



QUESTIONING SECULARIZATION

An Anthropological Study of How Danish
Teachers in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
Navigate between Religion and Science

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Resumé

Et Spørgsmål om Sekularisering: Et Antropologisk Studie af hvordan Danske lærere i Mindfulness-Baseret Stress Reduktion Navigerer imellem Religion og Videnskab

Mindfulness-Baseret Stress Reduktion (MBSR) præsenteres som et 'sekulariseret', 'evidensbaseret' program i meditation og yoga med en buddhistisk oprindelse. Samtidig argumenterer programmets grundlægger Kabat-Zinn, at MBSR er en rekontekstualisering og en fortsat udbredelse af den *universelle dharma*, som MBSR lærere også forventes at have udbredt kendskab til. Denne tilknytning *mystificeres* (Wilson) i midlertidige i offentligheden og i MBSR kurserne. Dette skaber et grundlæggende spændingsforhold imellem religion og videnskab inden for MBSR, som fortsat diskuteres og er i konstant forhandling inden for feltet.

I forlængelse heraf undersøger dette speciale, hvordan MBSR lærere og lærerstuderende navigerer imellem feltets videnskabelige/sekulære og religiøse/spirituelle orienteringer i deres stræben efter at være eller blive kvalificerede MBSR lærere. Undersøgelsens empiriske grundlag er et etnografisk feltarbejde blandt danske lærere og lærerstuderende i MBSR uddannelsen ved Dansk Center for Mindfulness. Specialet placerer sig i mellem en diskurs- og praksisanalytisk tilgang, som belyser, hvordan MBSR lærere strategisk tager del i *sandhedsspil* (Foucault), hvorigennem de tilpasser deres *retfærdiggørelser* (Boltanski & Thévenot) af relationen mellem videnskab og religion i MBSR til en given kontekst. Dette vil vise, hvordan mødet mellem religion og videnskab i MBSR skaber en *friktion* (Tsing), som resulterer i kompromiser, generaliseringer og relativiseringer på den ene side og antagelser, misforståelser og forudindtagetheder på den anden side. Herigennem skabes illusionen om de singulære universelle sandheder, som præsenteres i MBSR kurserne.

Specialet viser, at MBSR lærere nogle gange reproducerer hårde grænser i mellem religion og videnskab for at påvise, at MBSR er sekulært og videnskabeligt. Andre gange blødes grænserne op for at retfærdiggøre brugen af buddhistiske praksisser og værdigrundlag inden for en sekulær ramme, især når tilknytningen til dharmen og mystificeringen af denne søges at retfærdiggøres. Ofte argumenterer MBSR lærere her, at skellet mellem det spirituelle og sekulære transcenderes i MBSR, idet dharmen er

baseret på universelle sandheder så som lidelse, impermanens, interdependens og empati, som både kan verificeres af videnskaben og af erfaringen.

Samtidig refereres der indirekte til sekulære vestlige værdier så som individualisme, lighed og frihed, som ligeledes præsenteres som ikke-kulturelle universelle sandheder. Dette viser, hvordan MBSR lærerne i deres navigation mellem det spirituelle og sekulære også er styret af både moralske og økonomiske incitament, som peger mod en utopisk drøm om at kunne flytte individ for individ mod et mere mindfult samfund, nogen gange i samarbejde med kapitalistiske og instrumentalistiske systemer og andre gange i modarbejdelse heraf. I specialet bliver det problematiseret, at drømmen om absolut inklusion af disse veje ikke kan realiseres, da de universelle sandheder, som de er baseret på, uundgåeligt ekskluderer.

Spændingsforholdet mellem religion og videnskab i MBSR relativiseres ofte ved, at MBSR lærere argumenterer, at dette er spørgsmål som den praktiserende selv må undersøge via sin egen implicite, kropslige, erfaringsbaserede viden, som man kommer i kontakt med via sin mindfulness praksis. Dog guider MBSR programmets bagvedliggende *theory of mind* (Luhrman), hvilke sandhedseffekter MBSR lærere og praktiserende vil nå frem til via deres mindfulness praksis. Således lærer MBSR lærerne at facilitere MBSR kurserne ved at skifte imellem teoretiske tilgange til viden baseret på både spirituelle og sekulære rammesætninger på den ene side, og erfaringsbaseret tilgange til viden på den anden side, som både kan være baseret på personlige eller arbejdsrelateret viden fra fortiden eller fra mindfulness praksis i nuet. Herigennem forsøger MBSR-læreren at forene forskellige videnssystemer igennem et fokus på ligheder for at skabe mening i spændingsforholdet. Disse sammenfletninger er skrøbelige, da de altid er baseret på kompromis. Derfor svinger MBSR læreren mellem tro og tvivl i hendes læringsproces.

Den diskursive vending mod erfaringsbaseret viden problematiseres i specialet, da det resulterer i *produktive misforståelser* (Tsing). På den ene side fordi det betyder, at den enkelte bringer forskellige forståelser af, hvad denne implicite viden præcis handler om, og på den anden side fordi dette åbner op for flere fortolkninger og dermed for flere videnssystemer, hvilket gør det nemmere at udbrede MBSR til nye sekulære sammenhænge.

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Cover Illustration: Contemplation Day with the founder of MBSR, Jon Kabat-Zinn at the Bella Center, Copenhagen. By Danish Center for Mindfulness, 24.04.2016.

Formalities

With the exception of head of the Danish Center for Mindfulness Lone Fjorback, all informants have been made anonymous and are identified with a single letter. Men have a consonant (e.g., 'K') and the women a vowel (e.g., 'E').

Fieldnotes and citations have been translated from Danish to English by the author. Grammar has been corrected in the translation and fieldnotes edited for clarity while remaining faithful to the original meaning and substance.

Throughout the thesis, *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* will be referred to by the acronym MBSR, the *MBSR Teacher Training Programme* as TTP, *Danish Center for Mindfulness* as DCM, and *University of Massachusetts Medical School* as UMASS.

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Introduction

MBSR is presented in a neutral, disengaged language. And I think that is good and necessary. But then I have noticed that as soon as we [the MBSR teachers] are gathered without the course participants, we are talking about Buddhism and yoga excessively. That is in a bit of a... collision. In a way, it gets a bit covert when you then go and teach that this is a pure, neutral, and scientific described and documented programme. To me, this is a work problem.

(Comment by the MBSR student teacher V at a yoga seminar, recorded 11.03.16)

Public interest in Buddhist-derived ‘secular’ mindfulness and meditation practice has increased significantly in recent years, both in Denmark specifically and in the West more broadly (Gottfredsen 2014; Nielsen 2014; Wilson 2013). MBSR was the first of many mindfulness-based therapies and treatments of both physical and psychological illnesses. The MBSR programme therefore became the starting point for scientific research on the extent of the health and socioeconomic benefits of mindfulness, which has started a whole new branch of scientific/medical mindfulness outside of a Buddhist framework (Wilson 2013: 76–7). This has taken mindfulness outside of its original spiritual and religious context and into a secular one which has led to a mainstreaming of the concept. As a result, the MBSR programme has in the last few decades been disseminated and institutionalized within many new settings such as healthcare (Doran 2014; Fjorback 2012; McCollum 2015; Myers et al. 2015; Sears 2015), business (Holm-Iversen & Larsen 2007; Huppert 2010), education (Bush 2011; Mapel 2012; Mendelson et al 2013; Weare 2013), and other social services (Samuel 2015; Vishvapani 2012).

However, this does not mean that MBSR has let go of its Buddhist and spiritual origins. On the contrary, the founder of the MBSR programme, Jon Kabat-Zinn, states firmly that the MBSR programme is based on a *universal dharma* which conforms to medical ethics (Kabat-Zinn 2011a: 294). This also means that the MBSR teachers are expected to have in-depth knowledge about not only mindfulness practice and the scientific research behind it but also the dharma (Kabat-Zinn et al. 2017). This

foundation in the dharma is, however, *mystified* (Wilson 2013) within the MBSR courses, which means that this ethical, existential, and spiritual foundation is not made explicit in order to adapt it to its new scientific and secular contexts.

As MBSR has spread to various secular contexts, the personal and professional background of MBSR teachers has, as a result, become increasingly diverse. Therefore, it is not surprising that whereas the first-generation MBSR teachers in the seventies, eighties, and into the nineties had direct contact with the Buddhist contexts which MBSR originates from, many of the third-generation MBSR teachers of the new millennium's first acquaintance with mindfulness practice were found in these secular settings (Crane et al. 2012). Moreover, since MBSR teachers are encouraged to draw on previous professional training and personal backgrounds in their teachings (Kabat-Zinn 1996; McCown et al. 2010: 98), this also means that the MBSR programme seeks to encompass an expanding number of knowledge systems within its foundation. A tension has therefore emerged among the MBSR teachers between wanting to embrace more fields of knowledge in order to show the world the universality of the usefulness of mindfulness practices on the one hand, and a wish to safeguard the essence of the programme in order to stay true to the dharma as well as to differentiate it from other non-evidence-based programmes on the other.

These tensions between the religious/spiritual and the scientific/secular affiliations of the MBSR programme made me question how aspiring MBSR teachers on the level of the individual with each of their diverse personal and professional backgrounds make sense of these orientations in the transition phase of becoming MBSR teachers. This morphed into the following problem statement which this thesis seeks to answer:

With a focus on how dichotomies between religious/spiritual and scientific/secular orientations are renegotiated within MBSR, how do the MBSR teachers in discourse and practice navigate in these different fields of knowledge in order to learn how to become qualified MBSR teachers?

Within anthropology, as well as within the humanities and social sciences more broadly, this thesis therefore primarily wishes to contribute to the continuous debates about the

relationship between religion and science (Asad 1983; Cassanova 2011; Evans-Pritchard 1976 [1937]; Geertz 1973; Lambek 2008; Tambiah 1990; Winch 1964) as well as between spirituality and secularity in modernity (Asad 2003; Bubandt & van Beek 2014; Csordas 2007; Heelas & Woodhead 2005; Hirschkind 2011; Sayer 1991; Sloterdijk 2013; Taylor 2007).

Many studies of mindfulness distinguish religious/spiritual/Buddhist mindfulness from secular mindfulness as two distinct discourses and practices (Gottfredsen 2014; Marx 2014; Plank 2011; Singla 2011; Sharf 2015; Sun 2014; Van Dam & Grossman 2011). In these studies, MBSR is always placed as the primary example of what secular mindfulness entails, but as should already be evident, this is a somewhat misleading and simplified distinction, since MBSR teachers continue to find inspiration in different Buddhist, spiritual, and religious traditions *as well as* in different professional and scientific disciplines.

These studies therefore reproduce the cross-cultural etic categories of religion and science, which have been widely accepted as meaningful domains in virtually all societies and therefore also as analytical categories for comparison within anthropology (Tambiah 1990). Rather than approaching the categories of religion and science, spirituality, and secularity as theoretical concepts in need of scientific clarification, this thesis wishes to take its point of departure in how these concepts are understood emically by the MBSR teachers in relation to MBSR. This will be done by focusing on how the MBSR teachers in discourse and practice both implicitly and explicitly relate to these concepts. This will show how MBSR teachers draw on both religious and secular frameworks which lead to shifting conceptions of religious/secular binaries among MBSR teachers.

The thesis therefore opposes the structuralist assumption of fixed conceptual opposites, such as the opposition between religion and science, in the same way as it opposes the primacy that tends to be put on language in such analyses. Instead, this thesis will, with inspiration from the late Foucault (Gauthier 1988) and Asad (1983), look into how knowledge is produced and evolves over time. However, unlike Foucault and Asad, my point of departure will be in how this takes place on the level of the individual as knowledge is applied in practice. With help from Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) approach to *justification* as well as Tsing's (2005) concept of *friction*, this will

lead me to show the plurality of the ways these orientations are interpreted. Furthermore, this framework will help me to show how compromises, generalization, and relativization on the one hand and assumptions, misunderstandings, and biases on the other lead to the seeming singularity of the universal truths that are presented in the MBSR courses.

The empirical foundation of this study is my fieldwork, which was mainly conducted in the spring of 2016 in collaboration with DCM, who provide teacher training of the MBSR programme at Aarhus University. I have followed modules of the TTP alongside MBSR student teachers as well as followed three different eight-week, nine-session MBSR courses with MBSR teachers who are in the final phase of the TTP. Prior to my major fieldwork, I also participated in an MBSR course with an experienced MBSR teacher at the DCM. I have conducted several formal interviews with teachers, student teachers, and participants that I have met during my fieldwork, but I have limited my empirical focus in this thesis to be on the new or upcoming teachers and student teachers. In my fieldwork on the TTP, I have taken on the role of a student teacher myself and therefore also studied the curriculum and engaged in a daily mindfulness practice, as is expected of both teachers and participants of the MBSR courses.

I found the aspiring MBSR teachers to be the most relevant group for investigating my problem statement, since I found that the tension between the spiritual and the secular were most prominent here due to their in-between state of being insiders and outsiders of MBSR. This position provided them with a reflexivity about their own navigation within MBSR similar to the anthropologist's who is embarking in a study of unknown territory. Moreover, this gave an opportunity to look into which new fields of knowledge are entering MBSR and thereby a glimpse into the newest development in this area. During my fieldwork, I therefore met MBSR teachers with diverse professional backgrounds and occupations such as psychologists, psychotherapists, doctors, nurses, biologists, social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, educationalists, information specialists, priests, yoga teachers, chefs, professors, anthropologists, salesmen, and coaches.

Very few ethnographic studies have been done about mindfulness (Kirmayer 2015; Myers et al. 2015). Until now, scientific research of mindfulness has mainly been focused

on providing evidence of the positive effects of mindfulness in the natural sciences. In the humanities, the main interest has been to trace back the Buddhist roots from which ‘secular’ mindfulness is derived (Lopez 2008; Singla 2011; Sun 2014; Van Dam & Grossman 2011; Williams & Kabat-Zinn 2011). None of these approaches investigate what is happening in practice within the MBSR courses and teachings or how this practice can be related to the discourse in which MBSR is embedded. This is a gap that this thesis seeks to answer.

Clarification of Concepts

MBSR is only one school among many that affiliates itself with the term *mindfulness*. Mindfulness as a concept is therefore used with a wide range of meanings in a wide range of contexts (Wilson 2013).

In *Full Catastrophe Living*, which is sometimes referred to as the ‘bible’ of MBSR, mindfulness is defined by the founder of MBSR as “The awareness that arises by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn 2013: xxxv). Within the TTP, however, teachers are encouraged to continuously work on and develop their own definitions of mindfulness. As also noted by Wilson (2013: 15, 89) there is still ambiguity about the usage of the term, since it is both used as an umbrella term that both covers the act of awareness itself as well as the elements from the *Eightfold Noble Path*¹ and the *dharma* from Buddhism. It is perhaps due to this ambiguity that the concept of mindfulness has been so widely appropriated in different contexts.

This is a point of great frustration for many MBSR teachers who wish to fixate the term, as they believe many people ‘outside MBSR’ use the term incorrectly which gives MBSR a bad reputation. When I use the term in this thesis, I do not wish to fixate it to my own definition, similar to the way I approach the concepts of *religion* and *science*. When I refer to ‘mindfulness practice’, this therefore may refer to a wide range of meditation and yoga practices, both from within and outside the framework of MBSR, depending on the context.

¹ A summary of the path of Buddhist practices that leads to liberation from suffering. Right Mindfulness is the seventh step on the eight-step path.

The purpose of this thesis is not to define the concepts of *religion* and *science*, *spirituality* and *secularization*, nor to evaluate whether MBSR is religious/spiritual or scientific/secular. Rather, the purpose is to investigate how people, especially the teachers, emically make sense of these concepts as they navigate within the MBSR programme and which assumptions lie behind these conceptions.

Outline of Chapters

In the first chapter, I will explain what MBSR is, present the context of my fieldwork, methods used, and expand on my analytical framework. Chapter 2 investigates how secularization, focusing on the relationship between the concepts of religion and science, is justified, renegotiated, and constantly discussed among the MBSR teachers. Chapter 3 will present a Goffman-inspired analytical distinction between the *frontstage* and *backstage* of MBSR, which will shed light on how tactics of representation related to religious/secular binaries are learned and performed in the public and private settings of MBSR. In Chapter 4, this will lead me to discuss MBSR as a global political enterprise in which MBSR teachers are guided by both moral and economic sentiments that cross the religious/secular divide. Chapter 5 will turn to an analytical distinction between *theoretical reasoning* and *practical wisdom* derived from Aristotle. This will provide a framework for understanding how MBSR teachers oscillate between theory and experience as they navigate in the knowledge systems of MBSR through shifting sentiments of belief and doubt. The conclusion will wrap up how meaning is constructed and subverted by turns in the fragile interlacements made of the religion/secular binaries by the MBSR-teachers.

CHAPTER 1

Field, Method, and Analytical Framework

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: The Course

It is the first day of the MBSR teacher E's MBSR course, which I am to participate in once a week for the next couple of months. I walk into the training hall in the physiotherapy clinic where the classes will take place. Ten chairs are standing in a circle around a bunch of yellow flowers, four candles, and a singing bowl. There are meditation cushions, blankets and mats in a corner, and training equipment in another. I take my seat as one of the last participants. We are assembled: nine women and one man. Most seem middle age, but there is one teenage girl and a woman in her seventies. People avoid each other's eyes before they turn to focus at E when she sits down and starts the introduction.

"We have all come here today to work on ourselves," she begins. Personally, and warmly, she introduces her own background for sitting here as an MBSR teacher today. She explains that she finished the TTP at DCM last September. She is an occupational therapist and a psychotherapist. She has worked with meditation for many years, but she only used to use it when her life seemed to be getting out of control. This changed after she got a severe depression three years ago. Mindfulness became her medicine which brought her out of the depression, and this inspired her to become an MBSR teacher.

Then E carries on, explaining what the MBSR course will be like when we are here. There will be no breaks in the duration of the three-hour lesson which will be part of the course each week. Instead, the participants should try to sense their needs within themselves and go to the toilet or go to have something to eat whenever they need to. She emphasized that, on this course, the focus will be on practice, which means there will be a lot of meditation. Together we should seek to create a space where everyone can participate and be with whatever arises.

E turns to explain about the origins of the MBSR programme. Jon-Kabat Zinn came up with the idea when he founded the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program at UMASS in 1979. She believed he was either a biologist or a doctor. At this point she looked questioningly at me. I knew he had studied molecular biology, but I just shrugged. I did not wish to position myself as some sort of specialist. E continued and explained that Jon had been inspired by his own engagement with Buddhist meditation practice, so mindfulness actually originates from the thousand-year-old wisdom of Eastern Mysticism. "This does not mean that mindfulness has anything to do with Buddhism," she emphasized, and made clear that she was not a Buddhist herself, and that she did not really know much about Buddhism either. Nevertheless, "The heritage should be acknowledged."

She explained further that it was revolutionary at the time to do what Jon did: bringing yoga and meditation into the healthcare system so that he could treat people with chronic illnesses. It turned out to be a huge success. Since then, the programme has spread to the rest of the world: "Therefore, it will be more or less the same course, whether you participate in the programme in Australia or in Denmark. The programme always has the same format because evidence has shown that this is what works, so why change it? This means there has been a lot of research on the programme, as well as on mindfulness in general. It is almost impossible to open a newspaper without finding new results which show that mindfulness works."

She emphasized that "This does not mean that mindfulness is a miracle cure. It is not magic. And therefore, there are no guarantees. One may even experience that one's symptoms are getting worse because one learns to be with the pains in one's life that one normally pushes away. But even in these cases, I have experienced that participants have gained a lot from the course at the end of the weeks. It could also be that one's symptoms will be reduced as stress is reduced in the programme. Or maybe the symptoms will just be easier to live with. Mindfulness is tough work, like getting in shape for a marathon. As Jon has been known to say, it is the hardest work in the world. You can only expect to get results if you do your forty-five minutes of mindfulness homework each day during these eight weeks. It does not matter if you believe or doubt, as long as you try."

Then E guides us through our first short breathing meditation. She first brings our focus to our body: "How does it feel to sit here right now? The sensation of the seat on the chair, the feet on the ground." Then she guides us to our breath, and she asks us to investigate where in the body we can feel it. Previously, I have experienced that MBSR teachers tend to guide the participant to either focus on the sensation of the breath in the nose, breast or stomach, so I find myself surprised by the open question and start to reflect on how I can feel my breathing in other areas of my body as well. Then E draws our attention to the fact that our thoughts tend to fly away elsewhere all the time (just as I at this moment notice that my thoughts have left to wonder about how other MBSR teachers guide their meditations). E specifies that this can be thoughts about what we will do later or how the day has been etc. "But this is the nature of thought. Try just to notice with kindness: where did your thought go? And then return to the sensation of your breath."

After the meditation, E asks people to share what they experienced and noticed during the meditation. The first person mentions pain in the back. The second nausea. The third the sensation of heat which was spreading through the body. And the fourth described excessive thoughts.

E turns to the whiteboard and writes Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness on it.

(Fieldnotes 01.04.2016)

The above exemplifies the introduction of one of the eight-week, nine-session MBSR courses I participated in as a part of my fieldwork in the spring of 2016. As it is written in the curriculum guide of the MBSR programme (Blacker et al. 2015), MBSR is designed to teach participants how to integrate and apply mindfulness in their everyday lives and to the range of challenges arising from medical and psychological conditions and life stresses. It therefore has an equal focus on the experiential cultivation of formal meditation and mindful hatha yoga and of informal mindfulness practice in one's daily everyday life. Together it is intended to develop self-regulatory skills that develop positive health behaviours as well as psychological and emotional resilience which can be utilized beyond the completion of the programme (Ibid.).

For each class, there is an overall theme² and a typical class sequence consisting of specific exercises, dialogues, and mindfulness practices that should be more or less covered from class to class. In each class, the MBSR teacher gives the participants forty-five minutes of daily homework based on the meditation and yoga practices they learn each week. The participants can hear the guided meditation and yoga practices with the MBSR teacher's voice on a recorded audio file. Besides the eight two-and-a-half-to-three-hour classes, there is one contemplation day in silence which focuses on practice, lasting five to seven hours. The MBSR curriculum therefore seems tight, but there is also room for differences, since teachers are encouraged to draw on their personal and professional background as well as to adapt the programme to the context in which they teach (Kabat-Zinn 1996; McCown et al. 2010).

Becoming an MBSR Teacher: The Teacher Training Programme

The TTP provided by DCM was launched as the first in Europe in 2013 in collaboration with Aarhus University, the research clinic for functional disorders at Aarhus University Hospital, and the Center for Mindfulness at UMASS. It corresponds to the MBSR programme originally developed at UMASS. This also means that the MBSR student teachers can take some of the modules at UMASS and some at DCM if they wish, which some of the Danish MBSR student teachers do since not all the modules are held in Denmark every year. Because of the emphasis that is put on experience and practice as an MBSR teacher, it is a long process to become a certified MBSR teacher, which means that none of the teachers trained at DCM are certified yet.³ As Center for Mindfulness writes on their webpage about the principles and standards of becoming an MBSR teacher:

The training of teachers to deliver MBSR is a complex undertaking.

This is in part because MBSR spans a confluence of epistemologies and practices from two very distinct and until recently, divergent lineages, both committed to

² The overall themes of each class are as follows (note that each MBSR-teacher may adapt and rephrase the themes): 1: Introduction to MBSR. 2: Perception and creative responding. 3: The present moment. 4: How conditioning and perception shape our experience. 5: The difference between automatic reaction and mindful response to stress. 6: Stressful communication. 7: Integration of mindfulness in daily life. 8: Change and keeping up the momentum developed throughout the course (Blacker et al 2015)

³ For an overview of the structure of the TTP, see Appendix 1

empirical investigation, albeit utilizing very different methodologies: that of science, medicine, and psychology, on the one hand, and that of Buddhist meditative traditions and their teachings and practices, known collectively as the Dharma, on the other. One reason MBSR proved viable in mainstream clinical settings is that the Dharma is in essence universal. Mindfulness, often being spoken of as "the heart of Buddhist meditation," and being primarily about the systematic training and refinement of attention and awareness, compassion and wisdom, is a manifestation of its universal applicability (...) Because people with many different backgrounds are interested in becoming MBSR teachers, programs for the training of MBSR instructors of necessity include a range of different characteristics to expose potential trainees to a spectrum of experiences, perspectives, and practices with which they may have limited familiarity, and then nurture their development and build increasing competency over time. (Kabat-Zinn et al. 2017, emphasis in original)

I will return to the emphasis that is put on the concept of a *universal dharma* in Chapter 2. For the time being, I wish to point to how MBSR is presented as referring back to a "universal applicability" that transcends scientific and Buddhist epistemologies. This reference to the universal implies that the programme can be applied by teachers with diverse backgrounds, as long as a common foundation of "experiences, perspectives, and practices" has been developed (Ibid.).

Formally, the requirements for becoming an MBSR student teacher are firstly based on the aspiring teacher's mindfulness training. To become an MBSR student teacher, one has to have completed an MBSR course, have participated in at least one five-to-ten-day mindfulness silent retreat, and have a minimum of one year of daily meditation practice (DCM 2017). Secondly, the teacher has to have at least an academic level of an undergraduate or have the practical experience that is equivalent to this.

Other than that, the professional training required depends entirely on the context in which the MBSR teacher intends to teach. As Kabat-Zinn writes:

The optimal form and its delivery will depend critically on local factors and on the level of experience and understanding of the people undertaking the teaching.

Rather than "clone" or "franchise" one cookie-cutter approach, mindfulness ultimately requires the effective use of the present moment as the core indicator of the appropriateness of particular choices. (Kabat-Zinn 1996)

From this it follows that the principles of what it takes to become an MBSR teacher is not presented as a standardized teaching technique, since the way the teacher learns to be "in a wiser relationship to one's experience" is seen as essentially non-instrumental (Kabat-Zinn et al. 2017). Even so, it is also stated that it is acquired through a longstanding grounding in meditative practices and through a committed study of the dharma, both as the dharma is expressed within the Buddhist meditation traditions and in more mainstream contexts as in the case of MBSR. It is therefore emphasized that this has nothing to do with being or not being a Buddhist (Ibid.).

Methodology

The empirical basis of the analysis presented throughout this thesis is, firstly, based on participant observation of three MBSR courses. The first course was the one with E that has already been presented. The second was with Y, an anthropologist and private provider of MBSR courses, which was held at a monastery in the countryside. The third was with the psychologists K and U, who taught the course together at a job centre.

Secondly, it is based on participant observation of the first modules of the TTP, i.e., Practicum 1 and 2 (see Appendix 1), two MBSR seminars focusing on yoga and stress respectively, and a nine-day silent retreat led by an MBSR teacher in which several of my informants also participated.

Thirdly, the data is based on recorded semi-structured interviews as well as informal talks with MBSR teachers and MBSR student teachers. In order to go in-depth with the teacher's perspective on their own navigation in the facilitation of MBSR courses and in the learning process of TTP, I did two to three follow-up interviews with some of my key informants,⁴ with at least one month in between each interview.

Lastly, I have studied the MBSR literature and practiced mindfulness as if I were to become an MBSR teacher myself. This has provided an important duality between a

⁴ See Appendix 2 for a schematic overview of the key informants frequently mentioned in this thesis.

theoretical and practical understanding of the field that will provide a basis for the analysis, together with field observation and interviews.

Below, I will describe my roles in the field and my ethical considerations.

Roles of a Participant Researcher

It is essential for the use of participant observation as a method that the anthropologist is reflexive about the role of her own embodied, sensual, thinking, critical and positioned self in the data which is produced (O'Reilly 2012: 100). In the case of my fieldwork, many of my informants seemed just as reflexive about this as myself when they were confronted with the anthropologist's gaze. In an interview with the MBSR teacher K, he was at one point taken aback by one of my questions and burst with laughter:

I have this feeling that I am sitting face to face with a friendly woman who can get a man to speak from his heart! I know you do mindfulness yourself. I know we sit here with a mutual interest, like close colleagues. In the MBSR courses, I almost forget that you are not just any other participant or not one of us. But then I start noticing that you remember stuff and ask the right question, that behind it all, there is a fucking sharp computer! (12.05.2016)

K's remark sums up most of the dominant roles I had during my fieldwork. There was the role of the researcher, which in some situation was a challenging position, because many informants found the idea of having a researcher scrutinize you "anxiety provoking", as the MBSR teacher E put it. Nevertheless, in both the MBSR courses and the TTP, I experienced that as soon as I had shown that I participated in the courses and modules in the same manner as everyone else as I shared my own experiences, challenges, and perspectives as well as engaged in the mindfulness exercises, my informants' guards went down. They started to approach me as any other fellow participant. Still, the role as a researcher came back to the forefront in interviews or sometimes in the breaks, where people asked about my project or maybe had a comment they thought might be relevant for me.

In this way, my roles moved fluidly between being the anthropologist, the MBSR participant, and the MBSR student teacher. This flexibility made it possible for me to

“move up and down in the social structure, discreetly taking care of confessions” (Wulff 2000: 152), as both teachers and participants found me to be someone they could entrust with problems connected to the MBSR programme. During my fieldwork, I therefore had an experience of *studying sideways*, in relation to teachers, student teachers, and participants alike, but also of *studying through*, as I simultaneously sought to trace webs between actors, institutions, and discourses (Hannerz 2000: 24).

By putting my weight on participation in participant observation, it became possible for me to relate to my informants’ experiences with a starting point in my own experiences. I found this to be a necessary approach to gain insight in a field of study that puts as much value in experience-based knowledge and the sharing of experience as in MBSR. Jackson (in Orsi 2005: 173) writes that “Experience in this sense becomes a mode of experimentation, of testing and exploring the ways in which our experiences conjoin or connect us with others rather than the ways they set us apart.” In the context of my fieldwork, this was an exploration made both by the informants and researcher. It was evident both from the literature and my own process of becoming a part of the field of MBSR that the most basic criteria for gaining access is your own engagement in mindfulness practice. This is the line drawn between insiders and outsiders.

Ethical Considerations: Between Complicity and Critical Engagement

Even though I sought an emphasis on participation during the fieldwork, the tension between participation and observation, involvement and distancing, complicity and critical engagement became a driving force in the analysis presented in this thesis. As noted by Crawford (1992: 68–9) there is a process towards *becoming* during fieldwork and an *othering*, a distancing which separates informants and the anthropologists again, during the process of writing. This duality demands the anthropologist to take an ethical stance that balances solidarity with the field and critical perspectives.

Marcus (1998: 126) argues that complicity is both inevitable and necessary for maintaining collaboration with informants. Therefore, the anthropologist constantly risks simply reproducing the discourses of informants due to common references, analytical conceptions, and a mutual curiosity. In a reflexive field such as MBSR, with informants trained in many different professional disciplines, this risk indeed made itself felt. In this field, the voice of the anthropologist therefore becomes one

representation among many, especially since the tension between the religious and secular already was discussed in the literature as well as among the MBSR teachers.

However, this is exactly the point of adding an anthropological voice: that the subject *matters* to the subjects involved and may provide one of the first glimpses into how MBSR teachers make sense of these issues in practice. By pointing to consistencies and inconsistencies observed in my fieldwork, it is therefore my hope that this account may further the debate.

To reach this point, I have sought a position of *critical engagement* (Svendsen 2009: 37), which seeks to produce knowledge that addresses societal issues while creating a space for reflecting on discourses and practices within MBSR in collaboration with other professionals, which in my case has been my informants. This position meant that my informants both functioned as colleagues, who were personally involved in my problem statement, as well as a domain for my research.

This collaboration did not occur without friction, as different interests were at play between me and my informants. Often, I was met with the assumption that I, as a researcher, was aiming at producing 'evidence' for the MBSR programme, even though I sought to make my position as a critical engaged researcher clear. It seemed inevitable for me to take part in the *productive misunderstandings* (Tsing 2005) which will be an analytical focus of this thesis.

The MBSR teachers and student teachers who chose to collaborate with me emphasized that they found it rewarding to create a space for reflection on their practice and education in the discussions with me. In the case of the MBSR courses that I followed, the MBSR teachers expressed a specific interest in receiving feedback on their teaching, which I obliged with in order to make our interests meet. This was mainly done through the interviews, as I had the first interview with each of the four MBSR teachers before the respective MBSR course started, one interview in the middle of the course, and one at the end of the course. In the latter interviews, I described some of the observations and patterns that I had noticed during the course in order to get the MBSR teachers to comment on these. In the same manner, I organized a workshop for my informants at the end of the fieldwork in which I presented my preliminary perspectives on the thesis, with specific examples from my interactions with them in order to include their feedback.

Beyond these considerations, I have sought to follow the ethical guidelines of the American Anthropological Association (2012), both in my fieldwork and writing process.

Analytical Framework

In this last part of the chapter, I will present the analytical framework of this thesis. First, I will place my study within a broader dialogue and discussion of the relationship between Buddhism/religion and science. Second, I will place my study between a discourse and practice analytical approach.

The Convergence of Buddhism and Science

MBSR is one example among many of a broader discourse on the transmission of Buddhism and science through networks that crisscross the traditional boundaries between East and West (Lopez 2008). In the case of MBSR, inspiration from several Buddhist traditions can be found, such as Theravāda, Mahayana, yogic, and Zen (Kabat-Zinn 2011: 289) – and as will become evident later in the thesis, other religious traditions now take part in the dialogue too, such as Sufism and Christianity. In terms of science, MBSR especially draws upon neuroscience, health psychology, behavioural and integrative medicine, and psychotherapy (Fransgaard 2011).

As Lopez (2008: 31–2) suggests, in order for the claim for the compatibility of Buddhism and science to be made, both terms tend to be radically restricted in discourse. Buddhism becomes a single tradition, and, within that tradition, an isolated set of doctrines and practices. Science on the other hand becomes restricted to such an extent that it becomes like a rhetoric mantra. When one unfolds what is meant by these loose references to Buddhism and science in specific contexts, however, the content is ever shifting (Ibid.: xii).

Tsing (2005) argues that generalizations are diagnostic of the universal aspirations that are created in the messy negotiations of cultural dialogues, which I will also argue is the case for the generalizations made in the negotiations between Buddhism and science. Within MBSR, this is a continuous negotiation as new knowledge systems are brought to the programme.

MBSR is thus based on the fundamental assumption of the compatibility of Buddhism and science which assumes that Buddhist practices and spiritual insights can be secularized by focussing on similarities and disregarding differences between the knowledge systems. Kabat-Zinn therefore argues that the secularization of Buddhism is necessary for making mindfulness as accepted, universal, and helpful as possible. Accepted, since he claims that it makes it available to all, regardless of belief, as a result of being secular. Universal, by being evidence-based, with validation from both personal experience and sound science. Helpful, by being beneficial to people's modern way of life right now, both in regard to health, happiness, families, and society (Wilson 2013: 61). In this way, MBSR is presented as a panacea that can keep the Western citizen happy within prevailing societal structures, in opposition to the ascetic traditions that it is derived from, in which engagement in meditation practices often meant world denouncement.

Kabat-Zinn (2011a: 288) asserts that MBSR is a *recontextualizing* of the dharma and not a *decontextualizing* of the dharma. There are different opinions among scholars about whether MBSR succeeds in this endeavour. Some scholars have argued that there is nothing new about the cross-cultural transmission of Buddhist meditation techniques which MBSR is an example of. Buddhism has always been known to adapt to cultures and communities around the world as it has spread throughout the centuries (Wilson 2014: 4–5; Dunne 2011: 1–2). From this viewpoint, it has been argued that MBSR simply presents a new version of Buddhism and that what is happening is a silent takeover of religion in previously secular realms (Carrette & King 2005; Prebish & Tanaka 1998).

Many Buddhist scholars on the other hand criticize that MBSR is rather a *decontextualization*, as they argue that the deeper experiential, spiritual, moral, and ethical insights of Buddhism have been lost in this diffusion, mainstreaming, and secularization of mindfulness. This is the concern which has led critiques to nickname the development as *McMindfulness* (Hyland 2015; Marx 2014; Sun 2014; Wilson 2013).

These viewpoints are also discussed among the MBSR-teachers.

Transcending Religion and Science as Anthropological Categories

The concepts of religion and science, their demarcation, differentiation, and overlap have been widely debated since the birth of the anthropological discipline up until the present (Tambiah 1990). Cassanova (2011: 54–5) critiques that discursive separations of religion and science present the underlying modernist assumption that the rational, scientifically supported parts of Buddhism can be separated from the religious parts that are left behind as unnecessary irrational relics that do not belong to the modern secular age of progress. This approach therefore mirrors modernist ideas about a societal development from pre-modern traditional societies to modern societies, which was also a dominant conception among evolutionists in anthropology (Tambiah 1990: 45–51). As Bernstein (1983: 48) notes, this demarcation strategy is typical for any scientific-minded philosopher since the origins of modern science who presumes the only legitimate forms of ‘other’ forms of knowledge is knowledge that can be translated or reduced to scientific discourse. This strategy fits the assumption that secularization is a development which necessarily involves the decline of religion (Cassanova 2011: 60). As I will show, this is a part of the discourse that also presents itself among the MBSR teachers in the context of my fieldwork.

Like Asad (1983: 116), I will take a cultural relativist standpoint in this debate and argue that there can be no universal definition of religion or science because these classifications always will be historically and culturally specific as well as the historical product of discursive processes. From this perspective, it is therefore not an anthropological task to construct or apply such universal definitions. Instead, I will seek to unpack concepts such as the meaning of religion and science in the context of MBSR in order to archaeologically uncover how these concepts are infiltrated in truth effects and power structures (Foucault 2010 [1969]). This will lead me to show that emic conceptions of religion and secularity work as specific determinants of behaviour for contemporary communities (Helderman 2016) such as MBSR.

Like Foucault, Asad (1983: 115–6, 127) argues that discourses are bound up with power, and problematic relations of power are pervasive in the modernist discursive project of separating religion and science, resulting in the assumption that religion is separated from the domain of power and reason in which the domains of politics, law,

and science govern. Asad (1983: 118) uses this framework to investigate the question of how (religious) power creates (religious) truth by tracing back how Christianity has been constructed from the Middle Ages to the modern era in Europe. He points out that it was due to the rise of modern science and the modern state that the churches needed to distinguish the religious from the secular. Through this separation, Christianity fenced itself from accusations of irrationality by laying claim to another form of truth than science (Ibid.: 121, 127).

In the context of 'secular' mindfulness as represented by MBSR, I will argue that a new construction of truth is emerging which seeks to merge scientific and religious truths in new ways. I will therefore argue that MBSR is part of a movement which through an explicit scientific/secular power and an implicit Buddhist/spiritual cosmology seeks to create universal truth.

This is not to argue that MBSR represents a silent takeover of religion to previous secular contexts. Rather, it is a turn to the human as a practicing, training being, as also argued by Sloterdijk (2013). It is this turn to the practice of mindfulness, or to what Aristotle et al. (2009) has described as the *practical wisdom* gained from embodied experience, which the MBSR teachers ultimately believe can transcend this divide between religion and science.

Studying Games of Truth

What differentiates this study from previous research in this area is that it does not only focus on discourse but also on practice. This means that the study looks into how people do not necessarily *say* they do the same as what they *actually* do. This is also because much experiential knowledge is tacit (Spradley 1980: 11).

In terms of discourse, the thesis makes use of Foucault's *archaeological method* (2010 [1969]) that he uses to investigate the rules through which certain statements are accepted as meaningful and true in a given domain and period as they are organized within discursive formations. This is not to argue that discourses appear in common worldviews. Rather, they appear in complex discursive and institutional relationships which are as much defined by ruptures as by convergences. I find it crucial to investigate how the illusion of the singularity of truth comes to be through such ruptures and convergences in a study of MBSR teachers' navigation in religious/secular binaries.

In this respect, I take my point of departure in Foucault's concept of *games of truth* (Gauthier 1988: 15), because the concept, in opposition to his earlier concept of *regimes of truth*, brings focus to the practicing self that strategically enters such games. In this framework, discourse never deceives or reveals but is played, just as relations of power are played, in terms of strategy, chance, and objective (Peters 2004: 55). I will argue that the MBSR teachers enter such games to justify their navigation within MBSR, both to themselves and to others. In this framework, a discourse and practice approach meet.

On Justification

Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) theory of how individuals justify their actions will be used as an analytical framework for understanding how such games of truth are played out in practice.

One may ask why I do not simply make use of Foucault's framework on how legitimation is linked to relationships of power, knowledge, and subjectification. Here, I will lean on Boltanski and Thévenot (2006: 37) because they argue that the concept of legitimation tends "to confuse justification with deceit by rejecting the constraints of coordination and resorting to a relativism of values." Boltanski and Thévenot therefore provide a supplement to Foucault and Asad, since they provide a systematic framework for looking into how and why acts in a situation are made and perceived as justifiable.

They argue that in order for an agreement to occur, two opposing views must have a form of generality, a *higher common principle* that extends beyond themselves which is presumed to be valid within a given social situation (Ibid.: 18-9). Such principles therefore act as justifications or, in Foucault's framework, as the rules that define which procedures are valid. When disagreements occur, it is therefore often due to people referring to seemingly incommensurable and incompatible different higher principles, as such principles traverse a plurality of oppositions such as material/symbolic, positive/normative, relativist/objectivist, individual/universal, or religion/secular (Ibid.: 33).

Throughout the thesis, I will therefore investigate what higher common principles the MBSR teachers refer back to in their justifications of the relationship between religious/secular binaries in MBSR.

The Friction of Universals in Local Encounters and the Productive Misunderstandings of Agreement Reaching

Tsing focuses on the opposition between the universal, as it appears in broader discourses, and the local, as it appears in practical encounters. She argues that the anthropologist must let go of the universal as a self-fulfilling abstract truth and instead look into how the universal is embroiled in specific situations (Tsing 2005: 1). Her point is that the promise of universality in practice can never be fulfilled, because universals come to be through *friction*: the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference (Ibid.: 4, 9).

It can be perceived as a case of friction when the religious and scientific worlds meet in the cultural dialogue between the East and the West which MBSR entails. The global connection of this collaboration gives power to universal scientific, political, and spiritual visions in itself, because “to turn to universals, is to identify knowledge that moves – mobile and mobilizing – across localities and culture. Whether it is seen as underlying or transcending cultural difference” (Ibid.: 7). However, since knowledge keeps moving, it becomes evident that universal aspirations are always an unfinished achievement, and to see them as the confirmation of pre-formed laws is to ignore the historical conjunctures through which they came to be (Ibid.). In fact, all universalisms are “hybrid, transient, and involved in constant reformulation through dialogue. Liberal universals mix and meld with the universals of science, world religions (...) and emancipatory philosophies” (Ibid.: 9).

Here, MBSR exemplifies how such universalisms are in on-going dialogues within the TTP and in the MBSR courses where new philosophies, professions, and religions enter the conversation, resulting in an increasingly diverse MBSR audience as MBSR spreads to new contexts. The aspirations towards the universal in MBSR therefore come to be through the global connections of people and ideas, which provide the basis for the games of truth that the MBSR teachers can engage in as these diverse knowledge systems meet in local encounters.

The frictions of these encounters tend to create *productive misunderstandings* (Tsing 2005). This is because the incompatible elements from the knowledge systems that enter the MBSR conversation are overcome through strategies of purification, relativization, or compromise (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006), which will be elaborated in

the next chapter. All of these strategies entail that differences between the knowledge systems are either ignored, unacknowledged, or unknown by some of the parties in the dialogue. This does not mean that the differences are still not present implicitly in the minds and in the practice of the participants in the dialogue. The result is that the participants may talk at cross-purposes as they bring different implicit knowledge to the dialogue. Nevertheless, these misunderstandings are productive, since the propagation and mainstreaming of MBSR depends on such misunderstandings in order to interconnect across differences.

From this it follows that moments of agreement reaching and moments of critical questioning are intimately linked occurrences. These moments depend on whether one chooses to open or close one's eyes to the problematic nature of the purification, relativization, or compromise made for reaching an agreement (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006: 25). This also reveals belief and doubt as intimately linked in processes of realization.

This provides a theoretical understanding of how MBSR teachers make sense of the contradictory higher common principles that can be revealed in the intersection between the spiritual and secular, religious and scientific fields of knowledge as they appear in different contexts connected to MBSR.

How the games of truth that the MBSR teachers engage in are context dependent will also be analysed with reference to Goffman's distinction between *backstage* and *frontstage* (1959). This will shed light on how the *mystification* of religion (Wilson 2013) is connected to insider versus outsider contexts.

Preliminary Conclusion

This chapter has shown how MBSR is based on the basic confluence of Buddhism and science and how this confluence is used to argue that MBSR addresses 'the universal' and therefore can be applied in a wide range of contexts by MBSR teachers from diverse backgrounds. To understand how MBSR teachers navigate within this landscape of religious/spiritual and scientific/secular frameworks that coexist in the contexts of MBSR, it has been argued that the analytical focus should be on the relationship between discourse and practice. This approach will shed light on how the MBSR teachers'

navigation at times appears and is presented as coherent and at other times as incoherent when it is scrutinized more closely.

Now that the problem and framework has been presented, I will turn to the first analysis of how MBSR teachers relate to MBSR as a secular intervention.

CHAPTER 2

MBSR as a Secular Intervention

Translating Buddhism to Science

It is the fourth day of Practicum 1, the first module of the TTP, located at the idyllic Sostrup Castle, far out in the countryside of Djursland. The student teachers and I have been sent out in groups of four to each work with our part of the article “Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR, Skillful Means, and the Trouble with Maps” by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2011a), which the groups are to present to each other afterwards. Here, Kabat-Zinn describes how his vision of MBSR from the very beginning was to disseminate the universal dharma into mainstream settings. Here, he explains that he wanted to make meditation commonsensical for those who were not interested in Buddhist cosmology but who could still gain from the practice and the philosophy behind it. Ultimately, he sought to use Buddhist means to bring relief from suffering (such as emotional, psychological, and physical stress and pain) to populations that would never partake in the benefits of mindfulness practice if the religious roots were highlighted.

In the group work, the MBSR teachers I worked with expressed surprise about how huge a role Buddhism apparently had in MBSR. They pondered about the concept of dharma and asked me what it means. This led to a discussion about whether MBSR was indeed a secular intervention or a religion in disguise. Later, the question was brought up in plenum, and Lone Fjorback, the director of DCM shared the following explanation of why MBSR has nothing to do with religion, before she closed down the discussion for now:

So, in the article, Jon, also to make sure that he doesn't steal anything, refers to the Four Noble Truths and the Four Foundations of mindfulness... He refers to where he took it from, as you would if you were to cite a scientific article. You can't just take it and put your own name on. What shows that MBSR is not

religion is that there are dogmas in religion. And that is something you have to believe in. In Buddhism, it could for example be the belief in re-incarnation. And then there are a lot of rituals. If you go on a Zen retreat, for example, you have to bow when you walk in. You bow for the Buddha and you bow to your meditation cushion, because that is where wisdom can be found, and you bow to the group, because they help you to find the wisdom here. But in MBSR we only have the practical parts which help people to wake up and improve their mental health. So, simply to feel better about yourself, for the benefit of yourself, without needing to pray to or bow for anyone, or... to believe in anything or to become a part of a system.

(Fieldnotes and recording 21.02.2016)

In the above example, Fjorback argues that MBSR can be demarcated from religion because the cultural and religious particularities of Buddhism have been stripped off in MBSR. Only the essential, scientific, and universal parts of Buddhism are left. This reduces Kabat-Zinn's reference to the dharma to be a matter of avoiding plagiarism. This chapter will show how this is only one strategy among many through which the MBSR teachers present MBSR as a secular intervention.

To contextualize the conceptions presented by the MBSR teachers in my fieldwork, I will first give a more thorough account of how the relationship between religion and science in MBSR is presented by Kabat-Zinn, focusing on his concept of a *universal dharma*. Then, I will draw on a couple of examples on the *mystification* of religion as it was experienced in my fieldwork, before I elaborate on my theoretical framework for analysing how MBSR teachers both justify and critique this tacit convergence of Buddhism and science. Subsequently, I will go in depth with an analysis of how religious/secular binaries are both demarcated and blurred as MBSR teachers navigate in MBSR as a secular intervention.

The Universal Dharma

As exemplified by Fjorback's explanation, the translation from Buddhism to science that MBSR entails has been a question of discursively separating MBSR from what is

considered to be the ‘cultural-package’ of Buddhism, such as doctrines, symbols, and rituals, while keeping the elements that are believed to ‘really matter’ in secular Buddhism. These are the elements that are deemed compatible with a scientific framework of universalized truth but also with the values of individualism and self-actualization in modern Western society as Carvalho points to (2014: 139). This translation can be exemplified in the concept of *dharma* which Kabat-Zinn has sought to transform in this manner.

Dharma has many different meanings within different Buddhist traditions, but in the way Kabat-Zinn frames it, it means *universal lawfulness*, meaning that dharma is akin to the laws of nature and therefore is a universal, scientific, and rational concept rather than a religious one:

In some ways it is appropriate to characterize dharma as resembling scientific knowledge, ever growing, ever changing, yet with a core body of methods, observations, and natural laws distilled from thousands of years of inner exploration through highly disciplined self-observation and self-inquiry, a careful and precise recording and mapping of experiences encountered in investigating the nature of the mind, and direct empirical testing and confirming of the results (...) Mindfulness and dharma are best thought of as universal descriptions of the functioning of the human mind regarding the quality of one’s attention in relationship to the experience of suffering and the potential for happiness. They apply equally wherever there are human minds, just as the laws of physics apply equally everywhere in our universe. (Kabat-Zinn 2015: 136–7)

In this way, Kabat-Zinn reframes a Buddhist concept and makes it into a scientific one by asserting that Buddhist meditation from the very beginning has ‘actually’ been a scientific self-exploration. This framework makes Kabat-Zinn’s project of mainstreaming and secularizing mindfulness as a way of spreading the universal dharma a continuation of the Buddhist project itself, just outside the confinement of the religion as such.

In order to emphasize that the concept of a universal dharma indeed can be separated from the concept of religion, Kabat-Zinn (2011b: 57) also writes: “So although the Buddha articulated the dharma, the dharma itself can’t be Buddhist any more that

the law of gravity is English because of Newton or Italian because of Galileo.” In this way, Kabat-Zinn seeks to free the concept of the dharma from its cultural affiliations and transforms it into a non-cultural secularized universal concept, similar to what he has sought to do with the concept of mindfulness.

A Mystification of Religion

Neither the concept of *dharma* nor *Buddhism* in general is mentioned very often in the MBSR courses or in MBSR self-help books such as Jon Kabat-Zinn’s famous *Full Catastrophe Living* (2013). Wilson (2013) refers to this as a process of *mystification*, meaning that the origins of MBSR is purposely obscured as Buddhist concepts because they are considered to be too religious, strange, and exotic to be implemented in a secular Western context. Therefore, Buddhist concepts are either downplayed or re-interpreted so that they either can be used in a metaphoric manner or can be adapted to a scientific framework.

This mystification is also why the role of Buddhism in MBSR came as a surprise to many of the student teachers in Practicum 1. This element of surprise is new as MBSR has moved to educate third-generation teachers, who, unlike the first-generation teachers, have rarely had direct contact with the Buddhist contexts MBSR originated from. Instead, their first acquaintance with mindfulness practice has often been in secular settings (Crane et al. 2012). The result is non-Buddhists teaching other non-Buddhists about Buddhist-derived mindfulness (Wilson 2013: 74). Many participants in the MBSR courses never become aware of the Buddhist connections.

This development can even be felt in the short lifespan of the TTP at DCM. An MBSR teacher I met at Practicum 2, the second module of the TTP in September 2016, had taken the first module two years before when the TTP at DCM had just started. She said that she thought it was a whole other segment of people who had enrolled on the TTP now than two years earlier. Back then, most of the student teachers had already worked with or even taught mindfulness for many years. She felt a bit misplaced since she did not have all this prior knowledge about the dharma and other Buddhist concepts, which seemed like common knowledge among the other student teachers. Now there were many besides herself who did not know much about Buddhism and spirituality, and that was a relief to her.

The mystification of Buddhism was found to be problematic by some MBSR teachers, which became evident from the surprised MBSR student teachers at Practicum 1. Also, at the yoga seminar, the MBSR student teacher V brought up that he found it problematic that they as MBSR teachers are taught about Buddhism in the TTP, but are only teaching about science in the MBSR courses. This shows how the questions of what is religious and what is secular become crucial to the MBSR teachers after the MBSR teachers have divulged the Buddhist origins of MBSR. How boundaries are drawn between these conceptions determine how and whether a particular Buddhist concept or practice can be used by the MBSR teacher in a given social situation.

To shed light on how MBSR teachers are making sense of such boundary making in order to navigate in MBSR as a secular intervention, the following section will elaborate on the analytical framework that will help to look further into the MBSR teachers' strategies of justification in relation to presenting MBSR as a secular intervention in the last part of the chapter.

Drawing and Blurring Boundaries between Religion and Science

In his study of religious/secular binaries in relation to the use of Buddhist Psychology among psychotherapists, Helderma (2016) experienced that they rarely engage with definitional questions of what qualifies as religion, spirituality, secularity, or science. The same applied to the MBSR teachers when I interviewed them. More than once, they therefore asked *me* to define religion and spirituality when I asked *them* in interviews about how they related to these concepts in their own lives.

However, as Helderma, I will argue that they act implicitly on assumptions about what is religious/spiritual/scientific/secular and what is not, and this acts "as deeply rooted structures they feel compelled to contend with" (Ibid.: 5). Such an assumption could, for example, be that 'religion is dogmatic whereas MBSR is not – hence it is in the sphere of science'. This is a prevailing assumption which also was presented by Fjorback in the chapter's introductory fieldnote.

This argument does not seek to neglect the MBSR teachers' own reflexivity. On the contrary, I observed that the MBSR teachers use diverse strategies in order to make sense of religion/secular binaries in relation to their own professional and personal lives. As in the case of Helderma's study (2016: 6), these strategies are unstable over

time so that at one point the MBSR teachers seem to reproduce hard boundaries between religion and secular and at another they seem to be blurring them in order to be able to cross them within a secular setting. In this way, the MBSR teachers on the one hand tend to draw a clear line between religion and MBSR as a scientific programme, but on the other hand they draw knowingly on a Buddhist framework in the courses.

Strategies of Purification, Relativization, and Compromise

I will consider such inconsistencies to be an expression of the *games of truth* that the MBSR teachers engage in to make sense of religious/secular binaries within MBSR. As presented in the last chapter, disagreements and agreements on the outcome of such games of truth can be understood within Boltanski and Thévenot's framework on justification. The authors argue that any social *world* with reference to a *common higher principle* has its own corresponding things/beings that within the logic of the world can be put to a *test* (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006: 41). Here the concept of world refers to how different rules, tests, and higher common principles apply to different contexts that, however, can be present in the same situation. No ontological reality is implied in the use of the concept *world*. Rather, the concept will be used to provide a structural overview of how the MBSR teachers in practice refer to diverse higher common principles in order to justify their actions *in situ*.

If science is understood as a world in this framework, the typical test could be that of scientific inquiry and experiments, the things could be the tools through which results are measured, and the beings could be the scientists and the subjects under scrutiny. If we approach spirituality as a world on the other hand, a typical test could be that of subjective experience, the things could be the ritualistic objects included, and the beings could be the people engaged in spiritual practice and perhaps the spirits connected to it.

When different worlds are present in the same situation as in MBSR, disagreements of which test of which world is valid may arise. Different strategies of justification may be used in such situations.

One strategy is to deem only the test of one of the worlds present as valid. *Purification* is effectuated by removing the elements connected to the other world and adding elements connected to the world in question (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006: 218–

9), as when elements from Buddhism are removed in order to re-contextualize MBSR into a scientific context. The presence of another world may also challenge the very principles of the test and try to replace it by a test of another world (Ibid.), as when MBSR participants are asked to turn to the test of experience through mindfulness practice as a scientific inquiry. Science is here argued to be able to document and rationalize the positive effects of MBSR and hereby justify the use of the programme, but only engagement in the programme's mindfulness practice can give the final proof. As Lopez (2008: 19) notes, this is a recurrent view in the Buddhism and science debate, that "Science can confirm the insights of the Buddha, but is incapable of gaining those insights through its own means".

Often, elements from these different worlds are brought to the test at the same time in MBSR, which gives rise to awkward situations because it creates ambiguity about the nature of the test (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006: 226), which is why the tension between religion and science in MBSR keeps reoccurring. A strategy in these cases is simply to avoid the test by *relativizing*, which means that the parties agree that the discrepancy does not matter in order to avoid clashes. In such cases, complicity may be involved, which means the disagreement is purposely overlooked because it may serve the ends of the involved parties (Ibid.: 336–46).

The parties may also actively decide on a *compromise* which insists that it is possible to reach a principle that can take judgments based on elements stemming from different worlds and make them compatible. Through *techniques of creativity* it aims at a *common good* that transcends the principles from the involved worlds (Ibid.: 278).

A compromise therefore makes use of processes of *generalization*. Tsing (2005: 89) notes two features of generalization. First, that generalization requires a large space of compatibility among disparate particular facts and observations. Compatibility thus standardizes difference and hereby allows transcendence through which the general can rise from the particular. This means that an *axiom of unity* must be established, which can be argued to be a similar to the principle of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) concept of *the common good*. Second, collaboration between disparate forms of knowledge can turn incompatible facts and observations into compatible ones. Generalization is therefore a product of negotiations between incompatible differences (Tsing 2005: 89). In this framework, agreement between disparate parts actually presumes *productive*

misunderstandings. Differences are considered irrelevant, as this is the only way to rise above them and aspire towards the concept of universal truth.

As a result, the MBSR teachers may reach moments of agreeing on how to solve the tension between science and religion within MBSR as the tension comes up to the surface in specific situations, but the underlying tension of conflicting higher common principles prevails. Nevertheless, this capacity of testing situations in different games of truths is essential to knowledge production, since the outcome determines how reality is perceived (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006: 233).

Several worlds of MBSR could be identified within this framework, but for the purpose of this chapter, I will take a point of departure in the etic distinction between religious/spiritual and secular/scientific worlds. This distinction may seem to be equivalent to the etic distinction that I aim to criticize. However, my purpose is to show how MBSR teachers make use of this distinction in practice.

MBSR Put to the Test

In my interviews with the MBSR teachers, many of them highlighted the fact that MBSR is ‘evidence-based’ as a reason why they wanted to work with MBSR. They made it clear that the fact that MBSR is perceived to pass the test of science is what makes the use of MBSR in secular settings justifiable.

To do so, strategies of *purification* which make it clear that MBSR belongs to the world of science and not to the world of religion are applied. As already mentioned, this is done by first removing ‘cultural dogmatic’ elements of Buddhism. Secondly, this is done by developing scientific evidence which is continuously referred to in MBSR courses in order to motivate participants to engage in the practice, as also encouraged by Kabat-Zinn (2011a: 297). As E said to the participants halfway through her MBSR course: “Even though you cannot feel the effects of the programme clearly yet, then you can rest assured that evidence shows that it helps despite that” (Fieldnotes 21.05.2016).

The MBSR teacher K stated that the scientific evidence behind MBSR gives a professional security, even though he admitted that evidence also can be a mess (Interview 04.03.16). As Y expressed it, the word ‘evidence-based’ seems to be something people go into rapture over because it is commonly considered to be “the truth” (Interview 22.02.2016).

By referring to scientific evidence in this way, the MBSR teachers support the notion that scientific evidence-based research represents reality as it *really is* which therefore overrules individual experiences. This may seem counter logical, since MBSR participants are at the same time asked to introspect their own subjective experience by means of mindfulness practices in order to reach this reality as it *really is*. This approach is discursively justified in the MBSR courses by arguing that perception is mentally disturbed by cognition and emotion, a disturbance that can be transcended by means of meta-awareness. Participants are thus asked to engage in tests from two different worlds as validations: the third person perspective of science on the one hand and the first person perspective of experience on the other. This presents a compromise: The means are different, but the end point is the same – that of objective truth.

However, the exponential rise in the number of scientific papers on mindfulness that provides evidence of the effects of MBSR (Williams & Kabat-Zinn 2011: 2) also points to the fragility of the compromises MBSR are based upon. As pointed out by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006: 283), the frequent repetition of tests tends to be a sign of compromise not being judged as conclusive enough to bring a controversy to an end, as in the case of MBSR where the world of religion and the secular meet. These tests make the clash more explicit, but they are also necessary for the development of new principles of equivalence and for the clarification of the common good that is being sought. As a result, the evidence is also met with internal critique about the limitations of the research, also by Kabat-Zinn himself (in Wilson 2013: 97). In the TTP, teachers are therefore also warned about presenting MBSR as a miracle cure.

Are Dogmas and Rituals Religious?

The distinction between MBSR as scientific inquiry and religion as being ‘dogmatic’ and based on ‘belief’ and ‘rituals,’ which both Kabat-Zinn and Fjorback draw on, was also a distinction that was from time to time copied by several of the MBSR teachers. Where the line is drawn in such distinctions of what can be considered as religious and secular is both arbitrary and contextual, as it is constantly renegotiated in a given situation. If we, for example, return to Fjorback’s distinction of Zen Buddhism revealing itself as religious due to the practice of bowing, this is questionable, because bowing is a general cultural practice of courtesy in Japan, from where Zen Buddhism originates. If one

approaches such practices as intrinsic religious rituals, one could for example also question why many MBSR teachers use singing bowls to mark the beginning and ending of a meditation session in the MBSR courses, since singing bowls are also used in spiritual settings. Many MBSR teachers also place flowers or candles in the middle of the room, as is common in Zen Buddhism.

The MBSR teacher E was in fact told at a workplace where she had MBSR courses for the employees that they did not want her to place candles and flowers because they believed that was only something you do in “spiritual courses” (Interview 04.05.2016). E had obliged even though she disagreed. She justified that the flowers and candles are about atmosphere and opening the senses. She did not think that had anything to do with spirituality. This points to how religion is not only approached as an abstract concept but as a concept that is in need of renegotiation in relation to the physical environment and physical practices among the MBSR teachers.

It could also be questioned that MBSR does not have any dogmatic elements. For example, the MBSR teachers are reading about and discussing *The Four Noble Truths* in the TTP. They are both considered to be an essential philosophical basis of the programme as well as self-evident universal truths that can be experienced through meditation practice. As in the case of the dharma, the Four Noble Truths are translated into a scientific framework. The translation below was also presented in class by Fjorback in the second module of the TTP:

1. *Dukkha*: the “diagnosis”, which states that suffering is universal;
2. *Samudaya*: The “etiology”, which specifies that the cause of suffering is craving;
3. *Niroda*: The “prognosis”, which promises a cure against suffering by stopping the craving;
4. *Magga*: The “treatment plan”, which brings liberation from suffering, which is *The Noble Eightfold Path* that, according to Kabat-Zinn, is sought to be encompassed in MBSR (Wilson 2013: 89).

This way of medicalizing Buddhist concepts makes them adaptable to a medical setting and available to scientific inquiry. The Four Noble Truths themselves are therefore not mentioned in the MBSR courses, but they are considered to be insights that will be

discovered by the participants themselves through the meditation and dialogues in the course. Dogmas are thus implicitly translated to universal truths in MBSR, the underlying justification being that dogmas can only be verified in religion, whereas universal truths also are verified by science.

A Question of Interpretation

Justification of MBSR is not only performed with reference to scientific research and subjective experience but also with reference to scientific authorities such as Galileo, Newton, or Einstein (Kabat-Zinn 2011a: 284, 2011b: 57). In addition, MBSR teachers even refer to religious authorities from time to time.

Kabat-Zinn's reference to the dharma reveals the fact that he both seeks to justify the MBSR programme in scientific and Buddhist contexts. Here, Kabat-Zinn engages in a compromise as he seeks to show that the essence of the dharma is an element of both worlds because it is both an expression of scientific laws and Buddhist cosmology. As MBSR is based on the dharma, MBSR can therefore be justified not only through the test of science but also through the test of Buddhism, as far as it aims at spreading the dharma. Kabat-Zinn therefore actively sought validation from Buddhist authorities by having his approach accepted by figures such as the 14th Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh and a Rinzai Zen Master (Kabat-Zinn 2011a: 282; Wilson 2013: 87).

Also, the MBSR teachers refer to both scientific and religious figures in the MBSR courses. In the TTP, teachers are encouraged to make use of homiletics, as a "way of delivering didactic material to convey principles of the pedagogy of MBSR" (Piet et al. 2016: 72). This can take the form of stories and poetry as a way to make central themes in MBSR personally relevant. MBSR teachers therefore quote writers, scientists, poets, philosophers, other MBSR teachers, Buddhist monks, or Sufists interchangeably in MBSR courses. Since they are presented as poetic elements, they are therefore not really perceived as religious authorities in the context of the MBSR courses. As the MBSR teacher Y put it: "Poetry is like symbols and metaphors. You can put the meaning into it as you want. It may touch something spiritual within you. But it can also be interpreted differently" (Interview 22.02.2016).

The ambiguity in how stories and poems are interpreted therefore supports the idea that everyone, regardless of personal beliefs, should be able to join an MBSR course,

as the individual participant can decide whether they want to interpret a poem from the perspective of the spiritual or the secular. Here, a strategy of relativization is applied, since it is not discussed that such religious authorities 'in fact' belongs to the religious world.

Similarly, Fjorback argued at the yoga seminar that the Buddhist background in MBSR should stay implicit in the MBSR courses in order for MBSR to be "inclusive". This is what made sure that anyone is able to participate, regardless of whether they are an atheist, a Christian, a Buddhist, or any other kind of believer. This rhetoric reproduces the common conception that religion is privatized in secular realms (Taylor 2007) whereas science is perceived as a universal reference point that both encompasses people with religious and non-religious backgrounds, a view that Kabat-Zinn also presented in the previous chapter.

Changing Modes of Justification

As I did follow-up interviews with some of the student teachers before they participated in the first module of the TTP and afterwards as well, I could investigate how their conception of religion/secular binaries in MBSR changed over time as they gained new insights about the knowledge systems MBSR is based upon, both as individuals and as a group.

P, a university professor in the humanities, exemplifies an MBSR student teacher who changed his conception of these binaries during my conversations with him. In the first couple of interviews before and after his participation in Practicum 1, he stated that he believed MBSR is completely areligious, *despite* the fact that it seeks to acknowledge its Buddhist heritage, but *because* it is substantially scientifically documented. He reproduced the justification that the test of science makes it possible to distinguish which parts of Buddhism belongs to the religious world as it is "hocus-pocus" and which parts are adaptable to the modern world of science. This is a conception of science and religion as mutually exclusive and as belonging to two different worlds.

Yet, after we drove home together following a retreat day with Kabat-Zinn in Copenhagen, he questioned this distinction and stated that

MBSR is not emancipated from religion, even though they are trying to be secularized. They don't seem to be conscious about it themselves. But it's not something I have a problem with, because I don't have a fear of contact with religion. But some do. (Fieldnotes 21.04.2016)

In his eagerness to defend the programme as purely scientific, it seemed as if P had previously chosen to close his eyes to elements in MBSR that could be interpreted as religious, but that he in this moment chooses to open his eyes to the religious elements present in the secular MBSR. With this pollution in his range of vision, he now challenges the very principles the secular is based upon, as he argues that MBSR is 'in fact' still part of a religious framework.

When I asked P about this comment again one week later in our last interview, he wanted to adjust his statement. He emphasized that MBSR is neither religious nor spiritual. At the same time, he believed MBSR is not entirely emancipated from its Buddhist background, since the teachers tend to use culture-bound concepts from time to time such as 'dharma', 'sangha', or 'Buddha'. What he argued differentiated MBSR from spiritual meditation practices, however, was that the *primary* focus of MBSR is to reduce suffering in people's lives and not to support spiritual growth.

This justification can be considered to be a compromise, as it implies that the presence of elements deemed religious can be accepted as long as it serves the common good of both religious and scientific frameworks. Here, P argues that religion and science are not mutually exclusive but can overlap as long as they serve the same end, in this case the reduction of suffering.

It should be noted that it is no coincidence that he changed his strategy of justification after he had enrolled the TTP. The culture-bound concepts he mentioned, 'dharma', 'sangha' and 'Buddha' are discussed in the TTP but not in the MBSR courses. As a result of this mystification, MBSR teachers tend to justify the programme differently to *insiders* and *outsiders* as will become evident in the next chapters.

Another MBSR teacher who questioned whether MBSR is emancipated from religion was V, a pastor of the Lutheran Church. He sought to make another kind of compromise in order to make mindfulness available to a Christian context.

A Resacralization of Mindfulness or a Secularization of Religion?

When I met V at the two-day yoga seminar, I could not help but wonder how a pastor from the Lutheran Church of Denmark justifies the use of Buddhist-derived mindfulness practices. It turned out that V, next to the regular MBSR courses, teaches a Christian version of mindfulness in the church. He explained that the Lutheran Church of Denmark has cut away the practice of prayer, so he resorted to meditation, which he was familiar with from his background at Vækstcenteret.⁵ He basically argued that since prayer has been lost in the Lutheran Church of Denmark, it can be justified to bring in the foreign being of mindfulness as a replacement.

To make use of mindfulness practices in the church, however, V made it clear that it was crucial to him that MBSR is in fact secularized, since he did not believe he could justify the use of Buddhist practice in a Christian church. On the other hand, when the practice was parted from its cultural roots and supported by scientific evidence, he saw no problem in performing a Christian translation of MBSR. For example, he translated *loving-kindness* (derived from the Buddhist *metta*) into *charity*. He also translated *non-attachment/non-judgment* into *the forgiveness of sins* and connected the different themes in the MBSR curriculum to hymns and to stories from the Bible. In MBSR courses on the other hand, he thought it was important to frame his teachings as strictly secular with no reference to Christianity or Buddhism.

When I asked why exactly science was needed as an interlocutor in order to introduce mindfulness in a Christian framework, V persisted that the cultural aspects of Buddhism are incompatible with the cultural aspects of Christianity. On the other hand, science transcends such aspects as a neutral reference point of scientifically based universalism. Thus, V argued that MBSR is basically about universal competences that transcend secular/religion binaries. At the same time, V argued that the same core values persist in all religions, but he persisted that it is only the test of science that can disengage these core values from cultural traditions. We can see from this that V, similar to P, changes between justifying the convergence between Buddhism and science in MBSR and criticizing it.

⁵ A spiritual place to live and teach where several MBSR teachers of spiritual background were connected.

V was not the only one who presented this multi-religious perspective that insists that the values beneath MBSR could just as well be found in any other religion. Fjorback, for example, frequently referred to Saki Santorelli, one of the first MBSR teachers from UMASS, who has a meditation tradition from Sufism in order to justify this point. And the MBSR teacher K, who is a Buddhist, persisted that MBSR could just as well have been based on Christianity (Interview 04.03.2016).

Contrary to K, O, another MBSR student teacher who started the TTP in February 2016, persisted that she would not have accepted MBSR if she had realized that it originated from Scientology, Islam, or Christianity (even though she considered herself to be a Christian). She reflected that Buddhism is more concordant with the secular world because it can be regarded as more of a “lifestyle” than other religions. Buddhism, she argued, was less of a religion, since it did not have all those dogmas and therefore was more adaptable with science (Phone interview 16.03.2016).

A similar argument was posed by other MBSR teachers who argued that mindfulness has always been the scientific inquiry of the mind, also in Buddhist settings. In this framework, the presence of Buddhism in MBSR is simply justified by turning the matter upside down. Instead of arguing that the presence of religious elements in MBSR shows that MBSR is ‘in fact’ religious, it is here argued that scientific elements in Buddhism as a whole show that it is ‘in fact’ secular.

Since many third-generation MBSR teachers have only encountered Buddhism in secular settings, this is not a surprising argument. As also noted by Wilson (2013: 101–2), Buddhism has in general in a Western context become more and more embedded in scientific and psychological frameworks, which creates feedback effects which can be argued to be secularizing Western Buddhism as a religion.

The result is that ‘secular’ Buddhism is presented as being compatible with a scientific framework, whereas Christianity is not, which may also be related to the fact that processes of secularization in a Western context were related to a confrontation with Christianity, not Buddhism. As pointed out by Luhrman (2012: 166), it is not unlikely that prayer would give the same results as mindfulness, but there has simply been no economic interest in doing research on prayer in the same way as there has been with the presumed more secular adaptable Buddhist meditation.

A Turn to Universals

We can see from the above that a common argument for justifying the presence of religious elements in MBSR was that MBSR addresses 'the universal' that transcends the distinction between the religious and the secular and therefore makes the very distinction obsolete. These arguments tended to draw on similarities between the cause for the common good, which could be found in both scientific and religious frameworks, such as the common cause of reducing suffering.

As U expressed it, she believed that MBSR was part of a movement that is paving the way for religion and science to become one and the same in the name of universalism:

I have a feeling that at some point these two will meet. Then science and religion will become the same surface in some way (...) I think we will find out that these working parts, that they, well, that it is something which has a common language. At least, that is my own experience from MBSR (...) I mean, we wouldn't be sitting here as humans today if these universal things within this programme hadn't made sense. This is such a universal way to survive as a human. If we didn't have empathy towards ourselves and towards each other, we wouldn't have been sitting here. So call it science, religion, or spirituality, I mean, whatever. And I know that these thoughts hold on to a scientific approach by focusing on origins, how we survived as a species and so on. But well, you could also talk about it being a common feature within religion, to help one's neighbour, I mean, if we didn't do that, we wouldn't be here as humans today. (Recorded at workshop, 07.10.2016)

She believed it is a matter of time before science will have uncovered the mysteries of religion and will thereby have abolished any need for religion. Science would become able to satisfy the same needs that bring people to religion. In this framework, the presence of religion in MBSR is again justified by arguing that MBSR is a step on the path of secularizing religion itself.

On the other hand, both V and P referred to *unbound spirituality*, a concept derived from Jes Bertelsen, who founded Vækstcenteret. Bertelsen (2010: 30) argues that the *spiritual interior* (e.g., spiritual training and existential strategies) can be released from

the *religious exterior* (e.g., rituals and dogmas). This reference implied the conception that it is both a turn to spirituality and a turn to science which ensure that MBSR addresses the universal, contrary to cultural specific religions.

Such universalist claims are problematic. As already pointed to, neither science nor MBSR can claim to be void of culture and dogmas. The following chapters will return to the problematic nature of such universalist claims.

Preliminary Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the translation of Buddhism into science in MBSR is a strategy of purification that justifies the re-contextualization of MBSR into secular contexts. Elements which are deemed religious are either removed or transformed into elements that are consistent with a secular framework in order to put MBSR to the test of scientific research. In this way, scientific evidence becomes the starting point for justifying a clear demarcation of MBSR from Buddhism. This makes MBSR widely available in secular parts of the Western world, where public organizations are separated from religion, and religion is conceptualized as a private matter. As the test of science combined with the test of experience in MBSR is perceived as universal, universalism becomes a higher common principle which as a strategy of justification can permeate religion and spirituality with reference to the common good, such as the reduction of human suffering. In this way, the boundaries between the religious and the secular are sometimes clearly demarcated and sometimes blurred in order to justify the presence of Buddhism in a secular intervention.

The next chapter will show how such justifications are context dependent due to the fact that different rules and norms apply when religious/secular binaries in MBSR are presented to outsiders and when it is discussed among insiders.

CHAPTER 3

Impression Management in MBSR

Performing Authenticity on the frontstage and backstage of MBSR

It is evening on the third day of Practicum 2, the second module of the TTP. All the student teachers are sitting on meditation cushions in a big half-circle oriented towards the three organizers who sit in the far end of the dimly lit room.

The overall theme of this module seems to be how to present what exactly MBSR is to outsiders. To exemplify, Lone Fjorback now shows us a film clip from a meeting where she presented the research behind the MBSR programme to prominent politicians from the Danish party Radikale Venstre. She is enthusiastic about telling us about DCM's work on promoting and lobbying MBSR. She hopes that direct engagement with the decision makers in Danish politics may convince them to support the use of mindfulness-based interventions in public institutions. Before starting the film clip, Lone makes herself comfortable on her meditation cushion and lies down. Some of the student teachers follow suit.

In the film clip, Lone focuses on presenting the scientific evidence for the health benefits of MBSR. She shows how changes in the brain from before and after participation in an MBSR course can be documented in a brain scanner, and how anti-stress effects of MBSR can be documented in the genes. Lone also points to cost-benefit analyses which show that the use of MBSR in healthcare can result in economic savings.

One of the politicians seems positive and surprised about all this research on the area. He thanks Lone for making them aware. The other politician is sceptic and comments: "mindfulness' sounds so religious though. Why don't you just call it something else?"

After the clip, one of the MBSR student teachers complains: "I hate the way you have to talk so instrumentalist when you want to justify MBSR among other people. Out there, we have to talk about people like robots who need to be optimized! You

[DCM] are doing a great and important job to get there. It's just frustrating that it has to be that way. That we have to talk about scientific evidence instead of talking about what MBSR is really about: what it means to be human."

Many are nodding in agreement. Nevertheless, one of the other student teachers cannot help but to confront her: "So, are you saying that you would have bought the package of MBSR without the evidence?"

"That's the question," she replies uncertainly.

(Fieldnotes 03.09.2016)

The above exemplifies how the MBSR student teachers experience the way MBSR is presented in public contexts and how it is discussed privately within MBSR as contradictory.

In this chapter, I will draw on Goffman's concepts of *backstage* and *frontstage* to shed light on how tactics of representation relate to how the teachers are navigating between secular and spiritual orientations. How this analytical framework relates to the performance of authenticity among the MBSR teachers will be discussed. I will point to the importance of context and argue that different strategies of justification are applied and perceived as appropriate in the different 'stages' of MBSR as they talk to MBSR insiders, outsiders, and people who are considered to be somewhere in between.

The Theatre Metaphor

Goffman uses the metaphor of the theatre as an analytical framework in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) for understanding social interactions. He argues that people in social interactions perform as if they were on the frontstage of a stage where some aspects of the performance are for the audience and other aspects of the performance for the frontstage itself (Goffman 1959: 110). This means that some aspects of activity are accentuated on the frontstage, while others are suppressed. In the private sphere, there is a corresponding backstage where these suppressed facts make an appearance (Ibid.: 114). As Goffman describes further, the backstage is a place where:

illusions and impressions are openly constructed. Here stage props and items of personal front can be stored in a kind of compact collapsing of whole repertoires of

actions and characters. Here grades of ceremonial equipment, such as different types of liquor or clothes, can be hidden so that the audience will not be able to see the treatment accorded them in comparison with the treatment that could have been accorded them (...) Here costumes and parts of personal front may be adjusted and scrutinized for flaws. Here the team can run through its performance, checking for offending expressions when no audience is present to be affronted by them; here poor members of the team, who are expressively inept, can be schooled or dropped from the performance. Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character. (Goffman 1959: 114–5)

In order to manage impressions, the backstage is hidden from the audience of the frontstage (Ibid.: 116). This means that the audience does not know how the performance on the frontstage came to be.

With a point of departure in Goffman's theatre metaphor, I will discuss how public and private settings in different MBSR contexts can be understood in light of the concepts of *backstage* and *frontstage*.

It should be noted that all situations can be argued to have both frontstage and backstage elements, since it is situational whether and for whom a performance is made. In the case of the MBSR courses, one may argue that this is where the participants get to scrutinize their strengths and flaws in order to optimize their performance in the frontstage of their lives, whereas the MBSR teacher here is on a frontstage because she has a course to perform. In practice, however, many layers of privacy present themselves in the MBSR courses as in any other context in MBSR.

A concept which sheds light on this complexity is *authenticity*.

Performing Authenticity in MBSR

In *Teaching Mindfulness: A Practical Guide for Clinicians and Educators* (McCown et al. 2010), which is part of the curriculum in the TTP, it is stated that the person of the MBSR teacher should be "authentic". Here, authenticity refers to "being the person whose story you've lived" (Ibid.: 92), which means that the teacher, in order to be an *embodied* MBSR teacher who is living what she is teaching through the continuous practice of mindfulness, should get to know her own person well by inquiring into the

psychological, spiritual, professional, and biographical background that has brought the teacher to the here and now in which she teaches. This means that the teacher should bring *all that she is* to her teachings (McCown et al. 2010: 92–5). This essentially implies that the MBSR teacher should, in her teachings, let go of all performance behaviour. Many MBSR teachers expressed that this was what they found to be so relieving about MBSR; that here, they could let go of the performance of the outside ‘instrumentalist’ world and just be humans with all their flaws.

Nevertheless, I will argue that even authenticity is performed. The very idea of performing authenticity may seem counterintuitive; after all, the very aim of people in MBSR is to get in contact with the authentic self and authentic experiences behind the veil of perception and impression management through the practice of mindfulness. A focus on performance behaviour in interaction, on the other hand, does not seek to understand what the self behind the appearance of facework might entail.

Handler (1986) argues that authenticity can never be reached in the performance of social interaction. He asserts that the very concept of authenticity is a Western cultural construct closely linked to Western notions of individualism (and I wish to add essentialism as well as objectivism). It is based on the ontological assumption that “units” can assert themselves against the rest of the world as “a locus of ultimate meaning and reality” (Handler 1986: 3). Handler argues that authenticity is connected to the concept of sincerity, the absence of dissimulation, feigning, and pretence (Ibid.: 2). The paradox is that sincerity is basically a public and social virtue, as it is a means to honest social relationships; the result being that sincerity inevitably results in insincerity, as it is an act to be played. Authenticity thus refers to the true self, our individual existence, which can never be reached in social interaction (Ibid.: 3).

It should be noted that notions of authenticity can also be found in Buddhism. But whereas the Western notion of authenticity refers to a self-actualization which implies that an essence of the autonomous being can be found with the help of mindfulness practice, the Buddhist notion of non-self and non-duality denies such essentialism. Still, these notions refer to an inherent interdependent truth above the individual, which refers back to the concept of authenticity (Fransgaard 2011: 25).

I found that references to authenticity in MBSR pointed to a tension between the Buddhist notion of non-self and Western notions of individualism (for example, see the

section on “interdependence” in the next chapter). However, I will argue that both approaches to the concept imply that when one reaches for authentic acts, authenticity is inevitable performed.

How well the individual MBSR teacher performs authenticity was discussed among both MBSR teachers and MBSR participants. For example, in one of the MBSR courses I participated in, one of the participants explicitly said that she thought that she found the MBSR teacher to be “authentic” (fieldnotes 28.04.2016). She exemplified this with how she had noticed that the teacher in question during inquiry in the courses took a moment of introspection. In these moments, the teacher would before answering a question close his/her eyes and take a deep breath before answering a question. As a participant, you could almost *see* how the teacher in these moments was practicing the *mindful responses*⁶ that are taught in the MBSR courses. The participant interpreted this as an embodiment of what the MBSR teacher sought to teach and therefore as an authentic performance.

Cultivating mindful stress responses is believed to help both participants and teachers to connect with their ‘true’ selves by deactivating automatic responses and becoming present to one’s own life. Thus, ideas about actualizing authentic selves flourish in MBSR.

However, does the MBSR teacher in fact express ‘all that she is’ through such authentic performance? As I will show below, some personal aspects are quite deliberately kept behind the mask of the teachers in the MBSR course, related to the mystification of the religious background of MBSR.

Religion on the Backstage of MBSR Courses

The MBSR teacher K, who is a Buddhist himself, never explicitly referred to Buddhism or being a Buddhist. Even when a participant, who also was a Buddhist, came to him after

⁶ Participants learn that it is possible to change *automatic stress reactions* into *mindful stress responses* in MBSR courses. As a tool for this transformation, the participants are taught the STOP model: Stop, Take a few deep breaths, Observe, Proceed. They are asked to practice this as a home exercise whenever they are experiencing a stressful reaction. In these situations, they are asked to observe the interplay between bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings, and actions.

the introductory class and asked questions related to Buddhism, he politely avoided to engage in the subject and led the conversation elsewhere. In fact, both U and K seemed to be the most cautious teachers when it came to references to anything which might sound religious or spiritual. They explained that this was due to them working for a public institution. K more specifically made it clear that he clearly sought to demarcate Buddhism as something personal and private from science as the professional and public when he worked with MBSR. It would simply be inappropriate and out of context to talk about Buddhism in the scientific-based MBSR:

I would not take them out to swim in the ocean either if they hadn't learned to swim yet. Likewise, I would never talk about the four noble truths if anyone asked about the Buddhist background or something like that. People would not get what we were talking about. So, even though I am very proficient in Buddhist thought, I will strive to be faithful to and believe in the science that MBSR is based on. (Interview 12.05.2016)

I will return to the notion of *believing* in science in Chapter 5. For now, I wish to point to how religion, in relation to the person of the MBSR teacher, is perceived here as a private matter that should not be brought into the MBSR course. In this respect, the MBSR teacher cannot bring *all that he is* to the course but must hide religious affiliations. Whereas the line between the religious and secular was sometimes blurred when I talked to MBSR teachers in interviews or when it was discussed in the TTP, it seemed to be commonly agreed that this line should not be crossed in the MBSR courses. Here, the MBSR teacher must guard his words and make sure that he does not bring religious elements into his justifications of the courses.

In addition to authenticity, McCown et al. also write that the MBSR teacher should bring a quality of a "friendship" into the room. This

begins with the intention of meeting people 'where they are', of coming to any encounter *without* an agenda or intention to fix or improve the other, and with a willingness to allow relationships and situations to unfold in a fresh way. (McCown et al. 2010: 99, emphasis in original)

This emphasizes that the teacher should be able to be in touch with what is 'called for' in a given situation, an expression often used by MBSR teachers in my fieldwork. Here, the authors write: "Knowing what's too raw to speak of can keep you out of difficulties" (McCown et al. 2010: 99). They do not exemplify what this might be, but it implies that it may not be all insights that the participants are ready for in a given situation; as expressed by K, who basically argues that Buddhism is too raw to speak of. As MBSR teachers often argued during my fieldwork, especially in relation to insights connected to spirituality or Buddhism, these are insights that the participants must reach through their own *experience* (a point I will return to in Chapter 5).

On the part of the participants, on the other hand, the MBSR teacher E told that she thought that MBSR was a safe space for them to talk about religious and spiritual experiences. She gave the example that she had had an elderly woman in a course who openly told about how she connected her meditation practice to prayer. At the contemplation day of the MBSR course, she also had a participant who had a powerful connection with nature, which E interpreted as a spiritual experience. She let the woman share the experience in the group, but, as an MBSR teacher, she found it to be important that she did not share her own interpretation of the participant's experience: "She has to find out herself what she wants to use the experience for in her life" (recorded at the workshop, 07.10.2016). U commented that she would never interpret such an experience as spiritual, but she agreed that the teacher's interpretation of the experience does not matter, since the teacher should not share it anyway. It should be the participants and *their* experience which is the focus of the classes. As I will show in Chapter 5, the teachers nevertheless have no problem with guiding the participants' interpretations of their experiences in a specific direction through the theoretical framework of MBSR.

Both U and E reflected that they too have had many participants who they in fact know are spiritually/religiously orientated but who choose not to share this with the other participants in the MBSR courses. They thought it could both be because they did not find it relevant in the secular-oriented course or because they found it to be a private matter. Participants in MBSR should always be able themselves to choose exactly what and how much they want to share. This is one of the things that makes MBSR 'inclusive'.

One may question whether the participants in fact experience that MBSR is an open space to share religious experiences since the MBSR teachers on their own part present it as a private matter.

The MBSR teacher Y told me, however, that she adapted how implicit she made the more spiritual side of mindfulness to the audience in each MBSR course. It depended on each individual MBSR group which quotes and poems she chooses to present in each course. If she feels there are sceptics present who would feel offended by quotes that have a too spiritual ring to them, she would skip them.

Illness on the Frontstage of MBSR Courses

Other aspects such as psychological and physical illnesses, which normally belong to the backstage of people's lives according to the prevailing taboos in Western society (Foucault 2001 [1961]; Goffman 1990 [1963]), are more readily brought to the frontstage of the MBSR course than the subject of religion and spirituality.

It may seem self-evident that these subjects come to the fore, since MBSR is aimed at people who suffer from a wide range of psychological and physical illnesses. In the first week of the MBSR course, participants are therefore invited to share what brought them to this programme, and most tend to share whether they are suffering from stress, depression, anxiety, sorrow, bodily distress syndrome, migraine, cancer, a mix, or something else.

The stigmatized get the opportunity to be perceived as normal in social contexts where they are only surrounded by other stigmatized people, Goffman argues (1990 [1963]). In this sense, the MBSR course becomes a backstage of stigmatized insiders in which the participants can discuss and share their illnesses and sorrows, something that would create awkward situations if discussed too openly on the frontstage of their lives.

Contrary to the subject of religion and spirituality, the MBSR teacher often shares her own personal experiences in this area as well. Teachers in the TTP are also encouraged to do so in order to make active use of their own embodiment of mindfulness. As McCown et al. (2010: 104) describe: "everyone involved, teacher and participant alike, shares the sufferings and joys of the human condition". The idea is that MBSR courses are co-created so that *all* participants contribute, using the teacher only

as a catalyst. This is believed to develop a “non-hierarchical, non-pathologizing ethos” (Ibid.).

In this manner, on the first day of the MBSR course, E told that she had been absent due to depression, and that it was MBSR that helped her to get well again. Likewise, on the first day of her MBSR course, Y told of the sorrow she has been through when her grandchild who had cancer passed away, and how MBSR helped her get through this. In this regard, the MBSR teacher presents what Goffman (1990 [1963]: 28) refers to as the *wise normal*, that is:

those whose special situation has made them intimately privy to the secret life of the stigmatized individual and sympathetic with it, and who find themselves accorded a measure of acceptance, a measure of courtesy membership in the clan.

The fact that the teachers have had their own experiences with suffering similar to the participants’ experiences gives them a common ground of sympathy upon which a sense of community in the MBSR courses is slowly built throughout the weeks of the course.

Building a Backstage Community

As in Goffman’s backstage, the TTP is a space in which the MBSR teachers can construct their performance and scrutinize it for flaws and offensive remarks to make it ‘fit’ the MBSR teachers’ potential audiences. Many of the MBSR student teachers expressed that they felt that they can relax and step out of character in these modules. As they need to get in contact with their authentic selves, they should avoid concerning themselves with role stress.

To reach this point, a sense of being among like-minded peers is essential. Just as in the MBSR courses, this is cultivated through a focus on the practice of mindfulness as well as inquiring into the experiences the student teachers are having in their mindfulness practice. As people resonate with each other, both by being involved in wordless presence together and by recognizing others’ experiences as similar to their own, this sense of community is slowly built.

This attentiveness to one’s subjective experience and thereby one’s emotional life often intensifies one’s sensitivity, which was evident in both the modules of the TTP and

in the MBSR courses. At the end of the courses as well as at the end of the modules in the TTP, all participants and teachers would often sit in a circle and tell each other about how the given retreat, course, or module had changed their perception of life. This can be a very emotional experience where some participants cry. Often the round is ended with participants holding each other's hands with closed eyes, where everyone feels each other's presence and connection one last time.

The Case of Performance Anxiety

The intensified attentiveness to the teachers' emotional life in the TTP also resulted in an intensified focus on performance anxiety at Practicum 2. This points to how performance behaviour is also at stake in the TTP despite the fact that the MBSR teachers said that they could let go of role stress in these situations.

At Practicum 2, we did a lot of exercises where the student teachers could practice presentations and guides in mindfulness. Many expressed that they felt performance anxiety in these exercises. In a group exercise where we had to prepare a 45-minute presentation of mindfulness including a guided meditation, no one in my group wanted to guide the meditation, despite the fact that three of the student teachers in the group actually taught mindfulness in their everyday jobs. They reflected that this was due to self-judging thoughts about not being able to do it 'well enough'. Later, at lunch, I discussed this with a group of the student teachers, who expressed that they found it liberating that the TTP provided a space in which it was possible to express performance anxiety without being judged. They agreed that the MBSR teachers had provided a warm and safe learning environment, but the performance anxiety came nonetheless.

There was a duality at play that enforced the feeling of performance anxiety here. On the one hand, MBSR student teachers and participants are taught that embarrassment is a perfectly natural stress reaction, and if one learns to attend to such feelings, one may learn to respond to them mindfully instead of reacting to them automatically. On the one hand, this attentiveness may make the feeling stronger and, on the other hand, the feeling becomes socially acceptable which is why the MBSR teachers should not feel any need to hide it, which would be the 'normal' response on the frontstage of social encounters (Goffman 1956: 264).

Goffman also asserts that performance anxiety can be due to long-range interests that may require one to perform well, even though the specific task at hand may not be of importance. The result is that one may fear being inadequate (Goffman 1956: 266). The MBSR student teachers were indeed asked to engage in a performance with long-range interests in becoming authentic MBSR teachers. Such performance implied projecting an image of oneself as worthy of such a task. As such projections are counterintuitive to the concept of authenticity, of no pretence, of being exactly what they already are, the MBSR student teachers fear they will be discredited by the more competent teachers. Nevertheless, the performance of authenticity is exactly what the MBSR teachers are asked to do.

The case of performance anxiety therefore shows that different conceptions of what the authentic self entails reveal themselves in different situations.

Presenting MBSR to Outsiders

Returning to the fieldnote that I opened the chapter with, we can see that the MBSR student teachers are advised to teach mindfulness introductions differently from the way MBSR courses and the TTP are taught. At Practicum 2, when the MBSR teachers gave feedback on the MBSR student teachers' 45-minute introductory presentations of mindfulness, Lone explicitly warned against drawing too much on personal stories and examples in public spheres. She noted that such stories may be too intimate and sentimental, which could make some people uncomfortable. Such stories should first be included in the MBSR courses where an intimate space has been built.

In this way, the MBSR student teachers learn to relate and react to feelings of embarrassment with sensitivity to context. Within the TTP and the MBSR course, they are encouraged to be open to such feelings and share them without being ashamed of them, since MBSR is perceived as a 'non-judgmental' environment in which it is socially acceptable to share such feelings. This is an attitude that is learned *in* the MBSR course and can therefore not be expected to be present in public spheres. As Goffman notes, it is a common reaction to become embarrassed on behalf of another person who ought to be embarrassed in a given situation, even though "he may not have sufficient shame or appreciation of the circumstances to blush on his own account" (Goffman 1956: 265). This is the situation that Fjorback warns against here.

Instead, the student teachers are encouraged to focus on presenting the scientific evidence which points to the effects of mindfulness but without making it sound like a miracle cure. They should be precise with their choice of words, point to specific research results, and point to the fact that everyone reacts differently. Moreover, it is important to include a short meditation session and maybe a few yoga stretches in order to give the audience a taste of the mindfulness practices of the MBSR course. It should be noted that none of the groups chose to say anything about Buddhism or spiritual affiliations in their presentations, even though the organizers recommended mentioning it very briefly, also in order to get the references straight.

This makes it evident that the MBSR student teachers are encouraged to draw on slightly different modes of justification among outsiders and insiders. When presenting mindfulness to outsiders, the MBSR teachers are mainly asked to refer to the test of scientific research. At the same time, the MBSR teachers should also refer to the higher common principle of competition which answers to market dynamics. Here, I am pointing to the fact that the MBSR student teachers are basically learning how to sell the MBSR programme in order to propagate it. As Boltanski and Thévenot (2006: 200) also point out, the salesman (which in this case is the MBSR teacher) in the market world must seek opportunism, which often requires emotional distance, but also a certain attention to others (i.e., the ability to listen to the consumer in order to learn how to speak to their desires). Even though the MBSR teacher is taught to be sensitive to her own feelings at all times, she also has to be sensitive to others and be able to conceal her own feelings when they are not called for, such as when she is speaking to outsiders.

Simultaneously, she must appear *authentic* which means she should be able to vouch for what she is teaching on a personal level. Such authenticity may be justified through personal experience with meditation practice, stress, depression, but also with reference to the teacher's professional training and work experience. In frontstage settings, however, it is professionalism that is highlighted, whereas personal experiences are highlighted on the backstage.

In order to secure authenticity, we can see that it is also considered important to acknowledge the religious roots, but it is just as important to downplay the presence of religious elements in the present MBSR programme. In order to be taken seriously in secular and public contexts, it becomes of utmost importance to highlight the hard

science and to hide direct affiliations with religious and spiritual movements. It is a balancing act.

Both in frontstage and backstage settings, the importance of mindfulness practice is highlighted as the only way the audience can experience what mindfulness is *really* about. Through the first-hand experience of meditation, they can gain a tacit knowledge about the elements of mindfulness that are taboo in public discourse.

Preliminary Conclusion

Through a discussion of notions of authenticity among MBSR teachers, it has been argued that performance behaviour takes place in backstage and frontstage settings alike. The Buddhist background of MBSR is mystified in the MBSR courses, whereas psychological and physical illness, which are prevailing taboos in public spheres, come to the forefront. In the TTP, the focus is on inclusion, community and letting go of pretence, but when presenting MBSR to outsiders, the focus is on evidence-based science and socio-economic benefits.

The difference between discourse and practice in backstage and frontstage contexts in MBSR points to how MBSR teachers aim at mainstreaming and promoting mindfulness; an aim that is connected to both moral and economic sentiments, which I will turn to in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

The Global Political Outlook of MBSR

From Morality to Market Dynamics

Five hundred people had come to engage in a day of mindfulness with Jon Kabat-Zinn, the famous founder of the MBSR programme, at the Bella Centre in Copenhagen. They had “come to see the lion”, as one of the participants expressed it jokingly. During this event, people sat on their meditation cushions in an inner circle and on chairs in and outer circle around Kabat-Zinn, who sat calmly on his meditation cushion on a stage.

In the introductory remarks, Kabat-Zinn underlined how fantastic it was to be gathered with so many people here in a day of contemplation. He told how he currently travelled all around the world to facilitate such meetings. The mindfulness community had indeed become worldwide. He stated that today’s contemplation represented the dharma, life itself, something much bigger than the five hundred people who were gathered here. He asked the beginners to raise their hands and then the people who had meditated for at least thirty years to raise theirs. Then he stated: “It doesn’t matter if you just started meditating or have meditated for several years. In mindfulness, it is the now that matters and being authentic to that. In that sense, we are all aspiring towards the beginner’s mind.”

I felt awe as I sat there among these five hundred people in silence, who I nevertheless felt connected to through the common practice of mindfulness and maybe even the same vision of what mindfulness entails. I imagined how thousands, maybe millions of people around the world did the same.

(Fieldnotes 21.04.2016)

The above exemplifies how experiences of being a part of a global mindfulness society come to be in specific local encounters within MBSR. With a starting point in the above example, this chapter will show how the building of an *imagined community* based on an

implicit *utopia* in MBSR constructs a divide between the *mindful insiders* and the *mindless outsiders* which points to MBSR as a political enterprise with a moral outlook of changing the world for the better. I will show how this moral outlook implicitly presents itself in the MBSR teacher's focus on *interdependence* as a *universal truth* that transcends religious/secular binaries. Subsequently, I will look into how MBSR acts as a *weak resistance* as MBSR teachers move in and out of prevailing hegemonies. Here, I will point to how MBSR teachers relate to market dynamics, which is sometimes seen as running counter to and sometimes hand in hand with the moral outlook.

Envisioning a Global Mindful Society

The experience of being connected to a global mindful society was prominent in backstage settings such as the MBSR course, the TTP, or in a day like the contemplation day with Kabat-Zinn described above.

Anderson's concept of *imagined community* came alive in that room. This was indeed an imagined community insofar that most of the fellow-members will never meet, see, or hear each other, but in their minds, each lives in the image of their communion (Anderson 1991: 6). I also felt the egalitarian spirit of *communitas* (Turner 1967: 100), which was invigorated by Kabat-Zinn's assurance that the beginner and advanced meditator are each other's equal in MBSR.

Seeing that the monastic Buddhist contexts from which the mindfulness practices in MBSR originate were quite authoritarian (Wilson 2013: 49–52), this element of *communitas* shows how MBSR has, in the secularization process, become connected to Western values of individualism, liberty, and democracy. As Wilson also notes, such values are often presented as non-cultural and self-evident in most mindfulness movements, MBSR included (Ibid.: 181).

From this we can see that Kabat-Zinn's rhetoric evokes universal aspirations in the individual, the feeling of being part of something *big*. Similar techniques are brought into the MBSR course where the MBSR teacher shows the participants that they are not alone in the feelings and experiences they have. In the dialogues, I often saw how, after a participant had shared an experience where she implicit or explicit intimated that she was probably the only one having this experience, the MBSR teacher would simply ask anyone who had had a similar experience to raise their hand. In most cases, most of the

participants would raise their hands and send each other sympathetic looks with the silent message: 'You are not alone in your suffering. We are in this together'. Without needing to say it out loud, the MBSR teacher has here implied the first *Noble Truth* of Buddhism, the universality of suffering.

MBSR as a Moral Enterprise

As presented in the last chapter, it is perceived as a fundamental truth in the MBSR programme (as well as it is in many other mindfulness movements (Wilson 2013)) that by cultivating the practice of mindfulness, one will be able to gain from the wisdom of subjective experience and actively transfer this wisdom into mindful acts. As MBSR teachers seek to mainstream MBSR through research and advertising in the public sphere, they are, ideological speaking, seeking to transform inner peace into world peace by spreading mindfulness from person to person.

MBSR can therefore be argued to provide what Tsing calls "a dream bridge of universal truths" (2005: 84), through which science (in collaboration with Buddhism) provides the antidote that can help unite the world in peace across differences. International cooperation among professionals across scientific and religious disciplines here provides the model for coexistence. The MBSR programme can therefore be argued to contain an implicit *utopia*; that is, "narrative evoked images of better worlds that do not exist in the real world." (Sloterdijk 2013: 221). Foucault calls the spaces made by such utopias *heterotopias*: a spatial creation of an 'other place' with inner autonomous rules that often run counter to the surrounding society (Ibid.: 222). The spaces the MBSR courses and TTP dwell in can be argued to be the construction of such heterotopias.

Wilson argues that this moral outlook points to the fact that mindfulness movements tend to operate as a *civil religion*. They use "religiously derived techniques and scientifically derived rhetoric to advance this vision of global salvation" (Wilson 2013: 160). This involves envisioning the good society where mindfulness has a role to play in all institutions and a plan for how to achieve it by mainstreaming and (seemingly) secularizing mindfulness (Ibid.: 162). This provides

an implicit (or, in many cases, explicit) value system that provides orientation in the world, a sense of transcendent purpose, a program of action, and a division of the world into insiders (the mindful) and outsiders (the mindless)." (Wilson 2013: 161)

As highlighted earlier in this thesis, my point is not to argue that MBSR is a religion (or a civil religion for that matter) in disguise. Still, I will agree with Wilson insofar that people in MBSR tend to draw on many of the same attributes that are often affiliated with both religious institutions and political movements.

Furthermore, the above definition of what civil religion entails could more or less be applied to any discipline of science, since scientific research is also guided by ideological, ethical, and economic interests (Tambiah 1990: 142–3). As with Wilson's civil religion, science also has a value system (e.g., positivism and objectivism), a purpose (to increase knowledge), a programme of action (suggesting changes in society based on scientific research), as well as a division between insiders (the scientists) and outsiders (the public). Again, this shows that religion and science are not necessarily mutually exclusive, even though they are often demarcated as such discursively.

Interdependence as an Implicit Morality

Whereas Buddhism's original contexts were based on a moral conduct of life with guidelines for good and bad behaviour, as exemplified by the Buddhist concept of *karma*, there are no such explicit references in MBSR (Wilson 2013: 55). However, the moral outlook in MBSR still presents itself implicitly; for example, in the MBSR teachers' focus on 'interdependence'.

Many of the MBSR teachers referred to interdependence, connectedness or relatedness as the very foundational *universal truth* of MBSR which made it meaningful for them to become MBSR teachers. Also, Kabat-Zinn (2013: xxxvii) himself writes that mindfulness is basically about

how we are in relationship to everything, including our own minds and bodies, our thoughts and emotions, our past and what transpired to bring us, still breathing,

into this moment – and how we can learn to live our way into every aspect of life with integrity, with kindness towards ourselves and others, and with wisdom.

Each MBSR teacher seemed to have their own interpretation of the concept. In the case of the MBSR teacher U, she related to this truth by pointing to how everything was created in the Big Bang, and how everything is as a result relational and interconnected to this date. She argued that if you pull the MBSR programme apart, it is basically about this relatedness, just as everything else in the world comes back to (Interview 04.03.2016). Being an atheist, this interdependence had nothing to do with spirituality according to her.

To the MBSR teacher Y, on the other hand, the connectedness that MBSR refers back to had everything to do with spirituality, even though she would never speak of it as such in an MBSR course. To her, it referred back to Buddhist non-duality, which challenges the Cartesian illusion that the self is separate from others (fieldnotes 22.03.2016).

From an outsider perspective, it may seem like an important difference whether the teacher explains the theme of connectedness through a secular or a spiritual framework. However, from an insider perspective, all that matters to the teachers is that they agree on the common realized insight of interdependence as a *higher common principle* that can be experienced through mindfulness practice or through the feeling of being part of a global *communitas*, experiences that transcend religious/secular binaries.

The Buddhist notions of non-self and non-duality were also taught in the TTP and implied in the MBSR literature. However, as a part of the mystification of religion framework, it was commonly agreed among the MBSR teachers that the theme of interdependence should not be discussed too explicitly in the MBSR courses. The participants “may not be ready to hear it” because it may sound spiritual, as Y expressed it (Interview 22.02.2016). The closest she came to talking about interdependence in the MBSR course was to describe how we “all are breathing the same air” (fieldnotes 22.03.2016). Instead, it was a theme that participants were supposed to arrive at themselves through the tacit knowledge of mindfulness practice.

In the mindfulness practices of MBSR, the theme of interdependence is most explicitly implied in *mindful eating* where participants are encouraged to think about all

the things and people who have been part of producing the food they eat. But also in the *loving-kindness* meditation which is introduced almost at the end of the MBSR programme (typically at the contemplation day). In this meditation participants practice compassionate mantras directed towards oneself and towards other people, both people you like and people you do not like, people you know and people you do not know. Such a mantra could for example be: “May you feel safe and protected. May you be in good health. May you be happy. And may you live with ease and in peace.”

Nevertheless, it should be noted that when I talked to some of the MBSR participants in interviews after they had participated in the MBSR course, not all of them seemed to have arrived at interdependence being a central theme of the programme. Some expressed that they felt a sense of alienation towards the outside world, to the *mindless outsiders*, as they got more involved in getting connected with themselves through mindfulness practice. One participant directly expressed that she missed a greater focus on relations to others in the programme.

Samuel (2015) argues that MBSR does not succeed in bringing forth the Buddhist notion of the non-self because modern psychotherapeutic notions of self-actualization dominate the programme. It could seem to be the case that the MBSR teachers’ implicit focus on interdependence does not always succeed in getting across to the MBSR participants.

The Deception of Universals

The above section shows that universals such as the concept of interdependence are made and unmade in the frictions of local encounters (Tsing 2005). This is fuelled by the *productive misunderstandings* that are produced when MBSR participants and teachers are asked to find these universals in tacit experiential knowledge. Where one may feel that she is experiencing the universal truth of interdependence because she feels connected to everyone in her mindfulness practice in a given situation, and she imagines how the others in the room probably feel the same, this may not be the case. However, she may never know when this knowledge is considered tacit.

An underlying critique that I seek to point to here is the same warning as Tsing (2005: 8) points to: that people who claim to be in touch with the universal tend to be

“bad at seeing the limits and exclusions of their knowledge”. No matter how much MBSR seeks to make meditation and yoga available to everyone, some will always be excluded.

As Sloterdijk writes in a similar spirit, this points to the deception of universalisms: they are developed by individuals who believe they can speak for everyone, claiming that the achievement of minorities are not privileges of the few but conquests for all (Sloterdijk 2013: 193, 220). However, the truth is:

that universalism can never bring about more than the reformatting of an elect group. Sooner or later, this group expands and assembles a larger ring of new converts, and sympathizers around the hard core. It is on such peripheries that the dreams of absolute inclusivity flourish. (Ibid.: 220)

The aspiring MBSR teachers can be argued to be such a periphery group within the global network of MBSR in which these implicit utopian dreams of inclusion flourish.

Weak Resistance

Nielsen (2014) argues that the need for implicit utopian aspirations point to the fact that what is taught in MBSR also presents an implicit critique of the current conditions of modern life. The MBSR programme can therefore be interpreted as presenting a resistance that aspires towards making a mindless world into a mindful one. This is not a resistance that calls for “radical changes to the economic structure, aggressive or combative political struggle, or class warfare” (Wilson 2013: 183). Rather, they believe it is a change that can come about slowly and peacefully through the established political system by spreading the teaching of mindfulness from person to person, from institution to institution.

This should not be understood as though the people in MBSR support passivism. As Wilson (Ibid.:185) writes:

Mindfulness is not just about sitting down quietly: there is an expectation that the meditator will eventually stand up energized to get to work on improving the world. When this happens, not only will mindfulness guide wise choices of voting, lobbying, protesting, helping, and consuming, but will also assist the worker in

fighting burnout, political cynicism, and hopelessness in the face of setbacks and the scale of complex problems facing the world.

So, MBSR teachers support participants to take an active stand in their own lives and their impact on their surroundings by learning to overcome automatic reactions and turn them into mindful responses in all aspects of life. But again, this encouragement is only *implicit*, since it is believed that this personal morality will be cultivated by itself through mindfulness practice.

From this, we may argue that MBSR in the framework of resistance must be perceived as a *weak* resistance that works *with* the system it seeks to change instead of fighting it. The way people engage with politics in MBSR thus seems similar to the everyday forms of peasant resistance that Scott analyses in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985); that is, the struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract resources from them. Such resistance makes use of low-profile techniques which require little coordination and planning, make use of implicit understandings and informal networks, represent a form of individual self-help, and avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority (Scott 1985: xxvi).

MBSR may have more formal networks, since it is in a continuous process of institutionalization, as we can see from MBSR's collaboration with, for example, healthcare and job centres or from Fjorback's lobbying in the last chapter. But otherwise, it spreads in a similar way. That said, the struggle that MBSR represents is a more abstract one than the one between the poor and the rich, as described in Scott's analysis. This is a struggle against societal structures internalized in the individual. In a sense, it is an everyday resistance against the unnoticed iron chains of involuntarily acquired habits that MBSR wishes to exchange into the freely accepted discipline that the self-technology⁷ of mindfulness practice entails.

That the MBSR teachers perceive themselves as a weaker party in relation to dominant societal structures, is evident from the very difference between backstage and frontstage behaviour and discourse, which was analysed in the last chapter. As Scott argues: "the weaker party is unlikely to speak his or her mind; a part of the full

⁷ *Self-technology* refers to practices of self-transformation that aim at developing a state of happiness, wisdom, or perfection (Foucault 1988: 18).

transcript will be withheld in favour of a ‘performance’ that is in keeping with the expectations of the powerholder” (Scott 1985: 286–7). As a result, he experienced in his fieldwork that it was necessary to move to backstage settings where the poor were alone among friends to get the full transcript “that would, if openly declared in other contexts, jeopardize their livelihood” (Ibid.: 284). Similarly, MBSR teachers argue that MBSR as a secular intervention would be jeopardized if Buddhism were not mystified in public contexts.

However, the different strategies through which each MBSR teacher relates to religious/secular binaries in backstage and frontstage settings show that such resistance cannot be seen as one united movement. To highlight the ambiguity of actions and the internal contradictions of resistance movements, Ortner (1995: 175, 179) argues that it may be better to talk about *transformative processes* instead of resistance. Her point is that the meaning of acts often changes in the process of acting. Therefore, more is often at stake in resistance than a *reaction*. Instead, it should also be understood as an action in itself with its own politics and internal conflicts related to all categories of friction and tension (Ibid.: 177). This is also how this thesis seeks to approach its topic. Yet, as Ortner also acknowledges, the strength in the concept of resistance is that it highlights the presence of power. She points out that “in a relationship of power, the dominant often has something to offer, and sometimes a great deal (though always of course at the price of continuing in power). The subordinate thus has many grounds for ambivalence about resisting the relationship” (Ibid.: 175).

One of the aspects MBSR teachers feel ambivalent about in relation to prevailing societal structures, which they both work with and against, is the market dynamics of capitalism.

When Mindfulness Meets Capitalism

In relation to the standards of MBSR, Kabat-Zinn et al. (2017) write that “it is important to develop a fair and non-exploitative pricing structure for both MBSR and for the training of teachers of MBSR.”

In practice, the MBSR student teachers at DCM are paying for one module at a time, but it is estimated that it costs approximately 150,000–200,000 DKK in total, including the silent retreats which must be taught by a certified MBSR teacher and which the

student teachers have to find themselves. The MBSR courses I have encountered in Denmark lie in a price range between 3,000 and 5,000 DKK (with an exception of the MBSR courses offered by public services such as job centres, where the courses are free). Many MBSR teachers and participants alike complained to me that they found the price range to be way too expensive.

When the teachers explained why they nevertheless had chosen the TTP instead of other training programmes as mindfulness or meditation teachers, they emphasized it was because this education is 'evidence-based'. They found that this ensures a high quality, also "in the eyes of the customers", as P expressed it (Interview 17.02.2016).

As the MBSR teacher K also put it, 'evidence' is a keyword for opening cash boxes and good will in relation to the municipality. Some of the MBSR student teachers who worked at places like job centres, hospitals, or pain clinics therefore also had their workplace pay for their TTP. Some of them expressed that they were in a bit of a hurry to get the teacher training done as fast as possible because they were not sure they would be able to get funding in the future. In relation to the price level of the MBSR courses, E and Y explained that these prices are the result of MBSR not being recognized by the public health insurance, so the participants must cover all the expenses themselves. Also, the prices have to match the investment in the TTP. Here, we see how the world of marketing also plays an important role in the teachers' justification of their navigation within MBSR. In the end, they have to make a living off this investment, which they see as a meaningful way to earn money.

In this context, it should also be noted that in practice, during the time of research, DCM was relaxed about letting MBSR student teachers in who did not meet the formal requirements. Some of the student teachers who started at Practicum 1 with me in February 2016 had not meditated for long and had not attended a silent retreat, even though it was a formal requirement. And some of those who were, for example, psychotherapists, sellers, or chefs who did not have a bachelor degree but had still been judged to have the equivalent in practical experience, turned out to have trouble with the academic English readings in the syllabus.

The secretary at DCM explained to me in an informal interview (07.03.16) that in her experience, candidates who were not really qualified, tended to drop out by

themselves anyway after the first module. I could not help but wonder whether they led them in due to the funding DCM gets from participants of each module of the TTP.

Wilson (2013: 185) writes: “Most mindfulness authors pin their hopes on a mindful capitalism as sufficient to bring about the kinder, wiser society they envision.” They accept capitalism as a part of the rules of the game they must navigate within even though they may seek to adjust it to an ethical sustainable framework of “mindful consumerism” (Ibid.: 183). Why not work within the instrumental logic of capitalism if it is possible to work on making the world a better place while making a living doing so? This shows how mindfulness movements like MBSR have moved away from the monastic renunciation and detachment from such worldly thoughts and experiences that were part of the contexts that mindfulness comes from. Instead, mindfulness in MBSR can be applied in everyday experiences as a part of everyday life for the secular lay person with this-worldly work, family, friends, and spare time hobbies. As argued by Carrette (2007: 154), this actually makes mindfulness practices the new “perfect ideological supplement of capitalism” in replace of religion by “reducing religion to a mere form of ‘experience’, ignoring cultural and historical particularities”.

Therefore, even though they talk about holism, inclusion, and warmth on the backstage of MBSR, they cannot escape the logic of the instrumentalism of cold calculations from the world of marketing in the frontstage of their lives. Thus, we see how Tsing’s concept of friction comes alive, as MBSR teachers in this way challenge and enforce the hegemony of capitalism at one and the same time as they engage in the weak resistance of mindfulness. Sometimes this contradiction is emphasized, as in the case of the introductory fieldnote in Chapter 3 where the student teacher problematizes the instrumentalist discourse of MBSR when MBSR teachers try to ‘sell’ it to outsiders. At other times, this tension is blurred and presented as an unproblematic ‘win-win’ situation. As Lone Fjorback said in her introduction of MBSR in the first module of the TTP: “There are both great socio-economic advantages of MBSR as there are savings to be made in healthcare here, *and* there are important values such as promoting a sense of community among people” (fieldnotes 18.02.2016).

This duality points to what Sloterdijk (2013: 430) calls the *institutionalization of selfishness*. Sloterdijk argues that the growth capacity of subsystems in modern society – whether in politics, business, law, science, art, the church, sport, pedagogy, or the health

systems – depends on a constant increase in its self-referentiality. Each subsystem therefore produces experts who can explain “to the sceptical audience why the all-too-visible self-interest of the subsystem is outweighed by its usefulness for all” (Sloterdijk 2013: 431). As a result, selfishness is often hidden beneath holistic rhetoric. Where one does not find confessions of such selfishness, one instead finds diagnoses of the structural problems that the given subsystem seeks to answer to (Ibid.). MBSR teachers do indeed depend on the self-referentiality of experts, such as scientists who argue for the societal need of MBSR, in order to survive as a funded enterprise.

Preliminary Conclusion

This chapter has shown that MBSR teachers’ aim of mainstreaming and promoting MBSR are both related to moral and economic sentiments. Moral, as they hope that the development of the inner peace of mindfulness can further the development towards a more mindful society, one individual at a time. Economic, as this moral outlook is combined with the economic incentive of making a living as an MBSR teacher. This shows how MBSR teachers work within prevailing hegemonies in order to change them. These sentiments are justified with indirect reference to concepts and values that cross the religious/secular divide and that are deemed universal by the MBSR teachers, such as the reduction of suffering, interdependence, individualism, or liberty. Such universals are deceptive since exclusion of the mindless outsiders is inevitable.

The last chapter will turn to how such universal aspirations come to be as the MBSR teachers alternate between experiential and theoretical knowledge in their navigation of the religious and secular in MBSR.

CHAPTER 5

Mindfulness as Practical Wisdom

*Navigating in between Theoretical and Experiential Knowledge through
Sentiments of Belief and Doubt*

It is the third week of the MBSR course with K and U. We are halfway through the class when U guides us through a short meditation of a couple of minutes in which we are supposed to bring our memory back to a specific pleasant experience we have had during the last week. I decide on the memory of a run in the forest where I stopped for a moment to enjoy the view and the sensation of my blood rushing through the body. U asks us how we feel in the body right now. My body feels hot and my heart is pumping.

U then asks us to sit together in pairs of two and tell each other about our chosen memories. We are to focus more on the bodily sensations, thought, and feelings associated with the experience than on what the experience was about. In this exercise, we should listen to each other without commenting. After the couple exercise, U invited us to tell about our experiences in plenum. A raises her hand.

A: "I think it is difficult to remember good memories. I find it difficult to remember at command. So, when I tell about it, it feels superficial. I get this feeling of being empty. I have that feeling often, almost all the time. So this thing about experiencing good things, living in the present, I think it's hard."

U: "So, may I ask how you feel now?"

A: "Empty."

U: "How do you experience that?"

A: "I've gotten used to my emptiness. I've gotten used to how I feel. I've accepted it."

U: "So, if you feel your body right now, what do you feel then?"

A: *"I don't understand your question?"*

U: *"Hm, I am curious about how emptiness feels to you. Is it something you can feel in your body?"*

A: *"I feel empty right here (points to her heart), emotionally. You know, I also have moments where I'm very emotional, but I've gotten used to repressing it. So, I'm here to face my problems really. I guess that's why I feel empty, because I tend to pretend everything is perfect. So, I'm here to learn to feel again, not that I'm insensitive or cynical, but... Deal with it, you know? I was happy for a moment last night though."*

U: *"And how did you feel that?"*

A: *"I smiled and was happy, but when I tell it to you, it's not the feeling I remember. I remember it in pictures, that we sat at the table, the family together, having a cosy time."*

U: *"How do you feel in your body now?"*

A: *"Now that we talk about it, I feel more relaxed, but warm. I don't know why, but it got my blood circulation started."*

U thanks A for sharing and lets N speak next.

N: *"I also feel that way, that I do not have many emotional fluctuations due to my medicine, but I still have experiences which I know are positive experiences. But it's more like I know rationally that it's a good experience, it's not like I really feel it. I have a girlfriend who's abroad, and we share our experiences every day. It is a bit like this exercise. It helps."*

U: *"What helps?"*

N: *"That I remember some of the good experiences by telling her about them. But it's more like objective and rational. I can see that this was a good experience, but I don't feel it. It's like I'm standing outside the experience."*

U: "You are putting something important in words here, N. We can use much time in our heads, also in relation to the good experiences. **We have a tendency to categorize experiences as either good or bad.** So, the reason why we have chosen to focus on pleasant experiences now is so **we can start to notice this connection between body, emotions, and thoughts.** We are training this ability to discover when something feels pleasant, these magical moments, but also in a grander perspective to start noticing what is happening in my body. What is it that I am experiencing in my body, what is it that I am thinking? And it can be difficult to say that now I am only experiencing a bodily sensation. **These different sensations happen on top of each other all the time. But there is still something we can get into and categorize as bodily sensations, thoughts, and emotions which all are connected.** And with the positive experiences, there are certain moods and colours which appear. Maybe lightness, but also sadness, when it disappears, or 'hey, I haven't had that feeling for a long time.' So, the more we train our awareness of what is happening inside us, the better we get at **waking up** and noticing where I am right now, what am I rushing through right now? And what would be the best to do right now? Should I stay and enjoy, or do I have to move on for my appointment? Does it make sense?"

People are nodding. One comments: *I think it's hard to distinguish thoughts and feelings."*

U nods in agreement: "It is, because a lot is happening at the same time. A thought can bring about a feeling, and a feeling can bring about a new thought. And feelings are also bodily sensations. So, **it is a holistic entity** really, but we can inquire into it and see that there is a difference. There's a difference between thinking that I am sad and feeling it. **And the thought that "it is always like that". Suddenly you start noticing that you also feel happy from time to time.** But it is how we think as humans. We categorize in order to understand the world around us, but these categorizations can be problematic."

(Fieldnotes and recording, my emphasis, 14.04.2016)

The above exemplifies how the MBSR teacher in her teachings alternates between experiential and theoretical approaches to knowledge in her guiding of the MBSR courses. By letting the participants look into their own bodily experiences and by guiding them to tap into this embodied knowledge by inquiring into these experiences, she is seeking to make the messages of the MBSR programme a part of their own experiential knowledge. Concurrently, the MBSR participants learn that these bodily experiences are to be interpreted within a specific frame of theory. For example, the very differentiation between bodily sensations, feelings, emotions, and actions is derived from models in cognitive therapy. The talk about “waking up” and the realization that “it is not always like that” is, on the other hand, a reference to the Buddhist concepts of *Awakening* and *Impermanence*.

In this chapter, I focus on the analytical distinction between experiential and theoretical knowledge. I will point to the primary position that is put on subjective experience in mindfulness practices, but also to how MBSR teachers guide and make sense of these experiences through a *theory of mind* derived from both scientific and religious frameworks. As each MBSR teacher seeks to make sense of the relationship between her own *practical wisdom* and *theoretical reason*, I will argue that the MBSR teacher’s learning process is guided by a constant movement between *belief* and *doubt*. This making sense is individual, as each MBSR teacher is drawing on diverse experiences and knowledge systems from their professional and personal lives. Lastly, I will show how diversity is overcome through a turn to tacit experiential knowledge as a strategy of relativization.

A Differentiation between Theoretical Reasoning and Practical Wisdom

Kabat-Zinn (2011a: 284) states that “Mindfulness can only be understood from the inside out” and that it should primarily be understood as a “first-person experience”. The epistemological understanding of how knowledge is acquired in the context of MBSR is thus profoundly different from the third-person perspective of objectivist natural science, which is nonetheless the means through which the MBSR programme seeks to document the effects of the programme. This view of knowledge within the MBSR programme mirrors Aristotle’s advocacy for the concept of *practical wisdom*

through which he argued that the scope of knowledge is wider than the sphere of science.

Aristotle argued that the spheres of knowledge can be divided in the distinction between *epistēmē*, *technē*, and *phronēsis*. I will argue that the knowledge gained through the self-awareness techniques of mindfulness has little to do with the theoretical and rational knowledge of what Aristotle calls *episteme*, which science tends to be affiliated with (Bernstein 1983: 39). Neither is it just a matter of technical skill, what Aristotle calls *technē* (Aristotle et al. 2009: 1140a), even though some scientists studying mindfulness may seek to reduce it to such in order to put the practice under the scope of quantitative inquiry, as well as some promoters who seek to make mindfulness more widely available through recordings and apps. Rather, I will argue that the kind of knowledge that the MBSR teachers advocate is more akin to what Aristotle calls *phronēsis*, often translated as *practical wisdom* (Aristotle et al. 2009; Bernstein 1983). In his comparative study of Greek and Indian philosophy, McEvelley (2002) has even argued that the proper translation of *phronēsis* should actually be *mindfulness*.

In Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (2009: 1140a) defines that a man of practical wisdom is

able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g. about what sort of things conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general.

Practical wisdom is thus ultimately presented as the intellectual virtue that conditions the human ability to attain a good life, not unlike the claims of mindfulness movements who aim at improving one's quality of life through mindfulness practice.

Practical wisdom is gained from experience. Aristotle gives the example that a boy can be a mathematician, but not a philosopher, seeing that mathematics is a matter of theoretical reason, whereas philosophical insights are gained from the experience of practical engagements (Ibid.: 1142a).

Guiding Experience through a Theory of Mind

The MBSR teachers in the TTP are asked to teach primarily on the basis of their own practical wisdom and only secondarily on the basis on their theoretical and professional knowledge. As they write in *Teaching Mindfulness: A Practical Guide for Clinicians and Educators*, the teacher should seek to incorporate their professional training (whatever that might be), but only insofar as it fits their “more mindful way of working” (McCown et al. 2010: 98). Here, the authors advise the MBSR teacher “to see when what you *know* is more important than what you’ve *learned*” (Ibid., emphasis in original). This basically implies that the practical wisdom gained from the self-awareness of mindfulness practice is superior to, and thus overrules, any theoretical or technical knowledge gained from previous training. This also implies that the truths learned from mindfulness practices are truer than the truths learned from previous professional training.

Yet, it is theory that defines what the insights gained from the practical wisdom of mindfulness practice are supposed to be within the framework of MBSR. Therefore, it is also theory that guides the MBSR teacher’s interpretation of how to make use of her mindful experiences in her facilitation of the courses. As Kabat-Zinn (2011a: 297) also writes, the MBSR teacher

is continually engaged in mapping the territory inwardly through intimate first-person contact and discernment, moment by moment, all the while keeping the formal dharma maps of the territory in mind to whatever degree we may feel is valuable, but not relying on them explicitly for the framework, vocabulary, or vehicle for working with what is most salient and important in the classroom in any moment. Some of this will naturally be thoughtbased, but a good deal of it will be more intuition-based, more embodied, more coming out of the spaciousness of not-knowing rather than out of a solely conceptual knowing.

Again, Kabat-Zinn is placing intuition-based experiential knowledge of the present moment as primary. However, at the same time, his reference to the use of “formal dharma maps” in the first-person mapping of the mind shows that Kabat-Zinn expects the teacher’s interpretation of the experiential knowledge of mindfulness to point back

to the theoretical framework of the *universal dharma*, that is, Buddhist cosmology insofar it correlates with a scientific theoretical framework (see also Chapter 2). Thus, he argues that experiential knowledge of the present should be guided by a dharma-inspired theoretical mapping of the mind, but only “to whatever degree we may feel is valuable” (Kabat-Zinn 2011a: 297). This statement leaves room for a broad interpretation and ambiguity of how the dharma should be applied in a given context – which is why individual MBSR teachers relate to this in diverse ways.

How theory guides the engagement in mindfulness practice in MBSR can be seen in the very structure and curriculum of the MBSR programme. For example, in the second week of the course, participants are asked to be aware and write down at least one pleasant experience per day. In the following week, the teacher and the participants characterize together in plenum what bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts are connected to pleasant experiences (as exemplified in the chapter’s introductory fieldnote). In the third week, the participants are asked to do the same exercise with unpleasant experiences. Besides characterizing the symptoms together, the teacher also shows how these experiences can scientifically be shown to be stress reactions. In this way, the participants are provided with a clear theoretical framework through which they can interpret their experiences as empirical data rather than practical wisdom *per se*.

This shows that the experiential knowledge gained from mindfulness practice is inevitably connected to the new *theory of mind* (Luhrman 2012) which the MBSR teachers seek to cultivate in the MBSR courses. Acquiring this new theory of mind requires both learning and unlearning. As Luhrman, writes “the basic presumption that the mind is separate from the world is one of the most definite achievements of childhood development” (ibid.: 39). This achievement is one of the elements that are sought to be unlearned in MBSR with its focus on interdependence (even though not always with great success as we saw in the last chapter). Another is the essentialist categorizations of the mind which are challenged by the doctrine of Impermanence.

This theory of mind in MBSR is derived from the convergence of Buddhism and science, but only with explicit reference to such fields as neuroscience, biology, and psychology, which explain physical and mental behaviour as it can be documented and

categorized through science. Implicitly, this framework draws especially on Buddhism and Buddhist psychology.

Buddhist psychology argues that there is a gap between our actual experiences and how we perceive them. From this perspective, it is due to our perception that we divide experiences into good, neutral, and bad. In this framework, the reason to human suffering is due to a tendency to cling to the perceived good experiences and reject the bad (Elsass 2011). In the seventh week of the MBSR course, the overall theme is *Change*. After several weeks of mindfulness practice, the participants are then seen to be ready to find the way out of suffering by indirectly accepting the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence, which makes the clinging onto and the rejection of the good and the bad pointless. The MBSR teachers seek to guide the participants to make these realizations themselves through their own practical wisdom. However, the theory of mind behind the teaching, guiding, and inquiry in the programme makes it likely that these are exactly the truth effects the participants will arrive at.

This should also be illustrated by the introductory fieldnote of the chapter. Here, U first inquires into A's experience of always feeling empty. As she keeps asking A about how she feels in her body right now, she tries to get A to acknowledge, through her own practical wisdom, that she in fact does not feel empty *all the time*. When she has also inquired into N's experience, she sums up how their observations correlate with some of the theoretical bullet points of the programme: That experiences are impermanent and we tend to categorize experiences as good, neutral, and bad, but these categorizations are mere perceptions that are not necessarily true.

In this way, MBSR teachers move back and forth between theoretical and experiential understandings in order to make sense of their own and the participants' experiences. This is to argue that the role of how the theoretical framework of the MBSR programme guides the interpretation of the experiences made in mindfulness practice should not be underestimated, despite the focus on the primacy of first-person experiential knowledge in MBSR.

Unfolding the Known

Even though MBSR provides a common theoretical and experience-based foundation to teach from, MBSR teachers are also, on a secondary basis, encouraged to draw on

knowledge from their own professional and personal backgrounds to make their teachings personal and authentic as well as to adapt them to their given context (see also chapter 1).

For example, the anthropologist Y therefore drew on examples from her previous fieldwork when she taught about perception in the MBSR courses. On the other hand, the psychologists K and U went more in depth with the psychological models and cognitive processes in the brain when they explained stress reactions than the others did. And the occupational therapist E was the one who went most into detail with each body part in her guidance of body scans.⁸

This also means that the MBSR teachers make use of individual routes based on their own theoretical and practical knowledge to reach the same imagined *universal truths* of the MBSR programme. Often, these individual routes are dependent on exactly what knowledge the individual MBSR teacher has ready at hand as they make use of previous knowledge to make sense of the new.

The Lutheran pastor V exemplifies an MBSR student teacher who simply draws on the theoretical knowledge that is already available to him as he aims to re-contextualize mindfulness into a Christian context (see also Chapter 2). I found it curious that he resorted to MBSR instead of other movements within Christianity that make use of prayer practices. When I asked him, he replied that he did not know anything about these movements but that he doubted that these movements had the same reflexivity about the practice as MBSR (Interview 11.03.2016).

The point here is that since V believes that an experience-based prayer is missing in the Lutheran Church of Denmark, he simply turns to the meditation practice which he is already acquainted with from his background at Vækstcenteret. He then learns about MBSR, which he sees as a fitting framework for re-sacralizing mindfulness into a Christian context. My argument is that if V had had a Baptist background, he might as well have turned there.

Applied knowledge used for constructing meaning on the level of individuals can therefore be argued to be a matter of more or less arbitrary associations based on the knowledge and experience that individuals bring with them. Another example of this is

⁸ One of the meditation practices in MBSR in which each part of the body is 'scanned' with one's awareness.

K, who as both a psychologist and a Buddhist, changes between these theoretical frameworks to put into words and make sense of the practical wisdom gained from engaging in the TTP over a longer period of time:

Something I like about the teacher training programme is that it insists that it cannot be done in half a year. I like that you have a module, and then you have to work with it and let it sink in. And in that way take ownership of the matter. Ownership both in a cognitive and bodily sense. So, you have to let it grow in some way. And then you can... Well, now it is getting a bit Freudian, but then you can have a look at your own shadows. Here I am drawing on something from Jung, I don't know if Jon [Kabat-Zinn] would say this, but to see the nature of the mind, if I were to use Buddhist terms. (Interview 04.03.2016)

Again, the point is that other MBSR teachers who are not well read in psychology or Buddhism will draw on other theoretical frameworks to make sense of the MBSR programme – such as V, who drew parallels to Christianity and Jes Bertelsen's teachings (as we could see in Chapter 2).

Belief and Doubt as a Learning Process

Throughout my fieldwork, I experienced that most of the MBSR teachers were continuously alternating between expressing self-confidence and self-doubt about becoming and being competent MBSR teachers. In this section, I wish to argue that this can be interpreted as an alternation between *belief* and *doubt*, which are both sentiments through which the MBSR teachers navigate in the knowledge systems of the MBSR programme.

In order to make use of belief and doubt as analytical concepts, I first wish to point out a common misconception which states that religion can be defined by belief whereas science can be defined by doubt, an ethnocentric distinction between 'their beliefs' and 'our knowledge' which has been dominant in the rationality debate within anthropology (Evans-Pritchard 1976 [1937]; Geertz 1973; Tambiah 1990; Winch 1964). This distinction is also popular within justifications of religion/secular binaries in MBSR when MBSR is sought to be demarcated from religion, as should be evident from Chapter

2. Here, it was often emphasized that MBSR is not a belief system in order to argue that MBSR is on the side on science. On the other hand, doubt was encouraged as a useful tool of the scientific inquiry of the mind. Closer scrutiny shows that both belief and doubt are prevalent sentiments in both institutions of science and religion.

This is evident from how MBSR teachers encourage the participants to continue their mindfulness practice in cases where they cannot feel that it makes a difference. In these cases, the MBSR teachers ask them to put their *faith* in science. A popular reference is that even though the difference cannot be *felt*, the difference can be *seen* on a brain scanner. It can be argued to be a problematic assumption that an imagined change in wave patterns in the brain, as measured by an imagined machine (as the participants in the given MBSR course in fact do not get their brain patterns measured), has anything to say about the well-being an MBSR programme might provide you. To reach this conclusion, a certain positivist theoretical framework for interpreting empirical data is required which transfers the results from previous research to the given contexts. A bold question would be whether any less belief is required here than, for example, to interpret some of your experiences as the voice of God?

In Luhrman's monograph *When God Talks Back* (2012) based on her fieldwork in the Vineyard, an American Evangelical church, she argues that a *suspension of disbelief* is essential to the congregants' religious practice. At the same time, she argues that it is exactly the dynamic between the certainty of belief and the uncertainty of doubt in which the hyper-reality of God arises, because there can be no faith without doubt (Luhrman 2012: xiii, 319–322). By pretending and acting as if God is literally there by your side, the congregants break down the distinction between belief and make-believe. It is through the ambiguity that this religiosity does for Christians what postmodernism did for intellectuals: "It allows them to waver between the metaphorical and the literal, between what they fear to be true and what they yearn to be true" (Ibid.: 322). The same may happen when MBSR practitioners put their faith in science: They yearn for the imagined analysis of the changes in their brains in a brain scanner to be true or that they can make it true. Thus, the technology, these tools of measurements, even if they are just imagined, become co-creators of the practitioners' life.

From this it should be evident that what constitutes facts is defined by the theoretical framework and will therefore always be a matter of interpretation. Natural

science is just as much about interpretation of meaning as social science, hermeneutics (Hesse in Bernstein 1983: 33), or religion for that matter.

In this framework, belief and doubt condition each other as the practitioner moves between them in order to reach new levels of understanding. Below, I will show how sentiments of both belief and doubt condition how the MBSR teacher interprets the relationship between experiential and theoretical knowledge.

Putting Faith in the Practical Wisdom of Mindfulness Practice

In my first interview with the MBSR teacher E, she commented on my use of the concept *spirituality* in the e-mail that I had sent to her, as follows:

When you wrote that about spirituality, I first thought: “Don’t ask me about that, because if there is something that I *don’t* know anything about...” I really get this feeling of being stupid! When I’m sitting on those retreats and they start talking about one revelation after the other, and I’m thinking: “What are you *talking* about? I’m *all* at sea.” But in the meantime I know... My husband has often told me: “I am the one who *knows* everything about spirituality, but you are the one *living* it all the time.” (...) So, in a way it was a bit provoking that you wrote (laughs). Because if it had just been about the science, right? I am an occupational therapist, I can relate to that. But I also feel that it is really interesting to be challenged on. Because I sense a lot of spirituality within me, it’s just figuring out exactly what it is. (Interview 23.02.2016)

Here, E expresses insecurity about her lacking theoretical knowledge about spirituality (and Buddhism more specifically, as she also expressed later on), but confidence about her professional training as an occupational therapist. Then she acknowledges that she actually *does* know a lot about spirituality through her own experience. She is expressing that she lacks the theoretical knowledge in areas connected to spirituality but nonetheless has the tacit experiential knowledge.

As also noted in Chapter 2, it turned out to be a common pattern that many of the aspiring third-generation MBSR teachers had little theoretical knowledge about Buddhism, even though it is stated in the guidelines of the TTP that the teacher should

have in-depth knowledge about the dharma. In a later interview with E, she defended the fact that they are not taught much about spirituality or Buddhism. In the TTP, you learn about “the evidence-based, the research-related, what it does to your health” (Interview 04.05.2016). Instead, spirituality and Buddhism were things that MBSR teachers should learn about and “find within themselves” in silent retreats outside the confinements of the TTP as such.

Here, E is supporting the mystification of religion not only in the MBSR courses but also in the TTP, as she argues this is tacit knowledge that may be important but that it does not need explicit teachings in either the TTP or the MBSR courses. In the contemplation day of her MBSR course, she also mentioned to me that the fact that many of the participants had experienced restlessness and laziness today is a part of the path to enlightenment in Buddhism. She explained that she had not mentioned it to the participants since “this is the sort of insight people have to get to through their own experience” (Fieldnotes 21.05.16).

Nevertheless, E seemed to vacillate between wanting to learn more about the Buddhist background, as she sometimes felt she did not know enough about it compared to other MBSR teachers, and arguing that what she already knew was sufficient, as long as she continued deepening her practice. E was not the only one who presented this vacillating view. Several of the MBSR teachers with little spiritual background expressed that they from time to time had a feeling of being left in the dark in relation to these ‘revelations’ that other MBSR teachers seemed to experience. When these uncertainties arose, refuge was often found in the conclusion that the answer must be found in one’s own mindfulness practice, in time. As O also concluded in the group work at Practicum 1, where we discussed what the concept *dharma* meant: “I guess it is a matter of getting to know about it through experience! By experiencing the dharma on your own body” (Fieldnotes 21.02.15). Thus, it was a recurrent pattern that lacking conveyance of theoretical knowledge of Buddhism was justified by referring to Buddhism as simply being a matter of tacit experiential knowledge that can be found in mindfulness practice within the secular framework of MBSR.

There is an element of *suspension of disbelief* in this justification, in both O’s and E’s belief that spirituality and the dharma will eventually make sense through continuous practice. The comfort, which is found by turning to practice, also finds support in the

MBSR literature. As McCown et al. (2010: 91) express it: “To teach mindfulness is to practice it, and to practice means to bring all that you are to every moment. And all that you are is all that is needed; The real you really *is* sufficient.” This statement implies that theoretical knowledge of the foundation of mindfulness is not that important in the teaching of mindfulness. All you need is the experiential knowledge.

If we look back at Kabat-Zinn’s reference to how the MBSR teacher should engage in a mapping of the mind with use of formal dharma maps, it can be questioned whether he intended the dharma to simply be a matter of experiential knowledge. However, when the MBSR teachers are encouraged to investigate Buddhism, the dharma, and spirituality outside the confinement of the TTP, the result is that it remains unclear exactly what the MBSR teachers are supposed to know about these subjects. The result is that it varies a lot from MBSR teacher to MBSR teacher how much knowledge about Buddhism and spirituality they bring with them and how much knowledge about these subjects they work on expanding, just as in the case of the personal and professional knowledge they bring with them.

Preliminary Conclusion

This chapter has shown how experiential knowledge discursively is placed as superior to theoretical knowledge within MBSR. In practice, the structure of the MBSR programme as well as the MBSR teachers’ facilitation of the courses are guided by a *theory of mind* derived from both Buddhism and science through which experiences are interpreted. Thus, it has been argued that the way the MBSR teacher navigates in the knowledge systems of MBSR is guided by an oscillation between theory and experience, which is also connected to the theoretical and experiential knowledge the MBSR teacher brings with her from her personal and professional background. This is a learning process that on another level is guided by belief and doubt, which act as shifting sentiments through which the MBSR teachers choose to either close or open their eyes to the compromises which the juxtaposition of knowledge systems MBSR entail. Often, it was agreed that the common engagement in mindfulness practices transcends such divides as a strategy of relativization. This echoes Sloterdijk’s argument in *You Must Change Your Life* (2013: 3) in which he brings the following diagnosis of the modern age of secularism:

the tiresome distinction between 'true religion' and superstition loses its meaning. There are only regimens that are more or less capable and worthy of propagation. The false dichotomy of believers and unbelievers becomes obsolete and is replaced by the distinction between the practicing and the untrained, or those who train differently.

Or, as E said in the introduction of her MBSR course: "It does not matter if you believe or doubt, as long as you try" (Fieldnotes 01.04.2016).

Conclusion

This thesis has proposed several overlapping frameworks for understanding how MBSR teachers in discourse and practice navigate within religious/spiritual and scientific/secular fields of knowledge in the MBSR programme in their learning process of becoming qualified MBSR teachers.

It has been argued that the MBSR teachers strategically engage in *games of truth* through which they justify their navigation in this dichotomy, both to themselves and to others. In these games, Buddhism is sometimes clearly demarcated from the MBSR programme in order to justify that MBSR is secular and scientifically based, an approach which presumes that religion and science is mutually exclusive. At other times, the line between religion and science is blurred in order to justify that Buddhism can be compatible with the secular and scientific framework of MBSR. At other times again, the very distinction between religion and science as well as between secularity and spirituality is presented as pointless and obsolete. In these cases, MBSR is argued to transcend such divides by turning to ideas about universal dispositions that can be found in all humans as practicing beings.

All of these approaches support the *privatization of religion* discourse which argues that the individual practitioner is welcome to bring any belief into the practice as he or she wishes, as long as it supports the truth effects of the programme. In the MBSR courses themselves, it is, however, commonly agreed that the Buddhist background should be *mystified* in order for the MBSR programme and the MBSR teacher to be taken seriously within a secular framework.

This points to how the MBSR teachers have learned to navigate between the religious and secular orientations in the MBSR programme by distinguishing between what can be said to the *mindless outsiders*, the *mindful insiders*, and people who are in a position somewhere in between, such as the MBSR participants. When speaking to outsiders, scientific research on mindfulness is often put at the forefront in order to justify the use of the programme. Here, science is merely used as a means to an end for propagating MBSR to the mindless outsiders who has yet to experience the only way MBSR can truly be understood (i.e., through the practical engagement in mindfulness). Among insiders the focus is therefore turned to the subjective experiences made

through mindfulness practice. It is also only among the insiders in the modules of the TTP in which the role of Buddhism and spirituality in MBSR were discussed more openly, but only in relation to how it can be integrated in the secular framework of MBSR.

When speaking to the MBSR participants, scientific research is referred to as a way to motivate the practitioners, but otherwise the focus is also shifted to the subjective experiences made in mindfulness practice in which the MBSR teacher guides the participants to what they should attend to. A *theory of mind* derived from the convergence of Buddhism and science which MBSR is based on, especially as represented by Buddhist psychology, underlines the structure of the course as well as the themes that are sought covered. The MBSR teacher therefore actively seeks to guide the participants explicitly to connect the experiences they make through the mindfulness exercises to cognitive models and biological mechanisms on the one hand, and implicitly to Buddhists' insights of suffering, impermanence, interdependence etc. on the other. Buddhist concepts are therefore translated into scientific or commonsensical phrasings, but kept as implicit *dharma maps* in the teachers' facilitation. In order to teach directly from one's own experiential knowledge and engagement in mindfulness practice in an *authentic* manner, the MBSR teacher also tends to draw on examples connected to the teacher's personal and professional background.

In this way, the MBSR teachers learn to facilitate the MBSR courses by oscillating between theoretically Buddhist and scientific/secular frameworks on the one hand and experience-based knowledge on the other. Experience-based knowledge can be derived from both previous experiences as well as mindfulness practice in the present. In this process, the MBSR teachers make use of strategies of purification, relativization, and compromise in order to make the different knowledge systems 'fit' in a coherent, meaningful framework in a given situation. These interlacements are fragile, as they depend on the teacher to focus on similarities between the systems while ignoring the differences. The result is that the tension between the religious and the secular keeps popping back into the picture, even though it seems to have been 'solved' in a given situation.

Therefore, the MBSR teachers are also oscillating between belief and doubt in their learning process, as in the case of any reflexive learning process. It requires a *suspension of disbelief* when the MBSR teacher seeks to encompass the universality of the human conditioning within the MBSR programme by juxtaposing the knowledge they bring with them as pieces of a puzzle which need to end up as a holistic entity of universal truth. Likewise, it requires a *suspension of belief* when the MBSR teacher opens her eyes to the flaws of the puzzle and pulls it apart in order to open up to new juxtapositions. This shows that belief and doubt has nothing to do with religion and science as such, but they are sentiments through which MBSR teachers navigate in religious/secular binaries.

MBSR teachers therefore argue for the value of tacit experiential knowledge; that is, the embodied form of knowledge which can be found through mindfulness practice and which is considered to be deeper than cognition and therefore cannot always be described in words. The turn to the taciturnity of the *practical wisdom* found in mindfulness practice is therefore also used as a justification of the mystification of religion. Such a deliberate use of tacit knowledge has its flaws, as it results in a lot of misunderstandings, both within the TTP and the MBSR courses. The challenge is that each MBSR teacher brings implicit approaches and assumptions to what this tacit knowledge is about exactly. At the same time, it should also be acknowledged that these misunderstandings are productive, since ambiguity is what makes it possible to propagate MBSR to a wider audience. As MBSR teachers find support in a wide range of knowledge systems by bringing a focus to commonalities rather than differences while opening up to individual interpretations and experiences within this framework, it becomes easier to disseminate MBSR to new contexts.

MBSR teachers' wish to propagate MBSR is both guided by moral and economic considerations. The MBSR teachers see the MBSR programme as a way of helping people gain a better life, both in a micro and macro perspective. A *utopia* of moving towards a mindful and compassionate society, one individual at a time, prevails among the MBSR teachers. Therefore, the MBSR teachers see the job of facilitating MBSR courses as an ethical, sustainable way of making a living.

As in the case of the religious/secular dichotomy, the moral and economic outlook of MBSR is sometimes seen as walking hand in hand and sometimes it is seen as contradictory. In order to propagate MBSR, scientists and teachers of MBSR draw on the

instrumentalist discourse of the surrounding society, which they seek to change by turning to mindfulness practice. The mainstreaming and institutionalization of MBSR has therefore also entailed an active collaboration with capitalist orientations, which many MBSR teachers feel morally ambivalent about. What MBSR teachers tend to fail to acknowledge is that the dream of a mindful society of absolute inclusion is based upon a dream bridge of universal truths which can never be realized as universals move in space-specific conjunctures which inevitable also exclude.

Still, this is no excuse to abandon the bridge. The world would not get anywhere without such aspirations. In the end, all we can do is to make do with the compromise of practical action and the messiness of local encounters. Even so, this is neither an excuse to close one's eyes to the compromises made for holding the bridge together. We must open our eyes to the cracks between the bricks. We must open our eyes to where the bridge can take us and where it cannot. Therefore, we must also acknowledge the compromises the translation from a Buddhist to a scientific context entails. Just as we must acknowledge the continuous compromise it takes each time MBSR is recontextualized as new MBSR teachers seek to adapt MBSR to their own given context. Each time something is lost in translation. But something new may also be gained.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

An Overview of the Structure of the MBSR Teacher Training Programme

Fase 1: Forudsætninger for optagelse på uddannelsen

Deltagelse i 8-ugers MBSR-kursus
varetaget af en MBSR-underviser, uddannet ved CFM, UMASS

Uddannelse svarende til akademisk grad på bachelor niveau
eller tilsvarende praktisk erfaring

5-10 dages stille mindfulnessmeditationsretreat
varetaget af anerkendte undervisere

Fase 2: Grundlæggende studier og træning

Practicum 1 + 2
intensivt forløb som internat, 2 moduler a hver 4,5 dages varighed

7-dages MBSR-retreat
ved Dansk Center for Mindfulness, AU eller CFM, UMASS

MBSR-seminarundervisning
8 x 2 dage med fokus på teori, empiri og praksis

5-10 dages stille mindfulnessmeditationsretreat
varetaget af anerkendte undervisere

Teacher Development Intensive (TDI)
intensivt 8-dages internat - efter TDI kan den enkelte deltager begynde at
varetage egne MBSR-forløb

Fase 3: Fordybelse af praksis og erfaring

Begynd at undervise 8-ugers MBSR-kurser
certificering kræver min. 8 MBSR-undervisnings forløb

Supervision af undervisning og supervisionssamtaler
min. 8-10 undervisningssessioner + samtaler

Refleksion over det hidtidige uddannelsesforløb
samt formel evaluering af den studerendes MBSR-underviserfærdigheder

Forberedelse af undervisningsmateriale til certificeringsreview

Vedvarende personlig og professionel udvikling
herunder daglig mindfulnessmeditationspraksis

5-10 dages stille mindfulnessmeditationsretreat
varetaget af anerkendte undervisere

Fase 4: Undervisercertificering i MBSR

Certificeringsreview
i henhold til internationale standarder udviklet af CFM

5-10 dages stille mindfulnessmeditationsretreat
varetaget af anerkendte undervisere

Certificering

Appendix 2

Overview of informants:

Name/ Pseudonym	Professional Background	Religious/ Spiritual Background	Teacher Training Programme	Teaching of MBSR
E	Occupational therapist and psychotherapist	Spiritual orientated	In phase 3 of the TTP	Taught MBSR as a private operator at a physiotherapy clinic
Y	Anthropologist	Spiritual orientated	In phase 3 of the TTP	Taught MBSR as a private operator at a monastery
K	Psychologist	Buddhist	In phase 3 of the TTP	Taught MBSR at a job centre
U	Psychologist and physiotherapist	Atheist	In phase 3 of the TTP	Taught MBSR at a job centre
V	Lutheran pastor	Christian + Spiritual orientated	In the end of phase 2 of the TTP (misses the TDI)	Taught MBSR-inspired Mindfulness in the Church
P	Associate Professor in the Humanities	Spiritual orientated	In the beginning of phase 2 of the TTP	Planned to teach MBSR-inspired mindfulness-courses to students and teachers at Aarhus University
O	Psychomotoric therapist	Christian + Spiritual orientated	In the beginning of phase 2 of the TTP	Did not know yet if, where and when she would teach MB
Lone Fjorback	Consultant Doctor	Religious/spiritual orientated	Head of DCM. Certified MBSR teacher at UMASS	Teaches modules of the TTP at DCM.