Methodology, Meditation, and Mindfulness: Toward a Mindfulness Hermeneutic

Balveer Singh Sikh¹ and Deb Spence²

Abstract
Understanding the nondualistic nature of mindfulness is a complex and challenging task particularly when most clinical psychology draws from Western methodologies and methods. In this article, we argue that the integration of philosophical hermeneutics with Eastern philosophy and practices may provide a methodology and methods to research mindfulness practice. Mindfulness hermeneutics brings together the nondualistically aligned Western philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer and selected Eastern philosophies and practices in an effort to bridge the gap between these differing worldviews. Based on the following: (1) fusion of horizons, (2) being in a hermeneutic circle, (3) understanding as intrinsic to awareness, and (4) the ongoing practice of meditation, a mindfulness hermeneutic approach was used to illuminate deeper understandings of mindfulness practice in ways that are congruent with its underpinning philosophies.

Keywords
hermeneutics, mindfulness, Eastern philosophy, research methodology/methods

Introduction
The efficacy of mindfulness in treating a myriad of physical and psychological problems is well established (Baer, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 2003, 2005; Lynch, Chapman, Rosenthal, Kuo, & Linehan, 2006; Teasdale, Segal, & Williams, 1995, 2003; J. M. G. Williams, Duggan, Crane, & Fennell, 2006). Mindfulness is closely related to the eastern concept of “unconditioned or pure awareness,” a state of awareness that can function unconditionally and intelligently (Krishnamurti, 1993, 1994). Yet mindfulness as a therapy is increasingly being used in Western clinical psychology which is primarily informed by dualistic philosophy.

The challenge therefore is understanding the underlying nonconceptual, nondual, and paradoxical nature of mindfulness (Shapiro, 2009). Furthermore, the challenge of researching mindfulness lies in the paradox that in being unconditional, it is not amenable to methodologies and methods. Unconditional or pure awareness cannot be understood through a method, yet without a method, it will continue to remain obscure.

We do not attempt to solve or remove this paradox, but rather its purpose is to report the usage of research methodology/methods that sought to illuminate deeper understanding of the nature of mindfulness drawing from selected Eastern philosophies and Western research. Fuller understanding of the insights gleaned through the research process has been articulated by Sikh (2012). Presentation of the findings relating to the tangible and intangible aspects of mind and mindfulness are also available (Sikh & Spence, In press).

Historically, hermeneutics has been a means of interpreting theories and philosophies (Crotty, 1998). However, because most forms of hermeneutics such as (1) Biblical hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998; Palmer, 1969), (2) hermeneutics in law (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002), (3) philosophical hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998; Palmer, 1969), and (4) historical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1996) are underpinned by the dualistic philosophies and worldviews, they are unsuitable in their current form for studying Eastern philosophies and practices. The hermeneutic approach we have begun to develop draws from both dualistic and nondualistic philosophies. The amalgamation of differing worldviews is based on the idea that the opposing traditions can

¹ Procare Psychological Services, Level 2, Westfield Shopping Centre, Manukau, Auckland, New Zealand
² School of Clinical Sciences, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

Corresponding Author:
Deb Spence, School of Clinical Sciences, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand.
Email: deb.spence@aut.ac.nz
coexist and pave the way for a new way of understanding (Osho, 1989).

We begin by describing philosophical hermeneutics and providing a rationale for its use in exploring mindfulness. We draw from Western and Eastern philosophies to explicate principles that can provide an appropriate heuristic guide. Western philosophies have been selected for their congruence and suitability for interpreting practices based on the nondualistic worldview. Selected Eastern philosophies are also discussed in terms of their capacity to inform hermeneutic research.

We then outline the methods through which philosophical principles and meditative practice were enacted in the research process. The method also describes the process by which the strands of hermeneutic interpretation evolved and fused to illuminate deeper understanding of the nature of mindfulness.

Understanding Hermeneutics

Understanding is essentially a human phenomenon. Every person seeks to understand and make meaning of his or her world in order to function and survive. Hermeneutic understanding, however, differs from everyday understanding. According to Crotty (1998), there are two principal differences: Firstly, texts which communicate human experience, beliefs, and values are viewed as strange and distant, hence they require sustained questioning to explicate their inherent meanings. Secondly, the purpose of hermeneutics is pragmatic understanding rather than abstract theorizing. In the context of clinical psychology, the purpose was to better understand the underpinnings of mindfulness practice.

The word hermeneutics is derived from the Greek verb *hermeneuein* which means “to interpret” (Crotty, 1998, p. 88). The term derives from Hermes, the Greek messenger god whose role was to transmute what was beyond human understanding into a form that humans could understand (Palmer, 1969). Hence, in order to deliver the Gods’ messages to humans, Hermes had to first interpret and understand before delivering the information (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002).

Thus, it is clear that hermeneutics is more complex than mere interpretation. Hermeneutic abilities include the understanding of discourses and interpretation, linguistic competence, and effective communication (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002), all of which combine to achieve deeper understandings. The following are the two main reasons for hermeneutic exploration: (1) there is text needing to be explored and explicated and (2) the meaning or meanings relating to identified phenomenon/phenomena are obscure.

Western hermeneutics has evolved from a more rigid dualistic stance to one that is less dualistic. The quest to explicate philosophical principles compatible with nondualistic mindfulness philosophies and practices requires consideration of the following: (1) understanding, language, and primordial speech; (2) the preexisting basis of understanding; (3) understanding as a category of life; (4) understanding and phenomenology; and (5) understanding and ontological hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998; Mueller-Vollmer, 2002; Palmer, 1969). These understandings are then compared with the nondualistic worldview in terms of their compatibility.

Understanding, Language, and Primordial Speech

Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was the first philosopher to ground hermeneutics in a concept of understanding (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002). Hermeneutics, according to Schleiermacher, was not just the decoding of a given meaning or a way of clearing obstacles in the way of proper understanding (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002; Palmer, 1969). It was concerned with illuminating the conditions for the possibility of understanding and its modes of interpretation.

For Schleiermacher, understanding was similar to speaking (Crotty, 1998). Both activities derive from man’s linguistic ability and his mastery of speech. Humans’ linguistic competence enables them to understand the utterances of others and put themselves in their position. Thus, speaking and understanding point to the primordial speech act of a speaker in whom the meaning of text is grounded, and understanding is like placing oneself within the author’s framework in order to recreate previously articulated understanding (Gadamer, 1996). Schleiermacher argued that there was a kind of empathy between the speaker and listener during the linguistic exchange, and he extended this to the interpretation of art and text.

He also argued that understanding involved the coalescence of two different planes: firstly, understanding in terms of language and secondly, understanding in terms of the speaker’s life process. These two sides of understanding correspond to two distinct modes of interpretation: grammatical and psychological (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002). In introducing the notion of psychological interpretation to hermeneutics, Schleiermacher reduces the distance between subject and object. However, given his stance on the role of language, this philosophy may not be fully able to explicate deeper nature of mindfulness.

Preexisting Basis of Understanding

Sharing Schleiermacher’s views on the nature of language, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) conceptualized that speaking and understanding together create active linguistic competence which occurs both in the speaker and in the writer (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002). This limits the transportive means of language. Humboldt argued that every act of understanding is also an act of nonunderstanding because of the personal aura of the speaker. History is therefore only partially accessible to a historian; the historian initially perceives some scattered and isolated events but not the coherence between them. Humboldt suggested that the historian must supply the inner coherence and unite the individual events. He or she must interpret phenomena in the light of an overriding cohesive whole which itself is not directly observable, supplying a concept that was later developed into the notion of the hermeneutic circle.

Humboldt recognized the interrelationship of parts and whole. He also suggested that historians’ investigative
capabilities become assimilated with the object under investigation. For Humboldt, every act of comprehension presupposes the existence of an analogue between person and phenomenon (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002), thus providing a basis for the concept of preexisting understanding.

**Understanding as a Category of Life**

Dilthey (1833–1911) transformed Schleiermacher’s contention that understanding was primarily rooted in language and embraced understanding as a methodological concept with its roots or origin in the process of human life itself. Dilthey states that understanding is primarily a “category of life” (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002, p. 25).

Dilthey advocated that the human sciences should not borrow their methods from natural sciences because the latter do not account for inner experience. Defining hermeneutics as “an art and science of understanding and interpretation” (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002), he explained that human beings have to understand what is happening around them, so that they may act/react accordingly (Crotty, 1998). Thus, actual behaviour reflects lived understanding and a comprehension of the social and cultural environment. Dilthey claimed, furthermore, that complex or higher understanding derives from lower forms of understanding. Therefore, the understanding which human scientists derive is always a manifestation of human life, a life expression (Palmer, 1969).

This philosophy helps bridge the divide between subject and object, making it possible to assimilate with mindfulness and illuminate experiential understandings. Dilthey does not, however, consider the possibility of preexisting understandings imposing themselves over insights gained through meditation.

**Understanding and Phenomenology**

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) introduced the notion of a “life world” and laid the ground for a phenomenology of human behavior (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002). Logical investigation requires understanding of three key factors: (1) logic or logical syntax of language, (2) ontological conditions of meaningful discourses, and (3) intentional acts of consciousness. According to Husserl, these key factors enable words to express beyond themselves (Crotty, 1998). Through the concepts of the “ontological life world” and the “conditional act of consciousness,” Husserl tried to articulate a universal way of understanding the world based on two major premises: (1) all acts are conditional upon consciousness and (2) the ontological conditional act of consciousness can be described logically, almost mathematically.

Husserl thus offers a “theory of meaning and understanding,” which suggests that both develop from subjective phenomenological experiences which then form a basis for intersubjectively valid meaning (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002).

Husserl was concerned with the description of intentional acts called performances. His work provided two important but contradictory insights: (1) a focus on the “things themselves” or the phenomenological world of things, which opens a way for engaging with mindfulness in experiential oneness and (2) the concept of intentionality or conditional engagement with mindfulness. On one hand, he introduces a nondualistic way of understanding, but on the other, he assumes that consciousness is always conditional.

**Understanding and Ontological Hermeneutics**

Heidegger challenged Husserl’s notion of the intentional act of consciousness in “being.” In his landmark work, *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguished being from specific beings (entities) and, in doing so, provided a framework for ontological hermeneutics. He investigated the being there of Dasein, which he termed as “hermeneutics of facticity” (Zhang, 2006). Dasein (being there) refers to the being from whose perspective all of these are being described. Not a person, not consciousness, or mind activity, Dasein is inseparable from the world “being in the world” (it is a unitary phenomenon; Crotty, 1998).

The investigation of being then drove Heidegger to inquire into the nature of authentic existence. Further unfolding of being remains a phenomenological process throughout one’s life. Heidegger argues that a “thing” is always covered over by layers of knowledge, and in order to achieve authentic understanding of the “thing in itself,” these layers must progressively be peeled away, so that the thing can present itself (Zhang, 2006). For Heidegger, hermeneutics is about understanding the hidden meanings that unfold in moments of being.

Heidegger argues that in being, we begin with and from a preunderstanding of being or Dasein. In this sense, Dasein is not preunderstanding as such but the possibility of understanding (Heidegger, 1952, 1996). In this way, Dasein leads to all understandings and the greatest of this possibility is self-understanding inextricably linked to one’s being in the world, wherein one finds his or her own being, a notion similar to the Eastern philosophies (Krishnamurti, 1993, 1994; Osho, 1988, 1989, 2009) informing mindfulness.

Heidegger suggests that the task of hermeneutics is uncovering and making this rudimentary understanding explicit. Explication then leads to articulation of the existential structures of being that make human existence and behavior possible.

In this understanding, being unfolds itself into an experience and at the same time goes on to grasp this self-being. Thus, understanding is inherent in the unfolding of being, and Heidegger’s circle of being is also a circle of understanding. An unfolding of being and understanding also takes place during mindfulness practice. For Osho (2006), enlightenment is the perpetual state of pure awareness or “unconditioned” understanding. Hence, mindfulness is also a process of understanding.

Gadamer (1900–2002) developed the notion of historicality of understanding from Heidegger’s ontological philosophy. He argued that human beings are always precognitively aware of their cultural and historical situatedness (Spence, 2001).
Moreover, to be engaged in a situation means being doubly influenced by tradition because we are simultaneously ‘‘affected’ by history and also brought into being [or] ‘effected’ by history’’ (Weinsheimer & Marshall, 1996, p. xv). Gadamer argues that historically effected consciousness enables human beings to simultaneously link past traditions with present interpretation and anticipation of the future. This also forms the basis for understanding as ‘‘fusion of horizons’’ (Gadamer, 1996, p. 397). Successful completion of the act of understanding requires not only consciousness of one’s historical horizon but an appreciation or examination of its effect (Spence, 2001). In relation to textual interpretation, this recognizes that understanding arises out of the fusion of two horizons; firstly, past horizons are inherent in the existing understanding of the interpreter enabling him or her to carry out the interpretation and secondly, there are horizons of understandings inherent in the text (Gadamer, 1989 in Crotty, 1998).

Rigorous hermeneutics requires an openness to historically effected consciousness or tradition. Gadamer argues that because history of the tradition and the interpreter’s subjective understanding already exist, the interpreter needs to dialectically engage with these in order to understand the fusion of meanings.

The Gadamerian notions of the fusion of horizons and historicity of understanding seem to claim the possibility that there are some universal ways of understanding. However, this may not always be the case, especially where cross-cultural understandings are involved. Mall (2000) argues that differing traditions may not fuse with each other, and better understandings may arise from both traditions, thus elucidating meanings paradoxically.

We are suggesting that openness to other may provide opportunity for the fluid state of potentially continuing understanding that Gadamer envisions. Although Gadamer’s philosophy may not fully comprehend nondualistic mindfulness, the fusion of horizons provides guidance in terms of understanding the circular and spiralling interpretive processes used in this research. His notion of prejudice as a prejudgement is also useful in terms of understanding the fusion between the researcher’s preunderstandings and the understandings which were previously hidden, arising from the hermeneutic engagement.

**Understanding: An Eastern Perspective**

Like Western philosophies, the Eastern philosophies have their own hermeneutic tradition; that is to say that these philosophies are also concerned with explicating and elucidating important and hidden meanings (Dasgupta, 1924; Murty, 1993). Because Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism are underpinned by a nondualistic worldview, these philosophies view the person ontologically, as part of the phenomenon, a view similar to Heidegger’s notion of being. The nondualistic worldview also proposes that ontological truth, in which the person and the phenomenon under investigation are the parts of the same reality, emerges from the experience of an ontological oneness. To achieve existential experience, one therefore needs to suspend all dualities, including the dualities created by one’s thoughts and language.

Eastern philosophies advocate different ways of achieving this ontological oneness. They include meditation (Osho, 1988; The Dalai Lama, 2002a), unconditional observation (Krishnamurti, 1994), and other practices such as *Hatha yoga*, *Jnana yoga*, and *Bhakti yoga* (Aurobindo, 1996). These philosophies are similar in that they argue that once the dualities are overcome, an authentic ontological understanding arises out of unconditioned awareness which already exists in its own right. In this way, for the Eastern philosophies, authentic understandings arise out of insights from unconditioned awareness.

Thus, meditation becomes a critical part of the mechanism of authentic understanding; Osho (1988, 1989) argues that it is almost impossible to overcome the conditioned mind without meditating. Most Buddhist philosophies involve meditation practice for achieving nondualistic oneness (Nhat Hanh, 1976, 2009; The Dalai Lama, 2002b). However, Krishnamurti (1994) believes that meditation can be achieved without the help of meditation techniques. For him, moment-to-moment unconditional observation of everyday life activities is meditation. Nonetheless, the Eastern philosophies are in agreement that, as all beings exist in their own right, a truth of the reality is a priority (Houshmand, Livingston, & Wallace, 1999; Krishnamurti, 1994; Osho, 1988). The function of meditation is to remove misunderstandings that occur due to automatic analysis by the conditioned mind. The Eastern philosophers believe that understanding of reality emerges on its own when misunderstandings are removed. This is similar to what Heidegger refers to as layers of meaning or preconceptions that conceal primordial understanding.

To explicate how selected Eastern philosophies and meditation practices inform this hermeneutic methodology, we will now briefly outline Buddhist understanding and the philosophies of Krishnamurti and Osho.

**Buddhist Understanding**

Buddha, through his experience of mindfulness and enlightenment, discovered that the conditioned mind obscures truth that unfolds in the moment-to-moment reality (Bodhi, 1995; Bodhi & Nanmoli, 2005; Nhat Hanh, 1976, 2009; P. W. Williams, 2009; Woodward, 1967). He further discovered that it was possible to overcome the conditioned mind by purposefully regulating attention to the present moment reality nonjudgmentally. As a result of meditation, the mind becomes still and starts working through pure awareness, like a mirror reflecting reality as it unfolds into awareness, rather than how it is interpreted through conditioning (Osho, 1988, 2006, 2009; The Dalai Lama, 1997). Meditation, by gradually deconditioning the mind, induces a state of mindfulness, which Buddhists refer to as *sammasati* or right mindfulness, and ultimately enlightenment, in which unconditional understandings take place. This unconditional way of understanding, which is the
cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy, emerges from pure or primordial awareness.

**Osho and Understanding**

Osho (2009) similarly states that conditioning impedes perception of reality. He argues further that it is impossible to achieve a clearer understanding through the conditioned mind. Osho (1988, 1989) believes that understanding as intrinsic to awareness, which means that awareness is able to transcend conditioning (learning) and is capable of understanding things as they exist in their own right. When awareness exists in its original nature or “pure awareness,” it permeates the subject and object in a nondualistic state from which clearest understandings of self and the environment arise (Osho, 2009).

However, Osho also suggests that such unconditional understandings cannot occur until the entire mind is deconditioned. He argues, furthermore, that such deconditioning can only occur through regular practice of meditation (Osho, 1988). Like Buddhist philosophies, Osho believes that meditation gradually increases awareness and progressively deconditions the mind. Once the mind is completely deconditioned, it functions independently of learning, providing clearer understandings of oneself and the environment.

Both Buddhist philosophies and Osho’s teachings advocate unconditional understandings. However, the central focus of these philosophies is a rare and elusive state of mind called enlightenment, which seems to reject the authenticity of everyday experiences, and this rejection often means that people become sceptical of enlightenment. A truth could, paradoxically, be that conditioned understanding as a process leading to unconditioned understanding, a notion which may bring Heidegger and Gadamer closer to the eastern philosophies.

**Krishnamurti and Understanding**

Krishnamurti, agreeing with Buddhist and Osho’s philosophies, states that understanding as the intrinsic nature of awareness. He suggests that the main activity involved in achieving understanding is removal of the hindrances caused by the conditioning. Krishnamurti suggests that when attention is maintained in moment-to-moment occurring reality, without the interference of thinking (thought), understandings arise on their own accord from awareness (Krishnamurti, 1993). He argues that meditation occurs when one unconditionally observes everyday life events, including one’s own thoughts, feelings, and activities (Krishnamurti, 2002). In a state of pure observation, the duality between subject (oneself) and object (things) disappears and both subject and object become part of awareness. This nondualistic state of awareness, in itself, understands.

In this way, even though Krishnamurti deviates from formal meditation practices, his insistence on “unconditional observation of everyday life events” is a form of meditation, that is, paying attention to the present moment reality nonjudgmentally (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 1994, 2003). Thus, Krishnamurti’s meditation and understanding and Heidegger’s circle of being may be sufficiently close to pave the way for an East–West synthesis.

The Eastern philosophies are multifaceted and complex; it is not easy to reconcile them. On the surface, they have many nuances and often appear to contradict each other. However, deep down these philosophies acknowledge one reality, that is, everything arises from pure awareness which can be experientially understood through unconditional awareness or mindfulness. Thus, viewed from a nondualistic understanding of unconditioned awareness, the nuances and differences among different Eastern philosophies become reconcilable.

The Eastern nondualistic way of understanding has similarities with Heidegger (Zhang, 2006). Comparing Heidegger and Buddhist philosophy, Zhang (2006) states:

... Heidegger’s ontological hermeneutics certainly brings out a parallel to the Buddhist outlook of the world. A Buddhist view of the world as being co-originated and dependent, arising without a theo-metaphysical origin or inherent nature-Brahma or Atman-can be traced back to Sakyamuni’s [Buddha] own enlightenment experience, in which he sees with his own enlightened eyes, the arising of the co-originating and mutually dependent matter/events [dhammas] that constitute his past lives without an originating point or a primary cause. (Zhang, 2006, p. 99)

Both Heideggerian and Buddhist philosophies understand that the being of Dasein is already the case (Buddha saw that his past lives had no originating point). They also believe that Dasein, which has no beginning, has no permanent self either. However, Dasein is shrouded in many layers of understanding. Stripping this human Dasein (oneself) of a permanent self or Atman helps to reveal a physical and psychological being manifesting in the present moment reality (Zhang, 2006).

Heidegger’s philosophy of being is also similar to Krishnamurti’s philosophy of thought and pure awareness or pure observation (Krishnamurti, 1993, 1994). Krishnamurti (1994) states, “Discovery (understanding) takes place not when mind is crowded with knowledge but when knowledge is absent; only then are there stillness and space, and in this state understanding or discovery comes into being” (Krishnamurti, 1994, p. 13). Krishnamurti is arguing that understanding of being (being of oneself in relation to the environment) is shrouded by knowledge or thought. When experiences (unfolding being there) are experienced in the stillness of being, without the crowding in of thoughts, understanding of oneself and reality become possible. We are suggesting therefore that Krishnamurti’s concept of crowdedness is similar to Dasein being shrouded in layers of preconceived ideas, and pure observation of Krishnamurti is stripping Dasein of this conditioning.

In summary then, a review of Western philosophies shows that hermeneutics has evolved, in the minds of some Western philosophers, from the art of grammatical interpretation to an existential understanding of being itself. In doing so, philosophies of human understanding have evolved from a stance of...
subject (interpreter)-object (text) duality toward a nondualistic position, gradually closing the gap between subject and object. Schleiermacher was the first to introduce an explication of psychological factors, that is, the author’s intent alongside the linguistic interpretation to hermeneutics. Suggesting the existence of a preexisting basis of understanding, Humboldt argued that alongside the linguistic and psychological interpretation, the interpreter also brings his or her own understanding to hermeneutics. Dilthey, expanding on Humboldt’s notion of the preexisting basis of understanding, suggested that understanding is a life process in which higher understandings develop from lower understandings. Husserl also expanded on Humboldt’s notion of hermeneutics as a life process into ontological life world, which suggested that understanding involves an ontological process occurring in both the internal (psychological) and external worlds. Heidegger reoriented the midst of hermeneutics toward more ontological and nondualistic notions. He developed a nondualistic philosophy of being in his own unique but rather complex way comparable possibly to the nondualistic philosophies (Zhang, 2006). Gadamer further developed aspects of Heideggerian philosophy focusing on understanding rather than being, that is, historically affected consciousness and fusion of horizons being crucial to understanding, yet this does not necessarily embrace nonduality.

We have taken the position that Gadamer’s notions of historicality, prejudice, and fusion of horizons together with Heidegger’s notion of being, may have some congruence with nondualistic mindfulness and thus be able to inform exploration of the meanings of mindfulness communicated in texts and through practice.

The following Eastern philosophical principles or tenets are also integral to the methodology: (1) understanding as intrinsic to awareness and (2) regular practice of meditation to facilitate overcoming one’s conditioning and allowing understandings to emerge in awareness. In this way, the insights unfolding during meditation and through life experience contribute to the emerging understanding.

In summary then, the following principles were used as a heuristic guide for the hermeneutic approach taken: (1) fusion of horizons, (2) being in a hermeneutic circle, (3) understanding as intrinsic to awareness, and (4) regular practice of meditation.

From Methodology to Method: A Mindfulness Hermeneutic

Discussion thus far has focused on the philosophies underpinning the research methodology. Because the research methodology included nondualistic Eastern philosophies and meditation practices, the interpretive methods extended beyond written texts to include analysis of the ongoing practice of meditation as a way of drawing from experiential insights contributing to the understanding of mindfulness.

The insights derived from meditation fused in an ongoing manner with the textual understandings creating a synthesis of intra- and intersubjective understandings. These understandings also fused with each other to develop a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of mindfulness.

The praxis thus comprised an organic fusion of understandings, documented understandings of the selected texts, and insights emerging from an ongoing practice of meditation. Evolving like an upwardly moving and expanding spiral, new insights became preexisting horizons for the next and so forth.

Preunderstandings and Fusion

Engaging with preunderstandings or prejudices (Gadamer, 1996) brings the researcher to the phenomenon of interest and, through ongoing questioning, facilitates the surfacing of those that further enable and/or limit expansion of understanding (Spence, 2001).

The fusion between hermeneutic analysis of the selected texts and regular meditation also involved sustained and reflexive reading and rereading moving from parts to whole. Each reading started with a partial understanding or preunderstanding of the phenomenon which merged with the text being read. The resulting preliminary interpretation then became the new whole and the text a part of the dialectical fusion of whole and parts, continuing through the processes of reading, thinking, writing, meditating, writing, rereading, and rewriting. The ongoing practice of meditation not only created an experiential understanding of mindfulness and the fusion of horizons but also enabled new insights to emerge.

Meditative Insights

The hermeneutic reading and writing, moving from part to whole and from whole to part, facilitated deeper engagement with the texts. It involved a thinking dialogue with the explicated meanings. The meditation allowed for different memories or interpretations and other automatic thoughts/images/beliefs to emerge in awareness. As these cognitions rise and fall in awareness without judgment, they are understood in an enhanced state of awareness from which new insights evolve. Thus, the process of understanding through mindfulness is a simultaneously occurring bidirectional process which allows deeper understanding of both mindfulness and one’s own mind.

In this way, an organic evolving interpretation occurs through multiple and ongoing fusions. Manen (1997) argues that writing is a hermeneutic method because it “is closely fused into the research activity and reflection itself” (p. 125). Describing this as a paradox, he further states “Writing separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know” (p. 127). The process of writing and rewriting is similar to the hermeneutic process of reading and rereading, moving reciprocally between parts to the whole. Each written text acts as a horizon ready to fuse with evolving understandings developing through the rewriting process. Writing is praxis; it takes the researcher out of the lived experience, allowing him or her to give shape to thoughts which challenge the researcher into rewriting, helping to communicate understandings in more concrete ways. However, from a nondualistic
point of view, duality still exists between the researcher and the written argument. For the Eastern philosophies, writing, like language, may not be the whole truth, but it is an effective means to convey understandings (Zhang, 2006). Ultimately, the writing presents understandings available for further interpretation and judgment as to their credibility.

**Rigor in Hermeneutic Research**

Rigor in scientific research seeks to ensure reliability and validity through precision in the method (Badger, 2000). Qualitative and interpretive approaches cannot be judged in the same way as quantitative designs, yet all research needs to be rigorous in order “to boast best research practice” (Maggs-Rapport, 2001, p. 381). Rigor in qualitative research requires that ontology, epistemology, methodology, and method are congruent with one another and clearly articulated Maggs-Rapport (2001).

In this research, philosophies and practices congruent with the ontological nature of mindfulness needed to inform the research process. Relevant philosophical notions from the ontologies articulated by Heidegger and Gadamer were used to underpin the methodology and methods. Yet to fully comprehend nondualistic reality, suitable Eastern philosophies and practices were included. This led to integrating meditation practices within the hermeneutic circle and the ongoing documentation of evolving understandings through writing, reflecting, and rewriting provided a decision trail (Koch, 1994, 1998) for evaluating the value and plausibility of the research.

**Conclusion**

We have argued that Western research methods underpinned by the dualistic worldview cannot fully comprehend the nature of mindfulness practices in clinical psychology because the underlying philosophy is nondualistic. The rationale for, and a modification of, philosophical hermeneutics has been articulated for the purpose of achieving greater congruence with the meanings and practice of mindfulness. Bridging the philosophical gap between East and West is a challenging task. If researcher prejudices are seen as both enabling and limiting (Spence, 2001) and engagement with paradox is not for solution but for expanding and generating deeper understandings, we believe that accommodating both worldviews is possible. Combining textual interpretation with the regular practice of meditation enabled an expanded deepening of fusions that resulted in further explication of the nondualistic and nonconceptual nature of mindfulness.

Fusion of horizons, the hermeneutic circle, understanding as intrinsic to awareness, and the ongoing practice of meditation may thus provide a heuristic guide for an ontologically hermeneutic methodology or, in this case, a mindfulness hermeneutic.

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