,* includes actions such as individuals disrupting a discussion that utilized oppressive language and stereotypes or interrupting a group setting where there were oppressive group behaviors. This could include being an "upstander," or someone who stands up against injustice, as opposed to a "bystander," who sees the oppression but remains passive.

APPENDIX R

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Moving Through Discomfort: How Mindfulness Pedagogy Affects Critical Consciousness Development in Social Work Curriculum
[Insert IRB log number when assigned]

I, [name of transcriber], agree to transcribe data for this study. I agree that I will:

1. Keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than [name of researcher/s], the researcher/s on this study;

2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession. This includes:

- using closed headphones when transcribing audio-taped interviews;
- keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews in computer password-protected files;
- closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
- keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet; and
- permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data;

3. Give all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the primary investigator when I have completed the research tasks;

4. Erase or destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable to the primary investigator (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

_____ _____
Signature of transcriber Date

_____ _____
Signature of principal investigator Date

Appendix S

Dr. Wong Email Communication

Mar 13, 2023, 9:42 AM

Yuk-Lin Renita Wong
to me

Hi Nikki,

Congratulations for the progress with your dissertation!

I appreciate your asking my permission to include a segment of our conversation. This gives me an opportunity to correct the misunderstanding and provide the missing contextual qualifiers of what I said. Please find my edits to the statements below. You may include the statements **with my edits**.

If interested, you can see that the 5 Mindfulness Trainings developed by Thich Nhat Hanh which is firmly grounded in the relational ethics of interbeing in Buddhist onto-epistemology is very different from the western popularized version of mindfulness. And if you read Bhikkhu Bodhi's article, "What Does Mindfulness Really Mean? A Canonical Perspective." *Contemporary Buddhism* 12(1) (2011): 19–39, you will also find how the western popularized version of mindfulness is divorced from its Buddhist onto-epistemological foundation. That's why I have been writing about the misappropriation of mindfulness in the west and calling for a decolonization of mindfulness.

Renita

Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, PhD
Professor, School of Social Work
Ross South Building Room 829
York University
4700 Keele Street, Toronto
Ontario M3J 1P3
Canada

York University acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Huron-Wendat, and the Métis. It is now home to many Indigenous Peoples. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish WithOne Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.

On 2023-03-11 6:28 p.m., Nikki Bodenstab Lee wrote:
Hello Dr. Wong,

You and I chatted virtually a little over a year ago regarding my doctoral research on mindfulness and critical consciousness development in social work education. Thank you very much for your insight. I am working on writing up my conclusions and would like to include something that you mentioned in our conversation, but I felt I should ask your permission first. Do you feel comfortable with me including the following statements in my conclusion section?

Early on in the literature-gathering phase of this dissertation process, the researcher communicated with an expert in critical social work education and mindfulness, Dr. Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, via a Google Meeting conversation. The researcher asked if mindfulness alone was enough to bring about critical consciousness. Dr. Wong replied that no, it was not, when mindfulness is divorced from its foundation of relational ethics in Buddhist onto-epistemology and interpreted simply as paying attention non-judgementally in the present moment as popularized in the west. She gave an example that a sniper can be very "mindful" (as in the popularized version of mindfulness) to get the most accurate shot. (Y.-L.Wong, personal communication, February 22, 2022).

Thank you,

Nikki

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