Exploring the influence of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programmes on participants’ experience of time, particularly the present (here and now): a case study of Eastern Cape participants.

Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Social Science in Counselling Psychology

by

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the extent to which participating in a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme may result in shifts in people’s relationship with time, notably whether they become more present-focused. The eight week MBSR programme advocates mindfulness, which is defined as paying attention on purpose in the present moment without judgement, as a way of reducing stress. The programme has been available in East London since 2009. A case study of eight MBSR programme participants’ experiences using narrative analysis was conducted. Narrative psychology and social constructionism provided the theoretical basis in which our storied lives are located in culturally inscribed narratives, with specific discourses around time and stress. Time discourses tend to pressurise people to believe that it is better to go about daily life at a fast pace, which requires significant hurrying and rushing with pervasive senses of time urgency. Stress discourse locates stress management within individuals. One-on-one semi structured interviews were held so that participants could reflect on their experience of time and the present moment orientation of the programme. Participants’ perceived a shift in how they experienced time with greater awareness of being present-focused and they identified stress reduction benefits, which included feeling calmer, less panicked and more self-accepting. However, some of the participants maintaining the formal mindfulness practices like the body scan, meditation and mindful movement after the programme often proved difficult, as they were drawn back into their dominant narratives around time which were characterised by busyness, productivity and time scarcity.

Keywords: mindfulness, attention, stress, time, present.
DECLARATION

I am the sole author of this mini-dissertation.

No part of this mini-dissertation has been published or submitted for publication.

To the best of my knowledge, my mini-dissertation does not infringe upon anyone’s copyright nor violate any proprietary rights. Any ideas, technique, quotations or any other material from the work of other people that I have included in my thesis, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the American Psychological Association’s (APA) guidelines.

This is a true copy of my thesis including any final revisions as approved by my supervisor.

This thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institutions.

Lorna Schofield
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thesis is about people’s storied lives in relation to time and given the huge social problems in my country, it has sometimes seemed an indulgence to have done this study. Without the encouragement of my supervisor Professor Dirk Odendaal and my friend and mindfulness companion, Dr Lorraine Lawrence, I might have succumbed to my own pressure to explore more pressing social issues that create psychological distress in people who don’t have access to traditional psychological services. I don’t think it was my consistent rider of wanting to use this work as a basis to understand the application of mindfulness in settings characterised by lack of access to education, gender equality, employment and health that kept their encouragement coming. It was probably my excitement at doing this study - my interest in time stems from my remote history through to my present - from longing for childhood holidays at my grandmother’s to come again, through to being an adolescent and listening to Pink Floyd’s Time and Jim Croce’s Time in a Bottle. As a journalist in my early professional life and as a mother of young children, I got caught up in “faster is better” time discourse and I experienced the stress of that. I remain curious at the simplicity of mindfulness and what it seems to offer if you get your bum on the cushion regularly. I thank Dr Simon Whitesman for his assertion that you can’t teach a hungry man to meditate, because it is my humble intention to challenge that in the work that this thesis prepares me for. I thank and celebrate Dr Janine Kirby and Barbara Gerber who run the MBSR programme in East London. Slowly their work is building a community of mindfulness practitioners, who through paying attention on purpose in the present moment, non-judgementally, do contribute to easing suffering. My family’s patience and love is my starting, staying and ending points for journeys like this mini-dissertation.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to understand from Eastern Cape participants whether attending a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme influenced their experience of time, particularly whether they became more present-focused. It considers the constructs of stress, mindfulness and time, in relation to MBSR programme participants’ experiences through a narrative analysis of eight participants’ experiences of an MBSR programme. Interest in participants’ experience of the present, centres on mindfulness definitions which refer to attention focussed on the present moment, (Greeson, 2009; Moore & Brody, 2009; Szanton, Wenzel, Connolly & Peferi, 2011; Carmody & Baer, 2008).

The well documented and researched MBSR programme (Greeson, 2009) aims to assist participants deal with daily stressors and a range of challenges arising from medical and psychological conditions and life stresses, (Blacker, Meleo-Meyer, Kabat-Zinn & Santorelli, 2009) by teaching participants how to integrate and apply mindfulness in their everyday lives. The eight week MBSR programme was developed in 1979 at the Massachusetts’ University Health Centre and since then some 18 000 people worldwide have gone through the programme (Kabat-Zinn, 2010). Since 2009, the programme has been offered in East London and some 120 people have attended.

A significant amount of quantitative research exists (Greeson, 2009) on the contribution mindfulness makes to stress reduction, however there is a scarcity of qualitative research and it appears this is the first study of Eastern Cape participants
and the first study that considers how attending an MBSR programme impacts peoples’ relationship with time, notably the present and how being present-focused may increase perceived well-being and reduce stress. This study is pertinent because stress causes human suffering, which is what the field of psychology aims to address and the MBSR programme positions itself as offering ways of reducing stress.

The study starts out by reviewing academic literature on: stress; the MBSR programme and more broadly mindfulness and time. Each of these are positioned theoretically as social constructions which impact how people experience themselves in relation to these. It argues that stress and time are linked and that there is a pervasive sense of urgency in many people (Adam, 1995). However, it also points out that as a social construction, time is experienced differently by some cultures and here is looks at time from an African and Buddhist perspective.

A narrative analysis of participants’ experience of time, particularly the present, was conducted using Riesmann’s (1983) narrative analysis method and the content of participants' narratives were analysed using White’s (2007) maps of narrative which link narratives in time. This lent itself to an analysis of participants' time-talk and identity conclusions (White, 2007). In addition, participants’ narratives that reflect the themes in academic discourse, like time urgency and busyness are written about. Atlas T1 was used to code the narratives into themes of time. Finally the study considers the possible application of the MBSR programme in disadvantaged or rural contexts where there is a lack of access to jobs, education, houses and health services.
The MBSR programme and how it is conceptualised and offered by MBSR programme leaders is located as an Appendix and the intention of this is to orient the reader of the approach the MBSR programme takes on human experience. The full interview transcriptions are included as an Addendum so that participants’ voices are not disjointed and lost in the process of research, but that in the spirit of a democratic research agenda, they are fully available to the reader.

In briefly expanding on areas of the study, mindfulness is defined as “paying attention, on purpose in the present moment, non-judgementally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2010). Hayes and Feldman (2004) describe mindfulness as “the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience” (p.256) and Garland, Gaylord and Park (2009) describe mindfulness as “a metacognitive form of awareness that involves a shifting of cognitive sets that enable alternate appraisals of life events” (p.38). References in the definitions of mindfulness to “the present moment” and “immediate experience” locate focusing on the present moment as a key component of the programme.

Riska (2002) indicates that over the past 60 years attention to stress has proliferated in both academic and lay literature. Studies of stress suggest that chronic stress negatively impacts the immune system and contributes to pervasive dis(ease) and if not addressed may escalate into both physical and psychological poor health, (De Kooker, 2009). Newton (1995) however points out that stress discourse is constructed to locate the experiences of stress in the individual and that stress management is an individual pursuit which takes the focus of how environments can be stress engendering. Both Adam (1995) and Kabat-Zinn (2010) identify time urgency as a contributor to stress and the term “hurry sickness” pathologises efforts
to be faster and quicker, which is a dominant discourse in the way in which success and efficiencies are constructed (Adam, 1995).

Gergen (2004) comments that we think about the past so that we can live in the future and Heidegger (1977) suggests that it is almost impossible for people to be present-focused for any length of time. Given this assertion the study’s interest in exploring participants’ narratives of time, particularly the present seems pertinent. In the context of the MBSR programme, Greeson (2009) adduces that by becoming more present-focused people derive long-term mental health benefits. Within a discourse of the inevitability of stress and the pressure of time efficiencies, the MBSR programme training invites participants to experience time differently. It does so through regular references which encourage a focus on immediate experience and being in the present.

For the purposes of this study, narrative analysis is aligned to narrative psychology which is located in a social constructionist paradigm. Both recognise language as central to meaning making. Crossley (2002) asserts that human psychology has a narrative structure and that the word narrative is synonymous with story. The structure of narrative incorporates sequence and time and in order to experience selfhood, “an understanding of the inextricable connection between temporality and identity” is necessary, (Crossley, 2002, p.3). Moreover, she identifies language as central to self-interpretation. It is through language that our story or narrative is brought to life and it often follows a structure related to time i.e., then, now and later, or before and after (White, 2007). Narrative psychology acknowledges that the stories which become our dominant stories are often shaped by discourses that our culture and family may inscribe us into. They are thus constructs that emerge out of
a particular set of historical-cultural understandings of the world. The presence of discourse and its disciplinary power over people influences what elements of their lives and experience people, will select out for expression (White, 2007).

The participants in the MBSR programme can be said to represent a case and this study can be described as an intrinsic case study because it is being undertaken to understand a component of the participants’ experience more fully (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The case study lends itself to a detailed collection of data from a few sources (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000). “The term ‘case study’ is also taken to carry implications for the kind of data that are collected, and perhaps also for how these are analysed” (Gomm et al., 2000, p.12).

The sample for this study were eight participants who had completed the MBSR programme in East London. They were purposively selected to represent as broad a cross section of participants as possible, albeit they may not have been representative of the general profile of MBSR programme participants. Data was collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews aimed at “opening a space” (White, 2007, p.12) for interviewees to reflect on and share narratives of their relationship with time, notably the present, as an outcome of attending the MBSR programme.

The semi-structured interview questions were guided by narrative inquiry principles which Jossleson and Lieblich (1995) describe as coming “into contact with our participants as people engaged in the process of interpreting themselves” (p. ix). The process of narrative analysis involves various stages, firstly the data generated from the interviews will be transcribed into text and then a narrative analysis will be conducted. This involves several stages of reading and re-reading to analyse both
differences and similarities between different narratives, as well as themes and patterns across the data, (Marais, 2009).
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a review of the three constructs that inform this study, namely stress, mindfulness and time with a view to informing the narrative analysis of the eight participants’ accounts of their experience of time, notably the present as a result of doing an MBSR programme. It begins with a review of stress discourse which positions stress it as a costly epidemic that erodes the productive capacity of work forces and that stress ‘management’ is located as a responsibility of the individual (Newton, 1995). It includes an overview of how mindfulness is described in academic literature and reports on mindfulness research findings and implications for how the MBSR programme is positioned in the literature. It then considers time, firstly how time discourse exerts disciplinary power on people to engage in a continuous pursuit to be quicker, faster and more productive (Adam, 1995) and then it explores the MBSR programme’s invitation to be present-focussed in the context of a marginalised present-focussed time discourse.

Stress

The MBSR programme’s central claim is that it facilitates stress reduction through cultivating mindfulness. The MBSR programme’s approach to stress is in terms of the General Adaptive Syndrome model developed by Selye (1956) which identifies positive and negative stress. If negative stress persists it follows a general pattern of an alarm state, a resistance state and an exhaustion state. This section will provide a critique of Selye’s model and introduce an alternative view of stress from a
discursive psychology perspective, in terms of which the disciplinary power of stress discourse is identified (Newton, 1985). Riska (2002) says stress discourse encourages people to develop hardiness against stress so that they can remain productive in a capitalist society which advocates a faster is better approach (Foucault, 1977). Selye (1956) locates stress primarily as a physiological response, whereas as other models identify stress as socially constructed around power differentials (Foucault, 1977). Stress and notions of time, specifically time urgency (Riska, 2002) are linked and this section of the review discusses this.

The MBSR programme’s orientation regarding stress, draws on early research by endocrinologist Selye (1956) who asserted that both exciting and scary prospects create a similar physiological response, which led Selye to describe positive stress as eustress and negative stress as distress (Kirby & Gerber, 2010). Eustress can be experienced as hope, satisfaction and excitement, while distress is apprehension, worry and fatigue (Kirby & Gerber, 2010). Selye (1956) termed the stress response as a General Adaptive Syndrome which is characterised by an alarm state, a resistance state and an exhaustion state. The alarm state generally arises in a fight or flight response and it is important to note the body is unable to distinguish between real and perceived stressors, and thus will experience an alarm state or stress response whether the concern is a noticing snake slithering in your car on the way to work or concern around whether the soufflé will rise or not, (Selye, 1956). Either way the stress reaction arises in a series of physical responses which include energy mobilisation, increased heart rate, blood sugar increase, a change in muscle tension and dilation of the pupils. This is accompanied by a sense of anxiety which may contribute to a person being more alert to their environment or the perceived
danger. After the threat has passed, whether it is real or perceived, like waiting to receive a marked essay or in the face of danger like an oncoming train, the body enters a relaxation response phase where stress hormones like adrenalin, noradrenalin and cortisone are restocked having been expended in the alarm state. If the resistance phase is prolonged it is likely to begin to become negative stress or distress in which certain conditions may arise like irritability, loss of concentration and fatigue. Finally if stressful conditions persist, either perceived or real, the body enters an exhaustion phase during which mental, physical and emotional resources are put under strain that can arise in anxiety and depression, (Kirby & Gerber, 2010).

Hobföll (1989) comments that the General Adaptive Syndrome model has come under criticism because stress research data does not support such uniform responses to stress, as generally fight or flight, nor the predictable alarm, resistance and an exhaustion state trajectory. Furthermore, it is held to overemphasise physiological responses to stress at the expense of psychological models. Newton (1995) discounts the fight or flight account of stress reactivity as anachronistic and outdated for modern living.

Hobföll (1989) offers Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) definition of stress “as a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his/her resources and endangering his/her well-being” (p.515). It is argued that a particular relationship is likely to be socially constructed through discourses of performance and speeds of performance in which the resources referred to above could include time.
However, Hobföll (1989) argues that “there are few areas of contemporary psychology that receive more attention than stress” (p. 513). He regards stress as a “major factor affecting people’s lives, is intimately tied to mental health, and is very possibly linked with many problems of physical health” (p. 513). Tetrick and LaRocco (1987) argue that perceived stress leads to anxiety and depression.

However, De Kooker (2010) says in terms of a psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) approach to stress, the connection between stress and mental and physical health is too loose because many people thrive in environments that others would consider overwhelming and therefore stress responses are individual and socially constructed.

**Hurry Sickness**

Studies into stress coin the term hurry sickness (De Backer, Kornitzer, Fittel and Bogaert, 1979). Sufferers of hurry sickness experience time urgency and attempt to complete tasks as fast as possible (Nay & Wagner, 1990). De Backer et al (1979) describe hurry sickness as an “action emotion complex that is exhibited by those individuals who are engaged in a chronic incessant struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time, thus giving rise to a sense of time urgency or ‘hurry sickness’” (p. 14). In their article on hurry sickness, Ulmer, Schwartsburd and Allen (1996) entitle it *Treatment of Time Pathologies*, which suggests the pathologising of time urgency. Described as such, it is indeed possible that a cycle of time urgency causing stress causing time urgency causing stress might arise. Riska (2002) observes in the 1950s hurry sickness was associated with Type A personalities who were constructed as male executives. When this construction of
stress entered popular media and more people across different classes identified with the symptoms, there was a shift towards encouraging resilience and that individuals should manage their own stress. Hobfoll (1989) comments that “the interest in stress has also caught the attention of the popular press, illustrating that stress is of concern to the lay public as well as the academic community” (p. 513).

Adam (1995) says the notion of time as finite, running on and out is at the heart of hurry sickness. Ironically the pressure to perform within certain timeframes is known as a deadline! The diseases implicated in ‘hurry sickness’ are heart diseases, high blood pressure, a lowering of immune function and an increase of susceptibility to infection and cancer. Both Adam (1995) and Flaherty (2003) suggest that meditation is a commonly used time slowing and therefore stress reducing activity. We thus see that irrespective of how it is viewed, it is popularly held that stress is pervasive, which creates a context for a programme like the MBSR to offer stress reduction techniques. Hurry sickness seems to encourage a quicker faster approach which relies on future planning and the present-focus and non-doing of the MBSR programme, can be viewed as a marginalised discourse in relation to more dominant stress discourses.

**Stress Discourse**

Lewig & Dollard (2001) suggest that stress discourse is constructed to serve dominant ideologies of western capitalist productivity in terms of which productivity is understood as a form of resilience and is encouraged. The responsibility of dealing with stress lies with the individual, more so than with a view of the environment as possibly stress inducing. This is consistent with traditional psychology’s focus on the
individual, without consideration for how power differentials in broader society impact experience.

Social constructionist views hold that discourses exert disciplinary pressure and determine what constitutes the real and the good (Gergen, 2002). Riska (2002) asserts that as stress became a popular term and more people identified with its symptoms, it became viewed as costly to organisations and so the term hardiness was offered to encourage the increasing number of blue collar workers who were experiencing it, a discourse that would encourage an endurance of stress rather than a succumbing to it. Newton (1995) argues that an interest in stress spans both expert and local knowledge and that while it might seem empowering to believe as individuals that it is up to us to manage our own stress, that stress discourse reflects power relations between men and women and employer and employee. He observes that the very emergence of the word stress is a relatively new concept and it is often a catch all phrase for a vast array of emotional experiences including anxiety, fear, apprehension and he calls for a wider understanding of stress. He suggests that stress discourse serves to describe rules of behaviour in public and private settings and it thus exerts discipline. While stress is seen as an inevitable part of modern life, Newton (1995) calls for clearer differentiation of healthy and unhealthy stress and says that popular media tend to suggest that all stress is bad. Gergen (2002) observes that the media provide “a barrage of new criteria” for self-evaluation and in so doing readers become inscribed into popular discourses around topics of interest (p.98).

In this way the inevitability of stress as a modern phenomenon becomes social constructed. Aneshensel (1992) in locating stress as being social in origin and not
merely biological or behavioural, identifies chronic stress sources as “barriers in the achievement of life goals, inequity in the form of inadequate reward relative to invested effort, excessive or inadequate environmental demand and resource deprivation” (p.24). This description acknowledges that poverty can be stressful and this stands in contrast to the earlier description of stress being the premise of the executive. De Kooker (2010) supports Aneshensel's view of stress as one that rather looks at psycho-social conditions that might be stressful, However, stress research rather looks at ways of the individual to manage stress and this is often located in workplaces where productive power of workforces is lessened by stress (Newton, 1995; Dick, 2000; Riska, 2002).

Reference to stress discourse holds a social constructionist lens to it. In terms of this, meaning is generated in the social realm, through language and it takes the focus off the individual whom it views as holding multiple subject positions which arise in terms of various roles that have discourses attached to them around what it means to be good at them – good student, good mother, good woman and good wife (Burr, 1995; Salih, 2010; Gergen, 2002). Within society certain experts become arbiters of what constitutes good performance of those identities, and it is to them that knowledge and power is conferred. They become the authorities. In relation to the MBSR programme’s positioning itself as a stress reduction programme, it is noted that primarily the authorities attached to the MBSR programme are doctors and psychologists, whose advice lay people generally consider worth taking (Newton, 1995). This endorses the medicalization of stress and locates responsibility to manage it within the individual response and does not address how conditions are constituted to be stress engendering.
As a popular term, stress is understood as a condition that requires ‘management’ and ‘reduction’. The exogenous knowledge that the presenters of MBSR programmes carry as health professionals, facilitates them being able to offer mindfulness as a stress reduction technique. Their authority endorses the programme and takes it from the potentially alternative to the mainstream. With the word stress attached to the MBSR programme it becomes an endeavour that many medical aids will cover. That it positions itself as one of the most researched stress reduction programmes in the world (www.mindfulness-el.blogspot.com), confirms both academic and medical discourse that empirical significance constitutes the kind of authority that lay people should respect and respond to.

Kirby (2012) comments that the ‘medicalisation’ of the MBSR programme had been debated at length. “Jon Kabat-Zinn is very clear that trainers need to be adequately trained, experienced and supervised. The reality is, this is often traumatic and painful work. We have often felt very relieved that we work together with another experienced and trained professional. Participants can have an en masse cry, panic attacks and even dissociate” (personal communication).” Certainly the non-doing of meditation stands in contrast to stress and time urgency discourse. The mindfulness attitudes challenge Western capitalist notions of success and promote an interconnection rather than an individualistic orientation. Similarly the notion of being present-focussed which the MBSR programme advocates takes place in a time discourse that advocates that being faster is automatically better.
Mindfulness

Towards a Definition

Kabat-Zinn’s (2010) definition of mindfulness as “paying attention on purpose in the present moment, non-judgementally” is the most commonly cited (Moore & Brody, 2009; Gambrel & Keeling, 2010, Brown & Ryan, 2003). The process of locating concepts in academic discourse involves it being redefined to meet the requirements of epistemology and ontology. Black (2010) calls for an “empirical definition of mindfulness which is neither too narrow to starve off the discipline, nor too broad as to nullify its empirical significance” (p.175) and in this process additional definitions and ways of understanding mindfulness become available.

Academic articles tracking the history of mindfulness locate it in Buddhist meditation traditions and there the word mindfulness is interpreted as “having awareness”, “attention” and “remembering” (Davies & Hayes, 2011, p 198). Kang and Whittingham (2010) describe mindfulness in the Buddhist tradition as “simple bare awareness of moment to moment experience” (p.163). They link it to broader Buddhist teachings aimed at cultivating wisdom and ethics. Moore & Brody (2009) observe that as mindfulness skills training has been incorporated into Western interventions for psychological distress, researchers have developed both operational definitions and valid assessment measures.

In terms of operational definitions the following are available in the literature. Mindfulness is “a psychological state of awareness, a mode of processing information and a characterological trait” or a “state of psychological freedom that
occurs when attention remains quiet and limber, without attachment to any particular point of view” (Davis & Hayes, 2011, p. 198). Szanton et al (2011) consider mindfulness to go beyond being a stress reduction technique; rather they view it as mental training that develops awareness and acceptance skills which enable those who practice it to cope with daily events that may otherwise lead to heightened anxiety and stress. Josefsson, Larsman, Broberg & Lundh (2011) adduce that meditation practice improves the ability to be mindful, which in turn promotes psychological well-being. At the same time, Josefsson et al (2011) argue that mindfulness is a naturally occurring trait in some people and Davis and Hayes (2011) regard it as a “characterlogical trait”. This leads Coffey, Hartman, Fredrickson (2010) to express concern that definitions of mindfulness may have become too broad when they argue that “multiple different definitions of mindfulness prevent a clear understanding of the construct” (p.235). However, as Coffey et al (2010) point out that despite “burgeoning interest in mindfulness and its applications, it is a new research field, and has yet to achieve a consensual definition of the core construct” (p.235). Coffey et al, (2010) regard mindfulness to encompass both attentional and acceptance-based components.

“The attentional component pertains to the ability to intentionally regulate attention, which is honed by deliberate and sustained observation of thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and other stimuli as they occur in the present moment. The acceptance-based component involves maintaining an attitude of openness and receptivity to these experiences, rather than judging, ignoring or minimizing them, particularly when they are unpleasant” (p.236).
Brown and Ryan (2003) describe attention as incorporating conscious awareness and a heightened sensitivity to a limited range of experience. It is noted that in their definition, attention does not include a present focussed component whereas for Coffey et al (2010) attention does incorporate a present focus.

In commencing this study, it was understood that the tension Black (2010) identifies between definitions of mindfulness being at risk of either being too narrow or too broad may be encountered. It is argued however, that Kabat-Zinn's (2010) definition that mindfulness is paying attention on purpose in the present moment, without judgement, coupled with Coffey et al’s (2010) description of mindfulness incorporating attentional and acceptance components, provides enough construct detail to operationalise the current research.

**Research Efforts Towards Valid Measures**

Much of the research into mindfulness and its benefits is conducted from a positivist paradigm which attempts to measure and prove (Greeson, 2009). Within research discourse this is a common basis on which a new research field establishes empirical significance. While it is argued that research discourse may obfuscate the simplicity of subjective experience, the literature points to the discourse’s preoccupation with validity. It thus seems pertinent to outline what mindfulness measures have been developed and ways in which they have been critiqued.

Measures of mindfulness include the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer & Toney (2006) which assesses five components of mindfulness. These are observing, non-reactivity to inner experience,
describing, non-judging of inner experience and acting with awareness. Coffey et al (2010) list the following mindfulness measures: the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003), the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (Buchheld, Grossman & Wallach, 2001), the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale (Kumar, Feldman & Hayes, 2008) and the Mindfulness Questionnaire (Chadwick, Hember, Mead, Lilley & Dagnan, 2005). Coffey et al (2010) argue that the Carolina Empirically Derived Mindfulness Inventory (CEDMI) supersedes the ability of the FFMQ to measure mindfulness. In their view some of the facets of the FFMQ, such as being able to identify and label emotional experience and the ability to manage negative affect, “may be better conceptualised as sequelae of present-centred attention and acceptance of one’s experience” (Coffey et al, 2010, p.249).

Josefsson et al (2011) argue that even if the majority of mindfulness instruments have been successfully validated, there is fundamental concern that the data gathered is through self-report. Grossman (2008) comments that at least a half dozen self-rating questionnaires have now been published that claim to measure mindfulness. He identifies that there are fundamental flaws that remain resolved in relation to psychometric assessment of self-reported "mindfulness." In his view, failure to recognize these problems may seriously compromise progress in mindfulness research.

Perhaps understandably efforts to create an empirical significance for mindfulness research, turns to what is considered more measurable – the brain. Greeson (2009) reports on studies that ‘prove’ how mindfulness training influences areas of the brain involved in regulating attention, awareness and emotion. “Brain imaging research has found that more mindful people appear to have a greater ability to control
emotional reactions in the amygdala and prefrontal cortex (PFC) which is associated with attention, concentration and emotion regulation” (p.12). A magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) study found that attending an MBSR programme influenced neural activity in regions of the brain utilised for self-awareness. In addition, meditation increases the grey matter regions in the brain, known as the right anterior insula, which expands self-awareness (Greeson, 2009).

Notwithstanding research discourse’s concerns as to what constitutes validity, it is argued that the subjective experience of participant’s experience of doing an MBSR programme has an inherent validity. The manner in which people language their experience in their social interactions and the meanings they derive from their participation in an MBSR programme constitutes their reality, their truth which stands in contrast to positivist efforts to prove a certain reality. As indicated earlier Grossman (2008) calls for more qualitative research into mindfulness.

**Psychological Benefits of Mindfulness**

Research evidences that there are mental health benefits to be derived from participating in mindfulness training (Carmody & Baer, 2008; Greeson, 2009; Coffey et al, 2010, Josefsson et al, 2011 & Szanton et al, 2011). A number of fields of psychology including cognitive therapy (Ma & Teasdale, 2004), narrative therapy (Gerhart & Paré, 2008), dialectical behaviour therapy and acceptance and commitment therapy (Carmody & Baer, 2008) have argued for mindfulness’ applicability in their respective therapeutic approaches. It appears that mindfulness advocates “would have us believe that virtually every client, and their therapists,
would benefit from being mindful. In fact, mindfulness has been proposed as a common factor in psychotherapy” (Davis & Hayes, 2011, p.198).

This section of the review focuses on research that argues that participation in an MBSR programme contributes to psychological well-being. Although this study utilises a narrative analysis research methodology, it does not confine itself to reporting only on qualitative studies into mindfulness. Greeson (2009) in a review of 52 exemplars of empirical and theoretical articles on MEDLINE, PsycINFO and Google Scholar databases between 2003 and 2008, found that research consistently showed that mindfulness training reduces symptoms of stress and negative mood states and increases emotional well-being and quality of life among persons with chronic illness. Broadly, research evidences that practising mindfulness assists in lower levels of psychological distress, including less anxiety, depression, anger and worry. In addition, it is suggested that cultivating mindfulness improves the ability to focus and maintain attention (Carmody & Baer, 2008). The implications for mindfulness lowering stress is that the symptoms of medical conditions associated with stress e.g. psoriasis, Type 2 diabetes, fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis and chronic lower back pain reduce when sufferers practice mindfulness (Greeson, 2009). Davis and Hayes (2011) suggest that mindfulness’ theorised benefits include “self-control, objectivity, affect tolerance, enhanced flexibility, equanimity, improved concentration and mental clarity, emotional intelligence and the ability to relate to others and one’s self with kindness, acceptance and compassion” (p.198).

Specifically, Carmody and Baer (2008) conducted a study of 209 individuals in nine MBSR groups and found that “the regular practice of meditation should cultivate mindfulness skills in everyday life, which in turn should lead to improved symptom
reduction, reduced stress and enhanced well-being” (p.31). They found that the formal mindfulness practice in the MBSR programme of mindful yoga had a particularly significant impact on cultivating mindfulness skills and reducing stress. Shapiro, Brown and Biegel (2007) describe doing the MBSR programme as self-care and conducted a study of therapist trainees who attended an MBSR programme and compared their experience of stress with a control group of therapist trainees who did not attend an MBSR course. Shapiro et al (2007) found that doing an MBSR programme was associated with improvements in graduate counselling psychology students’ mental health. Students who attended an MBSR programme reported declines in “perceived stress, negative affect, state and trait anxiety, and rumination, and significant increases in positive affect and self-compassion” (p. 111). Carmody & Baer (2008) found there was a relationship between the extent of mindfulness practice, levels of mindfulness and psychological well-being. In other words, the ability to maintain mindfulness requires formal meditation practice, in a similar way that maintaining fitness requires exercise.

Further studies which point to the MBSR programme’s ability to reduce stress include Szanton et al’s (2011) study of elderly African Americans in a low-income housing facility. Participants reported the MBSR programme helped them address stress management and they identified stressors as growing older with physical pain, having to undergo medical tests, not having enough money and having children or grandchildren who faced hardship. Greeson (2009) reported on studies which showed that MBSR participants with serious medical conditions including breast cancer, prostate cancer and other types of cancer, had documented lower levels of cortisol, a primary stress hormone – and normalised immune function. He further
reported on three studies which showed that mindfulness meditation practice can positively influence autonomic and neuroendocrine system functioning both at rest and when stressed.

Josefsson et al (2011) in their study which included 92 participants, were keen to establish whether “meditators scored higher than non-meditators on all mindfulness facets, as well as on psychological well-being, whether the length of meditation experience is positively related to all facets of mindfulness and to psychological well-being and whether the relationship between meditation experience and psychological well-being is mediated by mindfulness” (p.51). As indicated earlier Josefsson et al (2011) regard mindfulness as both a trait and a cultivated skill and they were interested to isolate these two elements in their study. They used the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer et al, 2006) which identifies the following: observe, describe, act with awareness, non-judge and non-react as five facets of mindfulness. Josefsson et al (2011) found that although meditators scored higher than non-meditators on four of the five facets of mindfulness, the meditators did not score significantly higher than non-meditators on psychological well-being. They argue that since their participants all had university degrees or were students, they had access to ways in which to cultivate insight and reflexivity that could have the same impact as practising mindfulness (Josefsson et al, 2011). It is believed that this view is arguable since meditative traditions are not predicated on access to education.

With regard to findings relating to the present-focussed interest of this study, Coffey et al (2010) found that “greater tendencies to attend to one’s present-moment experience and accept that experience was associated with a greater ability to
manage emotions when they were negative” (p.243). Greeson (2009) found that the ability to “regulate one’s internal emotional experience in the present moment may translate to good mental health long-term” (p.11). He concludes: “finally, research is beginning to prove what mindfulness practitioners have known for centuries – that greater attention, awareness, acceptance, and compassion can facilitate more flexible, adaptive responses to stress, which, in turn, can help free us from suffering and realise greater health and well-being” (p.15).

Research findings seem to be contradictory on whether being mindful requires ongoing formal meditation practice or whether once taught it becomes a skill that can be accessed in everyday life. Baer & Carmody (2006) indicate that regular meditation is required if one is to remain mindful and lessen distress over the long term. Similarly, Shapiro et al (2007) found that just eight weeks of meditation practice impacted levels of mindfulness, on the other hand Josefsson (2011) found that none of the five mindfulness facets of the FFMQ (Baer et al, 2006) “mediated the relation between meditation experience and psychological well-being” (p.55). Kang and Whittingham (2010) observe that of the therapies that utilise mindfulness as a therapeutic technique, only Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy utilises meditation, whereas dialectical behavioural therapy and acceptance and commitment therapy do not. Clearly more research into the relationship between meditation practice and mindfulness would be useful. Similarly it is noted that none of the studies, focus particularly on the influence of attending an MBSR programme and being present-focussed. Given the extent to which stress exists in relation to time urgency (Adam, 1995), more research into how being mindful mediates time stress is indicated.
Mindfulness Research – a Critique

Grossman (2008) offers a broad ranging critique of mindfulness research. He identifies the following as some of the critical issues: “serious conceptual difficulties and differences, even among experts, in a common understanding of just what mindfulness is; relative naiveté among constructors of inventories in terms of their own limited knowledge of Buddhist thinking and depth of experience of Buddhist meditation practices; neglect of the possibly profound differences among respondents in semantic understanding of scale items; potentially significant discrepancies between how mindful individuals believe themselves to be (their self-rating) vs. how mindful they really are; very apparent biases that may apply to long-term practitioners of mindfulness meditation and those who undergo the MBSR and problems in validation of the so called ‘mindfulness’ instruments” (p.404).

In handling each of these issues in turn, Grossman (2008) makes the following observations. He argues that mindfulness is a difficult concept to define because unlike more “universally familiar affective states like depression, anxiety, joy, which may have their own definitional difficulties, mindfulness is a concept that is largely unfamiliar to most people, at least in the West” (p 405). This difficulty in conceptualising mindfulness results in it not being understood in terms of discursive, theoretical, or intellectual thinking and rather, it relies on practical introspective practices to be understood. This and the different ways it is described, results in confusion in the psychological literature. Commenting on the items in the various mindfulness measurement scales, Grossman (2008) asserts that they introduce “an erroneous reductionism that in no way corresponds to the original Buddhist
psychological construct of mindfulness which intimately connects moment-to-
moment paying attention to the cultivation of knowledge, positive emotions such as 
kindness and compassion, and even ethical behaviour related to the principle of 
doing no harm” (p.406). He observes too that the measures hardly correlate with 
each other. He argues that mindfulness and self-ratings of mindfulness are two 
different things and here he draws on the Hawthorne effect, the overconfidence 
effect and social desirability as likely to invalidate findings.

Grossman (2008) proffers that gathering qualitative data through interviews may be 
a better way of exploring mindfulness. In this way he appears to be willing to 
suspend his argument about the concept as a construct in Western thinking while he 
notes that mindfulness does exist as a fully-fledged construct in Buddhist 
psychology. “However we proceed, I certainly do not mean to suggest that we give 
up hope of understanding mindfulness in relation to Western scientific psychological 
and psychosomatic models. Nevertheless, we need to appreciate that Buddhist and 
Western approaches to mind and body differ substantially. Haste toward an 
understanding of mindfulness may limit a genuine opportunity to expand 
perspectives beyond the familiar. The qualities of careful attention, patience, 
openness, curiousity and a beginner’s mind are often seen as central to the 
cultivation of mindfulness. Perhaps similar qualities can also serve us in our pursuit 
to bridge paradigms” (p.408). Grossman’s (2008) critique of mindfulness is welcome 
in that it counters widespread and often uncritical endorsement of mindfulness and 
the MBSR programme. His advocacy of more qualitative research into mindfulness 
is extrapolated as support for the current study which seeks to explore the influence
of doing an MBSR programme on participants’ experience of time, notably the present.

Notwithstanding that research into mindfulness is relatively new, it is argued that the research presented here evidences support for the efficacy of mindfulness and the MBSR programme to facilitate psychological well-being and reduced stress.

**Time**

It has argued above that there is a link between hurry sickness, which can be understood as a form of stress and people’s relationship with time thus locating time as part of psychological discourse. The construct of time forms a central component of this study’s literature review and attempts to scaffold the study’s exploration of MBSR programme participants’ experience of time, particularly the present as a result of doing the MBSR programme. As indicated above mindfulness is defined as “paying attention on purpose in the present moment, non-judgementally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2010), which locates the notion of time, particularly the present in the construct. This section provides a broad overview of time as it is conceptualised in primarily Western time discourse which acknowledges that humans tend to be temporal and that thinking simultaneously occupies the past, present and future (Adam, 1995). It is argued though, that there is an emphasis to be future-focused (Ricoeur, 1980). This suggests then that the invitation in the MBSR programme to focus on the present could be considered a marginalised discourse. The review also considers how time is viewed from alternative perspectives, particularly Buddhist which informs mindfulness and African perspectives because of where this study is located.
It considers dominant discourses around time and how these may increase stress reactivity which relate to Western capitalist discourse and time as a finite resource which should not be wasted (Adam, 1995). It also considers time more directly in relation to the study’s focus on the MBSR programme’s invitation to participants to be present-focused and what the literature covers in regard to how discourse shapes the way we attend to time. This review of literature about time also importantly informs understanding and interpretation of the eight narratives gathered from participants in the MBSR programme on how their experience of time, notably the present has been influenced through their participation in the programme.

Time is one of the most commonly referenced nouns in the English language (Adam, 1995) and Polkinghorne (1988) argues that time is one of the “fundamental and most pervasive phenomena of our lives” (p.127). Yet despite common references to it and its pervasiveness, Adam (1995) suggests that time is taken for granted and rarely thought about reflexively. It is hoped this section of the review constitutes a reflexive consideration of how time is positioned in academic literature.

**The Language of Time**

Language and the way in which it can exert power and influence, is central to social constructionist theorising. Rather than suggesting that desires and wishes emanate from within people, social constructionism sees language as bringing forth realities. The words we use, the things we say are what shape our multiple realities and these are often available to us in terms of discourses in our external world, (Burr, 1995). She argues that this construction of the person through language takes place in social contexts rather than within the individual and thus we can argue that our
relationship to time is socially constructed and discourses of time may exert a disciplinary power over us. Elucidating on how time is languaged, Ricoeur (1980) comments on “expressions such as ‘having time to,’ ‘taking time to,’ ‘wasting time,’” and so on, are most revealing. The same is true of the grammatical network of verbal tenses, and likewise of the far-ranging network of adverbs of time: then, after, later, earlier, since, while, until, whenever, now that, and so forth” (p.173). In this way time becomes deeply imbedded in our speech and part of our social experience of being in the world. “The ‘now’ which anyone expresses is always said in the publicness of Being-in-the-world with another” (Ricoeur, 1980, p.176).

In considering time talk and its relationship to mindfulness, Moore and Brody’s (2009) study which explored linguistic predictors of mindfulness in written self-disclosure narratives found “that relative increases in present tense words significantly predicted increased non-judgemental acceptance of present-moment experiences” (p.292). These findings support Burr’s (1995) assertion about how language functions in bringing about subjective realities. The way in which time is represented in language is referred to below, particularly references to productive time, since this study’s assertion is that much of time stress is attached to capitalist notions of faster is better.

**Temporality – Being in Time and Space**

This section of the review reflects on how time is often viewed more in relation to the past and future, with relatively less attention being placed on present-focussed experience and it attempts to account for this emphasis. Thinking is a temporal
experience which involves simultaneously inhabiting the past, present and future, whereas our embodied experience locates us as corporeal and in a place and occupying space. Our embodied experience can relate more to physical sensation that might facilitate being present-focused and may include experiencing our feet in our shoes, our breath as our lungs inflate on the in-breath and deflate on the out-breath, in which case we may observe: “I am here, now”. However, the assertion: “I think therefore I am” (Descartes, 1985) creates a dualism that can other our embodied experience (Adam, 1995) and has implications for our experience of the present-moment. Baer et al’s (2006) FFMQ measures mindfulness on people’s inclination to experience physical sensations like the wind in their hair, whereas Descartes’ (1985) statement elevates our thinking to a disembodied pre-eminence and suggests that our thoughts are us, all of us (Kabat-Zinn, 2010). Just as thinking is temporal through time, it is also temporal through place, in which we may think of ourselves and our experiences in different places and at different times. Our bodies however, can only be in one place at one time.

Adam (1995) illustrates how our being in time and space has other implications for human experience and she speaks of “the temporal patterning of our earth” (p.17) in which physical events like menses, birth, sickness and death occur along typical time lines. She posits that asthma attacks, heart attacks, strokes and the onset of bacterial and viral infections tend to occur at particular times. She notes that from “the moment we acquire it, language frames our temporal experiences” (p.19). If our thinking temporally locates us in the past, present and future what are the implications for the how people might respond to a suggestion that stress in their lives will be reduced if they maintain attention in the present moment?
When is Now?

Polkinghorne (1988) refutes a traditional representation of time as a sequence of “nows” that track the movements of objects in space and says “people simply do not experience time as a succession of instants” (p.12). Adam (1995) says that “during each present the past we have already lived and the future we still expect to live, plays a central role in the way we experience, plan and act” (p. 23). Gergen (2004) says we draw on our past so that we can live our future which suggests that the present is only truly experienced once it is passed (p. 109). Ricoeur (1980) argues that becoming “is a mediating structure between temporality (as the unity of coming forth, having-been and making-present) and within-time-ness” (p.181). While Ricoeur’s description is more existential than discursive it provides a valuable sense of ‘nowness’, in that ‘becoming’, ‘making-present’ and ‘within-time-ness’ suggest action and embodiment rather than merely temporal thought. Heidegger (1977) asserts that ‘now’ can stand for ‘time’ when he says: “that which has been interpreted and is addressed in the ‘now’ is what we call ‘time’” (p.460) which although it almost suggests now as synonymous with time – it does not mean this is where thinking and attention tend to remain.

Ricoeur (1990) observes in Augustine’s Confessions (AD 397) a threefold present which includes anticipation, expectation and memory. Anticipation is future-focussed, expectation has a present component to it and it could be based on past experience and memory typically relates to the past. Ricoeur (1980) drawing on Heidegger and refuting Augustine, argues our attention is mainly on the future. “The primary direction of care is toward the future. We are always ‘ahead of’ ourselves” (p.181).
“The impulse toward the future is, at the deep level of temporality, a finite movement to the extent that all genuine expectations are limited from within by being-toward-death” (p.181).

Flaherty’s (2003) study of people’s relationship with time showed inclinations to want to speed time up which suggests bringing the future forward. He found a greater interest in making time speed up when people were involved in work they did not enjoy, waiting in queues and for the weekend to arrive. They engaged in distracting activities to speed up time and said they found this relatively easy to achieve. On the other hand, respondents said they found it less likely that they would want to slow down time and that this was harder to achieve. The above assertions suggest that the present moment is rarely experienced. Flaherty (2003) said respondents suggested that focussing on the present moment and on bodily sensations, i.e. the wind blowing through their hair, was one way to savour experiences that they wanted to last as long as possible. As has been referenced earlier, there seems to be a significant absence of a sense of being present-focussed in literature about time. Being present-focussed is thus not a dominant discourse in how relationships to time are viewed (Heidegger, 1977). Thus the present-focus of the MBSR programme invites participants into a new relationship with time, or at least a more self-reflexive relationship with time, and suggests that it can have a stress reducing influence. This emphasises that reflexivity in relation to time, when considering mindfulness as a construct is pertinent.
**Time and Stress**

Ricoeur (1980) describes the preposition ‘in’ relation to time, as ‘in time’ as a useful guide, which contrasts with Kabat-Zinn’s (2010) suggestion that meditation particularly takes us ‘out of time’. Flaherty (2003) suggests that people experience time pressure, both when there is a scarcity and an abundance of time. When people have lots of time available to them, it appears that this causes distress and Adam (1995) views this in relation to a Western and primarily protestant work ethic which likens idleness to sinfulness. Kabat-Zinn (2010) describes non-doing and posits having a subjective relationship with time that he defines as “out of time”. Given Becker’s (1973), Heidegger (1977), and Adam’s (1995) assertions that some of our relationship with time is partly constituted to deny our mortality, it seems surprising that people want to hurry time along and hasten the arrival of the future and by implication death. These are perhaps some of the ways in which Adam (1995) asserts that we do not think reflexively of our relationship with time.

As indicated above, Western time discourses do not advocate being present-focused, yet given Polkinghorne (1988) and Adam’s (1995) assertions that time is not often reflexively experienced but rather exists in terms of pervasive dominant discourses of better, faster, quicker, it is interesting to explore the influence of the MBSR programme on participants’ experience of time, notably the present. In opening a space for participants to share their narratives of time it is necessary to understand what cultural narratives may have become dominant for them in relation to time.
Productive Time

As discussed earlier language enables the construction of discourses which become dominant and there are countless phrases that shape the way we relate to time. These include: “time waits for no man”, “you can’t halt the march of time” and “time flies” which demonstrate Polkinghorne’s (1988) description of a “thinglike analogy of time” in which time has the qualities of motion. Similarly, Ricoeur (1980) observes that the metaphor “the arrow of time” suggests movement usually in a linear single direction. Phrases like “procrastination is the thief of time”, “time is money”, “seize the moment” and “there is no time like the present” view time as a resource linked to productive energy in which it is encouraged that we don’t waste time and that we use it efficiently (Adam, 1995). A phrase like “failing to plan is planning to fail” suggests the importance of being future-focussed and developing a thorough knowledge of what you’re going to do in the future.

In environments like schools and workplaces positive discipline is exerted (Foucault, 1977) and specific discourses around time are constituted. From learning how to tell the time early in school going years, through to bells, timetables and periods, school children learn to do sets of activities based on clock-time. Adam (1995) notes that children would easily be able to answer the question: “What is the time?” but might have significantly more difficulty answering the question: “What is time?” In school environments there are hierarchies of power associated with time that continue throughout life. We wait for teachers, we wait for doctors. Some people’s time is positioned as more important than others.
In workplaces the manner in which we speak about time constructs it as a resource which we may spend, waste, invest, budget and save. These references equate it with money. “The capacity to control people’s time and the association with money, is only possible once time has become decontextualised and disembodied from events – once it has been established as universally applicable” (Adam, 1995, p.90). “The negative time discipline of preventing the waste of time was fused with the more active one of intensifying efforts, with a move towards maximum speed and efficiency” (Foucault, 1977, p. 154). In addition to the disciplinary power exerted through how we language time and our use of it, Adam (1995) points out that “clock time” attempts to suggest that anywhere in the world an hour is of the same value. “Clock time forms an integral part of contemporary Western societies’ time-consciousness. Time efficiency, time budgeting, time management – they all belong to the clock-time conceptualisation of time” (p.89). Kabat-Zinn’s (2010) original idea to offer an alternative to faster is better in the form of mindfulness, counters the dominant faster is better discourse which Foucault (1977) describes as “intensifying efforts, with a move towards maximum speed and efficiency” (p. 154). Kabat-Zinn (2010) does this by drawing on non-doing and being out of time, which is rooted in Buddhist philosophy. Adam (1995) suggests too that traditional African ways of perceiving time also provides alternatives, both of which highlight that the concept of time is not universal, but socially constructed in terms of culturally available discourses.
**Time and Narrative Psychology**

As has been discussed above, experiences of time are socially constructed and inform the manner in which people go about their lives. There are perceptions of ‘right’ times to do most things and over their lifetimes people develop their unique stories of how they are in relation to time. Narrative psychology acknowledges that stories are generated socially and are based on discourses of what constitutes the good (Gergen, 2002) and as reviewed above discourses of how to be good with time exist and become dominant discourses. This study has identified that the faster is better discourse which encourages hurrying and a sense of time scarcity is implicated in an increase in stress (Adam, 1995).

Furthermore, narratives are constructed with time-lines that may determine when certain identity conclusions were made or when people began to experience certain conditions as problematic (White, 2007). Thus narrative psychology recognises the role of time in shaping our storied lives. The section on narrative analysis does explore this more fully, however it is important to establish a link here between time and how it relates to narrative psychology.

**Different Time**

This section of the review considers time from a Buddhist and African perspective and explores constructions of these. This study’s interest in time takes a particular present-focus and it understands mindfulness to originate in Buddhist philosophy which emanated in India 2 500 years ago. It has since expanded through the East and is now practised throughout the world. Interestingly it was anticipated that
particularly the Buddhist perspective on time might yield mostly references to the present, but this has not been the case. Rapgay and Bystrisky (2009) observe that classical mindfulness involves attention to present, past and future experience which they contrast with modern mindfulness which they observe focusses on the present.

As indicated earlier Kang and Whittingham (2010) and Grossman (2008) express concern that although the MBSR programme draws fairly closely on mindfulness and its focus on the present, there are key areas of Buddhist philosophy that other Western-oriented mindfulness approaches overlook. Certainly as Kang and Whittingham (2010) point out “mindfulness in the Buddhist context includes the following: simple bare awareness of moment to moment experience; ‘gatekeeping’ awareness; remembering and sustaining attention on a familiar object; a process of systematically recollecting a sequence of ideas; ...wisely directed attention that probes into the source of experiential content” (p.164).

This description of mindfulness includes time references to the past, “remembering” and “recollecting” and “probes into the source of experiential content” which can relate to the past, present and future. This echoes Gergen’s (2004) assertion that we understand ourselves through our past so we may better negotiate our future. Thus, in searching in Buddhist-oriented literature there was not a predominant emphasis on being present-focussed which Rapgay and Bystrisky (2009) and Kang and Whittingham (2010) clarify as being an introduction into more western modern orientations of mindfulness. This does encourage enquiry into Kabat-Zinn’s (2004) definition which places being present-focussed as a central tenet and how it relates to other definitions of mindfulness.
In attempting to explore the situatedness and social construction of time further, we turn to our continent, Africa. Adam (1995) observes that studies of time in contexts that are ‘non-Western’ tend to “dichotomise societies into traditional and modern” and she offers numerous contrasts between “our” Western/modern times and “other” traditional times (p.29). Adam (1995) observes that the dichotomisation into “traditional” and “modern” time has been extensively criticised, not least of all because references to “other” time tends to be discriminatory. Gyekye (1987) notes that the term “African time” is contested and in our country, it is generally offered as an evaluation of levels of punctuality and the speed of doing things. Theorising about “African time” regards it as “complex and understood in relation to abstraction, objectification, spatialisation, context-independence and commodification” (Adam, 1995, p.34). She draws on Mbiti’s work which she says, contrasts the produced time of African people’s with the time in Western conceptualisation as having an objective quantity, linked to clock-time that can be exchanged in the labour market. She further asserts that in Mbiti’s view “time is simply a composition of events that have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur” and which conceptualises time as a long past, a present and virtually no future. (p. 34). Gyekye (1987) challenges Mbiti’s claims that “the linear concept of time in Western thought, with an infinite past, a momentary present and an infinite future is practically foreign to African thinking” (p. 172). Instead he says, the duality of time as a concrete reality and as an abstract notion is incorporated and is not seen as a binary. These various views illustrate that there are no universal objective truths about time and that the manner in which it is understood is socially constructed and incorporate notions of extents of past, present and future.
This literature review has attempted to demonstrate research and academic theorising around the three constructs that anchor this study, notably stress, mindfulness and time. It was observed that although mindfulness is a new field of interest in psychology with a prevalence of broad descriptions (Black, 2010), the definition of it as “paying attention on purpose in the present moment, without judgement” (Kabat-Zinn, 2010) provides enough of a construct to conduct a narrative analysis research study such as this. Stress discourse locates responsibility for handling stress on the individual without consideration for how environments can change to be less stress inducing. This is largely because stress can be regarded as an outcome of capitalist productivity endeavours which perpetuate a faster is better discourse (Foucault, 1977). This arises in hurry sickness thus time and stress are interrelated and the premise of mindfulness is that by being aware in the present moment, rather than attending to the future or past, experiences of stress can reduce. The review then looked at how time is constructed and drew on the work of Ricoeur (1980) and Heidegger (1977) who assert that time is not experienced as a series of nows, and Ricoeur (1980) argues that we are more likely to be future-focussed, which aligns with Foucault’s (1977) assertion that the modern experience of time is to try to do more and more, at a faster pace. The social construction of time was juxtaposed with Buddhist and “African” time for emphasis with the former focussing less on the present than was anticipated and “African” time being contested about the extent to which time is named, and the present is experienced. The overall faster better is discourse around time and stress, positions the invitation of mindfulness and being present-focussed to MBSR programme participants as a marginalised discourse which this study attempts to open a space for reflexive engagement with.
CHAPTER 3: EPISTEMOLOGICAL, METHODOLOGICAL AND ANALYTIC FRAMEWORKS

This chapter considers the various frameworks that inform this study. Its epistemological point of departure is located in narrative psychology and social constructionism. Methodologically a case study format was used which lends itself to various forms of data analysis. This study’s analytic framework is a narrative analysis and in considering the analytic framework, I draw on both the theory and method of narrative analysis. It is noted that this study’s interest in experiences of time is pertinently explored through narrative analysis because narratives are “significant wholes out of scattered events” that are achieved both chronologically and non-chronologically (Ricoeur, 1980, p. 174).

Narrative Psychology and Social Constructionism

Narrative psychology is located in a social constructionist paradigm. Both recognise language as central to meaning making. Crossley (2002) asserts that human psychology has a narrative structure and that the word narrative can be coterminous with story. The structure of narrative incorporates sequence and time and in order to experience identity, “an understanding of the inextricable connection between temporality and identity” is necessary (Crossley, 2002, p.2). Ricoeur (1980) says narrative goes beyond establishing humanity to incorporate not only “reckoning with time” but recollecting time (p.173). However, within the context of experience there may have been other stories that could have been identified, thus meaning is contextual and situated, suggesting the possibility for multiple realities. It is through language that our story or narrative is brought to life and it often follows a structure
related to time i.e., then, now and later, or before and after (White, 2007). Furthermore narrative psychology acknowledges the possibility for stories to change over time and that identity is fashioned from narratives or stories, that may be personal or cultural and these may inevitably be linked to time, (White, 2007). Narrative psychology posits that people arrive at identity conclusions and performances through the meaning they attach to events in their lives and the narratives that arise out of these (White & Epston, 1990). For Riesmann (1993) most forms of psychotherapy in which people speak of their lives and situated events in them, are acts of narrativising.

Narrative psychology seeks alternative stories that may be located in marginalised discourses and which may bring ease to clients. In the case of this study we argue that being present-focused can be understood as a marginalised discourse and that it counters a more dominant discourse of faster is better which creates a context for time stress. Narrative psychology acknowledges that the stories which become our dominant stories are often shaped by discourses that our culture and family may inscribe us into. We begin to live them without reflexively considering how this came to be and if it is what we want. They are thus constructs that emerge out of a particular set of historical-cultural understandings of the world. The presence of discourse and its disciplinary power over people influences what elements of their lives and experience people will select out for expression (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits, 1997).

Social constructionism holds that the ways in which we experience ourselves are socially derived, through interaction. It refutes the notion of an intrinsic, essential self, but rather argues that our identities are formed and performed through our
engagement with the external world, through contact, through discourse and through language, (Burr, 1995) and Gergen (2002). Discourses exert a disciplinary power over us and Foucault (1977) argued that personal narratives are often subjugated through adherence to dominant discourses and he uses the analogy of the panopticon prison to illustrate how discourse functions. Bentham’s panopticon prison was designed in such a way that guards in a tower are at all times able to see what the prisoners are doing and so whether watched or not, their behaviour is that of a watched person. Foucault (1977) suggests that discourses have a similar impact and that we self-monitor their disciplinary power. This means we exclude the possibilities of alternate stories that might be located in marginalised discourses because we fear being marginalised and excluded from forms of power (Foucault, 1977) and Marais (2009).

This study explores the extent to which attending an MBSR programme influenced participants’ experience of time, particularly whether they become more present-focused and what this may mean for their understandings of a more dominant faster is better discourse. As indicated earlier the origins of the faster is better discourse can be traced to production work ethics linked to capitalist discourse (Adam, 1995).

**Methodology - Case study**

The participants in the MBSR programme can be said to represent a case and this study can be described as an intrinsic case study because it is being undertaken to better understand a component of the participants’ experience more fully (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The case study lends itself to a detailed collection of data from a few sources (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000). “The term ‘case study’ is also taken
to carry implications for the kind of data that are collected, and perhaps also for how
these are analysed” (Gomm et al, 2000, p.12). Case studies accommodate different
ways in which the data may be analysed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), and in this study
a narrative analysis will be used.

**Narrative Creation**

The sample for this study was eight participants who had completed the MBSR
programme in East London. They were purposively selected to represent as broad a
cross section of participants as possible, albeit they may not have been
representative of the general profile of MBSR programme participants. The typical
MBSR programme participants are middle-aged, white woman. Four participants
were under 40, two were male and one was black.

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*Fig.1 Participant biographical data*
A sample size of eight participants is adequate both in terms of the methodological requirements of a case study and in terms of narratives generated for analysis.

**Towards Soundness – Participation**

Participants were recruited through an email that the MBSR course presenters in East London, Dr Janine Kirby and Barbara Gerber circulated to people who had attended a MBSR programme. In addition, Dr Kirby and Ms Gerber provided a letter to the University of Fort Hare (UFH) ethics committee indicating they were aware of the research. Participation in the study was voluntary and each participant received an informed consent form detailing the research, which they were requested to sign. Although participants were willing to have their identity disclosed, it was decided to conceal their identities as this was considered a more ethical research approach. In addition transcriptions were sent to participants, as was the completed thesis for their input. Since the work of Dr Kirby and Ms Gerber has been referred to extensively in this study, they have had sight of it and pointed out where my understanding and their intention diverged. All participants have received an electronic copy of this document so that they could comment on how I have worked with their narratives. These stages, put the theory of narrative analysis being a more democratic research agenda into action (Marais, 2009) and in so doing I have aimed to “profoundly respect” the participants (Madigan, 2007, p.183).

**Interviews**

Narratives were generated through face-to-face semi-structured interviews aimed at “opening a space” for interviewees to reflect on and share narratives of their
relationship with time, notably the present, as an outcome of attending the MBSR programme. Except for one, all interviews took place at the researcher's office. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) point out that we live in an “interview society” and they comment that “qualitative researchers are realising that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two people leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (p.62).

The semi-structured interview questions were guided by narrative inquiry principles which Jossleson and Lieblich (1995) describe as coming “into contact with our participants as people engaged in the process of interpreting themselves” (p. ix). Some interviews seemed to meander and as a researcher collecting narrative accounts, it seemed appropriate that the stories be told in ways the interviewees selected. Hollway and Jefferson (2003) emphasise the importance of giving interviewees’ free associations precedence over narrative coherence. Both yield analysable data. At the same time the participants in this study were viewed as “storied characters” both in their own lives and as characters in the story of my life, (Gergen, 2004, p.271).

“Interviews give us access to the repertoire of narratives that we use in producing accounts and they are situated in relation to the context in which they occur and the subject positions conferred” (Silverman, 2005a, p. 112). While the interview style for gathering data for narrative analysis may allow for the participants’ accounts to be fluid and free, the power imbalance in research lingers. Some participants expressed concern about whether what they had said was useful or usable and they seemed to hold the idea that research is only valid if it includes certain kinds of telling. Silverman (2005) says this raises the important methodological issue about whether
interview responses are to be treated as giving direct access to experience or as actively constructed narratives. For Riesmann (1993), what emerges from an interview is merely a representation. With regard to this study, it is argued that the interview responses are actively constructed narratives. The reasons participants had chosen to do the MBSR programme remained part of their broader narrative of their experience, and then they accommodated my interest in how it had influenced their experience of time, notably the present moment.

Riesmann (1993) suggests that between five to seven questions be used to guide narrative research. The questions used to guide the interviews were:

- What was your experience of doing the MBSR programme like?
- Was the focus on the present obvious to you?
- What does ‘society’ seem to be saying to us about time?
- Was time different for you before and after the MBSR programme?
- How do you know when you are being more present-focussed?
- What contribution to your well-being does being in the present bring to your life?

In some interviews these questions seem to provide too much structure and seemed to close down space, rather than open it up and in those instances interviews proceeded in a more freely associative way. Riesmann (1993) discourages too tight a research question because she says “data from narrative accounts causes questions to change and new ones to emerge” (p. 60). In some interviews, participants said during the course they noticed time differently and afterwards they resumed their earlier relationship with time. In such instances, the interview followed
these narratives through different questions and as researcher, it was important not to think that the participants’ narratives had to yield prescribed data.

An interview about participants’ experience of time could stand as an invitation for them to continue to develop new stories around the MBSR programme, their reflexive engagement with time and stress reduction in their lives.

What arose were eight recorded interviews and then the question became: what to do with all this talk? McCormack (2004) says “researchers working within a narrative paradigm frequently engage in in-depth conversations with participants. However, when these conversations conclude researchers face a daunting task. Faced with page upon page of interview transcript researchers often feel terrified and overwhelmed and at a loss as to where and how to begin” (p. 219). Conceptualising narrative analysis in terms of both theory and method, seem to guide me in my question of how to present the interviews in a way that could be viewed as relevant and robust research.

**The Theory of Narrative Analysis – Our Storied Lives**

Thorne (1999) describes narrative analysis as a qualitative research strategy which acknowledges the extent to which the stories we tell provide insights about research participants’ lived experiences. For Wiles, Rosenberg and Kearns (2005) “narrative analysis produces strategies to inform the conduct, interpretation and presentation of interview talk, and encourages and enables researchers to take account of research participants’ own evaluations” (p.89). According to Silverman (2005a) “participation in a culture includes participation in the narratives of that culture, a general
understanding of the stock of meanings and their relationships to each other …interviewees deploy these narratives to make their actions explainable and understandable to those who otherwise many not understand” (p. 100).

Marais (2009) says the narrative research method “has an epistemological commitment to a more democratised research agenda” (p.65) and it works at creating a space where participants can access what is real and meaningful for them, with the researcher as a partner in the co-construction of narratives on the topics being explored. The invitation in narrative research is for participants to share particular stories and this creates a context for participants and researcher to be aware of how cultural repertoires of narratives infuse lived experience (Gergen, 2004). According to Gergen (2004) “the researcher is within the stories researched” (p.272). The researcher appears in the stories researched because he or she makes an interpretation of what is said and may ask questions that could influence the flow of the story. It is thus necessary for the researcher to be aware of this and to allow for the participants’ stories to flow with minimal influence and some suggestions follow as to how this may be achieved.

Central to this study is an interest in whether participants’ stories about their relationship to time have changed as a result of doing the MBSR programme. The design of the study links throughout with the intention of how the data will be analysed. Narrative analysis is located in a social constructionist research paradigm. Social constructionism holds that meaning and realities are constructed through the interpretations we make of experiences. Our social interactions, facilitated through language determine how we understand our experience. According to Burr (1995) language produces and constructs our experiences of ourselves and each other.
“The person you are, your experience, your identity, your ‘personality’ are all the effects of language” (Burr, 1995, p.39). The implications of using a social constructionist paradigm for this study are that it recognises that through language we bring forth a reality and that there are not innate qualities to the MBSR programme and our relationship with time. Rather, as we language our experience, we create meaning which is malleable and flexible, according to who we are engaging with and the subject positions conferred and contested in any situation (Gergen, 2004).

Marais (2009) identifies that the object of analysis in narrative analysis are the stories themselves in which words and language are constituent of a constructed reality and become the means by which people perform their identities. In addition to this process, she highlights that narrative analysis concerns itself both with what the text is doing i.e. the content and how it is achieving this through word choice and sentence structure. “Language is not viewed as a transparent medium, unambiguously reflecting stable and singular meanings; rather it is understood as deeply constitutive of reality,” (Marais, 2009, p. 67).

Furthermore, the interaction between researcher and researched becomes an activity which also forms part of the analysis – the interaction itself becomes a co-construction of the narratives that are analysed. The act of analysis necessarily involves interpretation. Gergen (2004) suggests that narratives may be malleable and multi-faceted and these change over time. The narrative around how relationships with time may have changed will be analysed by focussing on how the languaging of time informs the narratives. Each person’s account of their experience of time as an outcome of doing an MBSR programme forms one part of the analysis,
and a second part involves the texts and narrative being understood as a single body of data which informs and is informed by discourses around time, stress and mindfulness. This component of the analysis will draw on discursive psychology and consider how the narratives relate to dominant discourses, (Gergen, 2004). Here the analysis will link individual stories to the wider culture in which they operate, thus ensuring that the analysis retains the study’s overall social constructionist framework.

Riesmann (1993) holds that one could regard a theme of stories or narratives as how people have “reinterpreted” their lives in the process. This suggests that in the process of participating in research of this nature, participants reinterpret their lives, perhaps even re-authoring their experience of time. Polkinghorne (1988) and Adam’s (1995) assertion that people don’t often think about their relationship with time reflexively supports this re-authoring possibility. It also amplifies Riesmann’s (1993) cautionary note that a researcher, in doing a narrative analysis, should avoid reducing participants stories to specific themes, yet at the same time there is a requirement for the analysis to be finite. Riesmann (1993) argues that narratives can be viewed as the organising principle for human action and that telling stories enables a reinterpretation of our lives. She highlights the collaborative nature of narrative analysis as “story telling is what we do with our research materials and participants do with us” (p.1).

This study looks at first person accounts of participants in the MBSR programme and how in the interview they impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. Chase (2003) highlights that narrative research and analysis encourages researchers to listen well to what participants say and
Andersen (1992) emphasises the importance of listening, really listening to what people say, and not just what they mean. In the process of a becoming therapist, a narrative inclined research study has hopefully supported my growth as someone who can listen.

As outlined above, narrative psychology and social constructionism inform the theory of narrative analysis as a research method. We now move on to the operational phase of the research which considers the ‘how’ of the analysis.

**Methods of Narrative Analysis**

The method of narrative analysis involves various stages, firstly the narratives generated from the interviews will be transcribed into text and then a narrative analysis will be conducted. This involves several stages of reading and re-reading to analyse both differences and similarities between different narratives, as well as themes and patterns across the data, (Marais, 2009). In taking the pages of transcribed interviews and deciding how to analyse them, I turned to Riesmann’s (1993) model as method of narrative analysis. In using a model, it is acknowledged that other options may be excluded, yet a mini-dissertation such as this offers a situated story of academic undertaking which requires a focus and direction that a model may provide. Riesmann (1993) has constructed a model which includes the stages of attending, telling, transcribing, analysing, and reading. It is noted that at stages of the research both researcher and participant are both engaged in the above processes. For the purposes of this section, attending and telling are regarded as primarily participant processes, whereas transcribing and analysing are researcher driven processes, and reading is both a researcher and examiner.
process. Listening is implied by the model. At the analysing stage, White’s (2007) narrative model is utilised where accounts of participants’ experiences of time is analysed from the perspective of remote history, distant history, recent history, present and future. Instances of participants’ talk that were temporally located in these ‘time zones’ were grouped together using Atlas T1. Ricoeur (1980) observes that narratives bring together significant wholes out of scattered events. In terms of this study, the contexts in which people understand their experience of the MBSR programme and the present is likely to be arrived at through scattered events over their lifetime and this is why a timeline of experience is analysed. Consistent with the research title, particular attention is paid to narratives of experiences of the present.

Attending

The narratives that emerge from the interviews conducted for this study do not offer direct access to participants’ experiences of the MBSR programme nor to their experiences of time, but rather they represent an occasion of meaning-making based on what they attended to in the interview. They make choices based on a selection of a totality of experience that constitutes for them the MBSR programme. What participants attended to in the interview is also influenced by their experience of past interviews, their experience of the researcher, the questions and their efforts to represent themselves as authentic, (Riesmann, 1993). What they attend to becomes an active construction of their reality around the MBSR programme, in a situated context of their participation in a research project.
Telling/Storying their experience of an MBSR programme

Amongst the countless thoughts that could inform multiple narratives that occur while seated in the research interview, participants select to perform a personal narrative through the words they speak, the pauses they make, the pace at which they speak and the rise and fall of the voices and their facial expressions. Along with what they tell me, are the experiences of what made them decide to do the MBSR programme, what they hoped the MBSR programme would bring into their lives, the ways in which it would relieve stress and disease. While these may not have been invited by the research question posed, if they were important to the telling of participants’ experiences they would share them - the depression, the bulimia and the fear of an imploding life. They tell me of how they see the world and time in it, themselves in the world and in time, their agency with being present or not. They do this with words, with language and in so doing constitute their narrative and a situated reality.

Transcribing

Riesmann (1993) regards taping and transcribing interviews as “absolutely essential” to narrative analysis (p.56). The transcription of narrated experiences renders words as text, devoid of the nuance of personal exchange, but more loaded with discourse which provides an opportunity to see what the talk is doing. Each interview was transcribed verbatim with both participant and researcher’s words. Full transcriptions are included as an Addendum at the end of this mini-dissertation so that the full narratives of participants are available. Selections for analysis appear as text in the analysis and interpretation section of the study. “Texts created in transcription
allowed for analysis of interruptions, pauses and other spoken features” that illustrate the co-construction of narratives for analysis, (Riesmann, 1993, p. 56). Mishler (1992) and Heidegger (1977) point out that the transcribed text reveals elements of how the conversation may have been influenced by the researcher, as well as how certain aspects of the conversation only become clear in the process of working with the transcriptions. The process of transcribing shapes the difficult decision about how to analyse the interview conversation as written text.

**Analysing**

In analysing the narratives, Riesmann (1993) cautions against the tendency to read the narrative only for content or to read it as evidence of prior theory.

Individual narratives are situated in particular interactions but also in social, cultural, and institutional discourses, which must be brought to bear to interpret them. Nor can researchers bypass difficult issues of power: Whose voice is represented in the final product? How open is the text to other readings? How are we situated in the personal narratives we collect and analyse? It is essential, to open up these interpretive issues for readers to see. (p. 61)

Ultimately, the features of participants’ narrative accounts a researcher selects to write about, is linked to the research question, the theoretical/epistemological frameworks the research is informed by and often the researcher’s personal biography and interests. Bruner (1986) says the narrative mode “leads to conclusions not about certainties in an aboriginal (original and objective) world, but
about the varying perspectives that can be constructed to make experience comprehensible” (p.76). In addition to this, presenting a body of academic work to comply with an academic requirement for the qualification of master in psychology, requires that the analysis be structured, be coherent and demonstrate a synthesis of theory with a practical research application. In attempting this White’s (2007) narrative model provides direction in how to analyse the utterances.

For the purposes of analysis and in deference to the research interest around time, it seemed that White (2007) offers an appropriate structure for conducting a narrative analysis of the research data. In looking at what the talk of the participants was doing in relation to time – their stories were coded using Atlas Ti for instances of reference to remote history, distant history, recent history, present and future. Interpretations of how to understand the terms follows: remote history is understood to include early childhood experiences and handed down family narratives, distant history includes experiences from later childhood to adulthood and prior to doing the MBSR programme. Recent history includes the last two or three years and up to completing the MBSR programme, while the present includes both the interview experience and references to being present-focussed. Future relates to talk of plans beyond the present.

**Reading**

Bruner (1986) says readers participate in the construction of a story-line of a text. This is a parallel process and in this instance, this document is written with a type of reader in mind and in the process of reading it back to myself, I may change it, develop a more nuanced or different view, sharpen it or expand it. My storied
experience as researcher is open to multiple interpretations. Similarly this document will be submitted to multiple readers whose views of it will differ because their “impressions of a new terrain are of course based on older journeys already taken” (Bruner, 1986, p.81). Some may hear my voice too much, others may point out alternative ways of interpreting participants’ narratives and yet others may ask where my personal biography reveals itself? In this way we see how “collaboration is inevitable because the reader is an agent of the text” (Bruner, 1986, p. 82). The final document that reaches an examiner will demonstrate a “plurivocal text, open to several readings and constructions” (Riesmann, 1993, p 15).

She observes that analysis and reading can be difficult to distinguish because once the interviews have been transcribed they become text and to some extent the role of analyser is that of reader who finds in the storied account of people who have attended the MBSR programme, gaps and dramatic turns. “The reader is given the task of developing and reconciling what Kermode (1981) referred to as sjuzet (the linear events that make up the plot) and the fabula (the timeless underlying theme) (White, 2007, p. 77).

The research process thus includes the interview which is a situated identity performance in which narratives of time are explored, in which the researcher becomes a collaborator and co-constructor. The transcription of the interview creates a text, with which researcher as reader creates new meaning through the process of writing up the work. Throughout she attempts to be transparent in her interpretation, so that it stands as trustworthy and also with the intention that readers of the text will “participate both in the production and the comprehension of the work’s intention” (White, 2007, p. 79) and that the text (this thesis) “initiates performances of meaning
rather than actually formulating meanings themselves” (p. 79). Since time is a central element in narrative construction, the decision to utilise narrative analysis for an enquiry into participants’ shifts in experiences of time as a result of doing the MBSR programme, seems an appropriate research decision.
CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Narrative Analysis

This narrative analysis section of the study has two broad components to it: firstly participants’ stories in relation to time are analysed and this tends to be a more individual account of narratives. Here, I have attempted a balance between presenting and analysing participants’ time talk and including parts of the interviews where I, as interviewer in a mean-making process “open up interpretive issues for readers to see” and I am experienced through the questions (Riesmann, 1993, p. 61). Each portion of selected talk is referenced to the transcripts which are included as an Addendum to this study. In the process of positioning myself as a researcher and interviewer for this study, I have experienced a tension between my identity performance as a becoming counselling psychologist interested in narratives and how they function and my past identity performances as a journalist who interviews and presents what people say in a particular way.

Secondly the common themes that emerge across the narratives, in which relationships to time and other dominant discourses as identified in the literature review follow. For both sections of the analysis the transcribed interviews were categorised using Atlas Ti which assists in organising lengthy transcriptions into easier-to-work-with categories. For the more individually oriented narratives references to: remote past, distant past, recent past, present and future (White, 2007) were grouped. These were then related back to the research enquiry of
whether doing an MBSR programme influences people’s experiences of time, notably whether they become more present-focussed and if so, whether this has benefits for participants.

The second component of the analysis identified the following themes: time as a scarce resource, an emphasis on being productive with time, an awareness of the link between time and stress, notions of different time and an inclination to be future-focussed in relation to time. It is conceded that as a research decision is made, it sometimes precludes other ways of working with the narratives. In embarking on this stage of analysis, I ask myself often: “What have I missed? What could be a more compelling way for participants to be represented and for the reader to experience their narratives? What are the other ways that I may have analysed this part of the narrative?” I imagine until the final moment of submitting this document, I might continue to ponder this.

I now locate elements of participants’ time narratives by using White’s (2007) maps of narrative that relate to how narratives are constructed by sometimes moving non-chronologically through the remote histories, distant histories, recent histories, present and future seamlessly. For the purposes of analysis, I select out participants’ words and locate them in these (his)stories. Given how narratives reckon with time and also recollect time, we witness what constitutes people’s time talk. As with the present-focussed orientation of this study, greater emphasis is placed on participants’ references to their experience of the present. In making these selections, I become aware of how time in the participants’ narrative becomes a dominant narrative and a representation of meaning that arises out of the process of research. Had they met me in another context, their stories of themselves, the MBSR
programme and time, may have been different, which highlights Gergen’s (2004) assertion that narratives are malleable and fluid. Participants’ narratives are treated as discrete across White’s (2007) maps of narrative and then specific themes and discourses are located. However an orientation on what is understood by the time categories follows which contextualises the interpretation and discussion.

**Maps of Narrative and Participants’ Narratives of Time**

The eight narratives generated in this study, which explored participants’ experience of time, notably the present were analysed using White’s (2007) maps of narrative and identifies events or statements located in participants’ remote history, distant history, recent history, present and future. Narratives are often generated from experiences and events in our remote history and even though the memories or contexts that generated them may be forgotten, the identity conclusions that sustain our narratives of self may persist. This is because what we pay attention to often confirms these identity conclusions (White, 2007) and (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits, 1997). In this study, remote history relates to experiences from childhood and when interviewees made reference to “always” or “never”, this was understood to mean participants saying: “for as long as I can remember” and as such these accounts were considered part of remote history.

Distant history refers to experiences that follow remote history and occur before recent history. Talk/text that started with “when”, “since”, “then”, as well as accounts that related to specific time like four years ago were considered to be part of a distant history narrative account.
Recent history is constructed to be from ‘yesterday’ to about three years ago. Besides TF who attended the MBSR in 2009, the other seven participants attended it in the last two years. In engaging reflexively with the participants’ statements I have selected to illustrate narratives which I interpret to constitute recent history, I become aware that my selection has been to locate them as MBSR programme participants and to give some sense of what made them choose to do the programme or their response to it. I have sometimes pondered about my interest in the specificity of the present moment focus of this study and acknowledged that a simpler study may have been to ask: “Were there benefits to you in doing the MBSR programme and if so what were these?” This seemed possibly too broad a question and given the way in which mindfulness is anchored in attention in the present moment, it seemed pertinent to pursue.

Parts of the interviewees’ stories that used the words “present”, “now”, “moment” or gerund verbs i.e. “realising” and “noticing” were categorised in present section. Since the focus of the study is on whether the MBSR programme influenced participants’ experience of being in the present, their accounts of this are given prominence and in so doing I accord them dominance. For all participants, doing the MBSR programme oriented them to the present moment. A number of participants said focusing on their breath and using the STOP technique described in the Appendix (p.152) was how they incorporated the present-focussed emphasis of mindfulness into their daily life, others spoke about how elements of their lives, particularly their work lent itself to being completely present and focussed. Still, others observed that although it wasn’t that easy to maintain a more present-focussed way of being, they
became more conscious of their rushing, ruminations on the past or inclination to plan for the future.

As indicated in the literature review, Ricoeur (1980) posits that human’s relationship with time tends to be more future-focussed and participants’ have indicated in their narratives of time that their rushing is often related to what has to be done next and that this can be stressful for them. Others have wanted a future with better things in it, including holidays and future selves. Participants’ narratives about the future and planning are presented.

Andersen (1992) encourages that we listen, really listen to the words that people say, rather than what they mean. In recording and transcribing the participants’ narratives and organising each into a ‘managed’ timeline of remote history, distant history, recent history, present and future, I have selected participants’ utterances that arise from them attending to my questions and my attending to their words in relation to the topic of this mini-dissertation. While in the interview, I may have listened, really listened, this section of the document inevitably becomes a series of situated narratives about time. More interpretation follows later in this section, however it seems pertinent at this stage to observe that MBSR programme participants appear to have become more reflexive in their relationship with time, and to notice when they are being more present-focussed.

The individual narratives that follow are organised as follows: I briefly introduce the participant in terms of how I have broadly experienced his/her broader story of self, why he/she chose to do an MBSR programme and then his/her narratives of time is represented in terms of White (2007) maps of narrative. The time categories appear
in bold to orient the reader. I then narratively analyse this according to what was presented in the literature review, this is followed by excerpts which attempt to show how my attempts at narrative interviewing create co-constructed narratives and finally I end with a summary of the participants’ experiences of time that emerges from the interview.

Participants’ words that appear within paragraphs are in quotations and italics. Longer versions of participants’ words are attributed to them by name, indented and represented as quotations, my questions are attributed to me by name and are in italics.

**Participant 1 – NMM**

NMM is a 24 year old woman who lives at home with her parents and is in second year at a local university. She has experienced drug addiction and has been “clean” for a year. She also had some experiences of dealing with an eating disorder, a bipolar II diagnosis and experiencing stress and anxiety, often somatically in the form of ear-ache and back pain. Her anxiety was attached to what she had to do in the next hour. NMM has been seeing Barbara Gerber for some years and she attended the Wednesday meditation group for about five weeks before doing the MBSR programme which she hoped would address how unwell she has felt for some time.

NMM’s reasons for doing the MBSR programme are related to how she experiences time in her life.

NMM recognises the ability for our remote history narratives to shape experience when she comments:
NMM: “It goes so far back and if you are going to cling to all these stories then you are never going to be able to be happy in the present moment.” (A5,l11)

The “it” she refers to relates to stories of self. Part of NMM's distant storied self is as someone who has battled bulimia, bi-polar II and cocaine addiction and for her letting the stories that “go so far back” go appears a route she hopes may deliver being “happy in the present moment”. Without doing this she posits that one can “never” locate attention in the present moment, nor experience happiness. She sees in her remote history, identity conclusions she perhaps wants to leave there and not cling to.

NMM is sceptical about Gergen’s (2004) notion that the past is something we learn from and take into the future and as indicated, she considers the past something she needs to let go of, so that she can engage in new identity performances. Of her remote history she says:

NMM: “That is what I noticed - for me to look at my past to prepare myself for the future, I find myself repeating patterns, stuck in a cycle. That is what was happening for me for years and years and years” (A8,l15).

NMM’s words show a rich infusion of time talk and how she has decided that her relationship with time and her views of her past self, are not a good source of understanding for how she wants to be in the world.

Her remote history account of herself is as someone who was “screwing up” and that patterns had been present for “years and years and years”. In terms of discourses of healthy development or the good life (Gergen, 2004) the polarities of bulimia, bi-polar and addiction were cycles she considers herself stuck in and wanted to exit.
Also of her remote history, NMM says “I used to have a lot of stress and anxiety in the past” (A3,l7). As we will see her statements categorised under the present, that her anxiety and stress arises from the things she has to do in the next minute, next hour and her awareness of this in the context of the MBSR programme’s present focus seems to orient her to a new story about time.

For NMM her initial experience of meditation and how this led into her doing an MBSR programme constitute her recent history statements. Her talk is detailed in terms of what mindfulness practices she did on what days and the perceived benefits.

NMM: “Before I went to the course I went to the Wednesday meditations and finally, I’d say after the fourth or fifth week after doing my practices as much as I could because I didn’t do them every day, I struggled to find the time, I struggled to find the discipline and I was always ill. But when I started doing it more often, like when the mindful movement came in which I enjoyed more than the body scans, when that started I could do that more often. Tuesday night class. Wednesday meditation and then on Thursday I’d feel really really good and that seemed to break a barrier from the regularity of it. It was like carrying on pushing through. And I was hopeless for a stage, I was very hopeless because I had put such a high expectation and it was like it wasn’t working, it wasn’t working but I just kept on and it’s just like you can struggle with something and struggle with something and then you can get so over it, but you just struggle a little more and then in like one second, everything just goes away and then you see things from a whole new perspective and like you know you can never go back to where you were.” (A1, l18).
NMM’s time infused talk demonstrates temporality as it moves through moments of recent past. It also emphasises that the formal practice of mindfulness, the body scan, the meditation and mindful movement are active and require commitment, and that it can be struggle to get to them. She also highlights that it is only after a time that she became aware of the benefits of mindfulness, which both GF and OJ also expressed. This suggests that the views of past experience create perspective that only becomes evident on reflection.

The **present** means for NMM: “*Once my mind goes places, I just go (breathes) and I breathe out and say okay, tomorrow doesn’t matter. But I am even stressed about what is going to happen in an hour’s time*” (A3, l11).

NMM: “An insight that I got in the course was to literally slow my life down one second at a time. Literally not getting anxious or worried about what is happening the next second” (A3, l13). She elaborates.

NMM: “Whereas if you just live in the present moment, just take away everything that happened, don’t focus on it, it doesn’t bother you it is in past. There is nothing of it in the present moment just the thoughts that you bring. So if you cast away all of that and focus on the present, none of those things are there and if you don’t worry about the future, then in that moment you are actually so happy and you have nothing to complain about, nothing to be anxious about, nothing to be scared about, nothing to complain about. You just sit there and you realise, I am happy right now because you let that go, let that go” (A3, l23).
NMM reveals how she utilises the notion of being present-focused to assist her deal with fear, anxiety and complaints. She shows self-awareness in how she reflexively engages with the present and what it means for her. She suggests that if awareness is on experience in the present moment, anxiety, fear and complaints can be replaced with happiness. This echoes back to her earlier statement and view that if you can’t focus on the present you can never be happy.

NMM comments on her perceptions of others’ experiences of the future.

NMM: “Like on Monday, someone will complain that it is Monday and the weekend is over. On Wednesday, they will be happier because the week is halfway and they are closer to the weekend. On a Friday, they will be so happy it is the weekend and on a Sunday they will be oh where did the weekend go? They invest so much time, looking forward and thinking about the weekend that they don’t take time to enjoy the week because they are so busy waiting for the weekend” (A6, I12).

NMM’s statements echo Flaherty (2003) study in which participants said they willed time to go faster when they weren’t enjoying themselves. This suggests a subjective relationship with time, where time’s pace can seem different, i.e. fast when experiences are enjoyable and slow when they are not. In terms of the MBSR programme, the encouragement is to be with things as they are, rather than judging whether they are good or bad.

Of her own experience NMM said she used to become stressed about what would happen in the next hour and that the MBSR programme had helped her to slow
down to “one second at a time” (A3, l14). She does not offer any words about her experience of her future.

What follows now are some excerpts which may show how my questions generated meaning for her in the process of the interview.

**LS:** “Are there times when you notice that it is easier for you to be present-focussed?” (A9, l24).

**NMM:** “When I have done my meditations, when I have done my reading and I have done my yoga … then I find it a lot easier to focus on the present” (A9, l27).

**LS:** Would you say that for you keeping up the practice is a necessary part of being more present-focussed?” (A9, l35).

**NMM:** “It only works if you do the work” (A10, l1).

**LS:** “What contribution to your well-being does being in the present bring for you?” (A10, l23).

**NMM:** “Happiness, contentment, love, gratitude. Gratitude is a big one being grateful for what I have” (A10, l24).

**LS:** “Thank you. I have an ear pain in my right ear. I get that sometimes. How was this conversation? You said it was a bit exposing” (A10,l26).

**NMM:** “The actual, what was presently going on was great but I think, the anxiety comes from the thoughts in my head which say, are you saying the right thing? … But if I take it all away, and that is (the thoughts in my head) the
cause of the earache. I had a good time. I like being involved in stuff like this … I wish everyone could feel like I am experiencing” (A10, l27 – l34).

LS: “Well it was very useful and there were lovely insights, you, and you expanded my sense of how time can operate” (A10, l35).

In reflecting on this excerpt above I observe my attention to NMM’s experience of the present and to her experience of the interview. I share with people when I experience their pain, in this case her earache, as it happens for me sometimes. It conveys a connection that to me echoes Hoffman’s (2007) reference to “underground rivers” (p.11). In notice too that I give time a “thinglike” (Polkinghorne, 1988) quality when I talk about it “operating”.

In concluding NMM’s narrative, she entered the MBSR programme with an awareness of the relationship between her body and her experience of anxiety and stress, which was largely to do with what she would have to do in the next hour. Her unique outcome was experiencing relief in realising that if she focusses in the present, the fear and anxiety can abate and she can experience happiness and gratitude more.

**Participant 2 – TF**

TF is a 44 year old woman who is married with children. She spoke about her awareness that prior to doing the MBSR programme she thought of herself as resilient but during the MBSR programme, she reframed that resilience as an ability to fantasize about a future life in which the grass was greener. She now regards herself as more self-accepting particularly in relation to dominant discourses around
being a woman and mother. From this perspective, she experiences a sense of agency in her life that she is able to be with whatever may happen.

TF does the MBSR programme out of interest, rather than to address a specific area of her life she wishes to change. She knows the presenters and had been attending a mindfulness reading group they ran.

TF’s remote history utterance is both in relation to time and it also illustrates how identity conclusions around mothering appear dominant in the women with children participants in the study.

TF: “I knew this (that children want their parents to be happy) from a very early age and even from a very early age I was trying to fulfil a role as a mother” (A23, l1).

TF’s awareness “from a very early age” is possibly a reflection on her experience as a child wanting happiness for her own parents, and this is what she later applies to her own experience of mothering.

TF’s distant history statement relates to self-awareness about how she used to be.

TF: “So some of the things I would have said then, were: ‘I am not going to think about it (difficulties in her life), I refuse to think about it’. Whereas now I am willing to give it some thought, give it some time. Whereas maybe in the past - by disconnecting by refusing to be in the present, I thought I was just being very good at putting up boundaries but I think that those boundaries were maybe brittle” (A15, l25).
TF’s “then” versus “now” words suggest an earlier resistance to being present to her experience of her problems. Her “then” experience of the disconnection was that it was “resilience” that for her becomes re-framed as a “brittle boundary”. She describes her awareness of her “resilience” as “disconnection” with a sense of loss.

TF: “As much as it (the disconnecting) was working on one level, it can only work for so long and so it was like waking up one day and saying you know what - all of that is wasted. I have a sense of loss really for all that disconnected time” (A15, l14).

TF’s reframing of how she experiences her experience, represents drawing new identity conclusions about herself and shows the contradictions that Bird (2004) refers to in which there is both loss and gains in the process of becoming more self-aware.

TF’s distant history narrative is also linked to her concerns around discourses that she resists and these are infused with time talk.

TF: “It has been a long time coming you know my own criticism of particular discourses of what it means to be a woman, what it means to be feminine, what it means to be professional, what it means to be a parent. You know I have been quite critical of a lot of those discourses for a long time” (A21, l17).

TF’s reference to “long time coming” suggests she has been contemplating these discourses for some time and that the new position she takes in relation to them, from her perspective, may be overdue. She goes on to observe that her awareness shifts to a greater self-acceptance about how she is in the world, but as she
describes below in another distant history statement, this is not without some "Mommy madness".

TF: “Previously when my daughter, my children had birthday parties I would want to bake the perfect cake, have the best invitations, have a wonderful party with activities and the best foods and every time my children had birthday parties I would hate it. I would absolutely hate the birthday party (A22, l23).

LS: “I so relate.”

TF: “Things would always get broken or messed up and I would berate myself, because there hadn’t been this perfect birthday party until I thought you know what, I go into what I used to call Mommy madness every birthday” (A22, l28).

TF’s view of herself as a mother organising birthday parties for her children involves an account of how she goes into “Mommy madness” when she attempts to host “good” birthday parties. Birthday party prowess is a common maternal discourse in particular classes of mothers and TF’s utterances demonstrate how she had been in relation to discourses of mothering.

Birthdays represent a milestone in the passing of time and are embedded in time and relationships with it. In the process of doing the MBSR programme, TF finds that she is able to reflect differently on how she approaches her role as mother and it is with more self-acceptance to be a good enough mother. She observes that she became aware that the better kinds of birthday celebrations for her children were when she was calm and able to enjoy them too and again this refers to what she knew “from an early age” that children want their parents to be happy. Here we see how the self-acceptance that TF experiences as a result of doing the MBSR
programme, is able to be applied retrospectively to her life and how she was when she tried hard to be the perfect mother. Here we see how discourses exert disciplinary power and that Gergen’s (2004) assertion that narratives can be malleable and fluid, is possible if circumstances, like doing an MBSR programme, arise that allow for reflection.

TF’s recent history account includes how her awareness of mindfulness prior to doing the MBSR programme was different to after she did the course. Her talk includes references to “before”, “after”, “years” and her awareness of “no longer switching off” or looking to a future time when things would be better.

TF: “I had been vaguely aware of mindfulness before the course started. You know I had known Janine and Barbara and I’d known they had been meeting for a couple of years so I went in thinking that I knew something about mindfulness but found that the practice is very different from the theory. Although not different because practice is aligned to theory - doing it is different to knowing about it” (A14, l2).

TF’s different understanding of mindfulness derived through the practice of it suggests that for her mindfulness is an action, rather than merely a theoretical concept, and that through practice her experience of it shifts.

Her recent history experience after the course is as follows:

TF: “I was no longer switching off, going into fantasy, planning how it was going to be when I grow up” (A14, l27).
TF’s describes her previous resilience and disconnection as “switching off” and “going into fantasy” where she could plan how it was going to be when she grew up, which after the course no longer occurred. By no longer switching off and going into fantasy and the future, she becomes more focussed on the present.

Regarding the present, TF echoes NMM’s sense that on some level, it is all there is:

TF: “This idea that you can be in touch with your body and can stay with the feeling and stay with the moment, meant for me that I felt as if the process was a maturation, a growing up, a stage you reach when this is it. I had a realisation that this is me, this is my life” (A14, l23).

LS: “I can see you putting your hands together and saying this is it. This is my life. Can you tell me what you mean?” (A14, l25).

TF: “The idea that living in the present, being fully aware that the present is all that there is, was in a sense very liberating, but in another sense that came with quite a lot of sadness that this um, kind of escape mechanism I had developed was not very useful, helpful. And that there was another way of being that didn’t give you the fantasy and escape or was a healthier, let me not use the word healthier, maybe just a kind of more connected way of being in the world, of being myself. A very real sense of being myself and connected with that a self-acceptance. Ja, self-acceptance was a very big part of the experience. Self-acceptance coming from being in the present which are two anchors and they really stand out for me” (A14, l28).

Here we see that TF experiences herself as being more present-focussed and what this may mean for her. She has identified greater self-acceptance as an outcome of
being more present-focused. The following temporal reference emphasises her experience of being present.

TF: “Previously my disconnection was about my fear of being able to contain something. And I called that resilience, and I called that an ability to cope but maybe it was more a disconnection. Now I think of my resilience much more in the moment and less fear. Or more confidence that whatever it is I will be able to contain it” (A15, l33).

The word “previously” locates her experience in the past, “now” locates her experience in the present and “I will be able” locates her experience in the future. The temporality of human speech and thoughts which move seamlessly between past, present and future supports Heidegger’s (1977) assertion that life cannot be thought of as a series of nows and creates a context for the curiosity with people’s experience of the present. TF elaborates on her views on “being able to contain it” and the role of present moment attention is this awareness.

TF: “It has to do with feeling you can keep it together. You know that this is a mechanism where you can access your breath. Be in the moment. Focus on this one life giving force that will nourish you that you will continue. As opposed to the feelings before when you were hoping, hoping and you weren’t really secure in the knowledge that is the difference, I have become more secure in the knowledge that I can exist. I want to use the word cope, but it is much more than that. It is existing in a true kind of real way, as opposed to in a disconnected way” (A16, l15).
TF: “I don’t know much about therapy but I should think there is something therapeutic in this being able to let your thoughts go. I can stay with something but I can also - I am not those thoughts and it is something I can contain. These thoughts are not going to overwhelm me. They are just thoughts. All of those are connected. So thank you, you have made me make a connection between the present, the breath and the thoughts. Staying in the body, staying in the moment, staying” (A18, l13).

In reading TF’s words at the editing stage of this thesis, I am moved by how sitting in the interview has opened a space for her to gain insight into her experience of her experience and how her comment illustrates Crossley’s (2002) point that through telling our stories, we interpret and re-interpret ourselves.

TF’s comment about the future, relates to her awareness about what role the future played in her life prior to doing the MBSR programme, and how she now is in relation to it, as an outcome of doing the MBSR programme:

TF: “But then you know I had to ask myself why am I always planning for the future, planning for better days or looking for grass that is greener, instead of focussing on now and being connected with what is happening right now” (A15, l1).

For TF, “planning for better days” is “no longer”, as she enjoys a sense of her life as it is now, being enough. However, her awareness of no longer switching off leads her to question more what function doing so served for her and as she indicated earlier, she becomes more comfortable with staying with the feelings, even when they are uncomfortable or unfamiliar.
In addition to my relating statement in the context of motherhood and birthday party prowess and TF’s comment about my participation in her meaning making, I include an example of dialogue to give a sense of my identity performance as narrative interviewer.

LS: “What are some of the words you use to remind yourself to be in the present?” (A15, l17).

TF: “Getting back to what I was saying about being resilient … Be present in it. I can’t honestly say I do that because I am going to solve the problem, I do that because it is less frightening, you know it is not as scary as it was before” (A15, l19 – 29).


TF: “The self-acceptance, the knowing …Now I think of my resilience much more in the moment” (A15, l31 – 36).

LS: So what are some of the senses and feelings of being in the moment for you? (A15, l38).

TF: “The disconnection was because I didn’t want to be overwhelmed but now … the boundaries are more solid” (A16, l1 – l12).

LS: “You used the word contained earlier, are those perhaps related – boundaries, solid, contained?” (A16, l13).

TF: “Yes. It has to do with feeling you can keep it together” (A16, l15).
LS: “So would my understanding of what you have been saying be correct if I summarise it as …”(A16, 22).

Here I have attended to TF’s words and I have used her words to understand her meaning more. Hopefully I have demonstrated as Andersen (1992) encourages, that I have really listened to TF.

TF’s awareness in relation to time is that her “resilience” was a form of “disconnection” and her newer awareness is of a more present focussed self-acceptance and belief in her ability that she can be with whatever comes her way. Her unique outcome is perhaps the experience she describes as waking up one morning and realising that how she has been, was no longer serving her and she explores alternatives that lead to greater ease.

**Participant 3 – VF**

VF is a 65 year old man who is married with a married adult son. He reflected about how school life is different now to the “steam driven school days” he endured, characterised by corporal punishment and little understanding of learning difficulties. He considers himself as having had difficulties with concentration and confidence. He enjoys researching topics of interest on the Internet and his current interest is American politics. He experiences his wife as problematic because she suggests they face a precarious financial future.

VF did the MBSR programme on the recommendation of his doctor Janine Kirby and says some of his health problems were based in unresolved psychological difficulties.
VF’s remote history statement relates to his experience with concentration when he was at school.

VF: “I had a huge problem with concentration, as a young person as well. In fact, I think it was almost a learning problem. Um, ja I went to school from the early 1950 to the 1960s which is like steam driven school compared to today” (A27,l10).

LS: “What do you mean by steam driven?”

VF: “Well, it was very different from how it is today. Those days if you battled at school you were regarded as stupid and there weren’t psychological counsellors” (A27, l15).

VF’s reference to “those days” can be viewed as a historicised statement where both “days” and “schools” were different. Also different was an understanding of abilities to concentrate. VF’s experience is that as a scholar in a “steam driven school” he may have been as considered stupid, whereas now he might receive psychological assessment to understand what might be the cause of his concentration difficulties. VF’s statement also implies that times change between those days and these days. It is also noteworthy that broad swathes of time, likes years and decades may be described in terms of “in those days”.

VF’s distant history refers at length to times prior to his retirement. Riesmann (1993) observes that in telling their story people attend to certain elements of it, usually those that hold particular meaning or out of which dominant identity conclusions are derived. It appears from the references below that this is so. For
Webster and Mertova (2007) what gets attended to is often regarded as a critical event for the teller and this critical event gets woven into their account of their lives and in so doing it becomes a dominant story. VF’s identity performance as a working man and a financial provider are infused in his recollections.

VF: “I remember I’d go on these high pressure business courses and it is go, go, go. While you’re doing it you think when I get back to the office, I will change everything and sort things out and you get back to the office and you get back to reality and you can do nothing because nobody is on the same wavelength” (A28, l20).

Remembering is a component of narrative construction and locates VF in his distant past. His memory is of “high pressure business courses” where it is “go, go, go”. VF’s abilities to be productive are implied in the action of “go, go, go” which links to time discourses of busyness and using time efficiently.

Both VF’s remote history and distant history utterances include references to technology. The school he speaks of is compared to being steam-driven and not modern. Relationships between colleagues are described as wavelengths. This situates VF within gendered discourse which posits that men are more likely to be technologically oriented. Also in his story is someone whose problems weren’t recognised and whose contribution is blocked.

VF narrates a recent history consultation with his doctor which is when he made the decision to do the MBSR programme.

VF: “Um, I see Janine as my GP and funny enough she and I were just joking at the end of a consultation a year or two back and this (doing the MBSR
course) came up and I thought it might be a good idea because I do have problems that I thought were psychological problems that I have never really dealt with and I am a great believer that psychology is mixed up with medicine in that sometimes. I am not good at describing things but I am sure you will get it - being sick even being physically sick, can very often be due to psychological problems” (A25, l3).

VF sees doing the MBSR programme as a way of attending to psychological problems he has “never really dealt with” which could locate the problems in remote history. He also expresses an awareness of the mind/body connection in which he considers that his physical ailments might arise from the problems he has yet to deal with.

A further recent history statement relates to technology, in this instance his interest in Internet research:

VF: “Research. I love learning things about almost anything. Um so if I am reading something and I don’t know anything about it I will tend to research it because I want to know about it. And now it is very easy with the Internet. I can spend a few hours a day on the Internet and it is not playing games. It is usually researching something, I will read about something and then I have to know how it works. I will go right into the whole thing” (A30, l27).

VF holds a view that productivity of some sort is a necessary human pursuit, such as the Internet research, which he intentionally points out is “not playing games”. Here he demonstrates an alignment to discourses about not wasting time.
For VF doing the MBSR programme has attenuated his focus on the present moment in the following way:

VF: “It made me slow down and living more in the present than being worried about tomorrow. You get into this thing and then suddenly realise and you can stop. That was quite a simple part of it but it made a big impression on me” (A25, l15).

VF: “The breathing thing I often do and lie there and breathe and cut out everything as much as you can, as you know it is not that simple and often thoughts are coming in to you” (A26, l27).

With VF’s remote history relationship with concentration, he considers the formal practices of mindfulness as a form of mind training which he regards another benefit.

VF described himself as “A great worrier about what was going to happen tomorrow,” but says he now experiences this less, although he aware of how he notices his wife’s concerns for their financial future remain.

VF’s following statement in relation to how his experience of age encourages a sense of being more present-focussed, is perhaps equally a statement about the future, which once again demonstrates how narratives can simultaneously represent the present, past and future.

VF: “It (being in his 60s) does put you more in the present because you can’t think about what you’re going to do when you’re 90, you have to make 90 first so rather almost live for today. I always admire people who can live for today
almost to their fullest extent who can really go for life and uh, we I think it is our culture but we waste our time. Save for tomorrow kind of thing” (A32, l31).

Here VF’s reference to “almost live for today” suggests his admiration is for others whereas he is still cultivating the possibility of being less worried about the future. This is further illustrated below and although it can be argued that narratives are malleable and fluid, in some respects dominant discourses, perhaps as males being providers can persist in identity conclusions.

VF: “I have realised my wife often says we won’t have money to live in the future kind of thing. And I said well maybe we won’t but what are we going to do about it really. We don’t know what is going to happen to the world economy, no one does as a matter of fact and we can put away as much as we can afford and live as well as we can without being stupid about it. And if something terrible happens, something terrible happens” (A35, l14).

VF’s subject position as a male provider exerts a disciplinary pressure on him and his identity conclusion of himself as a “great worrier about tomorrow” persists in the statement above where the possibility of “something terrible happening” lingers. The concerns for tomorrow and financial security, also relate to collective memories and he talks of the Great Depression which his parents probably lived through.

My interview with VF had awkward moments and I represent these below because it seems honest to show some of the more difficult aspects that may emerge in an interview setting and in my interpretation these relate to a negotiation of power.
VF: “There was nothing to prepare to come here to think of what to say...Um, how can I explain this? It is very difficult to explain without going back to what the original problems were (A26, l17).

LS: “I don’t want you tell me anything more than what you are comfortable to say and I have heard you twice say this is difficult to describe. I am also hearing you say the MBSR was useful and the STOP and being in the present. You used to worry about the tomorrow, tomorrow and now you’re aware of how much your wife is still worried about the future, but for you it is less of a personal concern. Okay, that is perfect for me” (A26, l15).

VF: “That was one of the problems I had was a lack of confidence in a way, a lack of confidence in myself which also I think has improved” (A29, l12).


VF: “Matter of fact it has improved. Perhaps you’re not interested. I was always a very shy person” (A29, l15).

LS: “V, I am interested in whatever you want to tell me. I just don’t want you to be pressurised” (A29, l17).

VF: “I am not pressurised. I came here knowing I would talk to you. Otherwise I would have told you to take a hike” (A29, l19).

LS: “Good. (Laughs)” (A29, l21).

VF: “I was an introverted, shy person ...” (A29, l22).
The relationship between researcher and participant has an inherent power differentials attached to it, and VF and my exchanges above demonstrate this. I attempt to neutralise this by reassuring him that the content of his talk meets my requirements and that I do not wish for him to be pressurised to share elements of his story that he does not wish to. After he expresses that he could have told me “to take a hike” and I am okay with this, he begins to talk more openly about himself.

In summarising VF’s experience, he recognises the MBSR’s attenuation to being present-focussed and partly his age encourages his awareness, yet he remains in admiration of people who can live more fully in the present. He remains committed to his value of the importance of productivity which is understood to imply effort in time and he decries a modern generation who have a poor work ethic. Just as he describes “those days” he says of himself that he comes from “an era” where work ethics were different. His unique outcome that he no longer worries so much about his financial future, which had been a preoccupation for him prior to doing the MBSR programme.

**Participant 4 – KH**

KH is a 37 year old married woman with a son. She believes that she is on a cusp of wisdom which relates to a belief that a certain form of life begins at 40 years old, a wiser, more self-accepting time. She has some fears about the future of our country, which requires having a nest egg and medical aid. She describes herself as someone who packs a lot into her day.
KH has done the MBSR programme twice, the first time out of despair for the amount of stress she experienced in her life and the second time to be a companion to her husband who was attending.

KH’s remote history relationship with time is to use every second of it and she says this “comes from my Mom” (A42, l30) and “it is deeply engraved” (A43, l22). KH demonstrates how narratives are derived through primary relationships and that as a child growing up she witnessed her mother’s relationship to and utterances about time which included “don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today” (A43, l20). KH goes further to describe this “deeply engraved” relationship to time also stems from her grandmother.

KH: “My gran is the same. She grew up in Ngqeleni in Transkei but she grew up in this culture” (A45, l30).

Here she demonstrates how relationships to time are culturally derived and in this instance could be viewed in terms of discourses like “a woman’s work is never done”.

KH says of herself that she is “always rushing” and that sitting for ten minutes between meetings can seem like a waste of time. With the “deeply engraved” approach to time where using every second is valued, it seems likely that ten minutes of waiting might appear non-productive and wasteful. KH demonstrates how her identity conclusion of herself as someone who is “always rushing” is derived for behaviour in her family which was considered “good” behaviour and demonstrates how her narrative of time is generated (Gergen, 2004).

KH’s statements located in distant history are these:
KH: “Maybe I should go back. Let me go back. In absolute desperation I ended up at Mrs Cowley’s centre at St Francis and S (her husband) has meditated since I have known him, for years and he said: ‘Come KH I want to introduce you to this’. And I am ‘I don’t have time for this stuff’. And then when I went to Mrs Cowley because I was cracking up, I was cracked up - pushed over the edge. On the one evening at 5 o clock there was relaxation and I went in with my pillow to relax and to listen to Mozart and to relax. And only after I left did I realise it was an hour and a half meditation that I had participated in, done a deep meditation and done it obliviously and that was the turning point” (A41, 120).

In addition to locating a specific event in her distant history which facilitated her openness to doing a programme like the MBSR, KH’s description of her before and after experience and the events surrounding it are infused with time talk – “go back” (in time), “since I have known him”, “one evening”, “at 5 o clock” “after I left”, “half an hour” “before my mind”, “at one stage” and “realise it was an hour and a half meditation”. This example of time talk gives us a sense of Adam’s (1995) claim that time talk is more prevalent than other kinds of talk. KH says “she doesn’t have time for this stuff” (meditation) and it is her rushing and busyness that initially keeps her from contemplating meditation. Her chance experience of it at a health spa changes her view of its possible value and this constitutes for her a “turning point” in which doing the MBSR programme become possible.

KH’s recent history tells of a recent occasion when she expresses awareness about herself and time.
KH: “I had people around on Saturday and I, when I, they were all coming around at half past 12 and I had to sms them and say: ‘terribly sorry’. I knew I would get home at half past 12. ‘Please come at quarter to one because I’d been held up with a tenant’. But in that morning I had been to karate, I’d gone to do maintenance at a house with a tenant, I’d gone to do an incoming inspection, I still had to do the shopping for the 12:30 meeting and still drive through the roadworks. I mean when I look at it, I’m: ‘how were you going to get there by 12:30?’ and still the person I invited arrived at 12:30 and said she didn’t have anywhere else to go and I said: ‘never mind, sit I will make you coffee. And I will buzz around’ and I said: ‘I don’t know why I always do this to myself. What was I thinking?’” (A43, l23).

KH’s utterances above convey conflict between her awareness of herself in relation to time and its impact on her experience. Although she describes herself as someone who packs as much as possible into available time, she recognises it contributes to a sense of dis(ease) and stress.

KH also comments on her ability to be engrossed in the moment.

KH: “Then within a couple of minutes, if I move areas I teach in the one area and it is linked to the other area and my brain is weird if I go from the one place to the other and end up making a cup of tea, chat, chat, chat. If that person came over, it is embarrassing because it has happened so many times, I would probably greet them as though I hadn’t see them that day” (A48, l30)

LS: “What do you make of that, you’re pulling a face?”
KH: “It is like geographic categorisation. I associate people with places. I am too in the now. An hour ago is gone, I don’t absorb it. I don’t absorb it. I sound quite psychotic like that. Maybe too much is going on. Very weird, embarrassing” (A49, l10).

LS: “Is your mind busy for you?”

KH: “Very busy. Too busy. But if it wasn’t I would feel like I wasn’t doing enough” (A49, l14).

KH recognises her busyness and becomes aware of ways in which its existence is a preferred way of being. Yet, as an art teacher across her distant history, recent history and present, she says her attention to the visual and tactile focusses her attention on the present. She describes her alternate experience of rushing and focussed attention as “sometimes like schizophrenia”.

KH attributes an inclination to be present-focussed with her training as an artist and her ‘natural tendency’.

KH: “My experience is if I look at my personality, I do usually work in the present. I don’t look at the future and I don’t look behind. So that part is natural. I am not a worrier you know” (A47, l9).

LS: “What about you enables you not to worry about the future? Tell me your experience of that and of being present?” (A48, l1).

KH: “I think because I am always so in whatever I’m doing. I will always put in 110% and that forces you to be in the now? My brain capacity doesn’t allow it (to be different), I am in the now, I am not going to look ahead. I may have a
goal, but I get it done now. I work with the now. I know I will get there but I don’t look there” (A48, l3).

I realise there was a space here for me to take that I did not, where I may have asked how KH is able to be aware of a goal and remain in the now, or more about her understanding of her “brain capacity”. Her meaning making of this was an opportunity missed and how she brings her future goal into the present. KH’s engrossment and absorption are part of her 110%, and later in the interview I invite her to view these as gifts, in the spirit of Andersen’s (1992) notion of and/both thinking.

KH says sometimes when she is rushing she “stops and breathes”.

KH: “I ask myself: What are you doing? Where are you going? How are you going about it? Yes that comes from the course, that STOP. Yeah. I also use the STOP in an argumentative situation which that was context in which it was taught mostly, wasn’t it? Stop. Hear. Listen. Think and then react. I am kinder and not so sharp tongued” (A53, l30).

As indicated above a number of participants like KH experience the STOP as a practical manifestation of mindfulness that some describe as a “tool” or “technique”. I am curious at KH’s interpretation of the STOP as a reflexive present moment action in an argument. Since my words are measured and my tongue, generally unsharp I become aware of how courses like the MBSR programme reach people where they are. In the moment of the interview, I did not consider her words “wasn’t it?” an opportunity to orient her to my way of understanding the STOP technique.
For KH rushing is pervasive, and yet at times she is able to be fully absorbed. KH describes this as sometimes seeming like “schizophrenia”, whereas Andersen (1992) might describe this as both/and thinking and Bird (2004) as the contradictions that are part of being human. As researcher, my role was to listen and explore, rather than assist in reaching alternative meanings of KH’s use of the word “schizophrenia” and “psychotic”.

For KH although she says she doesn’t worry about the future, she does talk about “going with the big wheel that turns us” which in her case relates to discourses of the need for medical aid because state hospitals are poor and developing a nest egg in case the country becomes unsafe to live in – both of which represent future planning.

In addition to the above more time-oriented questions, I select out some of KH and my dialogue to illustrate the interviewing process.

KH: “The first one (MBSR programme) was life changing but it came at a time I really need it which I think is quite relevant” (A41, l4).

LS: “What were the new life changing things it gave you?” (A41, l13).

KH: “Clear mind … stillness. So it provided the stillness for the fog to clear” (A41, l14).

LS: “And what about it created a stillness so that you mind could become clear?” (A41, l17).

Since narratives are generated through language and words need to be spoken to generate understanding of what participants mean, my questions use KH’s words
and I don’t make assumptions about what concepts like “life changing” might mean because her experience and my experience of life changing will inevitably be different.

KH describes the first MBSR programme she did as life changing and she says she continues to use the STOP, but given a choice between meditating or going running, she would run any day. Even though KH castigates herself often, she said one of the unique outcomes was coming back to a place of greater self-liking.

**Participant 5 – OJ**

OJ is a 44 year old married woman who has two daughters, two horses, many dogs which she breeds and cows which she feeds. She describes herself as experiencing panic often about all the things she has to do in running their farm. She experiences a pervasive sense of time scarcity. She loves Wednesdays because this is when she comes to morning meditation, rides horses with her daughters and takes two, three or four dogs to the beach.

OJ did the MBSR programme on the recommendation of her doctor Janine Kirby because of stress related ailments she regularly experienced.

For OJ running and rushing are pervasive and she express this as being with her since her **remote history**.

OJ: “All my life I have been running, running, running. Rushing, rushing, rushing, except the time I was travelling. Since I have been a mother, all I have done is chase my own tail” (A57, l26).
This seems rather sad that all her life OJ has had a sense of time scarcity and urgency and that the only time she wasn’t “running” or “rushing” was when she was travelling. My attention is drawn to OJ’s profound statement and how for her there seems to be a clear distinction between “running” and “rushing” movement and “travelling” movement. It appears that other than when she was travelling, OJ has no recollection of times that were not characterised by “running” and “rushing”. I am aware of the possibility to have explored her understanding of the source of having run and rushed all her life. I am aware too that the language she uses in terms of “running” and “rushing”, “all her life” brings forth a reality for her that might have benefited from exploration. Children’s ability to hold present-focussed engrossment is often used as an example to explain the concept and the idea of OJ having no memory of this contributes to my sense of sadness for her. Her reference to since motherhood “all I have done is chase my own tail”, is echoed below by NT who says after having her baby “I have no time”.

OJ describes a panic associated with rushing and in re-reading her transcription towards finalising this mini-dissertation, I notice how of all the interviews hers is least infused with present-focussed questions. I realise I made an interpretation about OJ in relation to the present and it was derived from my identification with my own relationship with time when my children were young, as are hers.

OJ’s distant history statements relate to her doctor and MBSR teacher, Dr Janine Kirby recommending the MBSR programme as an option for her stress related ailments. “She (Janine) has been on me for years” (A57, l3), but says:

OJ: “I haven’t had time in the last so many years to do it” (A57, l5).
Time scarcity and rushing are dominant narratives for OJ who although she has stress related ailments says “I haven’t had time in the last so many years.” I imagine she may have been doing a mental calculation in which she attempted to number the years as in the “last 5 years” but instead it became the “last so many years” and this connects with her statement of “all my life I have been running …”.

OJ’s distant history narrative includes the premature birth of her second daughter which she ascribes to being precipitated by her father’s death and an argument with her brother. Her story and mine become intertwined as I share my story of my two children born early and how they are now at 21 and 17 years. From interviewer I shift into my mother narrative and my role as co-constructer of my interviewees’ narratives appears here in sharp relief.

With her father deceased, OJ’s relationship with her mother shifts.

OJ: “My mother would say you rush around all the time and, and this all happened luckily I had started to see Janine by then and she was on to me” (A61, I19).

Through her doctor noticing her tendency to rush, she begins to notice it and have a more self-aware relationship with busyness and time. Her mother’s awareness of OJ’s tendency to rush is not privileged in the same way and she says “luckily” she had started to see Janine by then, suggesting that Janine’s view of her rushing brought her some relief and perhaps a new way of viewing it. This is consistent with Foucault’s (1977) observations about who is conferred authority or not. Even though OJ’s mother had said “you rush around all the time”, it is only when Janine says it that she acknowledges it, thus conferring authority on her doctor and from this she derives self-awareness about how she rushes.
OJ recounts a recent history experience after the day long retreat that took place during her MBSR course in 2012.

OJ: “I came back from the first retreat and after that there was a school camp-out and I didn’t stay because I came back with my younger daughter and at the camp out I was sitting with a group of people and they said: ‘Oh you have been on this course’. DS (a local psychiatrist) was one of them and he said: ‘How was it?’ And I said: ‘It feels like I am on drugs’ and I don’t take medication, I don’t take sedatives, I don’t take anti-depressants. I feel like someone has given me drugs and he said: ‘What do you mean?’ and I said: ‘I don’t know, it seems like my busy, busy life it there, at a distance.’ You know I am quite happy with my life, buzzing around but everything seemed slowed down for me. Feel physically which blew me away. All my life I have been running, running, running. Rushing, rushing, rushing, except the time I was travelling” (A57, l17).

OJ attributes doing the MBSR programme to the existence of “distance” between herself and her rush, and she likens this experience to what she imagines might be derived from medication that might slow things down. MBSR programme course leaders, Dr Kirby and Ms Gerber argue that the MBSR programme’s assists participants to experience a sense of empowerment because they are reducing stress through simple practices and without using medication or therapy.

OJ’s account of how she experiences the present is anecdotal.

OJ: “There is a very funny Hebrew saying - para para, I don’t know if you know it?
Para para means cow by cow. The origin of it is a bull is in a field of cows and a young bull comes to help him and he asks: “How are we going to do all these cows?” and the older bull says “cow by cow” and that is it, you just have to do it cow by cow” (A58, l5).

OJ: “It (the MBSR programme) slowed my thinking down and it slowed my mind down so that I started a task and finished it, not jumping around from one thing to another” (A58,l11).

LS: “*If you think back to the MBSR programme and the notion of being present focussed, how did that shape up in your life?”* (A58,l23).

OJ: “During the course very well and after the course, not so well. I really believe it is because I am not doing any of the practices. I find the mindful movement very useful for being in the present, being in the now. And I don’t do enough of it. The tai chi is lovely. You can’t think about anything other than what you’re doing. … Maybe it is an individual thing, maybe some people prefer the meditation” (A58,l25).

A number of participants comment (OJ, NT and KH) on how during the course, doing the mindful practices seems easier than after the course and that after it, their rush, panic and senses of time scarcity return. She notices that a sense of panic and time urgency has returned.

OJ: “Ja, but the thing I can see is that I still, even though I am panicking more, I am noticing and saying: ‘Oh, you’re panicking. Girl, why are you doing that?’ Judging but also noticing” (A67, l1).
She and her MBSR group meet once a month and do a daily STOP in which they notice their breath and make a more conscious choice on how to proceed.

OJ’s future related utterance suggests she resists planning ahead.

OJ: “I don’t want to be in a situation when I say to people come to supper in two weeks’ time when I don’t know what is going to happen in two weeks’ time” (A65, l15).

Instead she’d rather phone them on the day which could suggest present focussed spontaneity or her sense of not knowing what is going to happen could be as a result of an experience of panic.

To show the dialogue, generated from the questions I asked, I select the follow:

OJ: “Since I have been a mother, all I have done is chase my own tail” (A57, I28).

LS: “Does the busy rushing have a relationship to time in any way?” (A57, I29).


LS: “When you are rushing, you are rushing because of what?” (A57, I31).

OJ: “Well because I have so much to do in my day. We have a farm… So I spend my life running and doing” (A57, I32 – I36).

LS: “And does it sometimes seem like there is not enough time?” (A58, I1).

OJ: “Oh ja, all the time” (A58, I2).

LS: “It can seem endemic. And then when there was this slowing down, was time different?”
OJ: “It seemed my mind slowed down. My thoughts were not so, I need to do this. I need to do this. (Sighs). I need to do this today, I need to do this today” (A58, l4).

The questions I pose and my interest in how OJ is with time, draws her into a description of how the MBSR programme influences her relationship with time, in that in slowing her mind down, she slowed the rushing and time seemed less of a scarce resource.

In the process of doing the MBSR programme OJ gains a perspective on her pervasive sense of time scarcity and one of her unique experiences is how she is now much more aware when she is rushing and she asks herself what the rush is about and she has a more mindful engagement with her rushing.

**Participant 6 – NT**

NT is a 39 year widow with three children. She lost her husband to cancer seven years ago and returned to the Eastern Cape to be near her family who live in Transkei to ‘heal’. She was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder in 1997. She has a one year old baby boy and is planning a move to KZN to complete her specialisation in paediatrics and so that her son can attend the same school that his dad and uncles did. She would love to have a centre that focuses on caring for children and she thinks of herself more as a healer than doctor.

NT said did the MBSR programme because she was very stressed at work and one of her children wasn’t doing well at school and she was finding she was being harsh towards him about this.
Similar to KH, NT observes that her remote history identity conclusion of herself as someone who rushes is derived from observing what her mother did and this shapes her own narrative of time.

NT: “I grew up in a home where my mother, actually I have become my mother, she was always late, she was always rushing” (A79, l36).

NT’s reference to “always late” and “always rushing” suggests this has existed for all time and is like KH’s “deep engraving” that she should use every second. NT’s “I have become my mother, she was always late, she was always rushing” illustrates how dominant stories endure which may have implications for new stories about time. It also suggests that time has a generational component to it where stories of it are handed down from one generation to another. The experience of being rushed and being late is stressful and often rushing is in an effort to avoid lateness.

For NT her distant history includes giving up a lucrative position as a medical doctor in Johannesburg and the death of her husband in 2005 and her return to the Eastern Cape to be near her family who live in Transkei. It also relates to her hopes to have become a professor by the time she was 40 years old. I present and analyse these in turn.

NT: “I knew for a long time he was going to die, for more than a year, he was stage 4 and we knew it was going to happen. It was horrible, but not so horrible. It was expected but he was so sick, it was horrible I would have preferred him to die before. It was so horrible at the end but it was what happened after that was so hurtful and it was unexpected. And I decided to shut that part of me and that is when I decided to move from J’burg and come
here. I could always feel I am not myself but anyway, I think I have healed that part of myself” (A72, l14).

This part of NT’s narrative allows for what Holway and Jefferson (2000) describe as free association as she explores this part of herself that she “closed up”. Her awareness of her husband’s impending death is time infused “I knew for long time”, “for more than a year”, “it was horrible”, “it was expected”. NT conveys the horror of her husband’s terminal illness and death. NT’s narrative tells a story of an unexpected life, in that her view of her possible life is radically changed by the early death of her husband and “what happened after that was so hurtful and unexpected” (A72, l20). I do not explore what was unexpected and trust she would have told me if she chose. Later she mentions it related to experiences with her husband’s family after his death. In NT’s experience, the unexpected has deep pain attached to it which she says takes her seven years to heal from.

Although the following statement is analysed as recent history, it fits well here and demonstrates how our stories are constructed non-chronologically to convey meaning.

NT: “It has been seven years. I don’t know if you know 7 year cycles. I really feel it this year of letting go for me. And it is something I have consciously been trying to do and it wasn’t happening” (A74, l4).

LS: Are you saying it is a bit easier now?

NT: “It is much easier now” (A74, l8).
NT’s has an understanding of life occurring in symbolic seven year cycles. NT also suggests that time does something and in relation to death one often hears the words “time heals”. As to seven year cycles there seems to be numerous including “a seven year itch” in marriage, seven years of famine and feast in the Bible and seven years of bad luck if you break a mirror.

Ricoeur (1980) speaks of time including expectation and the ways in which lives are constructed often includes an expected trajectory, rich in expectation of self and others. The interview takes place a few days before NT’s 40th birthday and she relates her aspiration to have been a professor by the time she was 40 years old.

NT: “At medical school I was top of my class, I was on the dean’s list and everyone thought I would become a specialist in record time. I was the academic person, I wanted to be a professor by the time I was 40” (A82, l16).

She has just reached that mark. It seems she is willing to let go the identity conclusion of herself as professor, and in its place, she still aims to qualify as a specialist. NT’s ability to do things in “record time” also relates to her entering medical school when she was 16 years old.

NT’s recent history reflects on doing the MBSR programme and on having a baby.

NT: “I did it (the MBSR programme) in 2010. At the time I was very stressed and um I felt very pressured at work and one of my children wasn’t doing well at school. I can’t remember who told me about it, but anyway um I found it really good in terms of relaxation and taking a breather, because I find I am always rushed. I noticed yesterday even though I wasn’t working I had to consciously tell my body to relax” (A69, l3).
NT draws a direct link between doing the MBSR programme and its benefits for stress relief. As indicated in the Context section of this study, noticing one’s breath is a key activity in presencing oneself and reducing the autonomic aspects of the stress response.

When NT talks about having her baby, it is also in relation to how time consuming small children are.

NT: “The meditation, yeah I used to listen to the CDs for an hour every day before I go to bed but that was before I had the baby” (A71, l2).

LS: “How old is the baby?” (A71, l4)

NT: “He has just turned 1. And he takes up all my time. He has learnt. He will only sleep when I am sleeping. As soon as I get out of bed, he is awake and I put him to the breast. He has one or two feeds throughout the night. But during the day when I am up, he is up. (Laughs)" (A71, l5).

In addition to the obvious time talk of “hour”, “every day”, “before”, “just turned”, “as soon”, “night” and “day”, I look at my words and wonder why other than simply social convention I asked how old NT’s baby was? One of the ways it appears to me now is an enquiry of whether he is still of the age to take up all her time, I judge my self-judging interpretation. I also notice how it seems what the baby has learnt is that by staying away when Mom is awake, he will have more time with her. Is this what he has learnt or does Mom want to be wanted by her baby? Multiple meanings abound.

Another aspect of NT’s recent history is a realisation that she needn’t put herself under time pressure to be a specialist.
NT: “It (the realisation) came last year actually. It came last year, I had a session with my psychiatrist and I was telling her I was going to write exams and I had just had a baby in May last year and in September I told myself I was going to write these exams. She asked me: ‘But why, why do you have to?’ And I didn’t have an answer, she said: ‘Do you even have to be a specialist?’ and I said: ‘Yes’ and she said: ‘Who is it for?’ It is for me to feel I am not a failure in other people’s eyes. Not in my eyes. But now I still want to be a specialist for myself” (A82, l24).

NT’s aspiration to become a specialist has changed from something she was doing to prove herself to others to something she wishes for herself. She speaks of having put in the hours and that she is almost complete. She feels to walk away now would be a waste because completion is within sight. In spite of the time talk around wasted time, productive time which I may have explored to understand her narrative of time more, I instead offer an analogy of trees in fruit which are ripening and ready to be picked. Her effort seems to me like fruit. “I like that”, she says “I will use it”. I am again reminded how I as researcher am engaged in the co-construction of the narratives that are being generated for this study.

In reflecting on NT’s words of perspective in relation to becoming a specialist remind me of the idiom “time will tell” and how in ways our aspirations are mediated by time and how there are connections between changed experiences in time and changes in perspective of that experience.
NT’s narrative of her experience of being present is:

NT: “It makes a great contribution. Because if you’re present-focussed you’re able to achieve more in all areas of your life. Because your mind is clearer, whatever you’re doing you enjoy it more. It is not as strenuous as when you’re not” (A82, l4).

LS: “When you say it is not as strenuous as when you’re not, what are you when you are more present-focussed?” (A82, l7).

NT: “Relaxed. More relaxed and kinder to you own self. I have become kinder to myself. Gentler. (Chuckles)” (A82, l9).

LS: “That is good. When you say that you seem very much at ease and relaxed. Is there anything else about time and the present that you want to touch upon before we conclude the formal part of the conversation?” (A82, l11).

NT: “I have since realised there is no wrong. There just is. Because I used to have lots of unattainable goals, that I wanted certain things by a certain time” (A82, l4).

TF talks about self-acceptance as an outcome of being more present-focussed and NT finds she is kinder to herself. Her statement that “there just is”, is in the present tense and relates to mindfulness notions of being present to what is.

In addition her work as an ‘almost’ paediatrician and as a mother with a young child, seem to compel attention in the present moment and her words are all in the present tense which was interesting to observe at the re-reading stage of this study.
NT: “I think a lot with the baby. With the baby you can’t be thinking about the future. The baby is there and if he wants whatever, you’re doing it, you’re doing it now. I have always been very present around my job” (A77, l3).

I am also aware in reading this of a ‘withness’ (Hoffman, 2007), I experienced with NT. Sitting in her bedroom, she on leave in her pyjamas, side by side on her sunny couch, discovering our shared knowledge of people from Mthatha, that she is close to and that she knows well the man after whom my son is named and the woman on whom one of my timeless anecdotes of race in our country is based on. I notice too, how my talk encourages her to talk of her experience of the present, and I am reminded, that the act of interviewing is not neutral and that the transparency narrative analysis invites, requires acknowledging myself in the process (Riesmann, 1993). As researcher I am experienced by the readers of this study and I am obviously in it.

For NT the future holds a move to KZN with better career prospects, a chance for her son to attend his father’s old school and an opportunity to appraise her life.

NT: “So if I write my exams next year I will be a specialist” (A73,l30).

NT: “I want to leave full time work and focus on my baby. I think for me I have an opportunity to do things differently. I don’t want to be such a busy Mum. Such an away-Mum for this baby” (A75, l15).

The discipline of discourses of mothering are leveraged in terms of how much time mothers spend with their children and here NT expresses she doesn’t want to be “such an away-Mum for this baby”. ‘Awayness’ tends to be measured in time and
guilt. She describes some of the ways she can be less busy, less away and spend more time with her baby.

NT: “I have an option of just doing sessions in a private hospital which very few sessions in a month which actually amount to the same I am getting in full time government service. And there is a private hospital that just opened in Hillcrest” (A75, l24).

The future she anticipates seems to be aligning elements of her life into greater ease.

NT: “So for me it seems as if everything is there... I have never had it that everything feels like it is there” (A75, l30).

Although NT speaks of never before experiencing “everything feels like it is there”, there were utterances in the interview where she spoke of interconnection and knowing what the exams would hold. Perhaps a different part of her identity was finding expression. Either way, it seems like a good place to be and I wonder if her sense of things being where they need to be, relates to notions attached to being 40 which is sometimes referred to as “when life begins” and which KH describes as likely to herald “great wisdom”. Perhaps too it is that NT has passed through a seven year healing cycle which believes will bring relief. Here we see how language brings forth our multiple realities (Burr, 1995).

I have treated analysis of NT’s narrative slightly differently to the preceding ones. Partly because too formulaic an analysis may numb a reader’s attention and because the showing of myself in the interview appeared earlier as did my impression of NT’s unique outcome around a sense of there being no right or wrong.
Participant 7 - NL

NL is a 67 year married women who has lost a son to cancer and has wanted to exit her marriage for years. She belongs to an ‘enlightenment school’ that ponders the notion of ‘no time’. She has experienced depression and has a heart condition. She continues the formal practices of the MBSR programme and other programmes she has attended and thought she would be ‘fixed’ by now. She is disappointed the depression is returning.

NL did not clearly express her reasons for doing the MBSR programme and since this was not a specific research question any possible reasons I may proffer would be my assumptions, my story.

NL’s remote history reference is to having “moved from where I have lived all my life” (A89, l2).

NL builds her distant history around depression that has been with her for six years, the death of her son from cancer four years ago and recently moving to their holiday home of thirty years in Chintsa. Part of NL’s distant narrative of time is being part of “a school of enlightenment” that has challenged the notion of the existence of time.

NL: “A long time ago, I remember thinking. How long is now, how big is it, how long does it extend? I have contemplated this concept of no time for a long time, so um I’m still not sure I have got it, but it is something that intrigues me” (A85, l20).
NL is the only participant in the study who has had a long term reflexive engagement with time and its meaning in her life. For the other participants, doing the MBSR programme attenuated their thinking about their experience of time and through it they became aware of where their thoughts are most likely to be located.

NL’s recent history reflects on her experience of doing the MBSR programme in 2011:

NL:  “It (the course) gave me the tools, knowledge and experience of mindfulness”  
(A84, l27).

LS:  “And when you say knowledge, how would you define those knowledges?”  
(A84, l29).

NL:  “Well first of all. The fact of the background of the course that it is paid for by medical aid, that it is very researched, that appeals to my left brain”  (A84, l30).

She goes on to describe her “left brain” as a quality that appreciates that a doctor and homeopath, whose knowledge is worth observing, are offering the course. VF also comments that the presenters are not “Aunty Sue with a crystal ball”. That it is researched and “scientific” appeals to VF and NL.

She also found it convenient that a neighbour attended as well because she doesn’t like driving at night.

NL:  “It’s strange because it is not part of my normal routine to drive to East London - it worked so well to have D with me and to have him drive. We finished in September and it was still quite light but I don’t like driving at night”  (A84, l5).
Within this simple statement of NL’s we can identify numerous references to time. Routines are typically time based, “finished” has connotations of time, “September” is a word for time and it being “quite light” relates to seasonal changes in nightfall and “night” is a reference to time. Again we are reminded of Adam’s (1995) assertion of how often time is referenced in language.

For NL her involvement with an enlightenment school that considers the notion of “no time” meant for her that the MBSR programme’s focus on the present, did not represent a new relationship with time. NL has had a longer-term awareness of being present-focussed. Her engagement with what is argued as a marginalised discourse around time, meant for her that the present focus of the MBSR programme, built on her existing way of being with time.

NL’s curiosity with time and exploring the concept of “no time” predates her doing the MBSR programme, however her experience of being present-focussed is attenuated in doing the MBSR programme.

NL: “It is such a difficult concept for us living in this linear world to get ‘now’ - in the past when I had this concept of ‘no time’ it was such an amazingly difficult concept to try and grasp it. The only way to grasp it is to do something in the body, something in the now. Um, four years ago I lost my eldest son to cancer and I had read The Power of Now. Someone gave him the book. Times of reading little extracts. It helped me tremendously at that stage at his illness and at his passing. Um, so it is all like a … I felt what he gave me and the new experience. A layering of this … and that this is all I have got and to sit and talk to you, to be fully present” (A85, I17).
We see here how NL’s references contain a free associative quality to them and how inevitably the event of her son’s death is likely to infuse her narrative. She also observes herself as fully present to the interview experience.

Although NL’s does regular meditative practice, she expresses disappointment that doing the MBSR programme has not led to complete relief in her life and that she might go back onto anti-depressants:

NL: “It should have fixed me already. I should be coping with my state of mind better. I’m doing the practice, it is all there. So I am disappointed that I might have to go back onto medication I don’t want” (A86, l23).

Her disappointment seems palpable and I am heavy with it. She is tearful when she connects to pain in being in an unhappy marriage that she feels she cannot leave. I am reminded of my role as researcher and that this is not a therapeutic conversation, yet as gently as I try to steer the conversation back to time and the present, part of me feels I have not attended to her in her pain. It appears that NL had an expectation that this one more course may have “fixed” her and that her present experience of life contains difficulties she hoped would end.

NL notices that “it is so easy to disappear into the future and past and not be in the present”. As we are walking to her car, she talks about her son’s request that she come and look after his children while he goes away. She observes that looking after children full-time is tiring, however she says she will do it because she was to leave an ‘imprint’ on them and that they can remember her in the future. Her wish to live on in her grandchildren’s memories is future-focussed.
To show myself as researcher and interviewer engaged in generating NL’s narrative about time, I re-read the transcription and recollect the interview, as the one in which there seemed the least connection. I ponder this and become aware of many things which include that I was intimidated by an experience of NL as authoritative, her staying in her unhappy marriage touched something of my own story and she seemed to want to get the interview over fairly quickly. I remember her too on the first day I met her and she was wearing cherise pink, a colour that reminds me of my mother and then the lack of connection is easily explained. I now become aware that my mom-stuff was in the room with me and this contributed to my deeper felt sense of the experience.

LS: “And if you consider the aspect of being present-focussed, has that changed for you as a result of doing the course?” (A84, l13).

NL: “Yes, yes I think it has. As I told you Echkar Tolle … like looking at the same object and looking at it from all sides” (A84, l16).

LS: “Looking at something you are familiar with and have been with, but in a new way?” (A84, l19).

NL: “Yes”

LS: “And what new perspective did the MBSR facilitate?”

NL: “Well, I said initially, I think it was the second session. Aha moment, easier way of understanding this being. Going into the body and the need to go into the body …” (A84, l22).
As indicated earlier for NL the MBSR programme provides a new layer on an existing relationship with time that contemplates the now. The possible unique outcome of connecting with the body as a way of being present-focused is somewhat overshadowed by NL’s disappointment that her experience of depression seems to be returning and she had hoped that doing the MBSR programme might bring a permanent end to it, especially given how much formal MBSR practices she continues to do.

**Participant 8 – GF**

GF is a 33 year old male who has recently exited a 12 year same sex relationship in which he felt he allowed his identity and pursuits to be subjugated to those of his partner’s. He has been treated for ADHD and has faced a cancer scare. He described himself as someone who lived more in the future, looking forward to holidays and upgrades on his electronic equipment. Since doing the MBSR programme he says he is kinder and more interested in what people have to say.

GF said he did the MBSR programme because he had reached a stage where he could see that exiting the relationship he was in would be a good idea and he wanted to bring some stability into his life to support him in taking this action.

GF’s *remote history* account of himself relates to his relationship to time:

GF: “I have never been a person living in the present” (A92, l32).

GF expresses awareness of where he tends to locate his attention and that it had “never been” in the present. This ironically expresses a completeness and a possibility of “never” having being present. Again Ricoeur’s (1980) assertion that
human experience of time is more likely to be forward looking is confirmed through GF’s utterance.

GF’s expands on a reconnection with strengths that were “always there”.

GF: “I was able to achieve in my younger years and I had suppressed that, how useless I am (I used to think), but I am not that useless” (A92, l29).

An emphasis of the MBSR programme is an encouragement to consider ourselves as having internal strengths which GF says he had “suppressed” and replaced with notions of uselessness. He re-remembers a time in his “younger years” when he was “able to achieve”. Re-remembering is a component of narrative construction (Anderson, 2003) and facilitates GF acknowledging his strengths that counter his narrative of self as useless.

GF’s distant history statement is how he was in relation to people.

GF: “Before when I did something for people it was for my ego and now I have a sincere care about those around me and I find that is a direct link to this course. Without a doubt” (A94, l15).

Like TF and NMM, GF’s narrative includes “before” and “now” elements to it and change which is attributed to doing the MBSR programme. In GF’s experience of himself he is has changed from egotistical to sincerely caring.

In his recent history, GF talks about how doing the MBSR programme co-incided with the break-up of a relationship, the “germinating” of the benefits and how since doing the course he has come off medication for ADHD:
GF: “I was going through my bad end phase of my relationship of 12 years. Same sex relationship and ja, I needed to get some stability back in my life” (A91, I3).

GF: “Within four weeks of the course I had it completely with E and it was very liberating for me” (A91, I14).

GF: “If you imagine a seed germinating, it (the benefits of mindfulness) took time to apply to my life, it was a process and I certainly could feel I was more in control of my emotions and I wasn’t as erratic as I had been. You know for one, I was on a drug for ADHD called Strattera. R1 800 bucks a month, medical aid doesn’t cover it. And um, I am off Strattera with Dr W. I said: ‘I don’t think I need this.’ I find that I am able to cope without medication” (A92, I20).

GF attributes doing the MBSR programme to his resolve to end his relationship with E and how even although his family could see how unhealthy the relationship had been for him, he couldn’t. Our interview takes place some six months post the break-up and there are many references to E in our conversation and I understand this to mean he is in a process of re-interpreting his identity as no longer E’s partner.

GF’s recent history utterances show an intention to laud the benefits of doing the MBSR programme and I consider the Hawthorne effect in research, where GF might wish to position himself as a good MBSR programme participant. As indicated earlier, it is not the intention of narrative analysis to establish the veracity of people’s accounts, but rather to view them as situated accounts, that might differ in other settings.
Despite identifying benefits to being in the present GF cautions against excess.

GF: “I have found such strength in being in the moment. There is a danger about being in the present all the time because then you forget about the past which is relevant, and you become too esoteric. I did go through that phase later in the course when I was this esoteric zenned out person. I loved being in a meditative state and I found it quite addictive and I spoke about it to Barbara and she said: ‘You need to remember that your past and your future are all linked. It is on this continuum and you need to be mindful of the past, present and future and where you are on them. You can’t just live in the moment, if you have bills to pay you have to pay them. You can’t just be in the present and not plan. I was swinging on a pendulum from being totally mindless to totally mindful. I am finding my way somewhere in the middle, when I am in the present but I am also connected to the future and the past” (A93, l30).

GF’s initial interpretation of being present seems to denounce the past and the future and could be a wish to be completely renewed in the process of becoming mindful. He also tells me of updating his religion status on Facebook to “mindful” after describing himself as “I haven’t been a religious person for my whole life. If you asked what I believe in, I’d say I believe in God” (A93, l26). His description of renewal seems similar to that of a ‘re-born’ person. His reflection of living in the present without a past and a future might also relate to elements of loss associated with his recent break-up. His past as a partnered person represents a time of “co-dependence” which is a psychological term that often seems to have negative associations and there may be elements of himself in his past which he perhaps wants to denounce or deny.
GF’s enthusiasm for his liberation and renewal continue, in how he relates to people:

GF: “I now find for the first time in my life I am able to actually listen to people and hear and be empathetic with them. Now I am able to listen, pause, acknowledge them, which I could never do before” (A97, l3).

He also observes:

GF: “I find that I am less impulsive, I find that I have more moments in the day that I remember and that I enjoy. If you say to me what did you do on Saturday, I can remember events whereas in the past I couldn’t so. Now I am more in the present and enjoying, savouring, like squeezing an orange and letting every bit of orange juice …I remember the events and that life is made up of moments not just this blur of buying this, doing that. And I am 1000 times happier” (A103, l12).

Being happier links with how he relates to his experiences and whereas someone like KH describes being present as part of her personality, GF’s remote history statement was as someone who “never been living in the present”, but like a seed the possibility of it germinates.

GF: “Now I’ll say I am feeling vulnerable, totally depressed and I am owning it, because sometimes I do go through processes of being depressed, not clinical depression but being unhappy and I am owning the experience” (A104, l1).

GF continues and talks about the kinds of more real connection that arise when he shows his vulnerability to people.
GF: “That is right of how fantastic life is. Tralala. Tralala Fucking amazing. Oh god. So it is a lot more real now. I wish I had discovered this (the MBSR programme and showing vulnerability) ten years ago. I wonder where I would be now?” (A104, l16).

TF and KH also talk about what their lives might have been like if they had attended an MBSR programme earlier in their lives and deduce that its timing was right. GF goes on to say:

GF: “Thinking back about it now, ten years ago this (the MBSR programme) would have passed over me, like water off a duck’s back. I don’t think I would have been ready for it then” (A104, l26).

Like NMM and TF, some of GF’s experience of the present is to be with what is, to notice and attend to experiences as they are, whether this is juicing an orange or acknowledging vulnerability. Mindfulness’ encouragement to pay attention on purpose in the present moment, non-judgementally seems to be what GF experiences of his emotions that he says he now “owns”.

For GF the future also held an allure.

GF: “I focused more on the future and on not my time. Holidays, um, upgrading stuff. Stuff which is totally irrelevant to who I am and I thought God, I am focusing on all of this nonsense” (A93, l23).

When GF had a cancer scare the future took on a different perspective.

GF: “And I wanted to die. I didn’t see any future” (A101, l).
With his health restored, his future focus is still part of his world, yet he sees it differently.

GF: “Because I have realised that although we are ourselves we have to pass on a legacy. There is a whole other way of leaving a legacy and empowering others. So my focus has shifted from holidays to leaving a legacy” (A95,l20).

The legacy GF speaks of is to help a young person who needs financial support to attend university. After our interview GF and I communicated and he decided he’d like to study psychology and move out of the IT industry. I will be interested to hear how his plans develop.

I was entertained and enlivened by Gareth’s exuberant expressiveness and I appreciated how openly his gayness was in his identity performance and in the conversation. In showing myself as interviewer I select the following:

GF: “And I find being kinder with my own efforts, and I don’t know which comes first – the cart or the horse – so whether it is first being kind to myself or to others” (A105, l13).

LS: “So time for kindness?” (A105, l15).

GF: “Making kindness part of my daily, how I deal with people and things. … It has changed. I have boundaries but I am a lot more gentle with myself” (A105, l16 – l20).

LS: “How do you relate that to time?” (A105, l21).

GF: “Well it is more in the moment” (A105, l22).
LS: “So each moment is what?” (A105, l23).

GF: “I try to find the good in each moment…” (A106, l24).

GF privileged his thoughts about how being kinder in the moment which I experienced as somewhat tangential to what I was trying to explore. My intent to conduct a research interview about people’s experiences of time remained in the foreground and in this excerpt whatever he said, I tried to relate it to time. In instances like these I notice I was not really listening in the way Andersen (1992) encourages.

GF’s dominant theme was about the value of kindness and being present to people more and listening to them in a more caring way. He described himself as someone who had never been present-focussed and he talks of how he is in a process of finding a comfortable middle ground with being present-focussed. He describes how being present to everyday activities like washing dishes, cutting vegetables and juicing an orange brings him a new awareness of his senses in the moment. For GF the unique outcome of doing the MBSR programme was gaining the sense of stability he sought to exit his relation with E.

The eight narratives above have mostly been of the individual participants with some links between, the next step of the study aims at deconstructing the narratives in terms of time discourses and to extract themes that were common across the narratives.
Participants’ Narratives, Time Discourses, Interpretation and Discussion

The above narratives gathered in one-on-one semi-structured interviews aimed to open a space for participants to reflexively consider their experience of time, notably the present as a result of doing an MBSR programme. In terms of Riesman’s (1993) narrative analysis model, I attended particularly to aspects of the narratives that told me about participants’ experiences of time. The questions guided that the narratives would encapsulate time in them. Riesmann (1993) offers a meta-perspective of how narratives are constructed and White (2007) offers a way of organising narratives for analysis which I utilised for the analysis component of the research.

Linked to the literature review, the following themes appear in a number of participants’ experience of time: time as a scarce resource, an emphasis on being productive with time which can translate into an adherence to a faster is better approach to time; an awareness of the link between time and stress, notions of different time, the inclination to be future-focussed and the relationship between finding one’s breath which is a presencing action and perceived stress reduction. To some extent this remained the talk behind the talk about how doing an MBSR programme has influenced participants’ experience of the present, which is where my questions inevitably led participants.

Time as a scarce resource was a dominant theme in participants’ narratives. OJ refers to herself as “always rushing”. Rushing is understood to connote time scarcity. NT says “in my rush, I am always thinking of what I have to do next”. This keeps her plugged into a future, which may be seconds or months away. NMM expresses awareness that her anxiety was linked to what she had to do in the next hour. For
GF a good day used to be one which was packed with meetings and KH recognises her inclination to think of 10 minutes of down time as a waste of time. “Waiting is a waste of time. I don’t have time to sit. I need to be doing something.” Although NL has explored the possibility of there being “no time”, she delineates leisure time which can have no time in it, but in work time she wants punctuality and productivity.

A number of participants related their experiences of stress to their relationship with time, particularly KH, NMM, NT and OJ. KH says her rushing makes her “psychotic”, NMM speaks of her “anxiety” in relation to what she needs to do next and OJ talks of “panic”. GF says “There was no enjoyment of anything it was just rush, rush, rush and achieve little.” VF says of himself: “I was a great worrier about what was going to happen tomorrow.” NT identifies a link between her inclination to rush and stress.

Time was experienced as socially constructed around culture and particularly NT who was the only Xhosa participant shared how her more Western oriented late husband said she “disrespected” time by being late, which gives time a “thing like quality” which in this instance can be respected or disrespected (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.12). She understands the term “African time” to be an evaluation of how black people experience time. She spoke of how her husband, whose values she described as “western”, would say she “disrespected time” because she was sometimes late. She experienced the notion of African time in relation to the length of church services which would go on for hours longer than their scheduled time. NT said she responded to this by sometimes leaving when it suited her, but not without an experience of guilt, since it was “unAfrican” to demonstrate what could be interpreted as disrespect of the pastor. She said no one ever sanctioned her actions of sometimes leaving because of other obligations, like quality time with her children.
or simply rest. NT notes that the number of lifestyle diseases that were associated with stress like cancer and stroke were now more prevalent in particularly black middle classes where capitalist productivity and wealth creation is valued and which upholds a faster better time discourse. NL has two sorts of time – no time which is when she is at leisure and work time, which would be a time when meetings with people who are late, has her talking about African time. “I am dealing with government, municipalities and black people all the time. And their lack of time kind of gets of me. I am aware of what they’re dealing with. It is not that I am all that judgemental.”

NL raises the idea of African time at a retreat day prior to our interview and I revisit her words during the interview. I enquire of NT whether she has encountered the term and in her instance I do because she is a black African. I notice how in each interview there are elements to them which are unique and other elements where there are similarities, and in the process how my role as co-constructor of participants’ narratives is expressed.

A number of participants recognise the way their thoughts lure them into the future, GF had planned holidays and now looks forward to leaving a legacy, TF no longer fantasises about the future as much, but acknowledges spending years doing so. NT plans a future in a new town as a mark of a healed heart and being able to spend more time with her baby and NL says “it is easy to disappear into the future”. For VF, he says he is no longer as future-focussed as he used to be, and notices though that his wife still frets about their financial future, which impacts his role as provider.
For KH, NMM, TF, NL, OJ, GF, VF and NT the breath is in some way referenced as a way of coming to the present moment. Utilising breathing as a way of lessening the stress response is the simplicity of mindfulness and it appears all participants use this to some degree. Inevitably as one focusses on one’s breath, one becomes more present-focussed.

A number of study participants observed that it was after a time that the benefits of mindfulness practice became evident. GF talks of a seed which begin germinating and NMM talks of struggling and struggling and then within a second, she was able to see herself as mindful and what that might mean for her. OJ says after about five weeks she began to experience benefits from the course and practices.

In ordering the interpretation and discussion, I broadly organise it around the content selected out in the literature review and I then conclude this section with a discussion on future implications for MBSR work from a community and critical psychology perspective. Much of the research that has been done on the programme has been quantitative, which points to the value of doing qualitative research such as this narrative analysis. The eight people interviewed for this study adduce that they became more aware of being present-focussed as a result of doing the MBSR programme. The programme’s attenuation to the present was explicit and participants engaged with the possibility of being more aware in the present moment. They refer to derived benefits which include feeling calmer, experiencing a distance between their sense of stress and their lists of daily chores, worrying less about the future, greater self-acceptance and being kinder to themselves VF observes of the course: “It made me slow down and living more in the present than being worried about tomorrow” and GF comments: “I have found such strength in being in the
moment.” For NL being present-focussed is: “Vital it is, one of the solutions to me now. And I bring myself back to it and say this is my life.”

NMM says she gained insight into how her anxiety was linked to what she needed to do the next. “An insight that I got in the course was to literally slow my life down one second at a time.” TF says: “Self-acceptance coming from being in the present which are two anchors and they really stand out for me.” It is argued that when rushing it is less possible to be present-focussed and that slowing down can be associated with being in the present-moment, hence popular statements like “taking time to smell the roses” which suggests noticing oneself in one’s environment. NT sees a link between being more present-focussed and being gentler with herself.

In is held that doing the MBSR programme can open a space to possibly re-author experiences of time, especially in relation to time and stress. The interviews formed part of that process. White (2007) says “re-authoring conversations invite people to continue to develop and tell stories about their lives, but they also help people to include some of the more neglected, but potentially significant events and experiences that are ‘out of phase’ with their dominant storylines.” (p. 61). Being present-focussed may be regarded as a neglected storyline in the sense that children are often present-focussed and fully engrossed and as we grow up it becomes a marginalised storyline as we are encouraged to hold attention often on the future and what is next.

Participants’ narratives support research that suggests that doing an MBSR programme and being more present-focussed has psychological benefits. In his exuberant way, GF describes himself as “1000 times happier” since doing the MBSR
programme. KH says doing the MBSR programme helped clear her mind. “*Before my mind was completely fuzzy. At one stage I couldn’t string a sentence together. It was literally like clearing the fog. Stillness. So it provided the stillness for the fog to clear. To think rationally, sequentially before I couldn’t do that.*” For TF it “*definitely gave me a very accessible, um useful, practical tool to deal with anxiety.*” For VF doing the MBSR programme assisted in improving his self-confidence. “*One of the problems I had was a lack of confidence in a way, a lack of confidence in myself which also has I think improved.*” As reflected in the literature, time and stress are linked and often rushing and wanting to do things faster can arise in anxiety, racing thoughts and a sense of disorientation (Adam, 1995).

The temporal nature of narratives and human experience was expressed in participants’ descriptions of doing the MBSR programme and their relationship with time. Temporality is the way in which our storied lives seamlessly move between present, future, past and how as both tellers and listeners we create meaning in this way. This emphasises Ricoeur’s (1980) assertion of how narratives are both chronological and non-chronological. For the most part interviewees’ narratives of doing the MBSR programme fitted into their broader narrative of their lives and they often accessed stories from distant or even remote past to explain this. These related to stress, anxiety, depression, panic, brittle boundaries and drug addictions. The stages that Riesmann (1993) refers to of attending and telling and which Freeman, Epston and Lobovitz (1997) refer to as selecting out were evident here in how narratives are constructed. All the narratives (NMM, KH, GF, NT, NL, TF, VF, OJ) had statements that located it across all of the analysis categories viz remote history, distant history, recent history, present and future which indicates how both
experience and narratives have a temporal quality. Thinking can seamlessly inhabit
the past, present and future. The interview provided a specific event into which the
storied lives they have been weaving, remained part of what doing the MBSR
programme means for them. Their stories were temporal and moved fluidly through
remote past through to the present and sometimes into the future and back again in
non-linear sequences.

Although participants were not asked about how often they continue to engage in the
formal practices taught in the MBSR programme like the body scan, meditation and
mindful movement, most of them offered that they found it far easier to do the formal
practice during the course and afterwards it didn't always happen as they intended.
They expressed mixed responses to this which ranged from pragmatism through to
self-recrimination. MBSR programme trainers argue that the formal practice is a
necessary component of being able to maintain self-regulated attention (Whitesman
& Kantor, 2011 and Kirby & Gerber, 2010). It is argued that regular practice is to
mindfulness as exercise is to fitness and that long term benefits are sustained
through formal practice. This suggests that in order to maintain the psychological
benefits of mindfulness, it is necessary to continue the practice – to work at it. KH
says “I still haven’t got that right” (maintaining the practice) and says she’d prefer to
go for a run, than do a sitting practice. OJ “loves Wednesdays” and she regularly
attends a meditation practice, followed by mindful movement which Dr Kirby and Ms
Gerber run. For VF “after the programme, it seems we were just left to carry on, on
our own”. VF does sometimes attend the Wednesday group and says “although not
religious about practising, I do sometimes”. NT says during the course it was easy to
keep up the practice, but now her CD player is broken and she hasn’t fixed it yet. I
contemplate lending her one, after all it is her birthday in four day’s time. Many of the people who attend the MBSR programme do so to address an area of their lives they wish to change – the stress, the anxiety, the panic, the co-dependence and with the support of the weekly meetings and a sense of accountability to the programme leaders, they do the practice. Making a commitment to practice on one’s own after the course can be difficult as life seems to crowd in. TF observes that “Doing it (the mindfulness practices) is different to knowing about it.” and KH: “Now if I have a gap, I’d rather go for a run. To find that balance. It is almost a little unrealistic to be able to exercise and meditate.”

The benefits that participants carry with them appear to be an increased awareness of themselves and their emotional, behavioural and physical states whether negative or positive. As indicated previously it seems that sometimes after the course is complete, people’s busy lives resume and often it seems there just isn’t time to do the practices and as observed in KH’s interview it seems counterintuitive to a mindful way of being to castigate oneself.

For some participants being more present-focussed held intrinsic benefits, whereas for others focusing on the present was utilised as a way of avoiding stress. Clearly participants were aware of stress being in their lives and one of the significant ways in which participants learned how to handle stress was when they followed their breath which was a technique taught in the course as a way of incorporating mindfulness into everyday life. In terms of the stress model that the MBSR programme utilises, becoming aware of one’s breathing slows down the sympathetic reaction to stress characterised by increased adrenalin. Participants described this simple technique offered as a STOP process in the course, as a simple and useful
‘tool’ or ‘technique’ that could be utilised at any time. Participants appear to derive a sense of empowerment, which has implied psychological benefits, that in stressful situations they can access their breath, which is a ‘presencing’ action, and thereby reduce their stress. Particularly for OJ, TF and GF the STOP technique was a mainstay in integrating mindfulness into everyday life.

The extent to which participants are inscribed into time discourses which may compel being future-focused was apparent. For some research participants the course created an awareness of being more present-focused but once the course was over people returned to their dominant narratives of time which are derived from culturally available discourses about time and as discussed earlier these include time urgency, time scarcity, time as a finite resource that needs to be managed and productivity as a way of validating both work and leisure time (Adam, 1995). Participants were aware of time discourses of faster is better and commented on how doing the MBSR programme created an awareness of the possibility of being with time differently, especially through mindfulness’ definition of paying attention on purpose in the present moment. White (1992, quoted in Riesmann, 1993) observes the stories that people live by are rarely, if ever, “radically constructed” – it is not a matter of them being made up “out of the blue,” so to speak. Our culturally available and appropriate stories about personhood and about relationships have been historically constructed and negotiated in communities of person, and within the context of social structures and institutions.

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In the literature review the ways in which Western constructs of time impose a faster, better discourse was known to participants and KH refers to this as “the big wheel that turns us” and GF saw this as people always wanting more without waiting. Much of people’s rushing is related to subscribing to a faster is better discourse.

Ricoeur’s (1980) assertion that people are commonly future-focussed and “ahead of themselves” was evident in some of the narratives. The rushing of NT, OJ, KH had a thinking ahead quality to it and NL observes that it is “easy to disappear into the future”. VF says he often worried about the future, but does so less nowadays. GF’s future focus used to be about holidays and technology upgrades, whereas now he is more concerned about leaving a legacy of compassion.

It is argued that the invitation the MBSR programme offers participants to re-author their relationship with time, and by implication stress, through being more present-focussed, can be considered both a radical and marginalised discourse. As indicated earlier maintaining formal mindfulness practice is considered key to integrating it into everyday life. Years of constructing meaning around time from early school days of timetables, times tables, lines and bells through to working life where one’s productivity is primarily marked in hours worked, clocking in and clocking out, time sheets and deadlines may be difficult to change. This may be because being present-focussed counters a more dominant culturally inscribed narrative of faster is better and being busy and productive can be validating identity performances.

So while participants may have overall described doing the MBSR programme as life changing, in terms of their relationship with time it seems in the case of several participants the power of time-stress discourse returned. OJ talks of the panic
returning, VF talks about how after the course there wasn't anything to keep the practice going and KH is back to packing as much into her day as possible. What appears to remain more prevalently as a result of doing the MBSR programme and integrating mindfulness into daily life is paying attention and noticing - being more conscious of how one is with many more aspects of one's life. This is unsurprising given Polkinghorne’s (1988) assertion that it is uncommon for people to think reflexively about their relationship with time. NL who has a long interest in time and the concept of no time, reflects on it being difficult to grasp.

It is understood that different participants’ narratives are constructed and negotiated in their broader social context around race, gender, sexual orientation and class, which might have identity performances attached to them that may not include mindfulness as a way of being. Often participating in the programme arises out of a sense of desperation to address a difficulty, in NMM’s case it was her somatised pain, KH says she couldn’t string a sentence together and GF was itching to leave a relationship that he subjugated his own needs in. Once the initial benefits of mindfulness were attained, it might have been easy to see if the benefits could remain without the effort of practice. In some cases, the strength of the older more dominant faster is better narratives perhaps regained their disciplinary power. Arising from this awareness the course leaders now run a Wednesday meditation group which provides a reminder to get one’s bum on the cushion.

Along with the sometimes elusiveness of changing our relationship with time, is the added element of how dominant discourses function and how we become unwittingly inscribed into them (Salih, 2002). Where we stand in relation to discourses, either as self-monitoring as Foucault (1977) suggests or implicitly able to resist and subvert
them as Salih (2002) asserts, determines how we engage with the discourse. While over the longer term we may not change our subject position in terms of time as a result of doing the MBSR programme, it does offer an invitation to do so.

In addition to discourses about stress and time there was evidence of how participants had been inscribed into gendered culturally available stories. OJ, NT and KH are mothers with young children and it appeared motherhood is constructed as a super-ordinate identity performance activity that can interrupt any other (Radhakrishnan, 2005). VF and GF, who are men, seemed to be inscribed around discourses of work as a super-ordinate identity performance.

The MBSR programme is offered as a group process and mid-way through the eight week process there is a day-long retreat that current participants attend which is also open to previous participants. In East London, this community is growing and in the last two years it has grown from 12 to 35 attendees. This creates an on-going opportunity for participants to inscribe themselves into new subject positions that subvert dominant discourses of time and in so doing re-author their relationship with time to being more present-focused. In this process a mindfulness community develops, derived from a mainstream model of stress reduction that has been thoroughly researched (Greeson, 2009) and is generally offered by registered medical professionals. Yet it challenges traditional bio-medical models of stress relief by suggesting that the simple practice of mindfulness, “paying attention on purpose in the present moment, without judgment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2010) can yield psychological health benefits. It offers a non-doing that counters the dominant discourse of faster is better and it challenges notions of productivity and busyness which often keep us mindlessly carrying on and on. To sit mindfully requires attention and concentration,
which involves activity of sorts and somewhat contradicts the notion of non-doing. Given that the programme has only been running in East London since 2009, it will be interesting to see whether the mindfulness community continues to expand, and what its existence means to those who align to it and this might be the basis for future research.

Riesmann (1993) observes that narrators choose how they want to be understood by what they tell. A narrative is not a representation of reality or truth, but is an event of meaning making that is malleable and flexible (Gergen, 2004). Narrative analysis does not pay attention to the validity of the story, rather it considers what the words or texts are doing and what subject positions the narrator is taking up or resisting. As a researcher doing a narrative analysis, it is necessary to interpret and discuss my role in the process of gathering the narratives and writing them up. However, there may have been instances in which the context of being in a research interview might have influenced what people said. They might have wanted to seem ‘good’ MBSR programme delegates, which might suggest participants were sutured to subject-positions in relation to their narratives as being good at mindfulness (Gergen, 2002).

Implicit in the course were suggestions of how to be, being mindful has significant meaning attached to it and fundamentally this advocates being self-aware and noticing one’s experiences whether positive or negative. Their knowledge that I am studying towards becoming a counselling psychologist and the arrangement in the interview room which could seem like a therapeutic space may have facilitated opening a space that they might not enter in other conversations. On occasion I acknowledged that I was aware of the meaning and importance they were attaching to their experiences and I was concerned but steered back to the research interview.
Given the pressing social issues that cause psychological distress in our country, it is argued below that research into how the MBSR programme can benefit more than a few people who have access to medical aid, warrants attention.

**The MBSR Programme and Implications for Future Work**

Particularly positivist research findings present a utopian view of what practising mindfulness can deliver, yet access to the MBSR programme seems limited. Typically as with this study, the participants have access to education, health care and consequently greater access to alternative ways of viewing their life experience. Even in Szanton et al's (2011) narrative analysis of elderly black Americans living in a low-income facility’s experience of the MBSR programme, the environment appears to be one where there are adequate social services for a programme like this to be provided at no cost to participants. In South Africa, the MBSR programme is generally offered by a medical doctor and psychologist i.e. Dr Kirby and Ms Gerber in East London and Dr Whitesman and Ms Kantor in Cape Town. Their positions provide them with expert knowledge which is constructed as the kinds of expertise that can address stress and they are received in terms of a particular discourse that privileges certain knowledge as more authoritative. This is in spite of efforts they may make in privileging the local knowledge of their participants’ experience. As health practitioners they may be in a position to earn more doing other kinds of work, and offering the MBSR programme may for them seem acts of service for human kind, however it is exclusive. At over R3000 per eight week programme, part of which can be claimed back from medical aid, the programme is expensive and inaccessible for many people.
In East London, the MBSR programme is positioned as: “an integrative, medically-based, participant-centred approach to stress management developed 30 years ago at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre. To date, it is the longest standing, most successful and well-researched stress reduction programme worldwide” (mindfulness-el.blogspot.com). It can be viewed as a medically-based programme that locates stress management as an individual pursuit. This has particular relevance in our country where access to health is skewed along racial lines and where poor black people are denied basic human rights (Ratele in Visser, 2007). Parker, Georgaca, Harper, McLaughlin and Stowell-Smith (1995) suggest that the biomedical model locates recovery within the individual and glances over issues of access and the very groups who might experience the greatest degree of distress like the poor, the uneducated, and more vulnerable have the least access. Locating stress management and recovery from stress related ailments within the individual and focusing on an organic foundation for distress is problematic, in that it takes our focus off the social and political causes that might arise in the discrimination of people on the basis of gender, race and class and it can serve the interests of those in power.

It is intended that this research project provide the basis for further work in which a programme like the MBSR can be offered as a direct community psychology intervention. Lewis and Lewis (1989) point out that people’s environments tend to be nurturing or limiting. The extremely difficult personal circumstances that millions of South Africans live under are arguably limiting to their overall development (Ratele, in Visser, 2007) and both direct and indirect community wide interventions are necessary to address this.
Traditionally, African people focus on the collective and interdependence as a more important value that the interests of the individual. Cultural conceptions of mental health and ways of addressing these possibly through traditional healing and communicating with ancestors are often disregarded as sources of healing, (Ka Sigogo & Tso Modipa in Hook, 2004). It is in this context that Naidoo (2000) notes that in South Africa, “psychology has neglected the mental health of the majority of South Africans and that this irrelevance derives from the political system and psychology’s inability to address political concerns by addressing the impact of apartheid on its victims, and that traditionally interventions lacked the necessary broader contextual focus needed to address social problems”. Naidoo (2000), Gilbert (1998) and Painter and Terre’Blanche (2004) recognise the contribution that community psychology can have on alleviating distress and strengthening coping. In terms of Lewis and Lewis (1989), community psychology offers a possibility for working with people to make environments more nurturing for the people that live in them. Naidoo (2000) and Gilbert (1998) articulate ways in which community psychology can be constructed and positioned to offer services that are collectively oriented, that meet communities where they are culturally and socially by building on local knowledge. There is agreement on a need to shift the focus from the individual, and to focus on prevention initiatives that strengthen collective resilience and protective functioning (Naidoo, 2000) and to view interventions in a multi-faceted way (Lewis & Lewis, 1989). Thus there is a need for community psychologists to more vociferously demonstrate their contribution to easing human suffering and it is argued that a programme like the MBSR could perhaps meet the criteria for doing so.
Gerber (2012) views it as valid to conceptualise the MBSR programme as a direct community psychology intervention thereby broadening the accessibility of the work to those in greatest need. She envisages that this work could be rolled out to “key players who support those at the coal face e.g. health care workers, teachers and social workers” (personal communication). This could increase compassion to self and others as well as decrease levels of stress. She refers to instances in her own work where this has worked well in two community psychology projects which included establishing a Care Team Model at a local school and in a Sexual Health Counselling Project in which nurses were trained.

In making this study available to those whose narratives and work, I write about, Kirby (2012) comments: “I think that it is a valid observation that the price (of attending an MBSR programme) puts it beyond the reach of many people. In the greater health care context, it is still so much cheaper than on-going medicines or even surgery. Health care organisations in America are beginning to recognise the cost-effectiveness of these types of strategies, but in South Africa the deep benefits of what we do has not been validated” (personal communication). This suggests that positioning the MBSR programme as a community psychology intervention would need to be explored at an indirect level involving lobbying of health policy makers and at a direct level to people open to the possibility of it bringing ease to their lives. It is acknowledged that the programme may need to be adjusted to accommodate local environments. “It is going to be an interesting journey looking at how we can position MBSR into a broader paradigm. We have a long history of injustice, sadness and pain. It is critical to find ways to heal, so that we do not pass this sorrow on to our children” (Kirby, 2012, personal communication).
The centuries of mindfulness practice that Greeson (2009) refers to, locate the construct in its Buddhist tradition which includes in its tenets an intersubjectivity and interconnectedness of all living beings (Gerhart & Paré, 2008). In ways this echoes the African cosmology’s emphasis on collectivism and inter-connection and suggests the MBSR programme could be conceptualised as a direct community psychology intervention that aims to reduce stress and enhance coping and resilience. It was with this possibility, that this study was pursued as first steps of a longer journey.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In bringing this study to a conclusion, I reflect on whether what I set out to do has been done, which was to explore whether MBSR programme participants’ experience of time, notably the present has shifted as a result of doing the MBSR programme.

On an evening in April 2012, I explained to a friend who is a medical advisor at a car manufacturing company in East London, what my thesis topic considered. In hearing the word stress he became interested because he is aware of how stress-related complaints affect employee productivity. When he heard the term mindfulness as a means of addressing stress, he commented: “Meditating is hard work. People want relief without making any effort and that is what medication can provide.” His acknowledgement of the effort that goes into meditating was validating of my own formal mindfulness practice. In the process of this masters in counselling psychology year, my thesis has seemed like a refuge, haven and retreat where I could engage in scholarship about something that I plan to inform my later work in.

My own attendance of an MBSR programme in 2010 and the Mindfulness Teachers’ Development Retreat in 2011, has informed my subjective understanding of mindfulness as a philosophical stance that can be applied to mean making. My exploration of MBSR programme participants’ experiences of time, notably the present as a result of doing the MBSR programme has been informed by social constructionism and narrative psychology. This seemed to align well with selecting narrative analysis as a way of understanding the eight participants’ accounts of their
experience of time. In this sense, the study design and theoretical approach has added to coherence in this research effort. My own narrative as an erstwhile journalist, appears in the text, where my inclination has been to represent the words of the participants more so than to demonstrate my skills as a developing narrative therapist. I have a sense of becoming in this process and my own "deep engraving" to keep my voice out may have showed. Yet, I have also tried to address this by keeping elements of the dialogue intact to illustrate my becoming.

I experienced a tension between my subjective experience of mindfulness and the rigours of academic enquiry. I negotiated this by including an Appendix entitled Context in which I attempted to provide an understanding of how Jon Kabat-Zinn who developed the MBSR programme in 1979 conceptualised his work. This section also included the views and work of other MBSR programme facilitators including Simon Whitesman, Linda Kantor, Janine Kirby and Barbara Gerber. In the literature review section, viewing the MBSR programme from a social constructionism viewpoint allowed the space to regard the MBSR programme as holding no single truths, nor realities. Here I attempted to deconstruct mindfulness, time and stress. This was also informed by narrative psychology which privileges local knowledge and at the same time understands it as being socially located through meta-narratives that suggest what the good and the brave might be.

I explored the way in which both the MBSR programme and stress are medicalised and that facilitators can be seen as experts who have authority to assist people manage their stress. It was also argued however, that the MBSR programme encourages participants to seek non-medical ways to reduce stress and in this way it can be viewed as subverting the bio-medical perception of stress reduction. I further
created a link between stress and time which arises from Western values of productivity and a faster is better discourse (Foucault, 1977).

I conducted eight semi-structured face-to-face interviews with MBSR programme participants to explore their narratives of time and Riesmann’s (1993) theoretical approach to narrative analysis and White’s (2007) maps of narrative guided how I approached the analysis. White’s (2007) categories also demonstrate the temporality of narratives in that they can seamlessly move from remote past to present to future and back again in the activity of mean-making.

Linked to areas addressed in the literature review, the following themes came up in participants’ talk about time: time as a scarce resource, an emphasis on being productive with time; an adherence to a faster is better approach to time; an awareness of the link between time and stress, notions of different time, the inclination to be future-focussed and becoming aware of the relationship between finding one’s breath which is a presencing action and perceived stress reduction.

Participants’ experiences were that by paying attention in the present, they experienced greater senses of calmness, gratitude, happiness, confidence and self-acceptance. Their experience of stress and time urgency reduced. I argued that the MBSR programme’s emphasis on the present invites participants to re-author their relationship to time from perhaps, as according to Ricoeur (1980) generally future-focussed to more present-focussed. After completing the course some participants found it difficult to maintain both the formal and informal mindfulness practices, as they became re-inscribed into dominant time discourses of faster is better which tends to have a future focus and adheres to pervasive busyness.
The building of a mindfulness community facilitated through retreats that both present and past participants can attend assists in sustaining mindfulness as a philosophical way of being in the world for East London mindfulness practitioners. As indicated earlier my intention is to explore doing mindfulness work in contexts where there is lack of access to health and education and some of the possibilities to enable this could include applying mindfulness in a Care Team Model (Gerber, 2012). Evaluation and adaption to suit it to local appropriateness would be on going and this could form future research. It would also be useful to explore other contexts in which a more community based approach to mindfulness has been implemented. I argued for the possibility of mindfulness being conceptualised as a direct community psychology intervention aimed at prevention and resilience building, which might initially require lobbying and advocacy to enable programme delivery. Feedback from participants and course leaders on how I have understood their work, has contributed to the richness that completing this study has added to my experience of this year. For that I am grateful.

This research’s relevance arises from it being the first known research into mindfulness that is based in the Eastern Cape and it does respond to a call for more qualitative research into the construct. The experience of stress is pervasive and causes human suffering and so programmes that address it have relevance for the field of psychology. The relationship between experiences of time and stress are established in the literature and so to explore what contribution becoming more present-focused has on mental well-being seems a valid research enquiry.

Possibilities for future research include exploring mindfulness’ applicability in a broader range of settings, replicating the Shapiro, Brown and Biegel (2007) study
which looked into the impact of teaching training therapists mindfulness and considering further the relationship between mindfulness and self-acceptance which seemed to be highlighted by a number of participants. Research that explores people’s understanding and interpretation of mindfulness attitudes, and implications of these would also be relevant research.

While I, as both author and reader of this text, may humbly assert that I have completed the task of this mini-dissertation with commitment and intention and a more than good enough academic competence, it is you as examiner who will be the arbiter of my assertion.
REFERENCE LIST


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APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT - THE MBSR PROGRAMME

This appendix provides a contextual outline of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme and includes how stress and present moment
attention are presented to programme participants. It draws on definitions and explanations from Kabat-Zinn (2010) who founded the programme 32 years ago and local presenters of the programme, (Kirby & Gerber, 2010) and national trainers of trainers in the programme (Whitesman & Kantor, 2011). The context aims to orient the reader in the curriculum of the MBSR programme and to acknowledge that it presents a set of understandings that can be considered as socially constructed.

The MBSR programme curriculum guide describes the 8-week, 9 session programme as “systematic and intensive training in mindfulness meditation and mindful Hatha yoga” and it focusses on the “experiential cultivation of both ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ mindfulness practices as a foundation for the cultivation of positive health behaviours and psychological and emotional resilience that can be effectively utilised across the adult life span” (Blacker, Meleo-Meyer, Kabat-Zinn & Santorelli, 2009, p.1). The curriculum guide says its primary aim is to “cultivate ways of learning and being that can be utilised far beyond the completion of the programme” (Blacker et al, 2009, p.2). Meetings are held once a week for between 2,0 – 2,5 hours and there is a whole day meeting midway during the course, to which participants of previous programmes are invited.

Irrespective of where the MBSR programme is taught across 500 sites worldwide, the programme retains key elements which include that programme participants’ experience: a body scan, mindful meditation, mindful movement based on either hatha yoga, tai chi and qi kung and weekly themes aimed to cultivate mindfulness (Kirby & Gerber, 2010). They are also given a description of some of the physiological and psychological elements of stress and they reflect on their own experience of stress. Each week, homework is assigned which could include doing
formal mindfulness practices e.g. body scans, awareness of breath meditation, yoga and informal mindfulness practices which integrates mindfulness into day to day living often in terms of particular themes (Blacker et al, 2009).

Themes include the following; an emphasis that if you’re alive there is more right with you than wrong, how you see things or don’t see them will determine how you respond to them, there is pleasure and power in being present, learning new ways to relate to stressful moments and events, connecting mindfulness with perception/appraisal in moments of conscious choice which includes observing thought, emotion and physical sensation in typically stressful situations. This includes naming of thoughts, emotions and physical sensations, even in difficult situations, as a way of cultivating and maintaining mindfulness in daily life (Blacker et al, 2009).

Integrating mindfulness into daily life involves paying present-focused non-judgemental attention to routine tasks like washing dishes, driving, eating and working. In the context of the MBSR programme, judging is understood as experiencing activities as either good or bad, with a tendency to want to prolong good experiences and exit bad experiences. In addition MBSR programme delegates are taught mindfulness attitudes which include non-judging, patience, maintaining a beginner’s mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and letting go (Kabat-Zinn, 2010).

The three formal mindfulness practices of the body scan, meditation and mindful movement in the programme advance a mind/body integration ontology. The programme locates itself in a behavioural medicine approach premised on
mind/body unity (Kabat-Zinn, 2010). This is in contrast to dominant views of mind/body dualism. Joyce’s (1976) reference: “Mr Duffy lived a short distance from his body” (p.8), emphasises that Western human experience is often positioned as disembodied. Descartes’ (1985) reference “I think therefore I am” (p.15) creates a context for mind body dualism or a Cartesian split which has various outcomes, one of which is an emphasis on the human capacity to think, and to discredit the potential that our bodies may possess forms of knowledge (De Kooker, 2010). We often regard our mind as the capital of our bodies which are sometimes considered dumb vessels that carry our heads around which is where the superordinate activity of thinking occurs. This disembodiment can arise in being ‘cut off’ from our bodies (Kirby & Gerber, 2010).

The process of a body scan involves focussing on the body, area by area beginning with the toes of the right foot and experiencing sensations in those areas as opposed to thinking about that part of the body. Kabat-Zinn (2010) says “our thoughts about our body can limit drastically the range of feelings we allow ourselves to experience” (p. 156). Thinking is a temporal activity and while we’re thinking we simultaneously inhabit the past, present and future, whereas the body scan attempts to locate our attention in the present moment, with each breath, each heart-beat. Cullen (2011) describes the body scan as “designed to systematically, region by region, cultivate awareness of the body” (p.3). “The body serves as one of the most powerful anchors that we can draw on … and brings us directly into the present moment” (Kirby & Gerber, 2010, p.8).

The body scan is usually verbally guided by the trainers during the MBSR programme and audio recordings are available to delegates for homework and after
programme use. The body scan is often the first step in introducing trainees to formal mindfulness practice because the body’s corporeality is visible and tangible (Whitesman & Kantor, 2011). Kabat-Zinn (2010) says through the body scan MBSR programme participants learn to develop concentration, calmness and mindfulness. It often facilitates a sense of well-being and timelessness.

Mindfulness practice anchors on meditation and Kabat-Zinn (2010) describes meditation as not doing and a means by which we pay attention to our thoughts, physical sensations and emotions. Nairn (1998) describes meditation as “coming face-to-face” (p.21) with the mind and training it to be less reactive and more stable. Germer, Siegel and Fulton (2005) regard meditation as an effective way to promote self-awareness. The focus on meditation is also on an alert body posture which allows the breath to flow evenly (Kabat-Zinn, 2010). There are a number of meditations that are used during the MBSR programme and these include awareness of breath, which encourages a focus on breathing, simply concentrating on this often highlights how easily thinking begins and thoughts are followed. One of the ways in which meditation is facilitated in the programme is to label thoughts as ‘thinking’, ‘planning’, ‘worrying’, ‘regretting’ etc and on noticing this to “escort oneself back to the breath” (Kirby & Gerber, 2010, p.9). Other meditations include loving kindness, mountain and lake meditations. In the former, meditators are guided to explore extending kindness first to themselves, a loved one, a stranger, a difficult person and all beings everywhere. This aims to facilitate developing compassion as an inward and outward focussed quality. In the mountain and lake meditation, meditators are guided to visualise qualities of mountains and lakes as a way of
development a sense of endurance and reducing stress reactivity (Kirby & Gerber, 2010).

Finally and sometimes introduced to participants before other formal mindfulness practices, the MBSR programme draws on mindful movement oriented in hatha yoga. The emphasis on the mindful movement component of the MBSR programme is to work within the body’s capacity and to experience it as an integrated element of self. Particular attention is paid to the moment to moment unfolding of different sensations (Kirby & Gerber, 2010). Kabat-Zinn (2010) describes mindful movement as a form of meditation and he describes this as the third element to the formal mindfulness practice, along with the body scan, sitting meditation and walking meditation. Yoga means union in Sanskrit and is believed to facilitate a mind body union (Raub, 2001). Ripoll and Mahowald (2002) describe hatha yoga as “an ancient physical and mental exercise that has been used as a therapeutic modality in traditional Indian medicine for centuries. Yoga as a complementary modality in western medicine, is more recent and continues to grow” (p.1).

Carmody and Baer (2008) observe that the mild yoga stretches used in the MBSR programme take up less programme time and out of session practice than the other formal practices, yet seem to have significant perceived stress reduction benefits in self-report feedback.

The MBSR programme has an integrative medical approach which highlights the mind/body connection, in terms of which stress reactivity is understood to have a psychological impact. Kabat-Zinn (2010) describes stress as a commonly understood concept which is often subjectively applied. “People know exactly what it
means, at least to them. But stress occurs on a multiplicity of levels and originates from many different sources," (p.235). Stress, he comments, has physiological, psychological and social dimensions. The MBSR programme’s orientation regarding stress, draws on early research by endocrinologist Selye (1956) who asserted that both exciting and scary prospects create a similar physiological response, which led Selye to describe positive stress as eustress and negative stress as distress (Kirby & Gerber, 2010). Eustress can be experienced as hope, satisfaction and excitement, while distress is apprehension, worry and fatigue (Kirby & Gerber, 2010). Selye (1956) termed the stress response as a General Adaptive Syndrome which is characterised by an alarm state, a resistance state and an exhaustion state. The alarm state generally arises in a fight or flight response and it is important to note the body is unable to distinguish between real and perceived stressors, and thus will experience an alarm state or stress response whether the concern is a noticing snake slithering in your car on the way to work or concern around whether the soufflé will rise or not, (Kabat-Zinn, 2010). Either way the stress reaction arises in a series of physical responses which include energy mobilisation, increased heart rate, blood sugar increase, a change in muscle tension and dilation of the pupils. This is accompanied by a sense of anxiety which may contribute to a person being more alert to their environment or the perceived danger. After the threat has passed, whether it is real or perceived, like waiting to receive a marked essay or in the face of danger like an oncoming train, the body enters a relaxation response phase where stress hormones like adrenalin, noradrenalin and cortisone are restocked having been expended in the alarm state. If the resistance phase is prolonged it is likely to begin to become negative stress or distress in which certain conditions may arise like irritability, loss of concentration and fatigue. Finally if stressful conditions persist,
either perceived or real, the body enters an exhaustion phase during which mental, physical and emotional resources are put under strain that can arise in anxiety and depression, (Kirby & Gerber, 2010).

Kabat-Zinn (2010) draws a distinction between stress reactivity and response, in which he suggests that mindfulness can assist people to respond to stress as opposed to react to it. “The stress response is a healthy alternative to the stress reaction. It represents collectively what we call adaptive or healthy coping strategies” (p. 264). Health professionals often encourage clients to breathe in the midst of a stress reaction and this is because focusing on one’s breath in such situations decreases the elevation of stress hormones which alter physiological states accompanying an alarm state. This is the simplicity of mindfulness, to pay attention in the present moment without judgement to what one is experiencing and if it is stressful such that an alarm state is encountered to focus on the breath within the body, which assists in choosing how to respond to the stressors, rather than reacting, (Whitesman & Kantor, 2011). As illustrated above the series of formal mindfulness practices are intended to cultivate the ability to notice one’s experience in the moment.

Kirby and Gerber (2010) emphasise that positive stress is a necessary component of functional living, it gets us out of bed in the morning and through our day. Time is implicated in stress and Kabat-Zinn (2010) describes time as “one of our biggest stressors” (p.349) and he observes that people experience stress if they have too little time or if they find they have too much time, which suggests a pervasive relationship between time and stress. The MBSR programme trains participants to focus on the present, primarily through guided meditation compact disks (CDs) both
as a way of cultivating mindfulness and because being focussed without the clutter of rumination over the past and planning the future, allows bare attention (Kabat-Zinn, 2010). In terms of the MBSR programme, it is suggested there are mental health benefits in being more present focussed (Kabat-Zinn, 2010) and Greeson (2009). Guided meditation CDs that form part of the MBSR programme make regular reference to “the present”, “now” and “this moment”. The very definition of mindfulness of “paying attention on purpose to the present moment, non-judgementally” focusses attention on the present, and provides the research study’s interest. Kabat-Zinn (2010) suggests an ‘anti-dote’ to time stress is non-doing. He describes this as stepping outside of time and suggests that non-doing changes one’s relationship with time from urgency to simple attention to the present. “Meditation is really a non-doing. It is the only human endeavour that I know of that does not involve trying to get somewhere else, but rather, emphasises being where you already are” (Kabat-Zinn, 2010, p. 60).

The cultivation of non-judgemental present-centred attention to moment-by-moment experience is facilitated in the East London MBSR programme through the Triangle of Awareness and STOP process (Kirby & Gerber, 2010). Delegates are encouraged to become aware of their thoughts, emotions and physical sensations in situations. The STOP process utilises the word STOP as an acronym. “S - involves stopping in one’s tracks, settling into your body, and noticing what one is experiencing in the moment, T – involves turning your attention to your breathing, O – is opening up to and observing thoughts, feelings and sensations which is present centred and P – choosing how you would like to prefer to proceed, after making conscious choices that might break stress reactivity patterns and cultivate new stress response
patterns” (Gerber, 2012, personal communication). The STOP process demonstrates that the present focus of mindfulness is active rather than merely cognitive (Kirby & Gerber, 2010).

Although the emphasis on focussing on the present moment is explicit in the MBSR programme, it is assumed that most people who commit to doing the programme do so to address psychological distress or illness in their lives, through cultivating mindfulness. In the process they find that being present-focussed is one of the key ways of facilitating stress reduction which points to the relevance of the current study.

Note on Transcriptions

The interview transcriptions below are included to evidence a democratic research agenda in which the voices of participants are made available to the reader. All ‘ums’, ‘like’ and ‘so’ are retained, even if in reflection I seemed to be bumbling! They are laid out with single line spacing, for ecological and ego reasons. My assumption is the fatter the mini-dissertation document, the higher the possible irritation at the marking task!
ADDENDUM 1 – TRANSCRIPTIONS

Below are the verbatim transcriptions of the eight interviews conducted for this study. My words appear in *italics* and participants are in regular text.

5 Interview 1 – NMM

*To start can you tell me what your general experience of doing the MBSR was like?*

In the beginning I was excited to learn about meditation and to learn about yoga and being more mindful. I was very aware of what mindfulness means through my work with Barbara and Janine and through my studies of Buddhism, ja, it stems from all that and I had quite high expectations of the course. I found though the work of mindfulness very difficult and from the first group meeting I attended I was very anxious. At the time I was experiencing neck pains, back pains and spasms and ear ache that was all caused from anxiety and stress. So I had a very unpleasant time at the group meetings because for the first four or five meetings I was in physical pain when I was there. Trying to do the meditation, the exercises and stuff like that and even though I was in pain, I managed to speak and say things and ask questions because I really took it seriously and I wanted to do well and Barbara said she thinks I asked questions. Good contribution, finally.

20 Before I went to the course I went to the Wednesday meditations and finally, I’d say after the fourth or fifth week after doing my practices as much as I could because I didn’t do them every day, I struggled to find the time, I struggled to find the discipline and I was always ill. But when I started doing it more often, like when the mindful movement came in which I enjoyed more than the body scans, when that started, I could do that more often. Tuesday night class. Wednesday med and then on Thursday I’d feel really, really good and that seemed to break a barrier from the regularity of it. I also went to Janine for my headaches and earaches and she said perhaps I should cut out dairy. Dairy is a big part of my diet so I couldn’t cut it out completely, so I changed to skim milk and I changed from sugar to fructose and that in combination with the work I was doing, ja, although I wasn’t practising it religiously the meditations and the mindful movements, I was researching and reading, the more regularly I started doing (it) and the diet change and research. From the beginning of the course to the end, the person she could see most profound change was me. With this anxiety I have struggled with I was a bit closed and a bit hunched and with it, I was very like an inward person and especially with the movement stuff, my posture changed overnight and with that came more psychological changes just
like that and even at varsity I would always do the breathing exercises and take my shoulders up. I wouldn’t do the whole stop thing but that was my way of stopping. And just coming back to my breath.

The day that we had the retreat, I have never been in such a state of mind for such a long time and I have never done so many meditations in a row and I felt so good that day, it was one of the most magical days of my life from all the encounters I had with nature, these light bulb moments, these realisations. When I got home I was completely depressed and Janine explained it is like breaking out of an egg and feeling vulnerable and exposed and that is where that came from. I carried on and it just got better and better. A tough but in the end a good end result.

What made it possible for it to go from tough to a good end result?

Persistence. Doing the work. Like forcing myself to do a meditation or a yoga movement, or if I can’t get to it, read a little bit of the poetry or quotes. What really helped me was some of the quotes of mindfulness that were in the book (learner material) I wrote on my wall by my bed and by writing it I established my own identity in my room. Looking at it waking up to it, reminding myself, going to Barbara – I had a very busy life. I would see Barbara and Janine on a Tuesday night, I’d see Barbara and Janine on Wednesday at meditation, I’d see Barbara on a Thursday. There was a lot of commitment that didn’t require self-discipline because I was doing it a few times a week. I was getting in touch with these things and then once, twice or a maximum three times a week I’d meditate or do the movements. It was like carrying on pushing through. And I was hopeless for a stage, I was very hopeless because I had put such a high expectation and it was like it wasn’t working, it wasn’t working but I just kept on and it’s just like and you can struggle with something and struggle with something and then you can get so over it, but you just struggle a little more and then in like one second, everything just goes away and then you see things from a whole new perspective and like you know you can never go back to where you were.

So the new insight is with you?

Ja

Now what has doing the course and the practice made easier for you in life? What impact has doing the course had on how you are with life?

A major thing that I noticed with doing the course after I had started getting better was that my creativity and independence increased so much. Before it was work for me to be creative and I thought (sighs): Why must it be so hard, it should just be coming to me and actually, the Sunday, we had the retreat on the Saturday I was doing something for varsity and for the first time ever it flowed, there was an outpouring of creativity. I was just going and going, and it felt so natural and things
inside of me from years ago, different perspective and it was like my soul was coming out onto paper and I’d never really experienced that before and it’s still good at the moment. My creativity and my like sense, I had the confidence before because Barbara and I had worked on it but it like increased so much by doing this course. Like not walking around with my shoulders stooped and saying excuse me, I’m a bit different. Like owning it and saying this is how I am and saying you can take it or leave it. Especially in my room I had made changes because I wanted to establish this new sense of purpose. Ja

_Um, are you okay if we start talking about the present-focussed nature of the MBSR?_  
Ja.

_Um, ja, how has doing the MBSR influenced you sense of time and what it means to perhaps be more present-focussed?_

It um signs, I don’t know the words to say, I was sort of aware of the concept before from Buddhism, but the MBSR really reinforced it in a diligent and persistent way. And um, ja, I used to have a lot of stress and anxiety in the past and that’s how Janine and Barbs described it in the course – getting caught up in the story. And like letting that go. Like I’d go this and this and this and I haven’t ah – big story, and that is why I was always so anxious with the headaches and that.

Whereas the course taught me to just live in the present, once my mind goes places. .. I just go (breathes) and I breathe out and say ok tomorrow doesn’t matter. But I’m even stressed about what has to happen in an hour’s time. So an insight that I got in the course was to literally slow my life down to one second at a time. Literally not getting anxious or worried about what is happening the next second.

_So would you say that a specific source of your stress is what you have to do just now, in an hour, tomorrow?_  
Ja, and it really changed for me. I even (sighs), I took the whole thing and applied it to relationships and the way I saw things and perspectives and I just realised I had trust issues with men, but through this I realised I can’t walk around untrusting and having my guard up and being scared of being hurt. I can’t walk around like that actually carrying a lot. Whereas if you just live in the present moment, just take away everything that happened, don’t focus on it, it doesn’t bother you it is in past, there is nothing of it in the present moment just the thoughts that you bring. So if you cast away all of that and focus on the present. None of those things are there and if you don’t worry about the future, then in that moment you are actually so happy and you have nothing to complain about, nothing to be anxious about, nothing to be scared about, nothing to complain about. You just sit there and you realise, I am happy right
now because you let that go, let that go and then you’re like aah (NMM does a hand movement).

*If you were to describe with words that experience you showed with your hands, how would you describe that?*

Basically enlightenment. It is your eyes opening and seeing things in a different way. It was a wall that was built in your brain and it just shattered and now you can see with more of your brain. Things become clear to you. If you take all the stories and baggage away of what time brings you just like, everything is crystal clear.

*You said one of the ways you locate yourself in the present is with breath, can you tell me a bit more about that?*

Like I said I struggled with my posture. That was like my biggest indicator for when I am starting to get anxious because I would have my shoulders back and be working and after a while I would notice I am leaning very far forward or my shoulders are crunched in. I am very aware, I have always been very aware of my body, so as soon as I noticed that I would move back and squeeze it tightly for like, you’re supposed to hold it for two, three, four then relax and try and get the shoulder bones back to link up as much as possible and I do that quite a few times and with a new established posture I would continue working but every time I found myself like more closed and more hunched I would just notice it and I would do breathing and the shoulder exercise and the opening up exercise consistently. Sometimes it was twice a day, sometimes it was every five minutes. Through doing that on a daily basis and just noticing, just noticing not getting angry at myself and judging myself, practising loving kindness. That was a big key for me. Like not judging my meditations, not judging my feelings, just practising loving kindness and how I crapped myself in my head, like and when I find myself hunched again – “It’s okay, you just notice it and” this is how Barbara speaks about it all the time “and you breathe in and breathe out and you carry on” And there is no drama in the moment and you just carry on. Really light-hearted approach.

*So being in your body experiencing what your body is experiencing in an embodied way as opposed to a cognitive way, what role does that play in you being in the moment?*

My body, I notice things in my body before I notice feelings or thoughts. Like as soon as I get an ache here or a twitch there, that is the first thing I notice and what I’ve noticed is the only reason I have all these aches and pains. It is symptoms, that is the way my body first shows something is wrong. Before I even think ah I am not feeling so well, I will get an earache and I will know something is up. My body tells me so I have learnt to listen to it.
So you were saying earlier that there was a diligent messaging about being in the moment from Barbs and Janine as the course leaders. When you received that and you thought oh, they are talking about this again, oh, they are talking about this again, what were some of the things you noticed in relation to yourself?

For a while in the course I thought I know this, I know this. I know what mindfulness is and I thought um, especially she would always mention, one of my favourite things was Janine, someone would mention a comment. And so do you notice the story and it happened with everyone and I would experience something and I would be okay I am not going to say a story now and I start speaking and I think I am so mindful and there is no stories. And then Janine would say: Do you notice the story NM and but ah, I thought I had and I was often in this illusion and of course, it was such a repetitive thing and I made peace with it that I am not as far along with it as I thought I would be.

Like then it became easier for me to notice them (the stories) because she was, her approach was always the same and I started noticing how other people talk or interact with me and all the stories, that people live in their little stories and I started really like not wanting to be around people, not wanting to be in the mall. Even at class, this and this, and I felt for a while there are just all these stories.

Tell me more about what you mean by stories?

It is sort of a way for people to legitimise what they are going through, sort of like okay but you have to feel sorry for me because of this, and this and this. It is a way for them not to take responsibility for the present moment. That is what I saw, because if you are hanging on to this and then this and that happened. It goes so far back and if you are going to cling to all these stories then you are never going to be able to be happy in the present moment. If you say okay yes, this happened to me as a child and yes there is tension with this family member, yes we don’t have a lot of money, yes I am the only white kid at varsity, yes all these things are against me. All these different stories that I can use as excuses for why I do certain things and say certain things and if you take all that away, what do you have? Nothing.

Just your pure self?

There is nothing, there is silence, there is nothing. Like, just like purity and so if you take away all your stuff you are actually fine and then you own up to your own stuff because you bring those stories, you think back to that stuff. You dig up the past or you judge this person. It is all you and your head. When you realise that you are the sole person living your life and when you change your perspective and change your lifestyle, when you realise it is all on you then it is so much easier. Cos you don’t have to go and sort out what happened with that person or you don’t have to change varsities and get more money. You can just stop the stories and say okay goodbye
and then you have this bubble of pureness where everything is magical and clear. There is nothing for you to hold onto and then you float and that is amazing. That is what meditation is, that is what enlightenment is and that is what I experienced.

Now, if you think about some of the words you use now that describes your experience with time. What do you say? And this is perhaps me asking what are some of the storylines you have about time now that you are aware of?

I am aware now not to get attached to it. You mustn’t, whether something is good or whether something is bad, you tend when something bad happens to you to get consumed by it, but if you think of time as always passing, hanging on to a memory or feeling. You are getting dragged around by time. So if you the one thing that ties into Buddhism and mindfulness that I realised, came out of a song. The trick to life is not to get too attached to it and if you apply that to time, like it doesn’t affect you. If something good is happening, don’t go oh I want this to last forever, because you know it is going to pass and if something bad happens, it is going to pass so you have that hope. It frees you up. Attachment to time is a bad thing and it is the cause of a lot of suffering because you get stuck in a certain time frame and you don’t. Practice non-attachment like that you can’t see or touch like time and you just let it be then you know it is always going to pass, oh this is so shit, it is going to pass, it is so great, it is going to pass. It will come again. So that is how I think about time.

If you sort of think about how perhaps what bigger messages we get about time, that are not part of the mindfulness space. What other stories about time are prevalent in society as you may have encountered that you may now be thinking differently from?

Um, hmh. I will have to think about it. Lots of people, this is something that I really noticed. Lots of people wish their time away or they spend a lot of their time complaining. Like on Monday, someone will complain that it is Monday and the weekend is over. On Wednesday, they will be happier because the week is halfway and they are closer to the weekend. On a Friday, they will be so happy it is the weekend and on a Sunday they will be oh where did the weekend go? They invest so much time, looking forward and thinking about the weekend that they don’t take time to enjoy the week because they are so busy waiting for the weekend. I find that is what society does with a lot of things – they just slug through a lot of things and just wait for the next raise or ah, I don’t have a car – it is just five more years, five more years and they are so miserable in those five years because they are dreaming, a lot of dreaming and fantasising and not being happy in the present moment. Mostly complaining is very time related because what I find often on Facebook, if it is raining they complain that it is raining, if it is cold they complain it is too cold, if it is hot they complain that it is too hot. What actually is the temperature you would prefer? Would you like nature to change to suit you but the other person would like it a different way? So the message you’re basically sending out is you’re
always unhappy because you're always looking at what is going on and complaining whereas if you learned to enjoy the present moment, whether you like or don't like the present moment, enjoy it welcome it for the moment that it is. What I learned about the meditation is to use your senses and like, smell the rain, listen to the rain or what feelings come up inside and like, don't think of how you have experienced rain before or you think what is going to happen. But focus on it in the present moment. And then you can. When you use your senses to explore the rain you can actually enjoy it. There are magical things in it or special moments. If you are always complaining or waiting for something to be different that is what I find, people wait for something to be different. They focus on looking forward to something but not what is presently happening whereas they if they are miserable in the present they could focus on present and change their perspectives and even if you don't change the perspective in terms of how you interact with the present, it can become so much more pleasurable.

So your experience is a lot of people look forward to or want things to be different in the future. How much awareness do you think people have of what is going on for them?

They are not awake, that is a term I like to use, they are caught up in this world-wind of this future or the past, it is like people are always missing this person or missing that person, or wishing for things to be like they were. If you call it like that or call it the future. They are not aware of it until someone tells them and even if you come and you tell them, in a kind and loving way, they're okay but they don't really get it. And the next day they do the same thing. I sometimes look at society as zoombies all following each other. They are not looking or focused on anything, they are running after what is popular or running after money, and they don't like stop. They are so obsessed with where everyone is going and what the whole world is. If the whole of America thinks this then we must get on board. They are not individuals, they don't decide for themselves, they don't think for themselves, they don't challenge the passed down ways of thinking.

So you're saying there are passed down ways of thinking about time and they are future focussed and past noticing.

I think about my sewing teacher and she is always telling us about her children and how they were when they were little. Always telling us these stories. In the beginning I thought she is just sharing funny stories with us. And then I began to notice, throughout the course she often says similar things, or like I almost found she is so busy rekindling these memories that she is not actually looking reality in the face and saying okay time has passed. This is how they are now. She is not really appreciating how they are now. Because she has more love for who they were when they were little.
Yoh, it is quite sad hey.

Ja, I found it very sad.

I wonder how it is for them. How old are they?

They are quite old. They have jobs and they don’t live at home.

So that opens up quite an interesting reality because being in the present often means being with your present as you find it.

Ja.

And is that maybe what went on for you initially when you said I struggled and I struggled and I struggled?

Ja. You don’t like facing the reality because if you focus on the reality it is like, I am really not doing well. Or I have all these aches and pains, I am really sad. You can’t look at it. You don’t want anything to do with it. My most, greatest escape was sleeping or fashion, as much as it is my study? It is my greatest escape. When I don’t want to face the reality of I am not getting along with this person, now I am upset, then if I dress up and I just look at pretty pictures and I fantasise about this and buy a new hat and then the world is lovely and you get caught up in this whole fantasy where feelings and people and hardships and things that wear you down, don’t exist. Whereas if you face your reality you can see what is really happening become aware of why you don’t like the present moment and you can do things to change that. Or change your view about it.

It is interesting some of the readings I have to do to orient me, to show the people who are going to mark my thesis that I have studied about time – there is so little reference in academic literature to the word now.

The present

Doesn’t appear, the present doesn’t appear. It is like the past and the future and people say we visit the past so we can prepare the future. There is so little

To me that is the worst thing you can do. That is what I noticed – for me to look at my past to prepare myself for the future, I find myself repeating patterns, stuck in a cycle. That is what was happening for me for years and years and years. I was with Barbara in therapy for three, four years and lots of things had improved and I had changed whatever, there was still some things that were like the same things, like I wasn’t getting it. It was foreign for me or I couldn’t invite it in. There was this resistance because you know we think about the past and you know no, this is like that person and you don’t want to get mixed up with that, blah, blah, blah. We
always, like if a new man came into my life, we always compare the past to look for warnings and I should concentrate on this because I was too much like this when I was this person. And I actually found that that didn’t really help me. It was only after the course that something like really switched in me by being so focussed on the present and not being hung up on time anymore. It is only after that, that I could release all my hurt and release all my fears and like release a lot of anger that I had for a recent ex.

Because I just realised I walk around angry and not trusting men because of this but if I actually just forgive him, not for him, not because what he did was okay what he did but because I need to do it for myself to release the anger. Stop revisiting the past, when I see someone, I immediately go back to the past and think oh you look like this kind of guy, I know your type, blah, blah, blah and you can’t actually do that, you can’t judge new people by past experiences you have had and that is entirely unfair.

It is so fascinating to hear you describe how being more present focussed has helped you look at people with new eyes and you recognise that perhaps what you used to do was take that previous experience and sort of overlay it with the way you saw this person and said if I experience the moment.

Give them a chance. I used to think men don’t deserve a chance. They are all the same but when I let go of everything especially my ways of thinking and judging and just realise okay, I am sitting at the bar, here is this guy talking to me. Normally I would judge and say this and this and this. I don’t really want you to touch me so I will just move away.

Do you want to see the peacock. Here he is.

Oh wow.

Hello you. You’re so beautiful.

Whose is it?

He belongs to himself.

That is great.

He moves up and down here. He roosts up there somewhere

Ja, so it is about just realising when someone approaches me they are not – I look at them and think they are like this person and that is reverting back to the past. It has nothing to do with what is presently happening and you don’t know this person from a bar of soap. He is friendly and you enjoy him in the moment and you’re like hi,
what is your story? Who are you? Get to know them. Pay interest and like, and at the same time not to be attached to it and expecting it to be good or expecting it to be bad. That is all related to time. Whereas, if you go this is happening, right now in the present and have fun with it.

Are there instances where it might be easier to be present focussed and instances where it might be a bit more difficult. You were saying a lot of your stress before you did the programme was about thinking about things you had to do, so let us do one at a time. Are there times when you notice that it is easier for you to be present focussed?

Definitely there are times. (Sighs). It is so obvious and it is so repetitive but this really is the key. When I have done my meditations, when I have done my reading and I have done my yoga and if that recently happened, then I find it a lot easier to focus on the present and not get caught up in the stories. But say it has been two days ago and things start piling up and then I get my earaches and I worry I need to get this done and it takes me a lot longer to notice what is going on before I come back to my breath and by that time, I am all worked up and it is more difficult to damage control so I find that I operate at my optimum best in relation to time when I have done the work.

So would you say that for you keeping up the practice is a necessary part of being more present focussed?

It only works if you do the work. You can gain all this insight and it doesn’t leave you but like right now I have earache because I have a lot of work to do and like this is quite exposing myself in whatever and it is not because it is that bad, because I am pretty happy inside. I had a good time this afternoon researching for my project but I haven’t meditated or done yoga since Wednesday. If I did something Wednesday and I did something this afternoon it would be so much better.

So it sounds quite easy then, you just do the practice?

It is an easy concept but it is difficult to put it into practice because you find lots of excuses for ah, I don’t have the time now, I don’t feel that good, I really need to rest so that I can do my work, like. Ja, but one thing that was said in our course that when you really don’t want to meditate, when it is the last thing you want to do that is when you need it most. And even now trying to maintain the programme it is difficult for me and I struggle with the self-discipline but I only know what I know and I only felt good for those two, three weeks because I was doing the work on a regular basis. As soon as I stopped or I slacked off, I started getting my aches and pains again.

Those aches and pains sound useful because they really,
They remind you, like, not feeling attached to how I felt but now I know how I can feel, how I can go through life. And how happy and unaffected by outward experiences I can be when I keep up the practice regularly.

So now I may have asked this question before, but I am going to ask it again for closing off. I don’t know if you have any questions or anything like that. So in a nutshell what contribution to your well-being does being in the present bring you?

Happiness, contentment, love, gratitude. Gratitude is a big one, being grateful for what I have.

Thank you. I have an ear pain in my right ear. I get that sometimes. How was this conversation? You said it was a bit exposing.

The actual, what was presently going on was great but I think, the anxiety comes from the thoughts in my head which say, are you saying the right thing, is this going to help anyone, is she going to be able to use this, are you talking too much. It is the stories. It is where the anxiety comes from. But if I take it all away, and that is the cause of the earache, like I actually enjoyed. I had a good time. I like being involved in stuff like this and sharing my experience because I wish everyone could feel like I am experiencing.

Well it was very useful and there were lovely insights, you, and you expanded my sense of how time can operate because obviously I have chosen this topic because it interests me. Umm and I think quite a bit about what I am learning and about how I know when I am in the present and what, what, what. And what I do and so it is amazing to hear about someone else’s experience because they are not common kinds of conversations these.

No, not at all and those are the kinds of conversations I like the best.

Ja

And that is why I don’t like conversations with people who aren’t awake. I get bored. They will tell me about their problems and I get sad for them and in my mind I think but if you do this and this and this, you’ll be so stoked.

I just had a picture of you dressed as a pixie with a little wake up wand.

Laughs

Wake up now and like, laughs

For me it is not that I get bored. I find it draining to try and talk to people who aren’t awake. I find their whole presence, the words they use and what they think, very draining. I don’t like it at all.
“So what are you going to do now for the rest of your weekend?”

I have to do a lot of work – technical drawings, I was busy with a mood board for a fashion illustration, trying to relaunch Lady Gaga. Because she has done so many crazy things and I have researched all her looks I have been listening to her songs again. I have to get into where she has come from and the decisions she has made. Like by the new songs. Try and figure out what she was thinking and where she was going with this. So she was there and she did this and she was there and then she did this. So now she is here, so what would her next move be.

I don’t have to get that deep into. I could just put some pictures on a page but that fascinates me.

“So that is taking your interest. So you said you were doing second year?”

Hmh.

“My daughter is finishing off her Mtech in Fashion Design at NMMU. She likes it. She couldn’t draw ..”

Ja, I’m like that

“It is amazing how it comes on.

In first year we did live drawing, quite a lot of drawing. Fashion illustration which was a lot of drawing and we did our creative, where we design. But this year for fashion illustration we don’t draw as much as we used to and we don’t have live drawing anymore so basically we’re just designing and now again we draw and that is quite sad for me because I was really getting good at it when I was doing it so constantly last year. There was a major improvement in my work and I just wanted to get better and better. But it is not that focussed anymore.

“So is the qualification from WSU?”

Yes it is a diploma when you do it over three years. I would like to do my fourth year somewhere else because WSU doesn’t have a good name. I was thinking of NMMU actually.

“She has had a lovely time there.

I know, my boss and so many people I know have studied there or at Vadisa in Cape Town and um, ja, and they don’t have any of the problems we have at Walter Sisulu. I don’t want to get myself all sad about it.

“Yes, you’re there”
It is better than nothing.

So you’re going to make it work.

My parents could have said we don’t have money for you to study again so you have to go and work. But my mom found this course, I didn’t know they had fashion and they said they were willing to pay for it.

What were you doing before?

I was sort of screwing my life up trying to keep jobs. Drugs, drinking, I dropped out of varsity a few years back. Going nowhere slowly. Ja. At the end of April, I was clean for one year. No alcohol, no drugs, no bulimia.

And what contribution would you say mindfulness has made to that journey?

It has just enriched it so much more. I don’t struggle with it like I used to. I used to struggle with wanting to go out or being lonely, why is this so hard and no one understands me and all the young people are just partying weekends, alcohol and this and this and this. I didn’t have a friend who didn’t want to not do those things. It is not really normal for people my age not to go out and get excited over the weekend and I was very miserable and lonely and thinking ah, I am on such a hard road, it is such a lonely road, but with mindfulness it is now I have learnt that it is confirmation that you choose the best road there is because I realised I was always longing for people’s friendship but when I did make friends they would drag me down and with mindfulness you actually start loving yourself so much more and your own company and your need for attachment goes away and you just enjoy quiet time and meditation. Reflecting on things. You are not on the same level as other people any more by far. Not just because you are sober, because you think completely differently because a whole new world has opened to you and so you are not really lonely anymore and you look at people and feel sorry for them and wish they could experience what you’re experiencing and it is like the coin is flipped. I feel sorry for them now instead of feeling sorry for myself.

So you feel lucky for yourself?

Yes, extremely, extremely and extremely grateful. That is one that I have been feeling for the last week or so, that when I hear bad things happening or when I get a phone call from an old friend that we used to drugs together and she is crying in my ear because it is not going well, whatever. I realise how lucky and grateful I am that I got my happy ending. That I got out of it. 99% of the people that I called my friends or that I was involved with are still pretty much stuck in the same rut. Still doing that all day. Maybe they would have moved forward in like their career or maybe they don’t do it as often but they still enjoy doing it and do it every now and again. Even if you don’t do it that often, even that little bit over even a few months, it just keeps you
at that level where nothing can break through because you are not perfectly clean or perfectly sober and so you don’t have perfectly clear perspective.

Thank you for coming through and participating in my research and being so generous with yourself.

It was my pleasure.

I will see you on Wednesday. Have a good weekend.

Thank you I will. I’m not going anywhere. Just doing work.
Interview 2 – TF

*Overall what was your experience of doing the MBSR and what that was like?*

I had been vaguely aware of mindfulness before the course started. You know I had known Janine and Barbara and I’d known they had been meeting for a couple of years so I went in thinking I knew something about mindfulness but found that the practice is very different from the theory. Although not different because practice is aligned to theory. Doing it is different to knowing about it. I think I felt like I had a very positive experience, I really enjoyed it, I learned a lot, and I told a lot of people about it and I still do think it was a valuable experience. Overall it was enjoyable. I have been to two of the retreat days and I think sometime in the future, I’d like to do the course again as a refresher because I think every time you do it, you take it to a deeper level.

*On a personal level, what did doing the MBSR mean for you in your life?*

On one level, definitely it gave me a very accessible, um, useful, practical tool to deal with anxiety. But I don’t think that anxiety or that my life is being disturbed too much by anxiety. Interestingly the other side of it, that idea of not being in touch with your body was something that, um, perhaps is the thing that came out overall for me. Let me give you an example, I think that I have quite a good mechanism, perhaps it is not a good mechanism, but I have a way of switching off – I will never, for example struggle to fall asleep or be bothered by thoughts, I find it quite easy to put things out of my mind. That had obviously been something that I have developed. This idea that you can be in touch with your body and can stay with feeling and stay with the moment, meant for me that I felt as if the process was a maturation, a growing up, a stage you reach when this is it. I had a realisation that this is me, this is my life. I can see you putting your hands together and saying this is it. This is my life. Can you tell me what you mean?

I felt like I am grounded in my body. I was no longer switching off, going into fantasy, planning how it was going to be when I grow up. So the idea that living in the present, being fully aware that the present is all that there is, was in a sense very liberating but in another sense that came with quite a lot of sadness that this um, kind of escape mechanism I had developed was not very useful, helpful and that there was another way of being that didn’t give you the fantasy and escape or was a healthier, let me not use the word healthier, maybe just a kind of more connected way of being in the world, of being myself. A very real sense of being myself and connected with that a self-acceptance. Ja, self-acceptance was a very big part of the experience.
So I am hearing you talk about this is it, this is my life, this is now and let us be with that. Is that what created the space for self-acceptance or were there other things?

The loving-kindness, the self-nurturing. I can know that on one level, but then you know I had to ask myself why am I always planning for the future, planning for better days or looking for grass that is greener, instead of focussing on now and being connected to what is happening right now. So they’re definitely connected.

Self-acceptance coming from being in the present which are two anchors and they really stand out for me.

We’re moving now to discuss time, which is absolutely fine, so what are some of the words and phrases you may have used then to describe the future, a better life later and greener grass and what are some of the words you use now?

Okay. Um. I think very often. I consider myself as quite resilient and part of that is I am experiencing this right now and it will pass, it is I am ignoring this right now and it will pass, (laughs), and so for me, it is one thing to think of yourself as resilient and one thing to think of yourself as resilient when you’re gritting your teeth and waiting for better days. Lying back and thinking of England. As much as it was working on one level, it can only work for so long and so it was like waking up one day and saying you know what - all of that is wasted. I have a sense of loss really for all that disconnected time. Your question again?

What are some of the words you use to remind yourself to be in the present?

Getting back to what I was saying about being resilient – when things happen now, which are the same things that were happening before, I tend to be more willing to accept that these are things I can’t control or solve, so there is a sense of things that go with that – previously I was gritting my teeth, I wasn’t focussing on it because I knew one level that these were intractable problems, but I was choosing to be elsewhere. Whereas, now, these are still intractable problems, they are not easy but now I can be present with that knowledge. So some of the things I would have said then, were I am not going to think about it, I refuse to think about it whereas now, I am willing to give it some thought, give it some time. Be present in it, I can’t honestly say I do that because I am going to solve the problem, I do that because it is less frightening, you know it’s not scary as it was before.

What makes it less frightening?

The self-acceptance, the knowing that the kind of acceptance of the limits of my power, the acceptance that I am going to still be here tomorrow and that it is not going to all explode. The sense of being able to contain something. Previously my disconnection was about my fear of being able to contain something. And I called that resilience, and I called that an ability to cope but maybe it was more a
disconnection. Now I think of my resilience much more in the moment and less fear. Or more confidence that whatever it is, I will be able to contain it.

So what are some of the senses and feelings of being in the moment for you?

The disconnection was because I did not want to be overwhelmed but now I won’t be overwhelmed. And it is kind of a sense of just being um, (sighs), – trying to think of words for you, being large enough. You know we used to talk about expanding, expanding your chest. Being able to cope and you know something I haven’t yet touched upon. Also with mindfulness, maybe this isn’t a focus of it, but being expansive and being accepting and the attitude of acceptance to self and loving-kindness and talking about the present and being in the present. There is a boundedness about that, there are boundaries that are involved in that, where maybe in the past, by disconnecting, by refusing to be in the present, I thought I was just being very good at putting up boundaries but I think that those boundaries were maybe brittle. Easily broken. Whereas now, with a bigger understanding, the boundaries are more solid.

You used the word contained earlier, are those perhaps related boundaries, solid, contained?

Yes. It has to do with feeling you can keep it together. You know that this is a mechanism where you can access your breath. Be in the moment. Focus on this one life giving force that will nourish you, that you will continue. As opposed to the feelings before when you were hoping, hoping and you weren’t really secure in the knowledge. That is the difference, I have become more secure in the knowledge that I can exist. I want to use the word cope, but it is much more than that, it is existing in a true kind of real way, as opposed to in a disconnected way.

So would my understanding of what you have been saying be correct if I summarise it as the sense of being disconnected was often about being overwhelmed and creating a fantasy about a future where you would be less overwhelmed and be more able to prevail in your life. And now you are experiencing you’re more in the present and that being large enough has a boundedness that is solid and contained.

Yes

When you think of discourses of time in our society what do you think is out there that might tend to influence us and that we might not sit down and think about often, but when we do sit down and think about it we become aware? What is the world out there telling us about time and how we engage with it?

I definitely think there is the fact that we rush around. This idea we have of time as a scarce commodity that we don’t have enough of. Shortly after I finished the course I stopped working and carried on studying and although one is busy, when you don’t
have employment, where you go into the office every day. It is much easier to keep life simple. One task that I am engaged in - focus on one thing. When you are focussed on a lot of things and have to meet lots of expectations on a daily basis, there is a sense of there is not enough of you to go around and it is the same with time. There is not enough time to do all the things you need to do, and I think it is part of this discourse that time is scarce, that time is money. Um, moving through time is also people do in a fearful way and fear of aging and fear of becoming dependent on others again, so I think I would say that I have been one of those people that thought time was scarce and I didn’t have enough of it. I think as part of the course I chose to spend my time in ways that weren’t very mindful, doing things and being with people who, I can’t honestly say why I was making those decisions. Whereas now, I can honestly say I am more mindful about the fact that I am happier and feel much better about life if I choose how to spend my time, and that is the operative word - that I am choosing to spend my time in particular ways, ways that I know are beneficial and useful and bring joy to my life as opposed to spending my time in ways that drain me.

I think that might happen with age. When you’re younger the old thing of wanting to please people, expectations, the right thing, the good thing. Also the sense that I have the confidence that I know what is right for me, that it doesn’t actually matter that it doesn’t fit in with anybody else’s idea of what is right for me. I am the best person to think about what I should do is me. I don’t know if you can tell young people what can be useful for them, I think it comes from having a few years of experience – then looking back and thinking what was I thinking.

Would you say then that doing a course like the MBSR has an element of timing to it, because if you notice the people who are doing it are older, mainly women who perhaps are looking to permission themselves how they choose how to spend time at this stage of their lives?

Yes that is a factor, but of course I suppose you also have more disposable income. You get permission as well as give yourself permission. Whereas for a young person I think it is maybe more difficult. Which is not to say that if you’re 21 and you do it, you won’t get something out of it, which is partly why I’d like to do it again. Perhaps if I’d done it at 25, I might have come to this understanding earlier. (Laughs).

To what extent do you think the focus on the present in the research captures MBSR?

I think the focus on the present is useful and it has been a huge help for me. As a researcher I think the topic is fine.

Before you did the MBSR were you aware of what you were using the future for as a coping/resilience strategy?
I don’t think I was aware. I thought I was doing quite well. I thought I was quite, bring it on, I can disconnect from anything. (Laughs).

*In what ways does the MBSR programme give a clear message of the value of being present?*

Certainly the practice itself. (Sighs). I could be more disciplined. Certainly the words mindful, mindful, I they spend a long time talking about mindful, mindless, disconnecting and being elsewhere.

Focussing on your breath which is now. Constantly bringing you back to what is happening now and staying with what is happening in this present moment. That to me, the practice itself, the words that go with mindful awareness, those are all useful and the words and connecting with your body.

Previously I might have been aware of the trauma but would have grit my teeth and said it will get better, whereas now it is my reality and to breathe, not to dwell on the …. So it is in a way, you know that series that you are not your thoughts, I’d disconnect, clear thoughts, breathe, staying with feeling while understanding that I am not just those thoughts.

I don’t know much about therapy but I should think there is something therapeutic in being able to let your thoughts go. I can stay with something, but I can also I am not those thoughts and it is something I can contain. These thoughts are not going to overwhelm me. They are just thoughts.

All of those are connected. So thank you, you have made me make a connection between the present, the breath and the thoughts. Staying in the body, staying in the moment, staying.

*You know how in mindfulness there is the practice and then there is the part about integrating it in everyday life. Are there some daily activities that you have noticed that you are now more mindful and with them, whereas in the past you were maybe more mindless?*

Certainly I have much more of an appetite for the simple life. Whereas in the past I would be planning looking for the exciting life. I kind of realise that the search for the exciting life was more of a distraction than what I really wanted. There is that and then, um, and what goes with simplicity is quietness and less of a tendency to think I should be doing things.

*If you were to relate doing things and discourses about time, what comes up for you there?*
About being and not always doing. And achieving things and ticking off things in a box. Not always being the super-competent person who has done A, B, C.

Would you say there is pressure out there for efficiencies?

Absolutely there is pressure for efficiencies. And for the whole multi-tasking idea. I was never a fan of the multi-tasking idea but now I am pleased to have ammunition against it.

Tell me about having ammunition against multi-tasking?

I don’t think you should be doing 101 things, bake cook, have a career, be the perfect mother, be the perfect wife, be the perfect daughter, friend – all at the same time. Also the idea that you can be all those things to all people is so maybe something that came with the self-acceptance. You’re striving, striving to do all those things and mostly doing it badly. As opposed to accepting that there are some things that I do better than others and that I am still acceptable. Say out loud that I haven’t been very interested in homemaking, décor and gardening. I’d much rather read a book.

But somehow you can’t say that because it makes you sound like some kind of misfit and someone who is not concerned with having the trappings of making you look like someone.

As you were speaking I was thinking that kinda delination is partly around dividing up our time into many useful bits.

And it is about thinking balance meant giving all the tasks that were expected of me, sufficient time, without asking myself are all these tasks actually expected to me or am I expecting them of me and no 2, if they are being expected of me are they reasonable that they’re being expected of me? If it isn’t reasonable why do I still buy into it?

And what did that awareness allow?

It allowed me to let the pot plant die, but the pot plant was already dead. (Laughs). It allowed me to now beat myself up when the pot plant dies. It allowed me um, self-acceptance that the whole world is being unrealistic and that if you are to be a good, reasonable and decent person you should be doing A, B and C. I am not doing those things and what does it say about me and its okay, and there are people out there who say it’s okay and I will be part of them.

So it’s not easy, let me not give the impression that it is easy. It isn’t easy and sometimes I beat myself up for being … it is so easy I am always looking at people and I am in awe and I’m looking at their gardens, their menus and their co-ordinated
wardrobes and I think it is a miracle that I am fully dressed. I have more self-awareness and I am more growing into the process rather than having achieved the outcome.

Going on a course like that gives you the vocab for articulating a different way of being in the world whereas previously, you might have felt it but you didn’t have a way of saying it, of stating your position, of flying your flag.

*When you mention and recommend the MBSR to people, what do you say?*

People will find their way and you can’t recommend the MBSR to people who haven’t got their mind in a certain space. You can’t recommend it to people who think they should be multi-tasking and that they need to be efficient, save time, march all the troops. For someone like that it is going to be too much of a discordant way of thinking.

The thing that I generally do if I think someone is experiencing a great deal of anxiety or problems with self-acceptance – hyper organised and hyper vigilant and think that this can’t last forever. People come to it in their own time. And it is not for me to tell people what they need in their own life.

*Tell me what you mean by people come to things in their own time?*

I think you have to be open and I think you have to be at a place where you want to be in the world in a different way. But maybe it is just me. I don’t like to be told what to do and I assume that most other people are like that and so I think that everyone deserves the respect of making that choice for themselves and I am not 100% convinced the MBSR is for everyone.

*Yes, and that is why everyone isn’t doing it. Everyone is buying the You magazine.*

So you know, I think that people have influences from here, there and everywhere and if I think of what I studied in my honours year; things around narrative therapy and being exposed to people like Janine and Barbara and the kinds of books I have read, have prepared me to get so much from the MBSR and to get so much from it. If I done MBSR or similar I wouldn’t have got so much out of it so unless you’re willing to give another way of being in the world a try, that is why big people have to make decisions for children.

*How do you know when you’re being more present focussed or what do you experience?*

(Sighs). Long pause (*I wonder if the recorder is broken*) Generally the times you need to be more present focussed is when you don’t want to be present focussed.
Times when you’re feeling worried, anxious and then I might be reminded that I need to focus on my breath. Um, um.

*So a sense of stress or anxiety reminds you to find your breath and be here. And then what do you do?*

I think I might just breathe, try to clear my mind, or the usual kind of STOP thing is very useful just for a short while. The more you get used to doing it split second I have a choice to react here and the one thing I can do is focus on my breath. There is a slowing down. This year has been a strange year, with my father dying, Christmas sick, died in March, I feel as I have been cocooned and taking it down to bare minimum and being much kinder to myself than I would have been before.

*Some of the things that have happened in your life have required being dealt with now and being here.*

Yeah, yeah and I think I definitely sense that. I feel it is more okay to slow down, to stop to breathe and then the self-acceptance that goes with that. I am not getting caught up in the negative thoughts, this can’t be possible, this can’t be solved, I am so angry, I am so hurt. If I can let go of the thoughts and focus on my breath. I might still be experiencing those feelings, on some level even if they are not in my head and with that goes a self-acceptance that reinforces my - it’s okay and I’m still here for the next breath and the next breath. It is very anchoring process.

*In listening to you it seems there is a connection between self-acceptance and a kind of presencing.*

Yes, definitely, because previously there was a disconnecting, not being in the present and a lot of um, um, criticism that went with that.

*Was that in the future I will bring forth this new kind of life?*

Ja, ja.

*In which I cook, bake, do all these things*

Be better

*Would you say better and faster or just better?*

Hmmh, yes. Better and faster. It has been a long time coming you know my own criticism of particular discourses of what it means to be a woman, what it means to be feminine, what it means to be professional, what it means to be a parent. You know I have been quite critical of a lot of those discourses for a long time. This was just a way of, a practical way of practising that. Rejection of particular discourses, so whereas previously, I thought I don’t really buy into that but I’d look around and think
is it just me and just carry on. And whereas now I see it isn’t just me and it is okay. But who cares if it is just me because I am confident that it doesn’t work for me.

I have three sisters-in-law who I used to refer to as the glamorous sisters-in-law.

Your brothers’ wives or your husband’s brothers’ wives.

My husband’s brothers’ wives and I always used to talk about the glamorous sisters-in-law and their flashy cars and their beautiful houses and you know the kinds of lives they lived and it was interesting to me because I didn’t ever want their lives and if Pete said to me you can give up work and why don’t you just jog in the morning and then go for your facial mid-morning. I wouldn’t want that but it was so threatening to me on some level. I always felt not good enough, um, and yet um, I think that has been a useful thing, um, where you know that could be useful to you or you know you could try so much harder. And people say: when you put make up on you look so nice. You should do that more often. And now I am like I can say: “It is not something I value, but thank you” but previously I was much more insecure about what other people thought I should be doing and now it is a sense of knowing, knowing what it is and that is that connectedness. So you’re connected and being honest with yourself about what it is you want and what it is that you think works best for you.

I could probably extract this from what you have said because you have talked around it, and, and directly to it, but for my ease of transcription um, what does being present and you connected it with self-acceptance and the knowing, what does it, how does it contribute to your wellbeing?

Well besides the fact that it makes me feel better, um, happy with myself, contented. A sense of contentedness that I didn’t have before, um, I thought being discontent was what everyone needed just to move forward, otherwise who is going to be motivated to move forward, whereas with that acceptance comes you know what, with these things that I am doing, this family that I am part of, all of these things are beneficial and wonderful but none of it is absolutely necessary or vital for my well-being. So with that acceptance comes an acceptance of loss which is inevitable. You know the thought that if I can’t finish my doctorate it is actually possible for me to still be a happy person you know. And ah, ah, if someone heaven forbid, was to die I would carry on breathing.

These kinds of ideas that um, that idea that it is going to be okay and I can contain it, I will carry on and I am more resilient in this state than in disconnected state. That is kind of important for me and it contributes to my feeling that I can cope. Um, it contributes in practical ways. I feel that the members of my family, my children, my husband might feel that I am more at kind of peace. Because of course I think I am less likely to get caught up in a bit of madness. Previously when my daughter, my
children had birthday parties I would want to bake the perfect cake, have the best invitations, have a wonderful party with activities and the best foods and every time my children had birthday parties I would hate it. I would absolutely hate the birthday party.

*I so relate.*

Everything would go wrong. As soon as those children came into my space I would become this ugly teacher person you know, who jumps on other people’s couches but I didn’t realise how uptight I was until, the other people’s children come into my space. I like to think of myself as a relaxed person um, you know. Things would always get broken or messed up and I would berate myself, because there hadn’t been this perfect birthday party until I thought you know what, I go into what I used to call Mommy Madness every birthday, where I would be making the cake and making the invitations and actually my children would just have better birthdays if I just outsourced all of that and we just enjoyed the birthday. Let’s have it somewhere else, let us get someone else to bake the cake. Or you know what, instead of having the party, we will just give you a bigger present maybe that is what the child wants and giving myself permission to think about it in a different way. The reason I brought that up is that I think that children want to know that their parents are happy and I knew this from a very early age and even from a very early age I was trying to fulfil a role as a mother. What I thought what good mothering was at the expense of being present, self-accepting, being happy, being connected to the fact that this is my child’s birthday and not losing sight of what was important in the day.

I am much more likely to interrogate all of this busyness and all of this planning. What is the purpose of wanting to do this? Is it more about me performing the good mother or isn’t it more important for me to find some other way to show my love and affection and connectedness to the child? Um, and forgive myself for the fact that I can’t be one of those mothers that does everything, you know.

*When you interrogate then I think one often finds an understanding that, jeez, that comes with a huge amount of pressure, I am glad I am letting myself off the hook.*

*You poor dear can I help you, stroke your face at least. Because it looks like life is hard for you?*

And so ja, I did that so many times before I got that message. So how does it increase my well-being – it helps me interrogate my motivations much more?

*Like what am I doing right now?*

Like I recognise this feeling, let us stop the bus. What is this about – am I trying to do something because it is someone else’s expectations? Is there a way that if their expectation is reasonable, is there way?
So paying attention to yourself?

Paying attention to myself, forgiving myself, for not reaching a particular standard, asking for help. Saying I don’t think I will be able to do this. Without apologising. I did think as a younger person I wanted to apologise for my very being. And um, sometimes I still do that but it is more of an um, – you know there is a difference between putting yourself down because you really believe it and putting yourself down as a kind of humourous strategy because you don’t need other people’s affirmations to know that you are okay. There is a fine line between that and it is something that I do um, struggle with sometimes and I realise I have this um, ah, maybe this has to do with the boundaries, a sense of wanting to nurture and take care of other people you know and um, previously I put a lot of pressure on myself to do that and now I am interrogating why. Why do I need to do this? Is it necessary, could I just focus for a moment and think about this and focus on my breath and um, and try to understand my motivation for wanting to do this which is not necessarily the best for me? Ja, that also has to do with that, I didn’t bring that up before, but always wanting to step into the breach you know and save the world.

T, thank you is there anything you might have thought I would have asked or anything you want to add around anything to do with time, the present, MBSR and yourself.

I don’t think so. There are no other questions I would have asked.

Because I have lots of data from you, thank you.

I wouldn’t want to be one of those interviewees who doesn’t give you enough data.

I am sure you don’t.
Interview 3 – VF

V if you can tell me what your experience of doing the MBSR overall was about?

Um, I see Janine as my GP and funny enough she and I were just joking at the end of a consultation a year or two back and this came up and I thought it might be a good idea because I do have problems that I thought were psychological problems that I have never really dealt with. I am a great believer that psychology is mixed up with medicine in that sometimes - I am not good at describing things but I am sure you will get it, being sick, even being physically sick, can very often be due to psychological problems and Janine is very much into this kind of thinking. You have to treat people as a whole. And I don’t think she had to talk me into it but I decided to go for it and we were on the same course.

Yes. We were.

And it kind of changed things a lot, it changed the way I looked at life.

Okay.

It made me slow down and live more in the present than being worried about tomorrow. I was a great worrier about what was going to happen tomorrow. I have a problem with my wife in fact, because she is a person who worries tomorrow and in a way it has caused a problem because we both looked at life like that and now I am willing to let things be more.

Okay.

More than I ever did before. I’m not perfect obviously, probably no one is perfect. I had a whole lot of issues that I had to deal with and a lot of them came up. I had seen psychologists before, but uhh, psychologist are, I found they were great sitting there listening to you but they don’t have answers for you and I couldn’t understand that. When you go to a doctor with a headache they are going to give you pills or hit you over the head or send you for a scan. But they are going to try and cure it but with psychology, it is different. They are good at listening but they don’t say go off and do this or that, jump off a bridge or whatever. There are a lot of pills that help depression, depression was probably the main symptom that I had.

Okay.

(Sighs), which is very much a lot better now. Um.

What has assisted it be better?
I, look I’d like to do a lot more but the meditation that we do, I am not religious about and I don’t sit down for two hours every morning and go for it, ah do it every now and again. You remember that story with the stop.

Yes.

That kind of made a big impression on me.

Okay

You get into this thing and then suddenly realise and you can stop. That was quite a simple part of it but it made a big impression on me. Um.

Do you find you continue to use that?

Yes, it is a strange sort of describe. There was nothing to prepare to come here to think of what to say. I think just talking about things just helps. I also had a few sessions with Barbara, in her professional capacity afterwards which also helped a lot and she uses a lot of what we learn in her practice. Um, how can I explain this? It is very difficult to explain without going back to what the original problems were.

What is important for me is that this, um. What you’re telling me is useful for my project and what I am hearing you say is that Janine as your doctor at one of your consultations said why don’t you come along to this and you did and you found it useful. I don’t want you to tell me anything more than what you are comfortable to say and I have heard you twice say this is difficult to describe. I am also hearing you say the MBSR was useful and the STOP and being in the present useful. You used to worry about tomorrow, tomorrow and now you’re aware of how much your wife is still worried about the future, but for you it is less of a personal concern. Okay, that is perfect for me.

Ja.

Um, if you think about the MBSR what were some of the things that oriented you towards being more in the moment?

The training we had gave us like, like all the practices we do. If you remember the body

Scan

The body scan and the breathing. The breathing thing I often do and lie there and breathe and cut out everything as much as you can, as you know it is not that simple and often thoughts are coming in to you. Scary that it is so difficult to actually shut everything out and there is so much that wants to come in or your mind does
anyway. Um, those kind of things get you to it. Again it is difficult to explain how it works.

*And do you find that sometimes you don’t tell people who are not part of the mindfulness community about what you do because it does have an element of inexplicability?*

Ja. You don’t. I have mentioned it before but it is like any sort of psychiatric thing – it is in the air. But you are dealing with professionals. It is not like it is Aunty Sue with her crystal ball or stuff like that. I did a lot of research about it on the internet.

*Before you went?*

Before and after. I am forever looking. I am a great browser and it is on my list of things to browse for. If I see mindfulness come up I go there and I have found stuff from all over the place and it amazing what comes up if you start scratching and digging. And what goes on in the mindfulness community. And what it is being used for all over the show. It is not so much a mystery, I can actually see how it can work when you are training your mind to concentrate better. I had a huge problem with concentration, as a young person as well. In fact I think it was almost a learning problem. Um, ja I went to school from the early 1950 to the 1960s which is like steam driven school compared to today.

*What do you mean by steam driven?*

Well, it was very different from how it is today. Those days if you battled at school you were regarded as stupid and there weren’t psychological counsellors – if you have a problem child, I know my son was at Selborne and there would be a guy who would come round and if a child was acting up and they’d maybe diagnose you with something, and try and treat you. In those days you’d just battle on or work harder. If you fell by the wayside, and that was in even very good schools, still days of corporal punishment. When did they stop corporal punishment?

*I don’t know. Well let me think I have a 25 year old daughter, she would have started school in 1992. They weren’t allowed to be smacked back then. When I finished school. I finished school in 1981, in primary school they would sometimes hit us with a ruler.*

I guess it was different for a girl. I can’t imagine them asking a girl to bend over and get a whack.

*No.*

A ruler that was a silly thing. It is almost like for guys to be sent to the office, it is I got sent to the office.
It was quite cool.

Ja it was quite cool, but the best teachers I ever had never hit. As a matter of fact it was the useless teachers who hit.

Yes.

I can remember a teacher who would say I am going to teach you this and if you disrupt the class you are out? That is all he did, he’d point at you and say: “V, out”.

You find the mindfulness helps you with concentration and you have a relationship with concentration from a long time ago and a statement around whether you think you’re good at it or not.

Ja, and in general, um, I am just trying to think of other ways in which it assists?

And with that stop you find your breath.

Yeah.

So you were also saying that finding your breath out of the clutter of numerous thoughts is also useful.

Yes.

Okay.

I think to be alone and quiet like that, and putting your thoughts out your head, body search it takes you away and is therapeutic in a way which I can’t quite – if I had time, I could write it down. At the moment I have a short term contract and I really miss that – it is a pity we don’t have a night session every now and again, but that is beside the point. It is also getting together and doing the same kind of thing and getting reinforced is a very important thing and it is something they have to do quite seriously – not drop people after the course. We need to really carry on and build up a local community of this, where we carry on supporting one another.

Did you find after we finished there was a sense of and now what? For yourself?

Yes to a certain extent but that often happens. I remember I’d go on these high pressure business courses and it is go, go, go. While you’re doing it you think when I get back to the office, I will change everything and sort things out and you get back to the office and you get back to reality and you can do nothing because nobody is on the same wavelength. And eventually it all falls flat because you’re talking to them on a different level and they think this guy is crazy.
With regard to the MBSR even if there wasn’t that support and it now comes in the form of the weekly Wednesday meetings and attending the retreat.

Attending the retreat was the only support we got and that was brilliant.

Do you find that to some extent you still maintain some of the techniques, the stop and breathe.

I think subconsciously you maintain them. You mightn’t think it is 5 o clock, it is time to do this but you do. A lot of things, I’m like hang on a second, that stop thing, you remember the stop thing,

Yes.

For some reason it made an impression on me.

Yes I think it does because it allows a conscious response to a stressful moment. I am noticing my stress what are my options right now. If it is okay with you can we start looking at time and how you relate to time?

Ja.

You were saying that through the MBSR you noticed, or did you always know you worried about the future quite a lot or did the MBSR programme make you aware that it was like that for you?

No, I did know that it was an issue for me.

What would you say, like feeling apprehensive often?

Ja, I am not only worrying about the future but also an almost lack of confidence in a way. That was one of the problems I had was a lack of confidence in a way, a lack of confidence in myself which also has I think improved.

Okay.

Matter of fact it has improved. Perhaps you’re not interested. I was always a very shy person.

V, I am interested in whatever you want to tell me, I just don’t want you to be pressurised.

I am not pressurised. I came here knowing I would talk to you. Otherwise I would have said take a hike.

Good. (Laughs).
I was an introverted, shy person and I am probably still to a certain extent. I am okay talking to someone like you because I know you and you’re intelligent and I am not talking rubbish to you. But I am not the kind of person who does well at a cocktail party, walking around with a glass talking rubbish to people. That is awkward for me, really awkward. Some people are really good at that kind of thing.

*Ja, they work the room.*

Ja, that for me is like (exhales as though would not like it). I can’t do that. But I can sit down and have an intelligent conversation, and I don’t know whether this has helped me in that kind of way. Perhaps a few beers would help me more than mindfulness.

*It sounds like that you find mindfulness made you comfortable with who you are. You don’t have to like certain things, it is fine.*

That is where it came in more. I am realising I don’t have to prove a point and I haven’t really been a point-prover in any case. I don’t want to not be liked, but at the same time I shouldn’t have to do something I don’t like to be liked which is what a lot of people sometimes do. I have a brother-in-law who is mad on golfing. I mean I think he is crazy because all I think he does is talk about golf. It is nothing about anything else except golf. He is not an idiot he is a CA and all he wants to do it talk about golf.

*It seems he is quite obsessed with it.*

I think he is. He is retired and he plays three or four times a week, which is good for him.

*Does he live here nearby?*

Yes

*I see they are going to be building that golf course out at Chintsa – there is that new Chintsa River Lodge that is coming up.*

Yes and it had ground to a halt because they were battling to sell.

*Ja. Now they decided let us put the golf course and maybe the rest will follow.*

They are doing it that way round.

*Ja, they are building it now. So um, with time, when you think about some of the things in society about the way we relate to time. What kinds of things do you think – like people talk about time like a scarce commodity. If you think about time before the MBSR and after the MBSR what have you noticed?*
Um, I don’t think it is the MBSR but it maybe it is more because I am getting older that time is more precious but I also feel I want more time for myself, which isn’t always easy to do for some strange reason or other.

*When you make time for yourself what are some of the things you like to do in that time?*

Research. I love learning things about almost anything. Um, so if I am reading something and I don’t know anything about it I will tend to research it because I want to know about it. And now it is very easy with the Internet. I can spend a few hours a day on the Internet and it is not playing games. It is usually researching something, I will read about something and then I have to know how it works. I will go right into the whole thing.

*What are some of your current interests?*

Um, they vary such a lot. Don’t tell Janine but I do a lot of research into medicine.

*Okay, what makes you say that?*

Doctors don’t like you to know more than they do.

*I think she is special though.*

I am only joking when I say don’t tell her.

*I won’t tell her, this interview is confidential.*

No she is not that kind of person, I have a very good relationship with her as a doctor. I talk straight with her and she talks straight with me. We are more friends than doctors if you like. If I hear something, like we have a very close friend who has just been diagnosed with breast cancer so now I want to know all about breast cancer and in a few weeks I know more than the local surgeon. Well I can’t, but I will know everything there is to know about it. Because that is the beauty of the Internet you can go in as deep as you like and obviously if you are not medically trained you can only go in to a certain level. After that you get out of your depth because it is stuff you aren’t capable to know about.

*Do you think knowledge is constructed in certain ways to exclude people in certain ways with all these technical terms?*

In the case of medicine so much. My wife says I am daft but I have developed a great interest in American politics.

*Ok.*
It has made me rethink the whole American thing because they are going through a process now going up to an election and they have got such a strange system for electing presidents and their whole political system is so twisted and bent. It is almost worse than ours in ways. It is so open to corruption, money and buying that it is quite scary that the most powerful country in the world is so twisted. It is quite scary actually. I get the news from all the sources, I don’t get it from one source and I put it together myself. Just to see if I can find the truth about it. You can listen to one station and then get a different view from another station and you think who the hell is talking rubbish here or telling lies. Because that is how far apart things are and that I find really interesting and what started me doing that is my own country. Because I grew up in the apartheid era and so many things that I got to know were totally contrary to what I read in the newspaper.

_Absolutely_

And I was there so it wasn’t as though I just read it. You know you pick up the newspaper and read about this arms embargo against South Africa and you know that countries overseas are selling us arms and they are telling the world that they are not.

**What work were you doing at the time?**

I was conscripted into the navy, luckily not the army so I didn’t have to get involved with what was going on. I stayed on in the naval reserve and I got to a level where I got to know a lot of things with regard to apartheid which sometimes quite funny at the time. I remember doing a course – am I going off the topic here?

_I will bring you back._

Just quickly then, I landed up doing a course on explosives in Pretoria and I was sitting having my breakfast at a hotel and reading the Pretoria News that the Brits had an arms embargo and they wouldn’t have anything to do with us, yet the course I was on was being run by a British Army officer and I thought this is funny. South African navy was getting its arms from Israel yet what you read in the paper was completely different. That is what makes me want to find out what really goes on.

**So somewhat of an investigator?**

Ja. I enjoy that kind of stuff.

_You were talking about this research in the context of time seeming precious and wanting to spend time doing some of the things that are of interest to you._

Ja and they also take you mind off everyday other things. Um, I have never been great at sport. When I was young I wasn’t great at sport. Unless you were in the first
team it kind of peters away and so research and the industry I worked in which was telecommunications is what I became really interested in.

If we get back to time as being precious and you said perhaps that is because you are getting older. If we can maybe go back to just expanding on that you used to be concerned about the future but you’re happier to let things be more. Can you tell me about that for you?

I think when you get older again and uh, let me get my thoughts here, you see people sometimes even younger than you dying around you every second week. Someone you know to some degree or another you see their funeral comes up and you suddenly realise you don’t know how long you have got and you have to start making use of the time and start doing things you want and uh.

Do you think that puts you more in the present?

It does put you more in the present because you can’t think about what you’re going to do when you’re 90, you have to make 90 first so rather almost live for today. I always admire people who can live for today almost to their fullest extent who can really go for life and uh, we I think it is our culture but we waste our time. Save for tomorrow kind of thing. Um, you are obviously interested in how mindfulness has helped me with that?

Well if it has, if it hasn’t it hasn’t.

I don’t know if it mindfulness or the sessions I had with Barbara. I had a few sessions with Barbara afterward this and some things came out there that made me change the way I thought about things a lot. It is quite difficult to put it down. I saw it was the start of a changing thing.

Ok

Of the way I was living.

So it could be part of but you wouldn’t say it is really that easy to say before mindfulness I was like this in my relationship to time and afterwards I was different. There were other factors.

There were other factors I’d have to be honest. I am sure it helped definitely but …

anyway.

You talked about how in our culture we have this idea that we mustn’t waste time and what do you think comes from that concern. If we must waste time then what must we do or how are we with that awareness and this is about others maybe, than simply yourself?
I am not sure how to answer that really.

*For instance do you think people keep busy because or do you feel stopping to meditate can seem like a waste of time because people want to keep busy?*

No, stopping to meditate. I think everyone should spend an hour or two a day doing it, it could only do you good. But as you said in our culture we have this problem and we have it badly. I am doing a job now and I don’t know how I got involved in it working for a garage in town. Before I retired I was an operations manager and I was responsible for quality and productivity. I am going there at the other side at the lowest rank but I am looking at the situation and the absolute chaos, which is wrong.

*And if you were to relate your observation about that chaos and relate it to time what are your observations?*

There is a huge waste of time. I have a problem, I come from a different era. People from my age, and I don’t know if you fit in to the latest or the past but we had a work ethic that is no longer existent anywhere in the world, never mind South Africa. People are looking for more excuses to get out of work than do work and I have difficulty with that. Um, I am working for about nine hours a day but I am doing about two hours work by my standards and that is where time comes in. It is driving me around the bend. I am not in a position but actually I am going to go into the manager’s office one of these days and say: “I’m going because I only have three hours of work and if you can’t find me nine hours of work, there is no point in me being here.”

*Oh, so they are not keeping you busy?*

I haven’t figured what the set-up is actually. My wife came up with the idea actually. They were looking for someone to help with the pre-delivery inspection of new vehicles. I said: ‘I’ll do that for some extra pocket money’ and the way the system works is they rely on the amount of work that comes in and that varies. My suggestion to them would be for them to call me when there is a work load that is higher than they can handle with their normal staff. And me coming in because now I have to sit sometimes for three hours, in fact there is nowhere to sit so I have to walk around the workshop trying to look busy and it is driving me around the bend.

*What about it is making it uncomfortable for you?*

Just doing plain zero and I can’t just sit down with a book because you can’t have someone reading a book when everyone else is working. It just doesn’t work if people are working or someone is sitting. Some people are good at looking busy when they not, but I’m not, I am real bad at that.
I have always been an efficiency fruitcake. Too bad and that is something I have managed to but not in this situation. I am powerless and it hurts me. I can make good use for my time.

So you’re finding the use of your time in your current situation is frustrating. You’d prefer to be busy while you’re there or only called in when there is enough work.

It is just something I have to have out with them.

But it does relate to your relationship with time to some degree.

You have to be productive in some way. Not necessarily to be productive to make money but even in a leisure way you want to be productive. Either exercising your mind, or body or whatever, or working for money or whatever.

Do you find that is something that is part of you as a personal value that to use your time in a way that is productive and efficient something coming from it. And the non-doing of meditation you see as mind training which helps you with things like concentration and that.

Ja, pretty much.

And sometimes when you feel stressed you use the stop as a way of coming to a clearer moment.

Ja

And if you were to say the present fits in with any of those, does it?

The present?

You said the stop sometimes brings you to the present moment.

Ja well there is nothing at the moment. At the moment I am being productive I am helping you with your project. I am being productive and I am happy to do that for you. There is nothing stressing me and I am quite comfortable sitting here.

Good. I am glad to hear that. And um, you were mentioning in your own experience you were noticing you were less apprehensive or worried about the future and you were noticing that your wife still is? If you think about that it seems as though that could be more present focussed or less anxious about the future?

Ja

Can you give me some examples of what you would worry about the future and now you are letting it be? What kinds of daily things?
Money maybe.

Ok

I have realised my wife often says we won’t have money to live in the future kind of thing. And I said well maybe we won’t but what are we going to do about it really. We don’t know what is going to happen to the world economy, no one does as a matter of fact and we can put away as much as we can afford and live as well as we can without being stupid about it. And if something terrible happens, something terrible happens. There is nothing we can do about it because in 1930s there was a great depression and we are lucky in that I also tend to find I appreciate more of what I have. You know when you look around you and you see thousands, tens of hundreds of thousands or maybe millions of people who are losing their jobs and they are maybe in situations where they have kids at school and bonds and all sorts of things that they have to worry about. I don’t owe anyone any money.

So you are appreciating …

The fact that I don’t have millions in the bank like some people but some people they have got millions in the bank in shares that could become worthless overnight if something bad happens. So you know, there is really no point in worrying about this. I have just managed to shake that off because it was something that I used to worry about and it is just something that I have shaken off. I just don’t want to worry about this anymore and if we have to at some stage scale down to a little back room somewhere so be it.

And to what extent did getting on to the path of mindfulness and having conversations with Barbara afterwards that what contribution did doing that have to being able to shake off the worries of financial security in the future?

I think again probably both. You know going to see Barbara afterwards was probably a good idea because it consolidated a whole lot of things that were maybe personal to me. And I think that is probably a good way for other people to start, is to do something like mindfulness which helps you to realise there are other paths to take in life and if necessary more professional help for yourself personally because obviously personal things you can’t sort out in a mindfulness course. Um

Would you say in your case it brought up stuff which you noticed and then you decided to take action about?

Ja.

To address and that addressing it made it relatively simple – you said with some stuff: “I am just not going to worry about this anymore”.
Ja well. You can’t
You can.

But it is not going to get you anywhere. Quite often people have said don’t worry about things you have no control over, but it is easier said than done of course.

Ja, because if you don’t have control over it that is a source of worry.

Ja.

Um. Is it good for me to have someone like you talk to me because what I am hearing from you is it is a bit too complex to say it was the MBSR that created a shift for me and it is really good for research when people give you different stuff from what the other people are saying because it is like my examiners, if they see Ah she only got answers from people who answered her hypothesis – how did that happen. And your’s is saying I am not going to allocate that simply to mindfulness and actually my relationship with time is still around efficiency and productivity and it is a value I still experience.

It is my generation and the way I was brought up. I come from a German background and in my generation things were done differently to the way things are done now. There was more pride in work and things went that way. I may be wrong. I may be seeing through a cloud. I just don’t see the quality work today that I used to. I see well qualified people turning out work that my worst worker wouldn’t turn out and I sort of think, is this what we have come to and I don’t think I can ever shake it off and is it right for me to shake it off and we are a new world now. You know, why should I hammer a table over the floor when I can just string it and do a half job. I don’t know if I can let go of that and I have to be fair to myself and take a back seat.

Is that quite difficult to realise things have changed and your participation in them has also changed?

It is difficult sometimes. As I said where I am at the moment, just helping out. I’d like to get in there and turn it around. At the same token I don’t want to. I think if I were offered I’d turn it down but I don’t have an interest in managing people. As a matter of fact, going into management was probably one of the biggest mistakes I ever made. Maybe too cranky, which is also wrong. But when I was a technician I could work at my pace and my level of expectation and what have you. But when you have a dozen or two people working for you, you kind of expect them to work at your level and your level of expectation and it is not going to happen.

Ja I used to have aspirations of being a manager but now I’m if you can’t manage yourself, sorry for you, but if you’re going to take on management positions there is
someone up there who you can’t say to: Well I expect them to manage themselves. It doesn’t work like that.

There are probably people I would depend on for Telkom, there were good people working and some bad people working and the bad people you couldn’t fire for all sorts of reasons – unions, politics and you are almost a manager with your hands tied. In an open capitalistic society where hiring and firing is easy, like in America where they can say this is what I expect from you and if you don’t do it you can start looking for another job. But here you can’t do it. You really are tied and stuck with what you’ve got which is very frustrating.

Was there anything else with your own personal relationship with time maybe, as one thing and the MBSR that you might want to talk about before we close?

Um, I had no idea what we were going to talk about and I can’t say there is anything in particular.

As I said I will email you this and if you want to add.

That is a good idea and I will look basically through what you have picked up and if there is something I want to add I will.

You have my email if there is anything further you might want to say.

You send what you get from this through to me and if I want to add anything I will and you can either make use of it or not. Sure.

Thank you. I am sure you’ve noticed it is mainly women who do the MBSR so it is useful to have a male perspective.

Yes I mentioned this to Janine, if you go on the web it is mainly men who are leading this stuff overseas.

What did you make of that?

In South Africa women tend to go for this kind of thing but if you go to the states and other places a lot of men are involved. There is a qi gong site and it is mainly males who teach it. It is kind of strange. How many female martial arts teachers are there?

Very few. So Barbs is a bit unusual then.

Then you wonder why guys aren’t involved again and maybe South Africa is a bit – South African men are a bit. Speaking on behalf of myself when I volunteered I thought oh my god, I hope these people don’t think I am a moffie or something.

So in ways your masculinity…
Ja, I said to Janine how many other guys are going. Lucky for me in our course

*There was Charl what was his name Charl?*

Yes and there were

*Two, there was Ferdi*

I thought thank God there are another two guys as well. I thought all alone with all these woman, that sounds like a great idea um, I'd like this even better 30 years ago. But because I am normal as far as that is concerned. But it was a concern for me – it was. It probably is an area of concern for most guys is this a girly thing and I'm going to land up here and I am the only guy and what are they going to think? We shouldn't in this day and age have that kind of attitude, but it is there.

*One of the things I am thinking about is when you meditate and you take that time to focus on something like your breath and some of the things you don't attend to float up, um like Barbs calls it your subconscious and I think often men are encouraged not to attend to those aspects of themselves and to push it away and it can be quite difficult for men. It poses a conflict – I am socialised to think I mustn't attend to my feelings that are difficult and in meditation the things that need to be addressed come up.*

I am perhaps different from other people. I don't go with the flow. I will work for a company with a pub and everyone decides, it is a funny thing amongst guys, everyone decides that the beer of choice is Castle. I can remember I will feel nothing for drinking another beer and getting ragged for it. "Why aren't you drinking castle?" I am using a simple little example – you're expected to drink Castle beer the fact that you're going to drink Heineken there is something wrong you. They're drinking Castle and you're drinking Heineken. I am drinking Heineken because I like Heineken. I don't care if you like Castle and I have always been a little like that. I'd be a little naughty at work sometimes – we'd watch rugby and South Africa would be playing Australia and I'd shout for Australia and there I am being naughty now, because I'm just rattling the cage. I even went so far as buying some Foster's larger or pilsner which is expensive to buy and when they scored I'd open one up. But that was really being mischief making, but in reality I have to be honest in my personality, I would do what I want to do in those kinds of situations.

*I am thinking of something while you were giving me the Castle example, you spoke about how mindfulness had assisted with concentration if it helped you concentrate more, if you think about some of the daily things where your concentration seems to be easier for you. Um, what sorts of things would that be?*

It is difficult to pin-point because these things happen every day all day. I think it is more in a long term concentration.
Is it easier to focus on something without being distracted or …?

If I go off the point I am more likely to get back to it.

Is it an awareness and coming back to?

Yes, and awareness and coming back to what I really should be focussed on. Um, but it quite an interesting thing and if you have studied psychology you must have come across it but this whole thing of concentration, we must all have that problem. Your mind wanders all the time.

The mind is highly distractable. It is the nature of the mind.

That is what I’d think. I am not the only one.

Hmmh, I don’t think you’re the only one.

How do you measure it really?

My husband came to say goodbye to me the other day and then he came back. Did he leave his keys here? I said to him you must come to mindfulness with me because I don’t lose my keys. When I am putting my keys in my bags I notice things, when I walk around I notice that that was there, that that was there um he will come he is rushing flat out all the time um then he’ll say: Did you see my paddling bag. I will say I saw it over there because I am here with me, going with me, I am not walking by myself while my mind is like in tomorrow. That is what I have noticed.

That has helped you? It is different from how it was before?

Absolutely. Hugely different.

It is interesting, I can also have – there are things that are different and you don’t necessarily notice them just like that because you are not being pointed. I must actually think about that.

And another thing. In the car. When we drive, we drive on automatic pilot. We don’t think key, ignition, dah da. We just make sure we don’t bump anyone, for the rest and I notice it is the one thing that is easy for me to notice. I am not even in this car, I’m like all over the place and driving is the one thing where I will say where is your breath. Where is your breath and I love that about the breathing because it brings you to now in your body.

It is if you think about it quite dangerous when we drive like that. I have had and maybe it has helped me like that but I can remember driving from one place to another place and getting there and my mind clicked into gear again and I thought well how the hell did I get here? You have driven through the traffic, there have
been no screaming sirens but you made it there. You mind has gone somewhere
and you’re gee whiz at least I didn’t kill anyone on the way. It kinda of happens.
When I drive now I do tend to drive more consciously because most the people in
this country sadly don’t have licenses. You have to drive for yourself and for the
other people. My wife – I will slow down at a green light and she says why are you
slowing down and I am like that green robot I know about but does the person
coming on the other side of the red robot know about that. All day I see people
chasning the red robot.

_There is a saying about not eating the orange tomato that encourages shooting the robot._

I don’t trust robots they are almost for show. I can’t help I live in South Africa.
You have done the MBSR twice, I think you’re probably one of a few people who have done it twice. Can you tell me what your overall experience of doing it was like?

The first one was life changing but it came at a time I really needed it which I think is quite relevant. The second one was nowhere near as life it wasn’t life changing at all. I think I was there for different reasons and the wrong reasons. The second one I didn’t voluntarily do, I was trying to please Shaun.

And what about the first one?

The first one I was desperate for some sort of intervention. I was open to anything. So it is like being a child in a whole new experience, completely and I did everything that was required of me and embraced every little exercise and it was new. It was easier to embrace with that excitement behind it and with that desperation.

What were the new life-changing things it gave you?

Clear mind. Before my mind was completely fuzzy. At one stage I couldn’t string a sentence together. It was literally like clearing the fog. Stillness. So it provided the stillness for the fog to clear. To think rationally, sequentially before I couldn’t do that.

And what about it created the stillness so that your mind could become clear? I am assuming that there was something that you were doing, or sensing or feeling about you in your own life that facilitated that. There is MBSR and K and as they met?

Through the exercises. Maybe I should go back. Let me go back. In absolute desperation I ended up at Mrs Cowley’s centre at St Francis and Shaun has meditated since I have known him, for years and he said come K, I want to introduce you to this and I am I don’t have time for this stuff. I don’t have time to sit. I would rather be running on the beach. If I have time to do anything, I’d not prefer to sit. I prefer to do something active. And then when I went to Mrs Cowley because I was cracking up, I was cracked up – pushed over the edge. There was a programme set out, they’d do reflexology, they’d do aquarobics and itemised on the one evening at the bottom at 5 o’clock and I went in with my pillow to relax and to listen to Mozart and to relax. And only after I left did I realise it was an hour and a half meditation that I had participated in, done a deep meditation and done it obliviously and that was the turning point. Because had I known it was meditation I would have gone in with these preconceived ideas of “What is this about?” and I would rather have gone and done laps in the pool. So then also when I was there Mrs Cowley said: “Stop running.” And I was confused, she said to me “What are you doing this afternoon?” and I said:
“I’m going for a run.” And she said: “Stop running.” That was the beginning and then I did the mindfulness course after that and I was more open to it. And I had a wonderful experience there with the meditation. I think had I not had that I might have somewhere been more sceptical.

So it sounds like a preconception about meditation and one of the things you related to was not having enough time and to rather be active, running or swimming.

And I was ignorant to what meditation is I think. Very ignorant, I’m embarrassed to say. I literally thought it was sitting there going Ommm. I thought I’d rather get going than sit.

Did you think meditation was a bit of a waste of a time?

Yes.

Okay.

So it happened in an unplanned way that I experienced meditation and I am sure that was the key. Some sort of divine intervention.

(Laughs). That you needed at that moment?

Ja. I think everything is relevant, where you are in your life. I have discovered this before and I won’t push mindfulness or meditation on to anyone unless they are looking at it or they hint at it somewhere.

Okay

It falls on deaf ears. People don’t get it. I wouldn’t have got it. I am very aware of that.

So you’re saying there is an element of timing?

Yes like reading a book. You pick up a book and get through the first chapter and you think: This is rubbish and you pick it up later, like Woman who Run with Wolves. I picked it long ago and now eight or nine years later, it is suddenly relevant.

Okay.

I hope this helps you.

Why wouldn’t it?

I don’t know. It might throw a spanner in the works.
We did the MBSR together and when we did it, one of the things I observed about you was a tendency which you have described now, as wanting pace.

Yes.

You are quite fast.

Yes I notice every second which comes from my mom.

Tell me about your relationship with time.

Uw, uw I still haven't got that right.

Talk to me about time in your life and whether there was any difference before MBSR and after MBSR?

More conscious of it and I am more conscious of what I should be doing? I'm more aware. If I have a meeting and I get there ten minutes early, I will get out my diary. So if the meeting is at 08:00 and if I by some fluke, because the traffic hasn't been so bad, I cannot sit in the car with the radio on and just sit and wait.

Okay.

And I cannot sit in the waiting room with a magazine. I get my diary out, I have to go through the messages on my cell-phone. I need to be doing something because I can't just not be doing something with those ten minutes. So I usually time it so I get to a place, two minutes or on the nose. For my classes and lectures, which I know is wrong, I run in morning everyone, get your stuff out, get yourself going. And everyone just looks and that is how it has always been, since I was little. That is all I have ever known.

The waiting seems what?

A waste of time. I don't have time to sit. I need to be doing something.

I have heard you say a quite a couple of times, I don't have time.

Yeah, because I put try and shove too much into a day. That comes from my mom. Don't put off until tomorrow what you can achieve today, so I just slam it all in there, back to back and try and make it happen.

Is it still like that for you?

Yes, I think it is so deeply engrained. But I am conscious of it. I had people around on Saturday and I, when I, they were all coming around at half past 12 and I had to sms them and say terribly sorry. I knew I would get home at half past 12. Please come at
quarter to one because I'd been held up with a tenant. But in that morning I had been to karate, I'd gone to do maintenance at a house with a tenant, I'd gone to do an incoming inspection, I still had to do the shopping for 12:30 meeting and still drive through the roadworks. I mean when I look at it, I'm: “how were you going to get there by 12:30?” and still the person I invited arrived at 12:30 and said she didn’t have anywhere else to go and I said never mind, sit I will make you coffee. And I will buzz around and I said I don’t know why I always do this to myself. What was I thinking? Logistically I know I could not have done this so when everyone arrives I am sitting casually. I am the one buzzing and they’re sitting which is wrong. I recognise it.

What makes it wrong?

It is not healthy.

Oh. Okay.

It is not healthy and other people pick up on that angst energy and it is often a negative energy and not a positive one. I am glad we’re talking this through again.

Okay.

So that I can be more aware.

For a while after the MBSR

Everything was slower. I would say no. I don’t say no to anything or anyone.

At the time it was the exercises, the body scan and meditating and that? Are you finding you are still able to meditate or you know it is useful, but there is life?

Now if I have a gap, I’d rather go for a run. To find that balance. It is almost a little unrealistic to be able to exercise and meditate. Because you want to keep in shape and I enjoy running, it is a form of relaxation but it is not a quietening down which my personality needs. Um, but you need the exercise, so it is either running or meditation, because who, who has the time to take out that much time for themselves. There are some people who do.

And is there a notion in the course to be mindful in daily activities.

That is easier for me for me because of my line of work.

Tell me about that?

That was one thing that wasn’t a wow moment for me. An affirmation for me, it reaffirmed what I do do. I am very aware visually, tactiley – is that a word?
Ja. Do you pay attention a lot?

Creative way. So I am very fortunate in that way. If I was in a different line of work, that is not coming from me, it is coming from training and experience being in a creative field. If I was a left-brained person and an accountant, you know it is inbred. It comes with the job which is a bonus. It was affirmation really and everything else was a wow moment. Though the eating part that was a wow moment.

Oh yes, the cranberry.

Yes, because I don’t eat properly anyway. I eat in the car, I have my breakfast on the run, I have my tea in the car in the morning. I can sit and have breakfast and I won’t sit and have supper, except if someone is with me. If I am on my own I will go and get my diary or the newspaper. Which again, the course and going to Barbara made me realise – why can’t you sit and enjoy your food. Be mindful of, it is only with food that I am, that extreme with. The cranberry was a wow moment.

So if I am understanding you – there are certain things, like with your work when you find you’re being mindful.

Yes and it is mainly hearing, visually and tactiley.

Ok. Sensing.

But not taste. But maybe, maybe it all gets very involved because it is the nose thing, I can’t taste my food like other people can.

Your nose is what?

Blocked. It takes away the taste, so where others will think that tastes nice. I need something intense like blue cheese, gherkin, hectic strong taste. Maybe that is partially why I don’t sit and enjoy food.

So you were saying when you’re waiting you want to keep doing something, to keep up a busyness.

Yes.

And you seemed to think it was partly from being little and being encouraged by mom.

No, Mom is like that. My mother doesn’t sit so I know the source of it. It is just to break the cycle. I am my mom, which is a bit scary because when I look at her I say, Mom, just relax. You know the world isn’t going to stop if you don’t do it now. But I preach but I am exactly the same. But I am aware, she isn’t aware at all.
You have talked about your experience of time as something that shouldn’t be wasted and that should be filled as much as possible. If you think about what is out there in terms of discourses around time and how we should engage with time, what are you aware of what the encouragement is around how people should be with time?

It is specific to groups.

*Say for instance with you and your mom and being busy. What is the world saying about being busy?*

You’re right up there. If my mom and I were still in the dark ages we’d still be doing it, but we just so happen to be meeting society’s demands, but ours’ is inbred, it isn’t being dictated by society. My gran is the same. She grew up in Ngqeleni in Transkei but she grew up in this culture.

*What other things does our culture say about time?*

You go, go, go. Technology has forced the envelope with regard to that. Before it was snail mail. Say it is a lease agreement it would get mailed to you and everything would get to you a week later and now it is emailed and now you get your email on your phone and the person on the other end is smsing, phonning you and asking why haven’t you responded to the email I just sent you and everything is instant. Delayed gratification doesn’t exist anymore. I am seeing more and more with my students. They want instant results, they aren’t willing to work through anything because they don’t have to. Everything is instant. If you want something to eat you open the fridge, you don’t have to grow your own vegetables. You know what I mean. If you want information, people don’t know how to research any more – but students don’t know how to research. You tell them to go to the library, most haven’t been into the library before. They don’t even know how to find the books they need in the library. If they want anything, they go onto the Internet and google it and now they don’t even have to find a computer, they can do it directly on their phone. Now you say to them you need an image of a leaf. They don’t even think anymore to step outside the classroom and go and find a leaf. They google it and I’m why didn’t you look for a leaf and they’re no, because it is on my phone. Everything is instant and they don’t even think. What seems so logical just to walk outside. It is beyond me because the work is superficial. And the whole thing about research, I remember being a student is the process of research actually was more important than the product that you found at the end. Now there is no process, they are going straight for the product and there is no build up. Through the research you’d find other stuff and ooh, how does that relate to other stuff I’m doing. Ooh I didn’t know this. It evolved.

*Is the process perhaps slower?*
Oh much, but it was a process and now there is this instant gratification and kids want it and get it. I am so against technology, I am holding out on getting a blackberry let alone an iphone. But I am sucked into the Internet, I am sucked into Facebook. Oh what is everyone up to? I don’t have time to make a phone call and say Jax how are you and instead pop onto Facebook and see Max is turning one soon. But even though I am talking about the kids getting sucked in … I saw the headlines today Chat rooms are children’s new friends, even though I am aware of it I do it. Even me as an adult gets sucked in and I don’t even like technology.

So you’re saying that facebook relationship is time saving on some level.

It is a masked feeling that it is time saving but it is actually not.

You said you might be interested in how your friend Jax is but you don’t have time to make a phonecall but you’ll pop on to facebook.

By the time I have scrolled down and seen how Jax and Margo are doing I could have just made that one phonecall to Jackie.

It begins as a consideration of time and then there is a curiosity that takes longer.

We’re veering right off the point.

No we’re not, my interest is in relationships with time.

Oh then I must be your best candidate.

You’re saying that in some areas you’re paying a lot of attention to what you’re experiencing in the moment. So maybe let’s shift to what is your experience is of being present- focussed. Has doing the MBSR influenced you and the way you focus on the present because the MBSR suggests that if you focus on the present you’ll be less stressed because you won’t be ruminating on the past or focussing on the future and there is an ease that comes with being in the present? What is your experience?

My experience is if I look at my personality, I do usually work in the present. I don’t look at the future and I don’t look behind. So that part is natural. I am not a worrier you know. Shaun is the worrier. That comes easily.

Doing the MBSR

Made me more aware. The awareness is heightened but it needs practice. To make time for practice without excuses but realistically and logistically, it is not always possible and that is the reality. A big reality in today’s society. We all want to be quiet and still but we’d need to make radical changes in our lifestyle in order to do that. Our lifestyle doesn’t work hand in hand with that and I think we need to be careful not to become more uptight trying to be this quiet being when society is pushing us
completely in a different direction. There need to be bigger changes than just practising mindfulness.

*And what would those changes be?*

It is quite depressing really now that I am thinking about it. I quite like these chats.

*Good.*

It makes me think outside the box a little bit. The practices we are taught are great for the moment in the course but there is an end to the course and we just need to get through these eight weeks and then we can play with our time and be a little more flexible. But the reality is half the time, it is not logistically possible and maybe that is where I am presently. Everything I am saying here is that I don’t practice mindfulness like I should.

*But you’re also telling yourself that if you are always telling yourself to be something different all the time it is stressful.*

Yes. Yes.

*And you’re in your life.*

Yes there is no point getting more worked up. It is about going with the big wheel that turns us.

*What about you enables you to not worry about the future? Tell me your experience of that and of being present?*

I think because I am always so in whatever I’m doing. I will always put in 110% and that forces you to be in it now? My brain capacity doesn’t allow it, I am in the now, I am not going to look ahead. I may have a goal, but I get it done now. I work with the now. I know I will get there but I don’t look there.

*You gave the example of Saturday or Sunday when you had the friends over and by 12:30 you had done a lot of things.*

Yes, now you are meant to feel good about yourself, but I didn’t feel good about myself. I screwed the other two, I was trying to do too much.

*And is that doing too much future planning but not too far?*

No, no, I put too much on my plate. No. It was just stuff that needed to be done. When I’m talking about future planning, my interpretation is different that would be projects or where I see myself. At the moment, I don’t have any projects due to time constraints and I am not making excuses. Logistically it wouldn’t be possible. Um,
and I am just living in the now. Maybe I am in the fortunate position that I can do that, that relates to not being the sole breadwinner. I don’t know and in looking back at the past, there is a little mechanism in my brain, I have a memory like a sieve. I don’t remember much at all, but I relate that to doing a lot in my day. Not taking it in, and not letting it absorb in. It goes in and I don’t know where it goes but I don’t think back to the past at all.

So when you go from here, will you be in the car and when you get to where you’re going will you be there?

Yes.

So you won’t think I should have said this or I wonder why she asked me that.

Sometimes, because I am engaging on a deeper level than with most conversations. So yes most probably I will, more than likely I will. Yeah, this is a good example of how my brain works. I can meet someone in the one classroom. I could have just seen them literally pass them, maybe gone up to them, I am embarrassed to say this, maybe made a cup of tea with them in the staff room and then within a couple of minutes, if I move areas I teach in the one area and it linked to the other area and my brain is weird if I go from the one place to the other and end up making a cup of tea, chat, chat, chat. If that person came over, it is embarrassing because it has happened so many times, I would probably greet them as though I hadn’t see them that day.

What do you make of that, you’re pulling a face?

It is very scary my brain works in areas and I don’t expect to see them in that area. Hi, how you and then they look at me like I am crazy and say I have just seen you. Is that quite a regular thing?

Ja, I find it very scary. The same is with names I could have taught someone for four years and when I see them out of context. I find that very scary –

What that you can’t recognise them or

Their names I can’t remember their names.

But there are studies that that is what happens. You recognise people context specifically. That is what you’re saying.

It is like a geographic categorisation. I associate people with places. I am too in the now. An hour ago is gone, I don’t absorb it. I sound quite psychotic like that. Maybe too much is going on. Very weird, embarrassing.
Is your mind busy for you?

Very busy. Too Busy. But if it wasn't I would feel like I wasn't doing enough.

Now you have gone through quite a thought process about yourself and you seem to have slowed down. What is that like for you?

Now.

Ja.

Just before you said that I thought but I do know how to slow down. But I go to the opposite extreme. I feel like a nutter. I can sit in the garden and watch my chickens for hours and sometimes late at night I can sit in front of the hamster cage and watch it for ever. Then I'll think K you need to go to bed now. And that I find a form of relaxation, watching these little creatures. So then I do not with myself, maybe that is also something to think about. I have to make a conscious effort to sit – actually I can sit by myself and when I do it I enjoy it. But yes, my brain works too fast. It definitely pulsates faster than most, it doesn't make me more intelligent. If anything it makes me more stupid because you can't function at that speed I don't think. It is a very interesting conversation this.

But you do function

Yes

It seems more about how you experience the different speeds.

Ja, but things do lack. I do function at high speed at work but then everyday things like cooking supper I completely forget about and that is sort of isn’t well rounded at all. It is dictated by society. So I don’t know how to think about it differently. Both people need to earn money. (Breathes out) – but it is choices though. We have had this discussion with Shaun, I’m saying I am working I am busy I am constantly running between classes but the time I do have on a Wednesday and a Friday afternoon that it my time with Noah and come hell or high water I won’t, I have cancelled my gym contract because I won’t interfere with that because I feel he is too young to at least he needs me and I need him during that time. It is choices we could live comfortably with me being at home but in a discussion with Shaun we looked at the state of our country. We need to be comfortable, we need to have a nest egg. If we have to get up and leave we can because of the state of the country, we can. Which I suppose is society. You know I think it is unrealistic. We were discussing communes as in communities, not as in one house everyone living in the rural areas and just thinking the logistics of that of not having medical aid, not having insurance and not conforming to all of society’s demands and being like a hippy. And we were thinking what happens when their child has a tumour. The reality is you do need
medical aid. And you need the best medical care because our government doesn’t provide it. So there is society again.

So what you seem to be saying if I link it to the notion of time is that we are making money – there is a time to be making money in life and in the context in which you live it seems like a good idea. Kerry-Lyn I want to back to the beginning and to the first MBSR which you said were life changing.

It is weird there are tears, like a jolt.

Are your eyes tearing or are you feeling tearful?

Feeling tearful. It is amazing it was like switching on a light switch. Very powerful.

So what changed for you?

After that?

What about you changed?

I softened and I think I allowed myself to soften because I took more in. I think you become more internally aware. If you are on the run all the time, you have this great façade and I could be still and by myself. That was bringing back memories. That was like switching on a switch – the biggest thing I found, and you might remember this, tears run, was that I liked myself. It is a bit weird, it is easier to talk about the other stuff. Yes, that was huge. It is schizophrenic going between all this stuff. I remember that was it the last one, or the second last one, that was a big realisation not that I didn’t like myself before, that I was a nice person, that I was a good person. When you touch that place you start doubting yourself. I never believed I was (not a good person) but I doubted I was (a good person) that maybe I am not. Stems from my relationship when you’re constantly fighting and being mean, you start believing that you are becoming that person and then thinking you know what, the core of me is good. I do like myself.

So would you say it returned a

Confidence and a self-love. Because if you don’t have that you can’t have self-love. Ja. So the first MBSR reminded me, it didn’t make me, it reminded me that I do love myself. Like myself. I say that with fondness. I prefer the word like to love, it is my interpretation of the word I suppose. I do. It showed that I can still be excited about the little things. That was refreshing. I surprised myself. Nothing was premeditated. It was completely putting yourself out there. You open yourself up to yourself and to everyone around you. The group, was amazing. Um, how many of us were there 12. If we had had 11 completely differently people would I have had the same experience, to be honest, you are very special you know that, but yes I would have.
And that is because?

It was all about me. So I would have allowed those 11 people to be part of what I was discovering so I do think it would have been the same. Maybe that is being presumptuous, because an energy can shift things, but it was so intense I don’t think it would have mattered. Honestly, it could have been a room of just guys or just girls, foreigners who didn’t speak the same language. I remember in the beginning feeling so selfish because I was giving up this time to do something for me and at the end still feeling it was a very selfish process but in a positive way. The beginning experience of being selfish was negative and it was selfish because it was all about me. It sounds terrible because I don’t usually know about being all about me but in the end it had a positive connotation.

It was all about me but you know what, so what. So it taught be still in a nutshell it taught me to, it renewed my faith in myself. Also it showed me that I can have that childlike excitement that you lose when you get older. Um.

Would you say that that childlike excitement often involves being present focussed?

No. I think I am lucky enough that it comes naturally, depending on stress or pressure. It comes with anything new if I am not too rushed to miss it. If I am aware of it the childlike excitement is still there if I don’t rush through it. It was exciting to have it resurface because I am rushing too much that I miss a lot.

If you talking about rushing in relation to being in the moment. How are those two?

There is no link. Rushing and being in the moment. There is no link, they are polar opposites. They are at war with each other. Complete. You cannot be one with the other. Then it is superficial in any old sense. You might think you but then it is superficial and you are kidding yourself. So more importantly for me, I am very curious as to how in theory and in practice it works but it is within a course context and how do we integrate into our lives that it not only becomes a habit but part of yourself. It is like brushing your teeth. I don’t believe it happens because of forward planning. I believe it is dictated to by society.

Are you saying the pace of society isn’t conducive to being mindful?

Not at all. And logistically and realistically I don’t know how we can change that apart from building a mud hut in the Transkei. Opting out of society which we can’t do because of our infrastructure. We need medical, we need to make money and to make money you get swamped into society’s fast pace. I don’t know where the happy medium is. Everyone says everything is going to crash. There is this big build up and then everything is going to crash and we are going to go back to complete basics. I’m hanging on for this.
Have you read Pesthouse by Jim Crace. What you are describing is a post-apocalyptic crash.

Yes, a technological one. That is the problem. The phones and the laptop. We carry them everywhere.

At the same time Wednesday afternoons and Friday afternoons it is you and Noah.

.... Ja maybe it is about choices because I can validate that because I think it is important for him to move forward in life. It will make him stronger, more confident, more well-rounded child to handle the stresses of life, whereas taking that time out for me. No. Now then would I if I could? Would I do that or go to the gym. I'd probably go to the gym. Shocking, at the words come off my tongue.

It is courageous to be honest.

It is honest.

To go back to

Again it is about what society's dictates that my thighs are too big. Do you know what I mean?

K

No, but do you know what I mean. Why do I need to go to the gym? Because I would like to wear clothes that fit me nicely and not be conscious of my thighs. You learn how to dress when you get older. I am nearing, or I am on the cusp of this great wisdom, you know. I am looking forward to getting old for the first time in my life.

How old are you?

I'm, am I 37 or 38? What am I?

I don't know what year you were born in.

1975

Then you'll be 37 this year.

K you said it is quite easy for you to be in the present.

Hmmm
Do you think there are benefits for your life? This thing that the MBSR encourages, be in the moment, be in the now, be present. Do you think there are benefits? What is it about?

More beneficial to people working with their left brain. It is almost a must. That is why I say for me it is easier but for balance. Says she the balance queen, um it is the left brain need it for brain function.

What happens for left brain people when they are in the present and balance? Can you explain what you mean?

For tactile, smell, visual it would just do them so much more and they wouldn’t be so engrossed with their work. Like the accountant, when he picks up his pen, he feels his pen. To try and explain that to an accountant would be hell, like feel the pen. When putting the pen to the page, feel the pressure on the page you know. Feel the movement in your wrist when you’re writing I do that with my students. It will eventually be part of their lives later on. But I don’t know how you are going to tell that to the chartered accountant or lawyer.

Different courses for different horses.

But again.

Staying with you- your work is conducive for you being present focussed but there is a rushing part of you.

Yes, which is terrible.

Do you notice sometimes when you are rushing, that you are less present-focussed?

Yes, yes, yes, yes definitely.

And do sometimes remind yourself when you are rushing to

Stop and breathe.

Is that what you do?

Yes, stop and breathe. What are you doing? Where are you going? How are you going about it?

And is that useful for you?

Yes that comes from the course. That stop. Yeah. I also use the stop in an argumentative situation which that was context in which it was taught mostly, wasn’t it. Stop. Hear. Listen, Think and then react. I am kinder and not so sharp-tongued.
When you do that stop and find your breath, become aware of yourself in the moment. Are there kinds of words and phrases you use to remind yourself? One of them you say, you have used is: Stop.

Just stop.

5 And what are you doing right now?

And breathe is a big one.

Okay.

Stop. Just breathe. I did a meditation with my students without telling them it was a meditation. I did that one when you are a leaf going down a stream. It was guided meditation and you go into a cave and who do you meet there. And it was very interesting. I said to them afterwards does anyone want to share their experience and a few did and then I asked who they had met in the cave and everyone went tjoepestil and afterwards one girl came to me and said she met her step-mom in the cave and who has passed her away and I asked what feelings went with it and she said positive one. She was shocked and said she would never have thought she would meet her step mom and about three students had very moving experiences. So it is quite exciting doing that work when they don’t know what they are getting themselves into.

Now you said you did a meditation with them and you didn’t tell them what you were doing?

I said it was a visual relaxation exercise which my course lends itself to.

Of course, but what is the tentativeness around meditation?

My experience. My preconceived negative connotation.

So that was quite a big decision for you then if you had a certain scepticism about what meditation could actually offer you, that you went and used the course as a way of bringing relief, but then you did describe yourself as feeling desperate. But still.

I wouldn’t have been so open to it had I not gone to Mrs Cowley.

Ja.

For that relaxation exercise which turned out to be a full-blown meditation. On a very deep level, my whole body was shaking, it is darn long if it is the first time you have meditated. My entire body was, (breathing sound) this sound came out. It was hectic.

So it was quite a profound experience.
It was huge.

So, you were saying you sometimes use the stop and breathe. In other instances how would you know you are present focussed or in the moment?

Um, how would I know?

Ja

Well I usually am because of my work. And it lends itself and I work six or eight hours a day or whatever.

And when you’re at work do you find you sometimes think about what you are going to do when you get home?

No, not at all and I think that is sometimes the problem. Actually not thinking ahead. I am too engrossed in what I am doing with the kids. The students. When I am sitting with someone one-on-one I’m completely, it is like a bubble, it is just us.

I invite you to think of that as a gift, rather than a problem. I said to you that one of the reasons I thought of you as a good interview candidate was my observing how fast-paced you are but it is also true that I also observe that absorption you have with what you’re doing, that engrossment.

I think I am lucky because I absolutely love it. It is at the core of me. I love, love it. And it comes easily to me. If I was in any other profession I wouldn’t have the opportunity and I think the word opportunity is quite valid to build that bubble and interact with the student. Shaun always wanted me to study architecture and I researched it and then I am completely in society’s little mission.

Is there anything else from today you might like to …

Yeah, the only thing from today I might like to emphasise, and it is a question from me is how we take what we have learned and realistically and logistically integrate it into our lives. I think that is hugely valid. We have these tools. We have been given these tools, you know and the want is there, the desire is there but while you rationalise doing that.

Doing what?

Because I think it is taking time for yourself. It does we can say it has an extended good but it is more for yourself. Well it is for me. When I meditate it is for me and yes that calmness and clear thoughts will permeate the rest of my life. But the core of it is with me and how do I validate taking that extended time when there is so much other stuff that needs to be done. Maybe it is just excuses. I don’t know.
Do you ask yourself this often?

Yes I do, how do I do it? I sat down with a pen and paper and thought I teach from then to then. Have to get up. Maybe we should go to bed earlier because we wake up tired. There is always so much to do between seven and then that you don’t get a chance to do in the day. Maybe it is because I am an all-consuming mother. Maybe that is part of the problem.

Is there a problem?

With me being hands on with my own child. I am not blowing my own trumpet because I don’t know if it is a negative or a positive but I do think I do more than most mothers for their children. I am constantly giving to him, of my time, of my energy, my life and my love.

Would you like to be giving something back to yourself?

But I will have time for that later. He is little, he needs me.

It sounds to me you are being with the fact that right now, it is this way.

Ya, don’t get me wrong, later on

When you reach this cusp of wisdom which is just beyond 37

When Noah isn’t so reliant on me, I will be meditating two hours a day and I am just being realistic. Where I am in my life at the moment, I cannot take off an hour, even half-an-hour.

Does that offer you some

Yes. It isn’t necessarily what I want to hear and I don’t feel done out but I know it would have far greater benefit now. I can sit with the fact that you know what, it will come later. It is just a bummer that you have these tools, it is like you have been given tools prematurely. It is like being taught to knit at primary school and only starting later. (Laughs).

But it is so valid. Society (breathes out) that is where the whole thing lies.

Thank you for your time.

I don’t know if I have been any help to you because I just go off on a tangent. It is very interesting engaging in a conversation. Very interesting. I so like it.
What was your overall experience of doing the MBSR?

Jani has been after me for years to do it. Obviously I go and see her and my kids go and see her and obviously she sees my life. You need to do MBSR and I haven’t had time in the last so many years to do it. And this year or late last year, I thought I have to do this. I have to do this for me.

I know I don’t have time, but I have to do something for me. I presumed Janine was recommending it because it would be helpful. I had no expectations of it, but I was really blown away by it. How um, it changed my life. A lot of my life is hectic with my babies and my kids and my husband and people coming and going, but I haven’t had time to practice like I have during the course but I can during the day. Just breathe and just relax.

Our group still meets once a month and what we do is for those who need health, we do a stop once a day for the person and tonglen. So we have formed an MBSR support group and it has been wonderful. I have met such wonderful people.

When you say it blew you away, what about it blew you away?

It was the strangest thing. I came back from the first retreat and after that there was a school camp out and I didn’t stay because I came back with my younger daughter and at the retreat I was sitting with a group of people and they said: “oh you have been on this course”. Dave Schaefer was one of them and he said: “How was it?” And I said: “It feels like I am on drugs” and I don’t take medication, I don’t take sedatives, I don’t take anti-depressants. I feel like someone has given me drugs and he said: “What do you mean?” and I said: “I don’t know, it seems like my busy, busy life it there, at a distance.” You know I am quite happy with my life, buzzing around but everything seemed slowed down for me. Feel physically which blew me away. All my life I have been running, running, running. Rushing, rushing, rushing, except the time I was travelling. Since I have been a mother, all I have done is chase my own tail.

Does the busy rushing have a relationship to time in any way?

I am not sure what you mean.

When you were rushing, you are rushing because of what?

Well because I have so much to do in my day. We have a farm and a kennel for dogs and I have my children and my husband, three staff members who live on the
property and have to be fed. On Monday, I will get a grocery list and then I'll be, oh, we have to buy this and oh, we have to buy that. Oh the horse food has run out, oh the cow food has run out, oh the chicken has run out. So I spend my life running and doing.

And does it sometimes seem like there is not enough time?

Oh ja, all the time.

It can seem endemic. And then when there was slowing down, was time different?

It seemed my mind slowed down. My thoughts were not so, I need to do this, I need to do this. (Sighs). I need to do this today, I need to do this today. There is a very funny Hebrew saying - para para, I don’t know if you know it. Para para means cow by cow. The origin of it is a bull is in a field of cows and a young bull comes to help him and he asks: “How are we going to do all these cows?” and the older bull says “cow by cow” and that is it, you just have to do it cow by cow. And I find myself thinking argh, how am I going to do all this and I finish it in half the time because I plan my day. It slowed my thinking down and it slowed my mind down so that I started a task and finished it, not jumping around from one thing to another. Look it is difficult with small children, there are interruptions. I have regressed now and I am feeling that I have regressed and I am hoping that …

When you say regressed what do you mean?

I have been in more of a state of panic again than I was in the month after the course. Ok. I know I have caused it myself by having a batch of puppies. It is all my own doing. That it what I have to do, plan my life better because I overfill it. But ja, I felt after the course, immediately after it and after the 5th week, my mind had, I felt like I was taking something.

To slow it down and do things more on a cow by cow basis.

Ja.

If you think back to the MBSR and the notion of being present focussed, how did that shape up in your life?

During the course very well and after the course, not so well. I really believe it is because I am not doing any of the practices. I find the mindful movement very useful for being in the present, being in the now. And I don’t do enough of it. The tai chi is lovely. You can’t think about anything other than what you’re doing. Um and I am not making time for it. It slows me down, I find mentally it slows me down, doing that mindful movement. More so than doing the meditation. Maybe it is an individual thing, maybe some people prefer the meditation.
That is what you’re saying: for you being in the moment is more achievable in the mindful movement.

And Barbara helped me with that, you do some movement before you meditate. It also helps. I rushed in and my mind was all over the place. Logically I know this is what I need to do, but it is the doing it.

Ja sure, and in a sense there is the rest of your life to do it in. There is no rush. It sounds like you have identified the benefits of it and the integration of it into the rest of your life is a process. It is a process.

It is a process. My husband saw the benefits of it. (Sighs). I am a really great mother to babies, but I am not a great mother to children. I, hmh, they hmh …

How do you want them to be?

I don’t want them to be any different, I just don’t deal with them. I love them dearly. Any opportunity to kiss and cuddle them I do. But I find them enormously frustrating. Yesterday was one of those days and they just drive me up the wall. There is not five minutes when somebody is not asking for something.

You want them to be less demanding?

It is not them, it is me.

Yeah but if they were less demanding. Laughs.

I know but I can’t. It is the nature of the beast. It is the younger one. She is such a fighter. Second child. Premature child and they tend to be more feisty.

Yeah, I had 35 weeks and 36 weeks.

Did you? And temperament?

Ruthie, who has just turned 21 was born at 35 weeks. Before she was born she was like a feather in my tummy. Whereas the older one, I was very surprised she was a girl because she is very driven. She was very present in my tummy. I could feel her. Ruthie was by nature, she treads softly on the world.

And is she still like that?

Although she treads lightly, there is a firm inner core that is immovable. She is different. Whereas Tyler, he seemed purposeful and he is purposeful. … He is 17 and needs things, usually possessions to feel cool. But Maran the first born, she is still boss of us all. Ja, because Brian and I were quite young and she does
Rule the roost

In quite a substantial way. Which is quite good for her. She hasn’t lived here for seven years.

Apparently where you are born. Do you find you treated your children differently? My husband and I have an experience with our older brothers. We both have much older brothers who had terrible relationships with their fathers. We are both the youngest and we got on with our fathers. But both our older brothers are so difficult. People say that birth position really defines who you are.

Oh ja

Parents make all their mistakes with their first child.

But they all give their first borns all the attention. I did an honours degree some while ago and I did my thesis on the Impact of Motherhood on Career High Flyers. I wanted to be a career high flyer.

I was until it crashed.

And so I looked also at birth order.

And?

There is quite a lot of theory out there about how birth order impacts your way in the world. They get their parent’s undivided attention and encouragement and their parents’ aspirations which depending on the nature of the parent can be pushing. And they work out what they need to do to get the smiles and the nods and they’re oriented in that respect. And the first born might be told they’re boss of the littles and so it becomes easy for them to be assertive. When you’re three and someone is one. That is quite a big difference.

You have quite big gaps between your children

So do you

It is four-and-a-half years. We wanted it to be smaller.

Oh. What did you say are the ages?

3 and 8.

Maran was born in 1987 and Ruth in 1991. I read Marina Petropolus. She encouraged a three year gap. Brian wasn’t too enamoured with having a second child and I was negotiating a second child. Plus we weren’t married at the time.
Ja but you got married and lived happily ever after. Thankfully. I think it is so much easier for children if parents stay together and like each other.

Yes, what they say is the greatest gift a man can give his children is to love their mother.

And my parents didn’t have a great marriage and I remember my mother saying to my youngest brother “you nearly caused a divorce in this family”. He was very naughty, I think he has passed it onto my youngest child. And you know how scary that is for kids to hear. And my mom moaned about my dad all his life and when he died, um, I was pregnant with the second child and I think that was partly the problem.

The problem that you became ill … before beginning the recording O described the illness that arose in her second child being delivered prematurely by an emergency caesar.

My mother doesn’t drive.

Mine doesn’t either.

No, she used to, she developed a detached retina. Now you can’t even take her to the shopping centre and leave her there.

Aarh. Where does she live?

In a townhouse complex in Abbotsford with my younger brother. She moaned like a stuck pig about my dad when he was alive and then we he died we were supposed to feel sorry for her, but I didn’t. … then I realised how much of her behaviour he had protected us from. Shew. I don’t know if you had that when your mom died, that you realised. I realised my mother is a pain in the backside. Five times in one week, she phones me. I need to go here, I need to go th\_ere. R (her husband) one day said to me: O, you’re not working so you can look after the children, not so that you can be your mother’s chauffeur. Your brothers have to do something too.

That was very useful I imagine, thank you R, because then I suspect it was easier for you to say …

My mother would say you rush around all the time and … and this all happened … luckily I had started to see Janine by then and she was on to me and a week after my dad died, my older brother, my older brother, he attacked me. Obviously, not physically. He was so ugly that I didn’t sleep for two weeks, I cried, for two weeks I cried. I thought I had to not spend time with them, it was too stressful and all that contributed to the early birth.
I should imagine.

Anyway, anyway, it was stressful. And recently I sent him to Janine because he was struggling with skin. Are you sure it is not stress and he said I don’t know. You know he is a professor and he thinks he knows? Laughs

5 Who is your brother?

RE. Do you know him?

Yes I do and I know your other brother. What is his name?

J. Do you know him?

I know him. He used to be friends with the Rs.

10 Do you know the Rs?

M and I had children together. We used to both live in Mthata and we were at varsity together. We not doing interview too much.

I have gone off the topic.

If my heart tells me to do something, I do. You were my heart’s choice and I follow that. This is so nice.

Okay.

Tell me about busyness and rushing in your life?

What about it? What do you want to know? What my day consists of?

You say you still feel in a rush often and in the MBSR there was a sense of slowing down and keeping busyness at a distance?

… that urgency

And I am hearing also that you’re saying that the practice helps keep that distance.

Oh yes. I know that I am doing a disservice by not doing the practice. I mean Wednesday is always my best day. Firstly because I do meditation and when I fetch my children, we ride. We ride. I saddle up the mad horse and the sweet horse. The little one calls it the sweet horse. They ride the sweet horse, they take turns and I ride the mad horse and then I put the mad horse away and then I do lessons with them. I am not qualified to do it. My older daughter went to lessons somewhere and she fell off and she didn’t want to go back so I am doing lessons. And it is lovely, it is time with them. Now we have done something very stupid. (Sighs). This litter of
puppies we have had has taken lots of time. This little girl I have bred, she is five years old and she is, we have looked for the ideal male for her for five years and we found one in Port Edward and we did the mating and she came back and they are the best puppies I have ever seen and I am not .. I thought that from the beginning and I thought I was being subjective. Then this weekend the owner of the male came to choose his puppy and my friend came from Durban to help me choose mine and to help me choose his. And she sat there, and we brought in the five to choose from. There were 12 puppies in total and these were the best ones, but these were the best ones. So we brought them in in this dreadful weather and had them next to the fire and we held them and we played with them. And she said: “I am so glad that it isn’t me who has to choose between these puppies because I wouldn’t know what to do.” That confirmed for me what I thought about these puppies because it is so difficult. So I am keeping the one male, I fell in love with him the minute he was born. He is a liver nosed boy and he is kind and he is gentle and if I am walking around the garden he is with me and he comes running to me and looks at me adoringly. He is my dog, he has been from the beginning. And my husband is allowing my daughter to keep one too, so I have double trouble. Double work, double training in the doggy department.

Why was I telling you this?

You said it was a silly thing you’d done and it was related to time.

Ja, so now we have two puppies and although the one is my daughter’s I will have to do it.

So the vortex of your day seemed to be a little bit distant in the eight weeks of the MBSR?

Especially the second half and immediately after.

And now the vortex is back?

The vortex is back. (Laughs). And now I am going to ask you a question? Do you think it is my own doing – not my own feelings but the vortex? Do you think that I am over-filling my life, that I am not thinking enough? I don’t know.

Um. One thing I am hearing is that you can be quite hard on yourself.

(Laughs). We were talking about that.

And if you wanted to have a date with the cushion what would happen to the rest of the stuff if you did that?
It would wait. Except for the children. I cannot do it when the children are there, which means I have to do it in the morning when the children aren’t there. Or I have to do it when they have gone to bed which is the time for R and me.

Ja. Ok so how was it possible that you created the space to do the course?

I took time away from R. I did, I took away from R. But he supported me.

He saw the advantage.

He supported me. He would say: “Have you done your meditation today. Are you going to do it?” I would really love him to do it with me. Maybe that is what I need to say to him: “I’d really love it if you do it with me? He just looks me and he raises his eyebrows. I mean he is an attorney and as my friend said who met him for the first time, we were on our first or second date and we bumped into her and she said: “So R, what do you do?” and he said: “I am an attorney”, and she said: “Oh for goodness sake, O” because you know both of my brothers were attorneys. “Well keeping it in the family or what” He is totally different to my brothers. He is just R, but he is an attorney and this kind of stuff is airey fairy to him.

Then he does go on Sundays to church and he takes the girls. I can ride my horse and commune with God from the back of my horse. And that is um, that is my, ja. I, I enjoyed going to church, we had a wonderful minister and he left. He always had wonderful messages and always involved your life. He would talk about, he would start the sermon and talk about the drought and how water resources are dwindling and how we need to take care of our water resources. Anyway, and then he steers it towards something in the bible and I’d always come out of there enriched. Another minister took over and he just pissed me off and I thought I am not coming back until he goes. For me it is a private thing and it is important for me that my children have spiritual development because I think it is as important as physical. And you must have read Man’s Search for Meaning?

No, not from cover to cover.

Haven’t you! There is a lot in there I don’t understand because it is very technical. The gist of it is that in times of great strife and difficulty in your life, the people who can overcome that are the people are that have religious belief of whatever kind, whatever kind it may be. Whether it is Buddhism or Hinduism.

Or just being mindful?

Just some connection to a higher being, because we are not always going to be here for our kids but we need to give them some tools, you know to survive without us. And I think spirituality is one of the ways we can help them. Anyway that is my little six cents. (Laughs).
I am enjoying this by the way. You asked me if there are things I think you’re doing that makes it seem chaotic?

No, am I overfilling my life with things that (sighs) I often think that if I sat down and planned my life, I um, and I said okay this is what I have to do this week, this is what I have to buy today and I did it in one day and then the rest of my week is free. But I can’t seem to find the time to do that. I don’t know, it could be that my mind it all over the place. As you say, I am hard on myself?

Two young kids. I will give you an example of a day for me. Tyler wanted medication for his skin that we got from Janine, he was on the 10mg and he wanted the 20 mg and so I said then we are going to go back to her. I am not just going to ask her for a script. So we go to Janine. On Saturday he said his hip is sore. When my mom got sick in 2002, his hip got sore. So now his hip is sore. So we go to Janine and I say to him talk to Janine about your hip and he does and she says take him for an xray. So I’m sitting there waiting for the xray and I think: “hmh it is so seldom that my day is anything other than what I know it will be. And that it is. When you have two small children and animals and they part of what you’re doing it does become, and you live out of town, there is a lot of possibility for it to go in a direction you didn’t anticipate.

Yes and that is the difficulty I have with my mom, she will say, or, I say I should spend more time with her and I don’t have the time. I’d like to invite her here but I don’t want to set a day a week because I might have to say, oh mom, I forgot this or we have to do that.

It seems to me you might be asking the question: Am I filling my life too much because that is the sense you have of your life? Whether you invite it or it happens in spite of.

And we don’t see friends. Ja, we don’t see friends because things just seem to change and I know that, I don’t know who wrote that book Who moved my Cheese? but one of the things my mother is terrible with is change and I mean if someone arrived on our doorstep to visit my mom would have a fit. (Phone buzzes – it is one of my puppy owners. Um …)

Your mom would have a fit.

But I love to have to visitors. People will phone and R will say come for lunch or I will say come for lunch, I don’t know what we’re having but come for lunch. I love to cook and I love to feed people and I love to eat. It is one of the problems. So life is too short to eat bad food and drink bad coffee. Don’t you think?

Yes, and bad wine.
Yes, I like to have people but I don’t want to be in a situation when I say to people come to supper in two weeks’ time when I don’t know what is going to happen in two weeks’ time. I am always pushing people away and putting them off. Not pushing them away. I have a dear friend K who I adore. She is such an inspiring woman and we have so much in common, she also breastfed her child for three and a half years. I haven’t seen her for four weeks. I just haven’t had time. You know you are yourself with your friends.

So you took 8 weeks out to do the MBSR and it had a really good impact on your life. You said Janine was on me – which is quite an interesting statement.

Well I went there quite a lot and every time it was stress related issues. I didn’t know

And what I am hearing in this conversation is O finding out if she could do things differently, more efficiently

How clever are you?

And

I did a logistics qualification. Is there a quicker, faster…

Ja, and you’re moving yourself as a bit of a package, when your soul is saying woo hoo, woo hoo feed and it seems you might be saying to have my time cut out too structuredly when already it is under pressure

Monday is the only day I take the children to school, R has a rotary meeting and on that day I fetch the stock feed.

So Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday

R takes them and I start fetching at 12:00 and then on Friday L goes to my mom-in-law. ?? Has to be fed and then .. you what it is like. On a Tuesday, E goes to swimming and then school. Tuesday they go to drama and when they go to go drama, I take two dogs to the beach, or three dogs or four dogs, and then I come back and we have supper. On Wednesday, I fetch at 12 and at 1 and then come home and we have a rest.

Where is home?

On a farm in Dorchester Heights. It is closer than Gonubie. If you go to Dorchester Heights and you go over that causeway.

Are you near the van Wielie’s

Ja, you go past the Van Wielie’s.
Then the cattle need to be dipped and injected and then the farrier needs to come.

Who do you use?

Anton

Bless his soul.

Do you ride?

My daughter has a horse at Cavalo who a person called Marieki is leasing.

I don’t do that kind of riding. I do endurance riding which I love. I don’t do it now and I might do again when the kids are bigger.

Ruth just loves Brook. She has just had her 21st and on top of her guest list was Brook and I thought about it. Could we box him and bring him here and I didn’t know how our German Shepherd would respond and I thought two scared animals who we love wouldn’t be a good idea.

No. So it is the backwards and forwards and then when someone gets sick, it is all screwed up. Yes who was it yesterday, my 11 year old male Ridgeback decided to leap off the deck to chase something and he is hanging upside down. He is screeching and all the other dogs attack him. He is hanging upside down and the other dogs are trying to kill him and poor L has to try and save him. Now, I came home and I thought oh god, I have to take him to the vet now. And I look at him and there is no blood and he can walk. And I think: “I am not going to take you to the vet. He is 11 years old and what am I going to do? He is walking and I will give him some Rimadel. You know I exaggerate things in my mind. When she phoned me I though aoohh you, agh, and that is what I found during the MBSR, I didn’t react like that. It was through this haze. I would go, oh,

Noticing?

Ja, but the thing I can see is that I still, even though I am panicking more, I am noticing and saying oh, you’re panicking. Girl, why are you doing that? Judging but also noticing.

Yes, you’re noticing.

Hopefully I will start to incorporate that into my practice soon. You know I’d love for my husband to do mindful movement and it is going to be so difficult for him.

Why will it be difficult for him?
You know he likes to run and more controlled movement and he’d struggle. I struggle if I haven’t done it for a while. I struggle and I do it for two weeks and then I think this is so easy.

*When you practice is the practice likely more likely to be mindful movement.*

I benefit from it more.

*In terms of this research one of the things I am hearing from you is that keeping up the practice is keeping up the benefits in your life?*

Yes it is. For me it is the key to it. I don’t know who said the more you practice the better you get.

*The luckier*

Yes that was Gary Player. In this case it is the better you get, the more you do the mindful movement the better you get and I know that.

*Do you know this thing about neural pathways?*

When you say I am doing this now?

*Our experience of our lives whether it is stress or calm, burns neural pathways and often the message goes along the neural pathway before we register. And we often tend to have the assumption that we have the thought and then we feel, whether it is an emotion or a sensation but because of the fact that we have all these millions of neurons that have memory we often have the sensation before we have the thought or the emotional response, so in doing a practice whether it is doing the mindful movement or saying come back breath, stop you burn new neural pathways. And that is why you can go on a course and think this is amazing, this is going to change my life and what started noticing was that there was a new neural pathway which was becoming a default but that needs to be, reinforced, reinforced because the stress response was the neural pathway. So it is like, um, why the practice continuing burns new neural pathways.*

We talk amongst ourselves. One of the girls on our course’s other half is doing this course and she is doing the practice.

*Marlon? Is he a new boyfriend?*

Ag, I don’t know.

*He was eye candy at the retreat to be sure. It was between him and old Ed.*

Old Ed?
Remember at the retreat you attended Ed, the old minister?

Oh so it was between old Ed and Marlon. New boyfriend – well they have been going out since the beginning of the course. They were living together. She said, um that she was benefitting more because she was get all the practices with him and she was much better than when she was at the course.

Takes phone call from Johan and apologises for not answering earlier. Says she has been in a meeting. Can I phone you in five minutes.

He is the father of my litter. Third time he has phone me. Oh God.

.... I have rules about who takes my dogs.

I am having an emotional response. I don't know if I will do this again, it is so emotionally draining. The person whose dog’s leg is broken.

Alarm goes.

There is your alarm.

It has been good talking.

I am sorry, you need to focus me.

(My heart found connection – we had so many stories in common – the premature babies, the commitment to breast feeding, the dog’s euthanased just after male elders had died, where our female elders lived, the interest in horses and MBSR and in O I saw myself when my children were younger, when it seemed impossible to think about time differently. )
Interview 6 – NT

*What was your overall experience of doing the MBSR?*

I did it in 2010. At the time I was very stressed and um, I felt very pressured at work and one of my children wasn’t doing well at school.

I can’t remember who told me about it, but anyway um, I found it really good in terms of relaxation and taking a breather, because I find I am always rushed. I noticed yesterday even though I wasn’t working I had to consciously tell my body to relax. Now I take a bath instead of a shower so it slowed me down but in a good way.

*So one of the things I notice about what you say about yourself is an inclination to rush?*

Yes.

*And what creates that inclination?*

I suppose it is because I have a lot on my plate. I have to make sure the kids get to where they need to be on time. I have to be on time and I am breastfeeding so I need to produce enough milk for the baby and at work it is highly pressured and when I am at work I have to focus fully on work.

*Okay*

But mainly I don’t have good time management skills. I know if I wake up an hour earlier everything would fall into place, but I don’t.

*But it sounds like you’re quite pressured and perhaps you need your sleep.*

Absolutely. I wake up every day and I am exhausted. I think it can’t be seven o’clock and I am tired already.

*Ok, tell me a bit about your work.*

I work at Frere and Cecila Makiwane and I am a doctor and I am specialising in paediatrics, so I have finished my specialisation time which is four years but I haven’t had time to write the exams.

*Ok*

So if I write my exams next year I will be a specialist. So at the moment I work with children. On weekends I do a call for the labour ward and the preterm babies for ICU.
and general wards. So on the weekends I am everywhere and during the weekend I do the HIV/Aids clinic full time Monday to Friday.

*How many days a week do you work?*

Every day Monday to Friday and then some nights and some weekends. So I only work one weekend day and two week nights over a month.

*That sounds like a lot to time that goes to work?*

It is a lot. It is four calls a month but I have come from a point when I was doing eight calls a month, so this is heaven. We do get paid for overtime which is good because our salaries in government are not very good.

*It is a calling.*

Ya, it is a calling. I used to be a GP in Johannesburg and I earned a lot of money. I had no children. I had just got married but I found I was very bored and I felt, I didn’t feel very useful because a lot of GP patients are not really sick. They have more emotional and psychological, social problems. The very sick ones go to hospital if they have medical aid. Now that I am doing the work that I am doing ...(exhalation of satisfaction) and all my friends are in private practice they are like why are you still there and I’m like I am fine here.

*You said the work you are doing is in me and you had quite a satisfied expression on your face. If you were to put words to that hmmh what would they be?*

It is rewarding. I love kids, I have always loved kids. When I was growing up I took care of every child in the neighbourhood. The people who come here don’t have much and they’re poor. This is all they have. They don’t have many options. What I am finding at the HIV clinic it is very rewarding. It is not nice for the children who have HIV but it is better now that they have ARVs. I am also good at the psychosocial aspect and there is a lot of that around HIV because a lot of the mothers have passed away and the grannies, some of them can’t even access the grants – social work which is not part of the job. I can’t just be a doctor and focus on the medicine because if you don’t try and resolve their psychosocial issues, they actually fail on the medicine. So you have to resolve that for the medication to work.

Ja I feel very fulfilled, people ask me – I did a talk at my son’s school the other day and they were asking, don’t you feel bad when a baby dies. I actually don’t, also with the experience I have been working for so long, actually if a baby dies on my call, I would have done everything to save that baby. Um, I don’t feel sad, it is that …

*I have cold shivers listening to the wisdom and depth of the context we work in where if there is a death, knowing that you have the intent to make sure you have*
done all that you can, and that is enough. You said the MBSR helped you relax because you were feeling stressed. What else did the MBSR offer you?

It offered time for me because I found I am always doing for other people. There were times I used to go movies on my own, go for walks on the beach on my own. But I found because I am so stretched, the time that I have I want to be with the kids because there is lots of time when I am not with the children. I am not doing it which is not good.

When you say “I’m not doing it” what is it you’re not doing?

The meditation, yeah I used to listen to the CDs for an hour every day before I go to bed but that was before I had the baby.

How old is the baby?

He has just turned 1. And he takes up all my time. He has now learnt. He will only sleep when I am sleeping. As soon as I get out of bed, he is awake and I put him to the breast. He has one or two feeds throughout the night. But during the day when I am up, he is up. (Laughs).

The relaxation and spending time with myself and realising, I think I am a bit of a control freak and I realise I can’t control everything.

Are you saying that doing the MBSR made you see how control is in your life and that there are other ways of seeing it?

Yes.

I will come back to control issue. But also realising it doesn’t take much, you know too, to settle me or ground me. Like small little things like going out – I live in a complex and there is a garden in the middle of the complex and a fountain, now I walk out for five minutes – with the baby on your hip. I never used to do this before I did the MBSR, I look up in the sky and I just see these stars. I am sure they have always been there but also standing in the sun and noticing it. I have learned to appreciate the small things and one of the things I have learned is not to get involved in road rage. I found there are so many people who have road rage.

Do you have road rage or do you stay uninvolved?

No I don’t have it but I’d respond to it. Now I just look at them and think: oh, shame, they must be having it hard. Yesterday I went to pick up my child, he is doing extra maths lessons in Cambridge and I didn’t realise, I had parked and I was sitting waiting in the car, and I didn’t realise it was in somebody’s driveway because it wasn’t very clear and then I hear this banging on the passenger window and it was
this man who started swearing at me. “Can’t you see you’re in my driveway, what is wrong with you.” I just looked at him and thought he is angry, he has issues. It is nothing to do with me. It really taught me to relax and not to take things personally. Coming to the control issue, I am very controlling around my children and I have learned to relax and allow them to do their own thing. Of course within reason. And they are not very clever.

Tell me about them. How old are they? There is the one year old …

There is a 10 year old turning 11, and an 11 year old turning 13. Grade 7, Grade 5 and the baby.

They are intelligent children but they don’t like school work. They really don’t. Now when it came there tests and spelling tests, I wouldn’t be happy with anything under 100%, but now I have actually learned to relax a bit. Of course I have to make sure they have done their homework. But they are not as academic as I was at their age. When I look at the broader picture, I was never interested in sports. All I did was read. I started reading at the age of four. I was always picking up something and reading, but they are not like that and I have learned to accept that now.

If you think of the MBSR was the focus on the moment, being in the present quite clear in what they wanted to convey? Did you hear that often?

I heard that often but I am not doing it.

Interviewee had to resuscitate a baby and so we rescheduled.

Second interview took place on 29 June 2012

I have been able to go to that place in my life which I hadn’t wanted to face. Especially the death of my husband. I knew for a long time he was going to die, for more than a year, he was stage 4 and we knew it was going to happen. It was horrible, but no so horrible. It was expected but he was so sick, it was horrible I would have preferred him to die before. It was so horrible at the end but it was what happened after that was so hurtful and it was expected. And I decided to shut that part of me and that is when I decided to move from J’burg and come here. I could always feel I am not myself but anyway, I think I have healed that part of myself.

Good. When we met at your offices and we were looking at some of the influences of doing the MBSR and you spoke about going out into the garden and looking at the stars. I know it is about three weeks ago. Um, to pick up that conversation. Let us a pick it up as though we’re first starting. What was doing the MBSR like for you?

It was very good. I am this kind of person who has been doing, doing without sitting back and reflecting on being me and um. I tend to procrastinate a lot and everything I
do, I tend to do it under pressure because I have left it too long. And since I have
done that (the MBSR) I have relaxed, I have really relaxed. But I still I rush, but now I
am conscious. Every morning I am rushing the kids are late for school, is ... I always
read so many books, I will be reading five books at the same time. I was reading in
the one and it said even if you’re late. It is not good to be late, but if you are late,
don’t rush. It was saying you might be rushing and you can’t be late and you might
be cursing yourself that you can’t find your car keys and that is me. Every morning I
forget where I put the car keys, and I look for the car keys and then this writer was
saying, you might be looking for these car keys and cursing yourself that you might
be running late and maybe God is saving you from a car accident and that extra five
minutes, maybe you would have met up with danger. This is a perfect time to do it,
but my CD player part of it is not working, so I can’t listen to those CDs but I still do it
in my mind. I will sit in the bath. The bath I’d never use, I’d go into the shower for five
minutes and come out.

Why would you shower as opposed to bath?

It is quicker.

So there was a very evident sense of rush?

Yes, it is almost two years since I did it and I have become more relaxed and even
around my kids. I was very harsh and I am so proud of myself, especially this year I
haven’t been hard on them. My kids are very lazy with school work, with everything
actually. I could just never understand how relaxed they are about school. They don’t
even seem to see that it is important that they apply themselves. Every time at the
end of the term the report comes out and they’d be so scared because I’d shout at
them and this year I haven’t. My older son has ADD and he is struggling at school
but he is intelligent and he dodges and lies and he says no the teacher says I don’t
have to do that and he’ll say we did it in class. And this time round I have actually
decided let me not shout at this boy. Let me support him in other ways, because
every time I shout at him, the worse it becomes. I really think the course has had a
lot to do with that. Ja and what I said last time just to appreciate nature, and feel the
sun. I never used to – I didn’t notice the difference, I was so dead to what was going
on.

You said you notice things.

Yes and appreciate things, I took my friend out and as I was taking her out at 11 o
clock, I looked up to the stars. I never used to do those things. So it has really been
good.
My focus is around how we become more present-focused. When you were doing the MBSR the notion of being in the moment, being present. Did that come through clearly the teaching or orientation of the course?

It came through very clearly. It was difficult for me.

What was difficult about it?

I am the kind of person, in my rush I keep thinking ahead what do I have to do. I wasn’t actually in the moment. But that has really worked for me. It didn’t come easily for me. And listening to the breath, that isn’t something I did. And being me with. Ja. I am the kind of person who is always doing for other people. There was a time when I really enjoyed being with me, before I got married. I actually enjoyed going to the movies by myself. I found now that I always tend to do for others and I found that hour in the morning. It was only a morning but it was all about me.

And you have spoken about the sun on you in your bedroom, bathing. What would say about those activities in relation to future, present. Where are they more?

They are in the present. I am feeling it and enjoying it now. I am still struggling with the past and letting go. I struggle a lot with the past.

When did your husband die?

2005. It has been seven years. I don’t know if you know 7 year cycles. I really feel it this year of letting go for me. And it is something I have consciously trying to do and it wasn’t happening.

Are you saying it is a bit easier now?

It is much easier now. And I don’t know if I told you that we are moving to Durban.

Oh, when are you moving?

At the end of the year. I wasn’t sure of it but now I am. My son has been accepted into Kearsney College. It was my husband and his uncles’ old school and he got an old boy’s scholarship which is great and um. At first I thought there is no need for me to move, I thought it is time to let these kids be independent. My husband is from Durban.

Hmmh, T is a Zulu surname.

Ja. His whole family is there, but I was very worried about it because there has been a lot of tension between me and them. I thought I was moving for me to be closer to him. But I realised he still does need me. Moving to Durban will be good for my career. Because there is more support for me writing my exams. Next year is a very
big year for me because I will be writing my paediatrics. There is actually a programme for people writing exams that doesn’t exist here.

And I feel for me it is like time to move, time to go somewhere else. Because for me I came to East London to healing. It was about being closer to home and moving away from Johannesburg the friends. That life, the friends, that house and I do sense that it is time to go.

My son will still be at boarding school. But he can come home on weekends if he wants to. He has options, he doesn’t have to'

So where do you think you’ll live?

Hillcrest. Do you know Durban?

Yes my father grew up in Pietermaritzburg and I matriculated in Durban.

Where?

At Northlands.

Is that in the Durban North area?

Yeah.

I was at medical school there and that is where I met my husband. It seems that Hillcrest Shongweni area is the area for me. Before we moved here my kids were going to go to a Waldorf school and I always wanted that for my kids but it is not here. And I bought this magazine and it talked about the best schools in the country and Hillcrest Waldorf was one of them. I no intention of moving at the time and I thought this will be the right fit for the second born and when I decided to go to Durban I knew and Kearsney is right there, you know. It is all right there.

Oh, is Kearsney in Hillcrest?

Yes it is in Botha’s Hill. 2km from Hillcrest and the Waldorf School is 4km from Kearsney. And the other thing about the Waldorf School is there is a baby class and my second born and the baby will go there.

Where will you work?

I have an option of working in Durban, King Edward or Pietermaritzburg. And I think I’m not actually sure. I want to leave full time work and focus on my baby. I think for me I have an opportunity to do things differently. I don’t want to be such a busy Mum. Such an away Mum for this baby.
Do you think doing the MBSR which invites us to be in the world in ways that work for us more, has had any influence in your decision?

I hadn’t actually thought about that but I am sure it has. I am sure it has because it has had a big impact on me, in just doing. I have become more reflective. I have slowed down more and I am being more. I am sure it has had that impact, although I haven’t thought consciously.

And the nice thing about being a doctor is you are not limited. I have an option of just doing sessions in a private hospital which very few sessions in a month which actually amount to the same I am getting in full time government service. And there is a private hospital that just opened in Hillcrest.

Yoh.

So for me it seems as if everything is there. So it really seems to be pointing there. And I have never had that. East London has been great because Frere Hospital is quite close and Cecilia Makiwane is about 30km but it is no-where near the distances I would do in Joburg. I have never had it that everything feels like it is there. And the shops, I don’t have to go to Gateway or Pavilion everything you need is in Hillcrest in terms of shopping.

Before we started the formal part of the interview you spoke more about being open to your intuitive side. Do you think there is a relationship between that sense of the universe working with you and that openness?

There is a lot of that.

That interconnection.

You know the amazing thing is that I have always known that, since I was a child, at about 3, the best times of my life were lying on grass and looking at the sun. My mother used to shout at me all the time – “you are going to go blind you are not supposed to look at the sun”. Those were the best times for me, more than playing with other kids. I had this special spot at home, where the grass was really long and I loved lying there. I felt very connected and I couldn’t put a finger on it then, but I felt very connected. And then my home was not a very happy home, my father drank a lot, he was actually an alcoholic and I lost a lot of that. And when I went to medical school, I was only 16 when I went to medical school and I actually rediscovered that because there was no pressure from home and what was happening there. I was on my own again. Those years in Durban were really the best years of my life. I was very in tune. I was telling someone who came to visit me on Monday that you know, I always knew what was going to come out in the exam. I know, I just know. I wouldn’t dream, I don’t have dreams. I just know. And I just read that and it comes out. It was the best time of my life, I was very in tune with everything.
What made it possible that you could be there at 16? Did you jump a standard or two?

No I turned 17 later in the year. I was two years ahead. I started grade 1 at four turning five, instead of six turning seven. So I started two years early. If my father had agreed I jump I would have started varsity at 14 because there were two classes when the teachers wanted me to jump – standard 1 and standard 5. But my dad refused. That was a good decision. Even at 16 I was too young. Thank God I met my husband that year because I sort of became part of his family. I wonder if I hadn’t met him how my life would have turned out because I was very impressionable. But it worked out well.

That is like your 12 year old starting medical school in four year’s time.

I know. I look at the kids at Merrifield doing Grade 10, that is exactly the age, I have a friend whose daughter is 16 and the other day, this lady I was speaking about who came here on Monday, she brought her daughter who is 19 and she is a child. She is really a baby.

Does that give you a new appreciation for your achievements when you were that young?

It does, it really does. It is actually awesome.

Now going back, you said you were busy and more in doing mode than being mode, um if you could give me an idea that I’m present focussed when I do A,B,C? What are the kinds of moments when you bring your self back to the present or you are aware that you have present focusing doing this or at this time?

I think a lot with the baby. With the baby you can’t be thinking about the future. The baby is there and if he wants whatever you’re doing it, you’re doing it now. I have always been very present around my job.

You can’t not be.

No you can’t.

Because when we had that conversation I was listening and it sounded like there was a child who had had an electric shock and it sounded like the nurse was giving you an update. I was sitting there listening and observing and it sounded like you asked the same question a couple of times because you needed to be sure in terms of what was important for you to know, had been established and you couldn’t conclude the conversation until that had happened. And I thought wow, what an example of being present focussed because in your work if you lose concentration, big bad things can happen.
Absolutely. I have this friend of mine who I was telling you about, who I took out last night. She is also a doctor and she is also specialising in paediatrics. She has had an anxiety attack and she ended up in St Marks last year and we were just sharing. She sort of had a bad encounter with one of our bosses who was accusing her of not coming to meetings, not doing her job and she went to him to clarify things with him yesterday and he obviously doesn’t understand mental illness and she was so happy at the end of the day because at least in that conversation he started understanding. And he was saying that medicine is very hard, even for him as a man and it is worse for us as ladies. And I was saying to her actually this is all we have done. I mean most of us went straight from high school to medical school. At least people used to start with the BSc and then start medical school when they were 20/21, but we like this is all we have known really. And sometimes with me, especially I think this is how life is supposed to be and everytime someone says you’re working so hard, I don’t actually feel it because this is all I know, but now that I have been on leave these few days I have realised my job is actually very abnormal, that that is not a normal way of living. Besides the hours, and exactly what you’re saying, people’s lives depend on you. That is a huge responsibility and you have to be present. You can’t have things behind the scenes. A lot of doctors end up divorcing or becoming alcoholics and their family life is not good, especially when their partner is not a doctor. So ja, coming back to work, you have no option but to be present.

*And if you think of being present and the way the MBSR makes the people who go on the course aware of it. What is your sense of how the rest of the world is living in relation to time?*

Oh no, most people are not present and most people are rushed, and very angry. There is a lot of road rage and unhappiness.

*And what do you think that road rage and unhappiness is about?*

I think people are generally unhappy in their lives and they take it out on other people. I can’t really speak for them but I see it as a sign of being unhappy. Every time someone does that I know it is not about me.

*And um, the busyness and the rush, and what you were saying is part of your life, but it seems different now. What is that about, that inclination to be busy and rush. What does it say about us and time?*

It is that we are not managing our time well. And we are not loving ourselves enough. If we are taking care of ourselves and loving ourselves we wouldn’t have to rush. Well there might be times once in a while where we have to rush, but it shouldn’t be a way of life. We are not giving back to ourselves. I have found that now that I am more relaxed, I even achieve more than when I am rushing.
Would you say that part of that rushing is a sense of time pressure?

Hmhm. Absolutely. There is a sense of time pressure. It is us having a sense of do, do, do. And um, when I used to be in that mode, I am rushing and while I am rushing doing this, I am already thinking what has to be doing next. So even though I am rushing, when I am doing this I am not paying enough attention. I am already on the next task.

And what would make that so for you?

I don’t know. I think it is because there just isn’t enough time to do everything I have to do. And but then, instead of waking up an hour earlier but I suppose it is from exhaustion as well, I can’t seem, it is very difficult for me to get out of bed.

You like your bed.

I love sleeping, every time my alarm rings oh no, it can’t be and I sleep early, I don’t sleep late. Ja. And um, the other thing this course has worked for me, I have bi-polar disorder, it was diagnosed in 1997, so it has been a long time. I have, I tended to be a very busy lady, beside my work and my family, I was very sociable and I would be attending meetings and going to do this and going to this function. It was rare on a weekend off I’d be home. But I have since, I never used to be able to say no to invitations, but now I choose where I should go. It was my friend’s mother’s funeral two weeks ago, and I didn’t know about it, I saw it in the paper. This is my friend from varsity and we have common friends. Talk to her once in a while and one of my best friends is very close to her and when I saw the paper I thought I should go to the funeral but I never went. That is it. But why should I? I was on call on Friday, I was tired, I had a new helper. I need to be home and I didn’t feel guilty about it.

That says to me you’re making more choices about how to use your time in a way that is useful for you.

Hmm, hmm and tomorrow for instance it seems I have three things and it is impossible to do all three things and so I have to decide. There is a friend’s brother’s funeral, there is a first birthday party and a 21st birthday party. For me, the first birthday party is actually more important. It is the first time my baby is going to be home and he is having his first birthday party in two weeks’ time and so for me that is, I think I will end up going there and then I will go to the 21st. In our culture funerals are a big thing and there are always funerals somewhere. My friend used to say you bury so many people, and she hates funerals and hardly goes to funerals and I have a sense of obligation, but now I don’t really, not anymore and I always explain to her that since, for me that sense started when my husband passed away and I got so much support from people. Not just on the day of the funeral but before
and after. It is okay if I don’t go now. I think, I think it has a lot to do with the period of my life and letting go of that phase of my life.

As a Xhosa person do you see environments where there is different – is time a cultural thing?

Yes. That is why there is a phrase about African time. People are not in a hurry.

Tell me about your experience of that?

I have been bad with that. It actually took my husband. My husband was brought up in a very, hm, very how do I put it Western form. He went to a private school, he had friends that were white. His father was an advocate and become a judge, so that had this, they didn’t have a traditional African upbringing. He really respected time and he could never understand how I could disrespect time so much.

He would describe it as you disrespecting time?

Yes, he didn’t understand me. Don’t I realise time is money and I am always late and it is so bad. I learnt from him.

What did you learn from him?

That time is important. If you say you are going to meet someone at a certain time, you have to honour that. He would say you are disrespecting the person that you are made an arrangement with. You are saying that person is not important.

You don’t strike me as a disrespectful person, so before you had conversations with him and he offered a different perspective, how did you see it?

I thought it was normal. For me I would be late for something but I’d always phone. I’d always tell that person what I’m doing. I grew up in a home where my mother, actually I have become my mother. She was always late, she was always rushing. We only had one car at home and my father was the only driver. My mother would always catch the car as it was already getting out of the gate and my father was very impatient so there were a couple of times when he actually left her and she would have to follow in a taxi. So, I thought that was horrible, but I found myself doing the same. But now I do respect time. At work I am always on time and if I have a problem I will phone ahead. Time is very important. You even look at our church services, those are things that should not be – constantly they start late. They are supposed to be two hours, constantly they end late sometimes services become four hours.

What do people in the congregation do?
They sit, because that is what they’re used to. A lot of the time, I walk out because I have other things to do but I feel so guilty when I walk out during the service. But you can’t sit in church for so many hours.

*What makes you feel guilty?*

5 Because it is unAfrican to walk out while someone, especially someone in a position of authority is still busy is not done in our culture.

*Is there a response you get because you choose to leave?*

No, no one has ever said anything to me or got cross with me.

*What do you tell yourself about your choice?*

10 It is not out of disrespect, but I have got other engagements. Where for me Sundays are a very important day for me. Although sometimes I work on a Sunday, if I don’t it is a family day, so I can’t spend the whole day in church. When it comes to Monday it feels like I haven’t even had a weekend. For me Sunday is more important for me than Saturdays in terms of just relaxing with my kids.

15 *When you spoke first about African time, you said there is not the same sense of rush. If you were to consider that sounds quite good because rushing is stressful?*

Hmm. Ja, I think it comes from our traditional culture people didn’t even work. Even the men went to the fields.

*They did work, but they didn’t clock in and clock out at a particular time.*

20 Yes, that is true. So they did work, you’re right and they did achieve what they needed to achieve but at their own pace. Our disease profile as Africans we never used to get cancer. It was unheard of, even old people, prostate cancer, old men didn’t get it. I grew up, I never knew anyone who had cancer but now it has become so common, hypertension, diabetes – it has become so common. We didn’t have.

25 *And would you say that is in some way related to ‘respecting’ time?*

Rushing is stressful and those are lifestyle diseases and I mean it is a combination of things. Stress, is very important, the way we prepare our food, where we get our food from. Before everything was organic and healthy, and there was no rush people were able to do whatever they needed to do when they felt like doing. It has got a lot to do with that. We have lost a lot of good things and adopted the Western culture which is not necessarily good.

*I agree.*
And just I mean things like the communal type of living. You can’t believe, in this complex there are very few people I even greet. I’ve never been into someone’s house. Until now there is a new neighbour who is very friendly. But even not just white people, Africans I don’t know who they are and what they do. It is horrible. It is my third year here and I hardly know anyone by name in this complex of 18. It is very unAfrican.

*I suppose it is good to be able to choose. I don’t know.*

I don’t feel good about my choice. I really don’t. I am a very sociable person and you get the sense that it is their choice and you can’t really be all friendly.

*How would you like to be when you go to Hillcrest in terms of your living environment?*

I would like to be relaxed. Part of my dream is to open a healing centre. I want to start a place for children, because children are very close to my heart, where parents whether they are working or not, they can drop their kids. I don’t want to call it a nursery school – I don’t want it to be a traditional crèche, but teaching children to appreciate nature and teaching them what they need to learn at the same time and giving them a lot of love and appreciation. So I’d like to have that, to have my house open, my home.

I think I am a healer more than I am a doctor. Not that I think, that I know. But that is why I choose medicine but I am not your traditional doctor. Even at work my colleagues always complain because I see the least number of patients in the clinic. I don’t just ask what is wrong with you and give a prescription it is just not me.

*So, is Hillcrest going to offer an opportunity to align the doctor and healer in ways?*

Absolutely, Hillcrest is very laid back. People there are very relaxed. Most mothers and wives don’t work. My sister-in-law lives there and she is a psychologist, what do you call that – corporate psychologist.

*Organisational or industrial psychologist*

Industrial psychologist. She had her own big company and she just stopped. She now spends time with the kids, takes the kids to school and is involved in the community. She loves it and rides horses, laughs. She loves it.

*Really taken on the environment there.*

She loves it, the kids are so happy and the husband is so happy.

*If you think of being present-focused. What contribution does it make to your life?*
It makes a great contribution. Because if you’re present-focussed you’re able to achieve more in all areas of your life. Because your mind is clearer, whatever you’re doing you enjoy it more. It is not as strenuous as when you’re not.

*When you say it is not as strenuous as when you’re not, what are you when you are more present-focussed.*

Relaxed. More relaxed and kinder to your own self. I have become kinder to myself. Gentler. Chuckles

*That is good. When you say that you seem very much at ease and relaxed. Is there anything else about time and the present that you want to touch upon before we conclude the formal part of the conversation?*

I have since realised that there is no wrong. There just is. Because I used to have lots of unattainable goals, that I wanted certain things by a certain time. Lots of it is evident in my career. At medical school I was top of my class, I was on the Dean’s list and everyone thought I would become a specialist in record time. I was the academic person, I wanted to be a professor by the time I was 40. I am turning 40 next week and I am very far from it and I realise now, it is actually okay. It is okay. It is my path and it is not slow. It is as it should be and that was a big realisation for me. I was putting myself under lots of pressure that I had to write this exam and become a specialist.

*And the realisation, when did that come?*

It came last year actually. It came last year, I had a session with my psychiatrist and I was telling her I was going to write exams and I had just had a baby in May last year and in September I told myself I was going to write these exams. She asked me: but why, why do you have to? And I didn’t have an answer, she said : Do you even have to be a specialist and I said: “Yes” and she said who is it for? It is for me to feel I am not a failure in other people’s eyes. Not in my eyes. But now I still want to be a specialist for myself. I wouldn’t want to have spent the four years I have, it is very difficult to do those four years and I can’t really let it go to waste and at the same time, the thing I want to do, which is community work, you get more recognition when you are a specialist. And I have really put in the effort, I just have to write the exams.

Yes it sounds to me as if you have planted the crop and it is about to fruit and you walk away without saying well let me take this fruit and distribute it to people who can eat it.

Absolutely. That is a very good way of putting it.

*Thanks.*
It is incredible actually. I will use it.

So just in a nutshell, being present focussed came across quite clearly in the MBSR. It created an awareness for you, you tended to rush and you were doing, doing and that doing the course created a greater kindness and ease in relation to your world and to yourself.

And that I am part of the universe. That really came out for me strongly. That connection to everything and everyone.

Thank you.
Interview 7 – NL

What was your experience of doing the MBSR?

I loved it. I enjoyed. Over an extended period it gave me the opportunity to incorporate it into my practices and routines. I loved the poetry. I loved the group we were with and obviously Barbara and Janine. It’s strange because it is not part of my normal routine to drive to East London – it worked so well to have D with me and to have him drive. We finished in September and it was still quite light but I don’t like driving at night. So the mechanics of it I don’t know if I would have done the course if I had gone on my own. Definitely having someone with me, someone to chat with.

How do you know him?

I know him from his wife, they live at Chintsa and they have connections with the Free State which is where I come from. He is just a very gentle man who has been through depression. We could really speak on a special level.

And if you consider the aspect of being present-focused, has that changed for you as a result of doing the course?

Yes, yes I think it has. As I told you Echkard Tolle is my favourite and just now I have been listening to him and he is present-focused. So the MBSR just gave me another way of doing it – like looking at the same object and looking at it from all sides.

Looking at something you are familiar with and have been with, but in a new way?

Yes.

And what new perspective did the MBSR facilitate?

Well, I said initially, I think it was the second session. Aha moment, easier way of understanding this being. Going into the body and the need to go into the body. Added tools to do what I had been doing and to do it with more understanding. I am quite left brained and I like to get things on a scientific or a regulated way. So that is the awareness too of doing the dishes, doing arn things and being mindful. Mindful was a new definition of probably something I had touched on superficially. Gave me the tools, knowledge and experience of it.

And when you say knowledge, how would you define those knowledges?

Well first of all. The fact of the background of course that it is paid for by medical aid, that it is very researched, that appeals to my left brain. To give me a wherewithal, a

A89
how. For the following week you will do this, that and the other. I have studied the
brain, I have studied pain and the autonomic system and what stress can do. All that
sort of thing. I have done numerous courses through the years esoteric. It really
appealed to me that a doctor and a homeopath. It was during the course that those
two did that five day.

Yes they went on that silent retreat and Janine had to lick the stamps in Robertson.

(Laughs), yes. So you come from a scientific background and you are doing all these
things yourself.

They shared their experiences. Have I answered your question?

Yes, absolutely. If we look at the being present-focused, and you talked about the
dishes. In what other facets does it show up in your life that you might say before I
had this kind of relationship with time. And you were describing the listening to the
Eckard Tolle and about it being present focussed was there a before time when you
had a different orientation to time?

Ja, time. It is difficult for me to separate out the Eckhard Tolle and the MBSR and I
belong to a school of enlightenment where the focus is there is no time.

Share that with me?

It is something that I had looked at anyway, so I don’t know that the MBSR course.
No the MBSR didn’t change my view on time.

What I am hearing is your relationship with time has been in a process that is longer
than the eight weeks of the MBSR? So that I can understand your narrative of time?

It is such a difficult concept for us living in this linear world to now – in the past when
I had this concept of ‘no time’ it is such an amazingly difficult concept to try and
grasp it. The only way to grasp it is to do something in the body, something in the
now. A long time ago, I remember thinking. How long does now, how big is it, how
long does it extend? I have contemplated this concept of no time for a long time, so
um I’m still not sure I have got it, but it is something that intrigues me.

And does it make a contribution to your life this experience of being now focussed?

Oh, oh absolutely.

And what contribution is that?

Um, four years ago I lost my eldest son to cancer and I had read the Power of Now.
Someone gave him the book. Times of reading little extracts. It helped me
tremendously at that stage at his illness and at his passing. Um, so it is all like a … I
felt what he gave me and the new experience. A layering of this … and that this is all I have got and to sit and talk to you, to be fully present. So it is – I can’t separate anything it. Vital it is, one of the solutions to me now. And I bring myself back to it and say this is my life. Now. And I have a little book that I write down phrases that catch my attention. Keep reiterating to myself and to bring me back into this moment.

So what I’m hearing is – being present is quite an active awareness. So it is an action really?

I’d like it to be more.

What do you mean?

It is so easy to disappear into the future and in to the past and not be present. So I want to really make it a far more frequent awareness in my life. The other day I was washing the dishes and I thought of that Thich Nhat Hanh saying how he had washed the dishes in the cold water in the monastery and I thought …

So that sounds like quite a gift to have had years of practice as bringing oneself back to the present, into the body, into this is my life now because my experience of interviewing people is that for some the MBSR is the beginning of a change of awareness, which you are saying for you happened quite some time in the past and there are quite a few things you have done?

The MBSR was like taking this whole big picture and condensing it and making it more feasible and how do I incorporate it into my daily living.

The practices in the MBSR, the meditation, the body scan, the stopping part of your previous practice.

Yes. Just before I did the MBSR I did the Art of Living course and I do that Creative breathing every morning. And then I lie down and do a scan and he was saying do this … so there has certainly been part of my life.

Now when we met at that first retreat one of the things you said to me was that MBSR was you’d been on anti-depressants and you said doing the MBSR had helped you be with your depression.

Off, more change. I am so disappointed – this course should have, I should made more difference. It should have fixed me already. I should be coping with my state of mind better. I’m doing the practice, it is all there. So I am disappointed that I might have to go back onto some medication I don’t want.

You were hoping it might bring an end to the medication?
Yes, I finished the medication and then I didn’t continue. I have an underlying medical condition that is adding to this problem and the depression and so on. But still I don’t know whose fault it – I am doing the work. Things should be much better.

So the mindfulness attitudes of letting go and not judging.

I was at Barbara the other day – non-striving. I am one of those. To non-strive. I know. I wouldn’t do anything if I didn’t strive. The compassion.

So you’re not going to take non-striving lying down.

And judgement, self-judgement.

I wish for you that it could have been what you wanted.

Well it could still be. I am hoping that …

And when we were together this recent retreat and we were talking about time and you made a reference to time being a cultural conception and you made a reference to African time and you said some people might get impatient if they applied different cultural conceptions of time. Do you want to expand on that?

Ja. I suppose having been brought up the way I have. Even when people are ten minutes late it irritates me because that is the way things should be and then I become very judgemental. You probably know because that is the way and that is where I was at 08:00 this morning. I am the mayoress.

Good for you. I didn’t know.

Self-appointed, but otherwise I am the mayoress. I am chairperson of the Ratepayers’ Association and I am dealing with government, municipalities and black people all the time. And their lack of time kind of gets of me. I am aware of what they’re dealing with. It is not that I am all that judgemental. If someone is two hours late. Yesterday I got a call when someone was two hours late that he had to go to another meeting. But don’t tell the people you were supposed to be meeting after the start time about the other meeting. You must have known about the other meeting. It is a bit of an irritant for me

Case of time management. We are living in a world where we have to pull finger.

When you say time management – are you saying time is a resource that can be managed?

And I am giving of my time as a resource to a great degree. Respect that.
There appear to be the different concepts of time. If you were to describe the more Western discourses about time, what does society tell us about time?

It dictates to us and that is a limitation. So there are these conflicts to some degree we need to live by certain rules and in other ways we need to see it differently.

So if you were to think of the rules of time you’re talking about. According to your perspective what would those rules be?

Punctuality and consideration of other people. You aren’t invited for tea and then you stay for supper. Upbringing. Those things needs to be in place and but they can also be restricting.

I am not sure how old you are but you look older than me?

I am 67.

In your lifespan there must have been quite a lot of changes around how people communicate – cell-phones, email. Do you think that changes people’s perceptions of time?

Yes, yes of course. I hadn’t thought of that. What has occurred to me though is – see someone to communicate. Quick word, pick up phone. Spend double the time to type a message, also I like that it doesn’t intrude on somebody. I will sms my children. Phone call can be intrusive. It is the time factor. Before I was meticulous about a handwritten thing of thanks and the time it took, but that was a pretty little extra thing. Ordinary communication has taken on a time factor – I can’t type and I don’t want to learn to type. The time factor is how it has impacted me.

I’m curious – there is your curiosity with this notion of ‘no time’ and then there is a set of rules about time. How do you know when to be in no time mode and how do you know when to be in um let us all work in a way that is punctual.

Laughs – when I am working on duty and it is structured then there is time and when I am relaxing there is no time. It is my time.

So work time has rules and leisure time is no time

Yes. I can manipulate time. That is how I have been looking at it. There is that whole think of making time stretch. Or where time goes very fast.

Ja. What does stretching time mean? When would you make it longer?

I never thought about doing that, or that I had a choice. Just as an exercise.
Cos what I’m hearing is sometimes there is a desire to manipulate time and make it a minute longer, seem longer. And there might be times when you want to make it go faster and that variable way in which you engage with it. Are there specific times you’d like to stretch it or make it go faster?

Not in a voluntary conscious way like that. Awareness of time is when time can almost pause. Stop and you’re not measuring it in a linear way like the tick, tick of the clock.

_Do you think being present allows you fill time with yourself._

Yes, yes, with your awareness and your consciousness.

_I see you contemplate a lot?

I’d like to a lot more. I am very busy with this job at the moment. It is taking a lot of my time. I am not doing a lot of personal self things. That is my walk twice a day with my dogs and time to contemplate then and in the rest of my time, there are a lot of things I am not getting to. Time management and with my depression – hyposomnia where I could spend the whole day in bed and then I am not striving – stay here.

_And has depression been with you for how long?

Six years. Now at the moment it has just got. Moved from where I have lived all my life and I have a problem with my husband so I am dealing with a lot more. And my medical condition has aggravated the situation. So there are five or six things that are impacting on me that have made me more aware of this. That it has got to an intolerable level.

_So when it gets to seem intolerable are there times when you might bring things that the MBSR offered as an approach to life?

All the time, as often as I can.

_And what would those things be?

Well , heart condition. Daily do the loving kindness. I love the mountain and the lake, something like that that focuses on the chest area because this is just an angina it is a so-called, it is not medical problem. It makes me feel lousy. Sit with it. Live with it. Breathe into it. This morning I woke up at four o’ clock with this head ache and this chest pain and I did the surrender to silence and got up and did the breathing. Instead of taking a tablet, do a meditation, do something. It gave me tools and those CDs I have them all on my i-pod and use them as medication. Yes, in an attempt to get me some relief and at times it is what I need. Especially now that I have Barbara and Janine in tow with me, with the repercussions of afterwards.
So it has been fantastic.

*How did you choose Chintsa?*

We have had a holiday home there for 30 years. It is a lovely place to be. It is quite a mindshift and the village mentality.

5  *Where were you before?*

Bloemfontein

*I may have asked this but I am going to ask it again. The contribution to your life of being present focussed, even though it is not only as a result of MBSR? What are the things you’re doing when you notice you’re being present focussed?*

10  It would be between moments. If I am busy not a chance. I have to be focused

*That sounds like being present to being busy?*

Yes. Thank you I hadn’t thought about that. (Laughs).

*Busy is allowed.*

So it would be off-duty moments. Relaxing. Early morning. Last thing at night and at night if I wake up. Doing menial tasks. Suddenly stop, this is an opportunity to be present. Being present with people too. So often I can be on the phone with someone and I can hear click, click in the background and it is so important to be present with people. I am not always present to my husband, at all with him. That is like double standards.

20  GD had a women’s wellness retreat and she brought this woman from America, this doctor and she said “there are different ways of leaving” because I have wanted to leave for a long time and I haven’t left. Just don’t kick a dog when he is down. But not being present and withdrawing, I am leaving. It is also a way of preservation and being present to myself and not having that automatic. I need to do more of the stop process. Occasionally I catch myself and I am no, no, no. It is a good lesson. It has given me a tool. I went back and had a look what did I want from this course and it was self-empowerment and self-respect and it was all those things too. You have done well, you have done fantastically. But I wanted to be empowered to achieve that, Ja.

25  *And my impression is of a strong woman.*

Ja, but that is my problem as well too. I don’t have to be strong all the time.
Exactly. It is tiring. Oh gosh. I like my little person who wants to cry and doesn’t know what to do.

That one catches me and takes little breaths

Thank you Norma. I have enjoyed this.

I hope I have answered all your questions. I haven’t looked at the clock how are we doing for time.

I think well. We are under an hour.
Can you tell me what made you do the MBSR? What led to it?

I was going through my bad end phase of my relationship of 12 years. Same sex relationship and ja, I needed to get some stability back into my life. I have been seeing Barbara for the last few years for Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD).

Ok

And so the work side of my life was stable, everything around me was fine. Because of the co-dependent relationship I had with my partner, um it was extremely difficult for me to extricate myself from it. We were totally interwined, financially, everything, it was just a mindmeld, it was part of the ‘borg’ and I couldn’t find myself. He was self-actualising and I, everything I did was to support him. I was the classic co-dependent case and I said Barbara I want out of this and she said: G I think you’re ready for this course and I went in and within four weeks of the course I had ended it completely (with E) and it was very liberating for me.

I had tapped into a strength before that I always had, that had been there before the relationship and that I had forgotten about. And I am very, very grateful for doing it.

So if you were to describe the kinds of experiences that the MBSR reconnected you with or new ones it exposed you to, what would you say those are?

If I were to describe it idiomatically it was as though I was living on someone else’s carpet and it was as though I had lost my own carpet, my own foundation. I was sitting on someone else’s. And MBSR allowed me to re-establish my own turf and to establish my own boundaries because my relationship was totally unhealthy. My family and friends could see it but I couldn’t, to a point even my car. I had a luxury car, E took it away from me. It was under his name. Everything, my, we both banked at RMB, but it his facility. My income would go in there, it was a collective pool and um he was able to take it away from my cell-phone. So just took everything. Our entire lifestyle – I was responsible for the running expenses and top-up and he would acquire assets and stuff. When I left, he had the assets and stuff and I had, you know nothing. So getting in touch with that inner part of me, MBSR helped me with understanding why I went into that relationship. Why I handed over so much power and MBSR helped me get it back.

What I am hearing is that the MBSR facilitated quite a lot of self-awareness.
It did and it is almost as though I have become so much more grounded within myself that um it is like a bullshit barometer has been turned on. I can spot bullshit from a mile away. And I have tapped into parts of myself that I had totally forgotten about and I have reconnected with people that I had totally disconnected with for a part of my life. I have bought them back into my life, some not. It has been a tough journey losing all the material things or a large percentage of it. But it is incredibly liberating at the same time.

So I am hearing that the MBSR is about connecting with what is already there.

Yes. Because it was there already and I wasn’t tapping in to it. I was tapping into E’s strengths, he’s my partner. And my whole life revolved around ensuring his comfort prior to this. So I was um, like you imagine royalty and you imagine a person fanning them or throwing their jacket down in front of the puddle so they don’t walk on it. I was that kind of person. And he just totally accepted that, that I could do all those things for him but there was no financial benefit. There was nothing I did that would have any consequence that would have any value to him. When I started this course E wanted to sue Janine and Barbara so they upped their professional indemnity. He is an ex public prosecutor. He said these women have enlightened you. I said is that a crime.

What about MBSR enabled this?

When I started it, I took a friend I was very interested in and I took him along. No sexual relationship or anything. I thought this was an ideal opportunity for him as a sports person to find grounding and I thought I didn’t need grounding at all. Little did I know he didn’t need it and I did. So but for me doing the different techniques, the different mindful techniques – the body scan, breathing techniques. It only seemed to come together around the sixth week. If you imagine a seed germinating and it took time to start applying it to my life, it was a process and I certainly could feel I was more in control of my emotions and I wasn’t as erratic as I had been.

You know for one I was on a drug for ADHD called Strattera. R1800 bucks a month, medical aid doesn’t cover it. And um, I went off Strattera with Dr Woods. I said: “I don’t think I need this.” I find that I am able to cope without medication.

That is quite something.

It is quite something. I have been very dependent on outside intervention my whole life, pop a pill. If my back is sore go to the chiropractor. Always get someone to do something, rather within myself to do something. And now with my happiness, I was able to achieve in my younger years and I had suppressed that, how useless I am, but I am not that useless, so it was creating a linkage back to the past for me and to the present. I have never been a person living in the present.

A98
So that is what I am interested in. I am interested in everything you’ve said so far.

I thought I’d paint a picture.

You have and it is lovely how it has led into this. My curiosity is how we relate to time and how it impacts us. So I am hearing you say doing the course reconnected you to your achieving child and that you have asked yourself what that means for you in the present.

It has allowed me to be my authentic self, rather than my inauthentic self and without the need for external support to support me. I needed the right clothes, the right suburb and the right watch. All these support mechanisms to support the me which is how I wanted people to see me. But strip that all away and what is left – the vulnerable person that people still like.

Yes. Was that a surprise?

Yes it was and in the past I’d always carry the bills and we’d go for lunch and coffee, five times a week. And it was great to be in that buzz, and I may have lost some friends changing the boundaries but I have also gained friendships, much deeper ones. Last night we went to Cape Town Fish Market and my friends said: “We paying” and I’m like, this is unheard of. I have never had anyone pay my bill before and they said: “Nonsense, it is your birthday and we can afford this.”

Oh yes of course.

I thought this is daft. It is quite novel for someone to do this and it was quite good for me.

You said you weren’t present- focussed, where did you tend to focus?

I focused more on the future and on not my time. I had devalued my entire existence and I valued my partner’s. He was doing his master’s degree. All my focus was on him and ensuring his life was like cushioned.

So like when you focused on the future, what about the future were you focusing on?

Holidays, um, upgrading stuff. Stuff which is totally irrelevant to who I am and I thought God, I am focusing on all of this nonsense.

Is that what you noticed during the course?

I would say, I noticed it during the meditative practice, from a religious point of view I haven’t been a religious person for my whole life. If you asked me what I believe in, I’d say I believe in God. I have recently updated my religion status as mindful.
There are not a lot of people who have done that. I have found such strength in being in the moment. There is a danger about being in the present all the time because then you forget about the past which is relevant, and you become too esoteric. I did go through that phase later in the course when I was this esoteric zenned out person. I loved being in a meditative state and I found it quite addictive and I spoke about it to Barbara and she said: you need to remember that your past and your future are all linked. It is on this continuum and you need to be mindful of the past, present and future and where you are on them.

You can't just live in the moment, if you have bills to pay you have to pay them. You can't just be in the present and not plan. I was swinging on a pendulum from being totally mindless to totally mindful. I am finding my way somewhere in the middle, when I am in the present but I am also connected to the future and the past. So it was a bit of a pendulum swing. It has been incredibly grounding, also in terms of my relationship with family and friends. I have never had boundaries with people which has allowed them to overstep the mark and just abuse me. I have allowed it and I have enjoyed the fact that people have depended on me. Looking back though I can see it has been a very unhealthy pattern. As opposed to supporting someone and saying here is a grand, two grand I'll help you, don't worry to pay me back, I have pots of money and now the support has been more of a consultative approach and empowering. Teaching them how to fish rather than giving them a fish. It has now changed. I now find for the first time in my life I am able to actually listen to people and hear and be empathetic with them. I found I never had a sympathy bone in my body. Before when I did something for people it was for my ego and now I have a sincere care about those around me and I find that is a direct link to this course. Without a doubt.

*Um so before you’d notice you were more future- focussed around the next holiday and the next upgrade.*

Yes totally mindless and totally irrelevant.

*And in the MBSR is the focus on the present very obvious or is it something that slowly becomes clear?*

I think with the MBSR with the first course (session) which centred around a raisin when we were given a raisin and we had had to smell it and I clicked, this is what mindfulness is about, being in the moment, enjoying the small things. Appreciating moments rather than just blurring. But I didn't cotton on until I started doing the meditations, the standing – it was a process. The more that I practiced the meditations, and bear in mind with ADHD the longest I can do is 10 or 15 minutes. Um I am actually got to understand mindfulness and I am not there yet.

*It is an endless journey.*
It is an endless journey. The more I know, the less I know, I know.

*Having lived with ADHD, that is quite um, attention goes wherever there is stimulation – is that how it works?*

Totally. If you had a TV on here I’d look at the TV, if you had a cat here I’d look at the cat.

*How does that relate to stuff and time in your own experience prior to the MBSR?*

Prior to the MBSR, even on medication, I had difficulty finishing tasks. Now I see an end goal and I plan what I do. I don’t overstimulate my day with appointments. I loved doing so many things in a day. Then the best day for me is a flight a 6am flight to Joburg, shoot to Pretoria – be popular. And then fly back on the last flight. That is a perfect day.

*What makes it a perfect day?*

Because I am in demand but I wasn’t doing much. It was part of it. I thoroughly enjoyed the course – it let me go of material things. You should see our house, or where I lived, just full of stuff. E collects stuff and everything is so valuable and he finds himself through his things and when you have so many things you have to insure all these things. He has got his asset register and things all over the country that he has to worry about. I said: “my God this is crazy”. When I left it, it was such a weight off my shoulders. When I buy my own house, I will have very, very little in my house.

*The one bowl in the middle of the room.*

That is it. And it also shifted my focus. There is a youngster who lives down the road from me. He works at Pick ’n Pay. He didn’t finish his matric. He lives with his mom and he has no hope of anything. I said to him – he is a young black guy: “I am going to pay for your studies next year” and help him get his matric. Because I have realised that although we are ourselves we have to pass on a legacy. There is a whole other way of leaving a legacy and empowering others. So my focus has shifted from holidays to leaving a legacy.

*When you describe – I hope for you if it seems you sharing stuff with me and then I am going back to other parts of your story-*

No sure.

*When you spoke about going to Pretoria and your favourite day, it sounded like a busy day in which you tried to pack a lot into. Would you say on some level you used to or still do experience time pressure.*

A101
Yes. I have less time pressure than I used to before.

*Ok, so time was like a resource that you had to max.*

Yes and also looking back there were no moments in those days. It was just one blur. There was no enjoyment of anything it was just rush, rush, rush and achieve little. It was about making money and that was it and now, it is more about the moments and experiences and doing things like that. I enjoy spending times with my dogs. I loved them, now I enjoy time with them and time with family. I am doing less. E is an excellent chef and he can cook any meal in the world. I was always the one on salad duty, chopped up and every night here salad. And I wanted to cook, but he didn’t want me to cook that was his thing. So now having moved back to my mother’s house, I am cooking and it is direct result of this mindfulness course. I thoroughly enjoy it and I have turned out to be a bloody good chef.

*Uh huh.*

And that is something, I enjoy it. I enjoy cutting up things and tasting during cooking, the preparation. Those are things I never paid attention to. I was always the first one finished. I couldn’t wait to stack the dishwasher and get the kitchen spotless. Now I am washing dishes. My mother says: “Stack the dishwasher” and I’m like why, I want to wash dishes. Three plates.

*So when you’re doing those things and paying attention, how would you describe your relationship to time?*

I’m enjoying. There are tasks I don’t enjoy but I don’t criticise myself for not enjoying them. It is part of my day and I’m doing them.

*So when washing dishes, wash dishes.*

Yes and I going to do them properly and enjoy the warm water on my hands. I am trying to do it more, I don’t do it all the time, but be more in the moment. Also with ADHD, you can be up and down like a yoyo. Now I am sitting down, talking to them, listening to them, identifying with them. Sharing. I wasn’t able to do that before. I am quite happy even though I am not on medication. Even with this breakup I wanted to go on an anti-depressant. I have the script but I haven’t filled it. … I am trying to find the resources to handle this myself. But if a point comes when I have to take them I will.

*Sure, sure.*

But I don’t want to I want try and go without them. Also I am more in touch with my emotions. It is difficult to trigger me, with a spouse you find their pain zones that you can trigger. E knew all my triggers to trigger an attack. I have now unplugged myself
from that and it really destabilised E that he can’t get me on my back foot. And even things like, when I’d respond in an emotional way. I have many family issues, unresolved family issues with siblings and I’d have a typical emotional response and try and tear them out my life. And now it I wouldn’t say I’m zenned out, but I am mindful of what I say and how I say it.

*Would you say those emotional responses had a connection to a historic past, that over time they become something?*

Yes, over time I had taken on E’s persona. Even on the phone we sound identical and you can’t tell us apart. The way we walk, one hand in the pocket. I had taken on his persona and his aggression. I don’t do that anymore.

*You were saying with family and E that previous emotional triggers you’re able to do what with that is different now?*

Now, I am able to listen, pause, acknowledge them, which I could never do before. Actually I hear you, you’re right but I disagree with ABC and I believe you have over-crosed the line into my turf and I don’t appreciate it. I agree to disagree with you.

*Is that aligned to the STOP process that Janine and Barbs teach in the MBSR?*

It is that STOP sign was on my cell phone screen forever. Stop

*And would you say that pause is coming back to the present and what I choose now?*

Yes. In the past it was how can you do this to me and now it is how can I allow myself to react in this way? So everything has changed from Lorna how can you do this to me, to how can I allow myself to react in this way to Lorna?

*Shew.*

And it has allowed me to mature in a way. I have been out of my relationship with E since, say December when I ended it. But it was this sticky messy bit in between for a few months, but it is over now and I visit him and have dinner with him and there is no intimacy, nothing and I am now doing it from another position. He realises I have developed a personal strength that he can’t bulldoze. He has an incredibly powerful personality. You know he is a bulldozer.

*Sounds more forceful than powerful?*

Yes very forceful and a massive ego. The whole world revolves around him.

*Have you noticed having done the MBSR that other people, perhaps who haven’t done the MBSR, relationship with time may be different?*
Tell me about that.

And I have been teaching people, my ideas, although they’re not my ideas. My mindfulness ideas.

So what do you notice about other people’s ideas of time, especially people who haven’t done the MBSR?

They are very goal oriented. They want to achieve and they are climbing a ladder. I’m climbing a ladder even after the MBSR. I find that people who are not connected to the moment are likely to be triggered by events around them, rather than take control of themselves in the events around them. So now I see it as there can be a tornado around me, and I will still be here grounded, whereas others will be caught up. Even my family, when I ended it with E he had a private investigator follow me for five days and my family are like, “God, G, you have to get an attorney and a restraining order” and they were going into panic mode I said relax. Don’t fight, you know that whole thing don’t fight fire with fire. I have learned to be a lot more kind. I used to be a lot more brittle and E’s got this thing, the best form of defence is attack. I don’t believe that at all, and I don’t believe you fight fire with fire and I have learned that through meditation that um, you are only going to compact a snowball and make an attorney rich. And I said: “No,” they were giving me advice and saying do this, do that and I said: “I hear you but I am not going to do what you say.”

How do you relate that attitude to time?

I find I am much more gentle and kind with people in the moment. And I am more mindful of its impact on the future. I am more aware of what happens if I tear up your computer and storm out. I won’t do that. I would do that before – I’d break things and do crazy things.

In relation to my family, I find they’re more quick to respond without thinking regardless of the consequences. They will cut of their noses to spite their faces they won’t stand back and say I won’t be caught up in this. I will not be drawn into this.

So letting go?

Yes, letting go.

You mentioned earlier you love the cooking and chopping things.

Yes, I love the cooking.

And washing dishes.
Yes.

*What other things do you do that might demonstrate that being in the moment can be part of daily life?*

Bathing my dogs, I used to do it every two weeks and now I do it every week and I love blow drying it. They have this long silky hair. They are beautiful. So I am doing a lot of those kind of things.

*What else. Like driving, driving is an easy thing to do mindlessly.*

I drive a lot more mindfully these days. But funnily enough this morning, I do get destabilised once in a while.

*It was your birthday yesterday.*

Gosh it was. E wanted me home at 07:30. If I was half an hour late, he’d phone the flying squad. I went to an MBSR course and I came home late. He had phoned Barbara, Janine, everyone to find out where I was. I said E, I don’t appreciate this. So yesterday was fantastic and when I’d said yes, nine o’ clock I am so excited, I wrote down ten o’ clock because of my appointment yesterday. So ten o’ clock for me so I was quite mindless at the time and at nine o’ clock I was on Facebook and I thought I better get going, and then I got the address wrong and I nine o’ clock oh dear god (punctuality). So I do go through periods of mindlessness.

*Well, don’t we all?*

Yes and I so focussed on had 40, Butch, related to him.

*How important do you think it is to keep up the practice of meditation?*

Yes I do and I think it is something that needs to be incorporated into your daily life, like brushing your teeth, brushing your hair, daily routine. I think it is incredibly important. And not just as a single event during the day but throughout the day. For example what I do is at 9am and at three I have an alarm set on my phone that says stop and I know, at least twice a day I stop and I say I am here. That is very good for me. And also I find it allows me to, and one of the key things with this MBSR is it allows me to establish boundaries for myself. And also talking to the people on my course. They did have boundaries but the boundaries are more firmly established.

And not that we have become more rigid but that we are not going to change our plans for you unless you want to change.

*Did you find as a group you shared some of the things you were working with.*

Yes.
And what did you make of that?

It’s great and also that we established authentic bonds that I haven’t had with others. So for example in 08 I was diagnosed with colon cancer. It is out of my system now. It cost hundreds of thousands of Rands and I wasn’t on medical aid then. It was crazy, I was all over the place and I lost all this weight and so, also meeting others in the group who had cancer and I hadn’t named it. I hadn’t really taken ownership of it. Um, I am getting it cut out of me and it’s gone and I just imagined this blackness inside of me and I wanted it out. And I think this mindfulness course has really let me come to terms with this that it was part of me, my body, my cells that had changed and yeah, I have come to be mindful and appreciate my life a lot more than I had.

Ok

I used to joke with E, because E is twice my age. I used to joke I am 33, he is 64. He has got pots of degrees and more money than he knows what to do with. But he lives in a state of poverty that he is going to die with nothing as a pauper and shake his can outside Trust Bank, and I said well Trust Bank is Absa. There you have this fixation and he likes to have his things around him.

And likes you to be at home on time.

He likes all of these things and that is where he is. So I thought well I am half his age and I have cancer and we’re just going to die together. Let’s just put – I’ll die at 50 and he’ll die at .. and Barbara said: “What are you doing?” So I had come to the idea to just let go and think I was going to die at 55. I’ll die. But now I think my time is valuable and I have something to contribute to the world. And it is not to play second fiddle to E ...

I’m thinking back to your example of the carpet.

Yes, actually be on my own carpet and never be in a situation again when someone can pull the rug from under me, ever again.

In the reading I have been doing, it is theorised that a lot of our concern around time is primarily about mortality.

Yes.

How did your finding out about the colon cancer and your thoughts about a shortened life span impact the possibility of being more present focused.

Well at the time I said I just want to die. And the crazy thing at the time I was with a doctor in Cape Town a specialist – a gastro – I don’t know what they’re called. Anyway he said you have colon cancer and I said okay: I am going to get on the top
floor of the hospital and just die, die now. I imagined my hair falling out and he said: no, no we don’t have to do that now. We still have to do more tests and there are so many treatments. I thought oh god I’m going to die and I have no support and I phoned my friend PY. He is a social worker in town and he flew to Cape Town immediately. He cancelled his appointment and little citi golf. PY met me at the hospital. I was sitting there and he came and gave me a hug and said it’s fine, things are fine. It was surreal.

Were you with E at that time?

I was and I told E and he said no, He was upset and on the phone. They said it was HIV, they tested and tested. Five times.

How was that for stereotyping?

Ja, you’re gay? Yes, let’s test you again. All these crazy things. It is very stereotypical and there were all these west African illnesses. I’d been to a traditional ceremony of a friend’s, it was for his father’s passing and they had slaughtered a cow and meat and I thought god maybe something from the river. But it wasn’t any of those things.

You were telling me about being in Cape Town

And I wanted to die. I didn’t see any future. I didn’t want any therapies I wanted to die. I said thank you very much. Is assisted suicide legal and he said no it is not. And I said I am going to have to take my life and this doctor said no.

Mobilise the troops. Make sure he is not alone.

I have two sisters both were abroad at the time. One was in Morocco.

It was quite good that Patrick jumped on a plane.

Yes I had no-one. E was running a course at Mpekweni and I said I need to see a specialist in Cape Town and mindlessly I jumped on a plane.

Well how mindless was it really?

And then to get these results.

Was it mindless, it seemed your body was saying take me to CT?

My body knew. It was a one way ticket. I left my car at the airport and I just went. I phoned my mom and said I’m in CT and she said what are you doing in CT and I said I just am and I’m staying at Velle van Dom in Seapoint. I just love that place and she got hold of my sister and then I got my sister’s keys and stayed at her flat in
Cape Town. I had no one, no support. I had five days before I got the results. I had the colonoscopy, totally nauseating. It was the most violating thing. Have you ever had anything like that where they stick pipes down your throat. It is as close to rape as I can ever imagine the violation. I wasn’t mindful at all. I wanted out. I had no one, except Patrick. So ja.

What changed the sense of I just want to die to the process that brought you to where you are now?

They cut the cancer out. The pollops they took out. There wasn’t any need for treatment.

You kept your hair.

Well I am losing it. My mother’s side of the family. I am fine with it. Even until recently I was very hard on myself and that is why I encouraged E to actualise and get his master’s degree and I thought I ain’t going to be here long, I may as well support this guy. He is the breadwinner. He earns very well but I won’t. I will support that. Rather than saying wait a sec, I do have something to contribute and he saw that as a very selfish thing. That I am now saying I have to look after me and it has helped me a lot.

If, if you think about messages about time in society and discourses of time. You know there are discourses of thinness and discourses of richness. So in that sense - what do you interpret as the discourses of time? What is society telling us we should do in relation to time?

We need to work faster, we need to cram more into our day. We want it now, we want instant gratification. We don’t want to wait, we don’t want to save up for a deposit on a house, we want the house now. We don’t want to wait two years for our cell phone to be renewed, we want one in a year because there is a new model. We all want things now.

Is that now like an impatience?

It is an impatience and I think it is an immaturity in society. But I find it is a general thing, we are in a restaurant and we complain in a restaurant if we don’t get our food in ten minutes. We don’t see it as time to talk to interact.

So is that faster, faster?

Faster, faster and I am generalising because I am talking about people I know there may be five people in the room and each will be on their phone communicating to other people. We are communicating more but are communicating a whole lot less on a real face to face interactive means.
So does the faster, faster make us communicate differently?

It does and I think we are retrograding rather than progressing. In society that is what I find.

What impact does that have on people – time pressure?

Time pressure and I think financial pressure we live beyond our means and we’re under pressure to live up to what the Jones’ have. Maybe I am looking at it from my own perspective. In society we are in a time warp. We are going backwards.

Tell me what you mean by that?

I think with the advent of the term clock speed. I don’t know if you’ve come across that – it is used in IT, I am not too familiar with it, it is part of E’s study but you get this thing called organisational clock speed. So say for example, let me paint the background. In the past the larger fish ate the smaller fish, now it is the fastest eats the slowest. It is the organisations that can adapt the fastest that succeed, everyone has their blackberry. Even if you’re in a meeting and you get a message you have to check it and we think we’re being smarter but we’re being less smart. How were we 20 years ago? I remember when I was a child with my parents and before dinner we’d go for drinkies to the neighbours and friends. We seem to have lost that, and even now with my mom, she is on Facebook and talking to friends. An hour and a half in the day, and I’m my God why do you spend all this time and she is I’m interacting and I’m why don’t you go and see your friend Veronica. So it is all of these things and I think technology is …

What I am hearing is that in the instant, there is a loss of real connection? Is that

Yes. Everything is future driven, what are we going to do later. We are in the now and forgetting to breathe. I am part of that whole thing I have the blackberry and the i-phone and I spend lots of time on those things. I but I spend less time than I used to. It is bloody difficult. I do need that for my work. Rather than let my phone control me. I have turned off the instant messages and when I am ready, I go to my phone and download my messages. When I am ready. So I control my device rather than let it control me.

Sure

And so yes, the technology is helpful to us but we need to have control of our own space time and use that as another mechanism of communication.

What contribution does being present- focussed make to your life?
I find that I am less impulsive, I find that I have more moments in the day that I remember and that I enjoy. If you say to me what did you do on Saturday, I can remember events whereas in the past I couldn’t, so now I am more in the present and enjoying, savouring. Like squeezing an orange and letting every bit of orange juice – rather than eating it mindlessly and saying what did I eat. Oh I ate an orange. I remember the events and that life is made up of moments not just this blur of buying this, doing that. Barbara knew this because I started seeing Barbara a compulsion to spend and I had trolleys and bags and I don’t remember how I got all these things. It was filling a gap and I didn’t know I had a gap to fill but I was doing it with the wrong things and now I am spending 1% of what I used to spend. And I am 1000 times happier.

That is pretty amazing.

It is, it is totally amazing.

That you could be walking out of a shop and wondering when did I make a connection with this item.

Which of these two. What the hell, I will take both and have shop assistants run around me. Getting caught up in that moment. It was a lot of fun.

What spending 1%?

Yes so um, enjoying my time with people a lot more. I find since the course I have found I have let myself become more vulnerable. Before the course I had a problem with my façade – my façade had to be totally flawless and if there was a crack, I had to polly filla that crack in no time so that people had this perception of perfection. That everything was right but behind that there was this absolute chaos.

What is it like now?

Now I’ll say I am feeling vulnerable, totally depressed and I am owning it because sometimes I do go through processes of being depressed, not clinical depression but being unhappy and I am owning the experience. I say to myself it is normal to grieve. I am not grieving E, I am grieving the loss of my relationship. I am not, not I am intellectualising more and I am less hard on myself.

You said earlier it was easier to be kind on yourself.

Yes, and I am kinder to others.

Yes I think that generally happens when we are kinder to ourselves.

It is amazing. I have been meeting people along the way who I have perceived to have the perfect life. They have everything. (Imitates) “We’re off to Spain again” and
all these crazy things. I wish I could do that and when I sit down with them and then I hear Oh my husband, affair with secretary and this is happening, I have developed this and my son has got this and I am oh my god, there is chaos here. But had I not shared my vulnerability I would not have.

5 **Been keeping up the façade**

That is right of how fantastic life is. Tralala. Tralala. Fucking amazing. Oh god. So it is a lot more real now. I wish I had discovered this ten years ago. I wonder where I would be now?

And earlier in the conversation you said Barbara said she thought you were at a place that you could make the commitment to MBSR. Because it requires quite a commitment the MBSR to all that practising. Do you think there is the existence of timing in our lives where we come to things? Is there a part of you that recognises it was the time?

I do think you’re right. If I look at my journey I don’t regret anything in my journey. Everything has been a life lesson for me. The people that I have met, the mistakes that I have made, have all been lessons. So I don’t regret any of those things and thinking about it now, ten years ago this would have passed over me, like water off a duck’s back. I don’t think I would have been as ready for it then.

What do they say, when the teacher is ready the student arrives.

20 Yes. It is amazing. Barbara said we have a couple of spaces open and I said: “I will be there”.

As long as that sexy dude is there? How is he doing?

Do you know who the sexy dude is?

I think he is M.

25 Yes he is totally gorgeous. He is amazing.

How are we doing for time?

We are doing fine. It is quarter to 11.

Is there anything arising from our conversation that you figure you’d like us to touch upon.

30 I think that for me with this MBSR related to time, kindness as a continuous theme throughout the whole course. I always considered myself to be kind but on a superficial level.
To stroke your own ego

Yes and I am helping you because I can. I am this benevolent charitable fellow who is going to put in an hour’s charity work in and then go back to my palace. It is now totally different and I find I am able to connect with people on every social level from top to bottom and across the spectrum. And I find being kinder with my own efforts, and I don't know which comes first – the cart or the horse – so whether it is first being kind to myself or to others.

So time for kindness?

Making kindness part of my daily – how I deal with people and things. Even if food in a restaurant is really crappy I won’t crap on the waiter – I will say the veggies are alright but the steak needs to be sorted out. In the past I’d be a total bitch and say this is disgusting what kind of restaurant is this. You know kind of bullshit.

It has changed. I have my boundaries but I am a lot more gentle with myself.

And how do you relate that to time?

Well it is more of the moment.

So each moment is what?

I try and find the good in each moment and I used to be the glass was always half empty, now it is half full. So I always or I try see the positive or if there isn’t any positive, I acknowledge the negative and learn from it. Others who have a bad period, I do try and help them and do so from a position of internal strength where I allow them to tap into their strength. I have a friend whose mom, my best friend through primary school. Her mom had an affair about ten years ago, so her mom has now written a book. She had written it by hand and she got her daughter to type it and M said her mom had had an affair and now this book is going to get published and she is having a hernia, she is so angry with her. I said this is your mom this was ten years ago be gentle with her. She hates her mom, she isn’t continuing with the book. I said M this was ten years ago. This affected your mom and your dad. It had fuck all to do with you. You were much younger then. Get over it, it is your mom and I mean having an affair is not the biggest crime in the world. You know we all go through these things, not that we all have affairs – we all go through periods where we regret what we have done. Give your mom a break. Contact your mom and say I am here, I love you, I don’t like what you did but I am here for you. I appreciate that you have allowed me to share this with you and her mom phoned me. Thank you, thank you, I thought I’d lost my daughter. In the past I would have said: Your mom is a bitch, sided with her. Wouldn’t have told her that I have had plenty of affairs in my existence and so it about being gentle with themselves and others. I find it has helped me a lot. I am eternally grateful for this, you know I have my mom and her
sister and they are going on this one and my two sisters will be going to courses in Cape Town and my cousin who has thyroid, big thyroid issues, she is going too. So I am encouraging people. I have encouraged E but he won’t set a foot near Barbara and Janine. He calls them the wicked witches of the East.

(Laughs). It really is an awesome experience. I think it is a very valuable tool regardless of religion or background to practice some form of mindfulness. You know you talk to some people about meditation and they say it goes against the bible.

*There is a bit of a suspicion.*

You have to package your own thoughts to allow you to get the best out of it.

Because I think it will benefit everyone.