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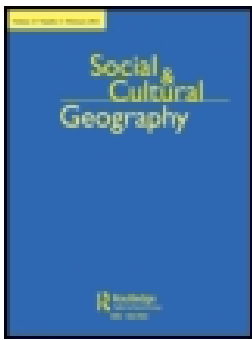
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## (Re)Inhabiting awareness: geography and mindfulness

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## (Re)Inhabiting awareness: geography and mindfulness

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### ABSTRACT

This paper opens up a dialogue between mindfulness and the discipline of geography. As a meditative practice that cultivates 'present-centred non-judgmental awareness', we claim that the practices and insights of mindfulness have important implications for various forms of geographical enquiry. This paper argues that mindfulness can inform geographical practices in relation to epistemology and methodology, and contribute towards geographically informed critical psychological theory and action. More specifically, we claim that mindfulness could offer a practice-based context to support the study of affects, extend the application of psychoanalytical geographical methods beyond the therapeutic, and contribute to emerging geographical studies of behavioural power and empowerment. This analysis explores these sites of interaction through a series of reflections on the Mindfulness, Behaviour Change and Engagement in Public Policy programme that was developed and delivered by the authors. This more-than-therapeutic mindfulness programme has been delivered to approximately 47 civil servants working in the UK Government.

### (Re)habiter la conscience: géographie et pleine conscience

#### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article ouvre un dialogue entre la pleine conscience et la discipline de la géographie. En tant que pratique méditative qui cultive « la conscience non-critique centrée sur le présent », nous affirmons que les pratiques et les perceptions de la pleine conscience ont des implications importantes sur l'investigation géographique sous toutes ses différentes formes. Cet article soutient que la pleine conscience peut orienter les pratiques géographiques en ce qui concerne l'épistémologie et la méthodologie, et contribuer à une théorie et une action critique psychologique liées à la géographie. Plus particulièrement, nous soutenons que la pleine conscience pourrait proposer un contexte fondé sur la pratique pour soutenir l'étude des affects, étendre l'application des méthodes géographiques psycho analytiques au-delà du thérapeutique et contribuer au développement des études géographiques du pouvoir comportemental et d'autonomisation. L'analyse explore ces sites

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d'interaction à travers une série de réflexions sur la pleine conscience, le changement comportemental et l'engagement dans le programme de politique publique qui a été développé et proposé par les auteurs. Ce programme de pleine conscience plus que thérapeutique a été présenté à environ quarante-sept fonctionnaires qui travaillent pour le gouvernement britannique.

## **(Re) Habitar la conciencia: Geografía y atención plena**

### **RESUMEN**

En este trabajo se abre un diálogo entre la atención plena y la disciplina de la geografía. Como práctica meditativa que cultiva la 'conciencia sin prejuicios centrada en el presente', se argumenta que las prácticas y percepciones de la atención plena tienen implicaciones importantes para diversas formas de investigación geográfica. Este documento sostiene que la atención plena puede asistir a prácticas geográficas en relación con la epistemología y la metodología, y contribuir a la teoría y la acción psicológica crítica geográficamente informada. Más específicamente, se afirma que la atención plena podría ofrecer un contexto basado en la práctica para apoyar el estudio de los afectos, extender la aplicación de métodos geográficos psicoanalíticos más allá de lo terapéutico, y contribuir a estudios geográficos de poder conductual y empoderamiento emergentes. El análisis explora estos sitios de interacción a través de una serie de reflexiones sobre la atención plena, el cambio de comportamiento y la participación en el programa de política pública que fue desarrollado y llevado a cabo por los autores. Este programa de atención plena más-que-terapéutica ha sido dado a aproximadamente cuarenta y siete funcionarios que trabajan en el gobierno del Reino Unido.

## **Introduction: attending the awareness**

Having made our way through the bag checks and scanners, and now wearing heavy security passes around our necks, we are sitting in a boardroom surrounded by civil servants. The civil servants are cupping a chocolate (or raisin, depending on their personal preference) in their hands and are about to participate in a mindfulness-based eating exercise. Sitting in an awkward silence, the participants are asked to first observe the object they are holding, noticing its colour, texture, weight, and any associative thoughts or emotions it may generate. After several minutes, participants are instructed to place the food onto their lips, where it rests for a minute. They are encouraged to notice the impacts this action has on the saliva in their mouths and the sensations they can feel in their stomachs. Finally, participants move the food onto their tongues, and are instructed, without chewing, to notice the taste sensations it generates, the changing textures of the food as it gradually dissolves, and how the presence of food in their mouths activates swallowing reflexes.

As I sit in the boardroom co-facilitating this mindfulness session, but also attempting to mindfully eat my own chocolate, my thoughts are racing.<sup>1</sup> What are the participants thinking? What must they think of us? Did the presentation I had just given on the connections between policy-making, the behavioural sciences and mindfulness make sense? Shouldn't

I be giving deeper attention to eating my chocolate? This mix of uncertainty, anxiety and guilt are not, in my experience, uncommon when conducting research, but I am feeling them acutely now.

The civil servants are now asked to share their experience of what it was like to refocus their awareness on such an ordinary everyday task. After a few moments of silence, the heartfelt answers come flooding forward.<sup>2</sup> One participant reflects on how difficult it was to stop her mind from wondering as she completed this simple task. Another observed how they had actually forgotten what chocolate tasted like because they often ate it in such a hurry. Another reflected on the fact that he often failed to allow himself to enjoy the process of eating because his mind was considering what he had to do next. One male participant commented on how fascinated he had become with the visual imperfections of the chocolate they had in their hand, while a female participant reflected on how eating even a small amount of food mindfully had satisfied her hunger.

I feel much more relaxed now: the participants appear to have understood the point of the exercise and have gained some helpful insights into their behaviour because of it. I start to enjoy the session and feel more able to listen and engage with what is being done and said. I notice now how strange it is that while nothing ostensibly changed in the delivery of the session, my assessment of its relative success, and my ability to notice what is actually occurring, is intimately bound up with my own felt sense of first fear/uncertainty and then enjoyment/excitement towards the event. What is also interesting is how my emotional relation with this event is conditioned by my real-time assessment of the responses of the people participating in the practice.

The event recounted above was a taster session for an 8-week *Mindfulness, Behaviour Change and Engagement in Public Policy* (MBCEPP) course which was designed and delivered by the authors of this paper to civil servants working in a branch of the UK Government. The programme ran between March and June 2014 and combined learning about new insights concerning the nature of human motivation and behaviour alongside the practices of mindfulness.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this programme was to explore the extent to which mindfulness could provide an effective context to support critical behavioural learning and facilitate the promotion of forms of behavioural policy that sought to empower those who were subjected to them. We will describe the nature and intent of this programme in greater detail later in the paper. As our brief introductory narrative reveals, the programme raised a series of interesting questions concerning the use of mindfulness techniques within research into critical behavioural learning, and the experience/positionality of researchers. We will explore both of these themes in conceptual and empirical contexts as we move through the paper. The primary goal of this paper is, however, to use this MBCEPP course as a context for thinking about and developing a broader conversation between geography and mindfulness.

According to Williams and Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness is a meditative practice that cultivates 'present-centred non-judgmental awareness' (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 6). The practice of mindfulness has a long history that stretches back over two-and-a-half thousand years. In its original form, mindfulness is a Buddhist practice that was recorded in the Satipatthāna Sutta (the Discourse of Establishing Mindfulness, found in the Pali Canon). The last 40 years have witnessed the application of mindfulness in a wide range of secular therapeutic and professional contexts. The development of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (which was introduced by Jon Kabat-Zinn as a practice for pain management), and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) (which has been used to alleviate certain mental illnesses)

are the most widely discussed secular applications of mindfulness (Bodhi, 2013, pp. 19–120). Following these prominent secular adaptations, mindfulness now appears to be entering the social and political mainstream. The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (UK), for example, has endorsed mindfulness as a treatment for repeat episode depression.<sup>4</sup> The *.b Mindfulness in Schools* project is supporting the use of mindfulness practices in UK education. Mindfulness is also now being widely used in the corporate world, with Google, EBay, Twitter and Facebook, Capital One, and London Transport among a series of companies who promote the practice among their employees.

This paper is predicated on the assumption that mindfulness techniques and insights are pertinent to geographical enquiry and practice. This analysis explores the relationship between mindfulness practice and geographical enquiry through three broad contexts: (1) epistemology and theory-building; (2) methodology; (3) critical psychological geography. More specifically, we claim that mindfulness can offer a practice-based context to support the study of affects, extend the application of psychoanalytical geographical methods beyond the therapeutic, and contribute to emerging geographical studies of behavioural power and empowerment. While these contexts are in part explored in general terms, they are also scrutinised more closely through reflection on the authors' collective involvement in the aforementioned MBCEPP programme. This programme provides a very specific empirical context within which the epistemological, methodological and critical psychological implications of mindfulness for geography can be explored.

## Geography and mindfulness: exploring the connections

### *From the monastery to Google: unpacking mindfulness traditions*

As a religious practice, mindfulness has a long history stretching back over two-and-a-half thousand years. Although this paper is primarily interested in emerging secular interpretations of mindfulness, the nature of mindfulness cannot be effectively grasped without some sense of its connection with Buddhist traditions. The first important thing to note about *Buddhism* is that unlike most major religions, it is not based upon a fixed belief system. In this context, it is helpful to refer to *buddha*-dharma (*awakened teaching*) as opposed to Buddhism (Hagen, 1997). As Hagen observes, '[r]eal Buddhism is not really an "ism". It's a process, an awareness, an openness, a spirit of inquiry – not a belief system, or even (as we normally understand it) a religion' (1997, p. 9). As a non-historical religion, *buddha*-dharma is not concerned with either origin stories or accounts of life after death. It is instead devoted to supporting clearer and more direct experiences, moment by moment, of the here and now (*ibid.*, pp. 7–8).

Mindfulness as a practice is central to the *four noble truths* of *buddha*-dharma: the unsatisfactory nature of existence; the problems that are generated by attachments; enlightenment; and liberation from suffering (see Ditrich, 2013). In *buddha*-dharma, mindfulness meditation is a practical technique in and through which people can change the nature of their relationship with existential phenomena and achieve greater freedom from the emotional constraints that define the human condition. The Pali Canon outlines *four establishments of mindfulness*,

Here a monk dwells contemplating the body in the body ... feelings in feelings ... mind in mind ... phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. (quoted in Bodhi, 2013, p. 21)

According to Bodhi, the four establishments of mindfulness effectively define the practice as 'the reflexive contemplation of one's own experience, subsumed under the four objective domains of the body, feelings, states of mind, and experiential phenomena' (ibid., p. 21). These domains provide practical foci for the 'close, repetitive observation' that lies at the heart of mindfulness (ibid.).<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary, secular interpretations of mindfulness (such as the aforementioned MBCT and MBSR programmes) have been described as 'Buddhist meditative practices, without the Buddhism' (Barker, 2014). Related adaptations of mindfulness use bodies, feelings, states of mind, and experiential prompts (such as noises and sounds) as contexts within which to support the training of attention. In practical terms, secular mindfulness practices often draw close attention to the body through the exercise of body scanning, within which people will spend up to an hour observing the sensations that they can feel in their body (ranging from their toes to their breath). In this context, the body becomes the object that is used to train attention, with participants learning to not only notice the sensations of their body, but also the tendency of their attention to be taken elsewhere.

For the purposes of this paper, we understand mindfulness to refer to 'present-centered non-judgmental awareness' (cf. Dreyfus, 2013). There are several aspects of this beguilingly simple definition that require further clarification. The present-centred nature of mindfulness refers to the emphasis that the practice places on experiencing the world on a moment-by-moment basis. Mindfulness practices (including body scans, breathing exercises and mindful movements *inter alia*) focus on returning a dispersed consciousness back to the present. The dispersion of consciousness is expressed by any process (be it dwelling on past events, future planning, multiple task processing or dealing with troubling emotional responses), which deflect attention from the social and environmental particularities of present situations. Consequently, whether the dispersion of consciousness is a specific product of cognitive overelaboration, or the outcome of a more general process of chronic divided attention, mindfulness attempts to enable a more 'lucid awareness' of the here and now.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the focus of attention, mindfulness supports the development of new relationships with, and perspectives on, the varied mental and physical processes that constitute our being.

The non-judgemental awareness that is characteristic of mindfulness is often wrongly associated with the cultivation of forms of transcendental indifference to the world around us. Non-judgemental awareness actually seeks to enable people to become more aware of the forces that shape their embodied experience and drive subsequent reactions. On these terms, mindfulness supports the development of attentiveness to both the role of emotions in prompting cognitive rumination, and the role of thought in driving emotional response. In this way, mindfulness cultivates an ability to see the connections between thoughts, physical feelings and emotional responses. Central to this process is the ability to see thoughts, feelings and emotions, as just thoughts, feelings and emotions, which while demanding of our attention (particularly in combination) can be skilfully observed. The non-judgemental ethos of mindfulness is practically important in this context because it avoids automatically labelling given thoughts and emotions as either good or bad (be they thoughts of helplessness or hope, or feelings of fear or happiness). Mindfulness thus facilitates an appreciation of the cognitive loops that connect the mind/brain and body while enabling the individual to not be automatically engulfed by these behavioural prompts. In clinical terms, the ability to be aware of, and yet not necessarily respond to, mental and emotional prompts has been shown to help alleviate symptoms of mental illness and physical pain (Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, &

Burney, 1985; Williams, 2008). In academic terms, we claim that the non-judgemental aspects of mindful awareness open up an interesting space (or pause) before the onset of analytical interpretation, within which it may be possible to notice (and experience) potentially overlooked (or unfelt) aspects of a situation (see Harrison, 2009). The cultivation of mindfulness is thus not about not judging, or caring, about the world, but instead involves developing new ways of knowing and caring that are based upon the delaying, but not permanent postponement, of judgement. In the context of mindfulness, judgement tends to shift from being a form of presiding singularity of assessment, to become a series of shifting perspectives on an event or situation that allows room to develop alternative interpretations and hopefully more skilful responses.

### ***Geography and mindfulness: exploring the connections***

While in the past, mindfulness has been primarily associated with the work of Buddhist specialists and contemplative scholars, the last 10 years have witnessed a growing interdisciplinary interest in its practical and epistemological implications. Early academic interest in mindfulness emerged, perhaps inevitably, within the fields of health psychology, cognitive therapy and neuroscience (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 6). Subsequently, mindfulness has become a subject of enquiry within educational studies, research on business and leadership, and analyses of environmental behaviour (Amel, Manning, & Scott, 2009). This paper is not the first attempt to forge connections between geography and mindfulness. It has already been argued, for example, that a mindfulness perspective can contribute to emerging geographical work on mind–body–world assemblages through which everyday habits are produced and sustained (Lea et al., 2015). In addition, existing geographical scholarship exploring the practices of self-awareness cultivated in yoga, stillness, and therapeutic landscapes have developed more implicit engagements with the ideas of mindfulness (Conradson, 2007; Harrison, 2000, 2009; Lea, 2009; Williams, 2007). So far, however, there has been no concerted consideration of the broader implications of mindfulness techniques for geographical research.

Perhaps the most promising, if implicit, indication of the potential significance of mindfulness to geographical inquiry can be discerned within Harrison's analysis of embodiment, sense and everyday life (Harrison, 2000, p. 497). Harrison is concerned with the ways in which the 'very close, the familiar and the habitual' have historically been marginalised within geographical and broader forms of sociological, philosophical and anthropological analysis. Harrison argues that the embodied sensations of everyday life have been routinely disregarded in sociological analysis because of their association with the idiosyncratic, uncertain and provisional (ibid., p. 499). Harrison argues that this disregard for lived experience has resulted in the 'enclosing of the lived within the private and idiosyncratic', and the subsequent neglect of the unthinking, habitual and instinctive ways in which the human organism is organised (ibid., p. 500). What tends to replace an attention to experience is 'purified critical judgment', through which certainty is pursued through objective (an account of the world as an unchanging reality) or subjective (idealised theoretical determinations of reality) transcendence (ibid., p. 507). Objective and subjective forms of transcendence have significant ontological and epistemological implications. Ontologically, objective transcendence leaves little room to account for the emergent changes of lived experience, or the opportunity for the intentional disturbance of the everyday. Epistemologically, subjective forms



of transcendence lead to 'a continual valorisation of the conscious mind over embodiment' (ibid., p. 504). Ultimately Harrison argues that a more embodied analysis of experience and our 'distracted collective habits and gestures' can facilitate disturbances within which we can 'create new forms of life rather than adopt them' (ibid., pp. 511, 509).

Harrison's call for new ways of attending to our distracted, everyday lives resonates strongly with the non-judgement, presented centred awareness of mindfulness. The emphasis that mindfulness places on embodied and environmentally situated awareness also seeks to avoid the forms of subjective transcendence of contemplative externals identified by Harrison. Given that Harrison's analysis draws on Verela's Buddhist inflected philosophies, these synergies are perhaps no surprise (see also Harrison, 2009). Harrison's concerns have, of course, become prominent themes within the broader work of geographers exploring the more-than-representational aspects of affect, the expressive emotions of psychoanalysis and therapeutic geographies (Bondi, 2005; Pile, 2010; Thrift, 2004a, 2004b; Vanolo, 2014). It is our contention that mindfulness techniques could provide a practical basis for developing a more radically oriented therapeutic geography, and a less cerebral engagement with the geographical fields of affect. Mindfulness also has the potential to contribute to emerging debates within the discipline about the relationship between physicality and consciousness (Gagen, 2006). It would also appear to be pertinent to emerging geographical analyses of the *problematic of attention* and the associated genealogies of attentionality (see Hannah, 2013).

In addition to work on more culturally oriented geography, it is becoming increasingly clear that mindfulness perspectives could have implications for emerging research in political geography on behavioural governance and power (see Jones, Pykett, & Whitehead, 2013). Recent developments in the behavioural sciences (see Damasio, 1994; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013 for a review) have presented a challenge to the conventional understanding of human decision-making that emphasises the role of rational contemplation, deliberation and self-interest in human action (Ariely, 2010; Jones et al., 2013). These insights have resulted in shifts within the design and implementation of public policy (see Sunstein, 2013; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Whitehead, Jones, & Pykett, 2011). The emergence of more psychologically oriented forms of governance have used the insights of the behavioural sciences to autocorrect non-optimal forms of human behaviour (pertaining to issues, such as organ donation, mitigating climate change, pension savings and personal health) (Jones, Pykett, & Whitehead, 2011; Rowson, 2011). In the wake of the emergence of new psychological techniques of government, mindfulness is seen by some as a potential strategy for challenging more disempowering manifestations of neuro-power. On these terms, mindfulness is being described as a technique that could be used to make people more aware of the diverse range of conscious and unconscious (deliberative and emotional) forces that shape human action, and thus more able to shape their own behavioural destinies (Hafenbrack, Kinias, & Barsade, 2014; Jones et al., 2013; Lilley & Whitehead, 2014; Rowson, 2011). In the final section of this paper, we explore in greater depth the potential contribution of mindfulness to work on radically oriented psychoanalytical geographies and the development of more empowering forms of behavioural government.

### **Mindfulness-based engagement in public policy: an account of an intervention**

A month has passed since the taster session for our MBCEPP ran. I am now in a large meeting room with the 14 civil servants who have signed up to the full programme. Having struggled

to move the heavy tables that were in the centre of the room to the sidewalls, we are now lying on our backs in uneven patterns on brightly coloured yoga mats. The glass doors and wall that are found in one corner of the room have been blocked using a hastily arranged wall of flip chart frames. We are encouraged to notice any tension (holding) in our jawbones and shoulders and where possible to allow these areas of our body to relax. It is suggested that as we face the bright lights of the ceiling above that we either relax our eyes (by allowing our vision to fall out of sharp focus) or close them. We are about to embark on a body scan that will encourage us to focus our attention on different aspects of our body (starting with the places where our bodies are in contact with our mats and slowly moving up the body from our toes to our head). As I lie in this silent room (noticing the different points where my body is making contact with the floor), I am conscious of the strangeness of the situation I find myself in: prostrate in a room with similarly horizontal civil servants with my eyes closed. I feel grateful for the presence of those shielding flipcharts, but concerned that they are not blocking all angles of sight from the corridor outside. What will onlookers think? Trying to refocus on the sensations of where my calf muscles are touching the floor, I am reassured by the teacher's voice: 'it is perfectly natural for your mind to wonder. The key is to notice that your attention has shifted and move it gently back to your body'.

We developed the MBCEPP programme in liaison with one branch of the British government's civil service. The programme emerged on the basis of our interest in the potential connections between initiatives that were designed to change people's behaviours (particularly in relation to low carbon living, health eating and financial planning) and mindfulness. Emerging behaviour change initiatives have been utilising the insights of the behavioural sciences (in particular behavioural economics, neuroscience and behavioural psychology) to develop policies that take into account the unconscious, emotional and practically oriented nature of human decision-making (Mettler, 2011; Shafir, 2013; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). While such policy developments offer valuable new perspectives on the nature of human behaviour, they have been widely criticised for being manipulative and taking too dim a view of the human capacity for behavioural learning (see Furedi, 2011; Gigerenzer, 2014; Jones et al., 2013). We were interested in the extent to which learning about the theories behind new behavioural insights alongside mindfulness training could facilitate approaches to behaviour change that were based upon new forms of self-understanding as opposed to external psychological nudging (see Hafenbrack et al., 2014).

The MBCEPP follows the standard 8-week MBCT programme, which gradually takes participants through exercises that draw attention to the automatic nature of the mind, embodied sensations, the nature of thoughts, how people deal with difficulties, and compassion (see Williams & Penman, 2011). Two-hour sessions were held every week with participants. In these sessions, participants were introduced to different mindfulness practices alongside relevant insights from the behavioural sciences (in relation to the behavioural sciences, particular focus was given to cognitive biases, the roles of emotions in decision-making and the importance of socio-environmental context within human action). Alongside these activities, the sessions enabled group members to openly discuss their experience of mindfulness practices. In addition to the weekly 2-h practices, participants on the course were expected to engage in ongoing mindfulness practices at home and work. The impacts of the programme have been assessed using a quantitative survey (measuring mindfulness traits on a standard scale and awareness of new behaviour insights). We also conducted a series of in-depth interviews with participants following the course. We have now run the

programme 3 times with 47 civil servants. In addition to measuring the impacts that the MBCEPP programme had on the everyday behaviours of participants, we have also been considering its affects on the design, implementation and evaluation of public policy for which participants have responsibility.

While we do reflect briefly on the provisional results of the MBCEPP programme, the purpose of this paper is not to provide a detailed account of this initiative.<sup>7</sup> Rather, we seek to use the MBCEPP programme as a context for thinking through the broader implications of mindfulness for geographical research. In this context, we attempt to offer not only an account of mindfulness as a process being researched, but also to reflect upon the broader impact of mindfulness on geographical research itself.

## **Modulating reactivity and cultivating acceptance: mindful methods and epistemologies**

What is interesting about the emerging forms of non-representational and more-than-rational geography that we outlined above is that while they have emphasised the importance of capturing the ephemeral and insidious contours of existence, it often remains unclear precisely how geographers can become more effective at capturing these notoriously elusive forces (although for some interesting discussion in this area see Lorino, Tricard, & Clot, 2011; Thomas, 2010). In this section, we consider the potential role of mindfulness in supporting the epistemological and methodological goals of a more-than-rational geography.

### ***Mindfulness methods and the cultivation of attention***

In therapeutic terms, Dreyfus argues that mindfulness be understood as

[a] state of awareness that allows for the observation of mental states without over-identifying with them so as to create an attitude of acceptance that can lead to greater curiosity and better self-understanding. This provides a way to disengage with the habitual patterns of discursive and affective reactivity so as to allow a more reflective response to the difficult circumstances of one's life rather than remain a prisoner of ones habits and compulsions. (2013, p. 43)

Taken out of a therapeutic context, it is our contention that mindfulness can both support a curiosity about the more-than-rational dimensions of social and cultural life and offer a potential palliative to the geographical researchers' reductionist habits and rationalising compulsions. At a methodological level, mindfulness practices are designed to deliberately sensitise people to both the affective push of the social and material worlds they inhabit (a sensitivity that includes smells, sounds, social norms and expectations), and the embodied forces of feelings and emotions (including physical pain, gut reactions and the bodily stresses of anxiety). On these terms, mindfulness could be used to nurture the practical skills that support the study of phenomenological and emotional processes that are central to more-than-rational perspectives on space and place.

In the MBCEPP programme, various practices were introduced to participants in order to enable them to pay greater attention to the more-than-conscious processes that infuse their daily lives. Breath and body meditations were used to enable participants to notice the sensations of their breath moving within different parts of their body, and to recognise how quickly attention tends to be taken away from this simple act of noticing. Body scans

provide a corporal focus for attention, but also reveal the multitude of embodied vibrations, feelings, and fluctuations that we routinely ignore. Sound-based meditations were similarly used in the MBCEPP programme to focus participant attention on the various overlapping sounds that constantly surround them in their daily lives. Sound-based meditations are used within mindfulness training not only to focus attention on overlooked aspects of the sonic environment, but also to cultivate richer appreciations of the soundscape, which recognises the changing textures, tonalities and frequencies of different sounds. It is important to note at this point that mindfulness training is not just about raising awareness of all of the affective processes that are so often missed within everyday life: it is a training process, which by repeatedly enabling people to see how their attention is quickly taken away from even the simplest practices of attentiveness, cultivates new skills of awareness. In this context, participants on the MBCEPP programme were not so much subjects of our research (as we assessed the impacts of mindfulness training on their behavioural traits and various aspects of everyday lives), as research practitioners who were cultivating new insights into different spheres of their interiority and external lives.

Participants on the MBCEPP programme reported a range of things that they noticed in their personal and working lives in new or enhanced ways. One participant, for example, described developing a new relationship with their body. Before the programme began, they saw their body 'as a bit annoying': something that tended to get in the way of a life that was largely intellectual in its orientation. Following the programme, they reported a new found appreciation of their body. They felt more 'joined-up', seeing their body as a vital part of their intellectual and physical life: they even joined an exercise class. Perhaps the most common theme that emerged in the course, however, was people's awareness of their embodied reactions to situations of fear and anxiety. One participant reflected on the impacts of mindfulness training on their understanding of their response to confrontational situations,

You know that you react and your body tells you. You know, there's a physiological spot, you can feel it. But I think the mindfulness practice would just confirm what I kind of knew would happen to me when I'm in a difficult situation. But I think the real benefit was that actually doing that practice shows you how things just come and go and it's transitory and things dissipate. And I think for me that was just really powerful, and I think it's really useful. You put yourself in that position rather than avoid it. Because, I mean, I don't like confrontation. I'm not really good ...[...] I would just curl up in that sort of situation. I don't like it. But I think you have to deal with it. And I think, again, the practice shows you, you know, the defending for example, it just shows you that you can be more accepting [...]. (MBCEPP Participant I)

There are two things of particular note within this observation. The first is the idea that mindfulness is actually drawing awareness to something that you somehow already know (for example, how your body responds to a threat). On these terms, it is not so much that mindfulness enables you to perceive something that was completely hidden to you before, but rather that it enables you to acknowledge something whose affects were so routine that they were unknowingly internalised. Second is the connection between mindful awareness and change. Noticing how emotional states and bodily responses come and go is obviously important within therapeutic contexts where people are trying to deal with seemingly all encompassing issues. But in non-therapeutic contexts, awareness of subtle forms of change and transience opens up new opportunities for responding to and interpreting phenomena.

Mindfulness provides a context within which to support new forms of attentiveness to a range of embodied and more-than-conscious processes. In a counter-intuitive way, the *in situ* mindfulness training we delivered was not the primary focus of our research inquiry.

While it was salutary to learn about the *in situ* experiences of participants while they practised mindfulness for the first time, the sessions actually acted as a form of prelude for participants who were trained to pay attention in new ways to a wide range of everyday processes that happened over the entire course of the 8-week programme. In this context, mindfulness acted as a form of methodological training for research participants who were able to use their new skills to develop new ways of attending to, and reporting on, more-than-rational aspects of their daily lives.

### **Bare awareness**

We are sitting in a circle with our backs positioned away from our chairs. We are encouraged to assume a posture that signals both being relaxed but attentive at the same time. We are encouraged to drop our shoulders and pay attention to the movement of our breath, the cold air coming in, the warm air being exhaled. After a couple of minutes, we are then instructed to pay attention to our thoughts. But we are told not to pay attention to our thoughts (and the emotional and bodily responses they generate) as we usually do. Instead of getting swept along into patterns of planning, reflecting and worrying, we are told to see thoughts 'as just thoughts' which come and go without us necessarily being caught up in the emotional charge that they carry. This form of non-reactive noticing of thoughts (and other phenomena) is sometimes referred to as *bare attention* (see Bodhi, 2013).

I find being given the license to pay attention to thoughts through the lens of bare attention initially liberating: I am apparently not an emotional prisoner to my thoughts and thinking of them as clouds passing in and out of consciousness is soothing and reassuring. But my initial sense of liberation soon gives way to a realisation of just how difficult it is to observe thoughts: without even realising it I am being constantly carried away by my thoughts into deeper levels of emotional engagement and problem-solving, before I realise what I have done and refocus my attention on the next thoughts to arise. Waiting for the genesis of a thought feels profound, but, strange though it may seem, as I wait for thoughts to arise, they seem reluctant to expose themselves to the light of bare attention. With time I notice that I am getting better at observing thoughts in a non-responsive way, but as soon I realise this, I notice how my thought pattern starts to dwell on the epistemological implications of bare attention, suddenly, and unexpectedly, I am arrested by the realisation that I am thinking about thinking: there is another level of thought to which bare attention can be given.

In drawing attention to the emergence of thoughts and the always, already connected nature of cognition and emotion, mindfulness can offer valuable insights into the nature of human interpretation and analysis. To these ends, there is more to mindfulness training than simply the aggregation of new insights into the more-than-rational-world of affect and embodiment. In exposing the affective qualities of thoughts as well emotions – and the complex ways in which these affective fields combine – mindfulness carries with it implications for geographical research. The idea of bare attention is crucial in this context. The development of bare attention cultivates forms of non-responsiveness between the individual and the thing to which that individual is giving attention. In this context, bare attention does not necessarily stop us reacting to cognitive or corporeal stimulus, but enables us to be more aware of how we are reacting and how it may be possible to image reacting in different ways. Prompts to reactivity can be discursive/representational and involve the words or interpretative frameworks of another. They can also be emotional, and reflect our gut reactions to

certain situations and environments. The fact that mindfulness deliberately attempts to open up a non-responsive and non-judgemental space between more-than-rational prompts and analytical acts has both epistemological methodological implications.

In terms of epistemology, the cultivation of bare attention has the potential to expose the automatic and reactive nature of the way in which we build knowledge and interpretative frameworks. While it is clearly different to give bare attention to a thought than it is to perceive more clearly how we construct theoretical interpretation, while delivering the MBCEPP programme we have noticed how bare attention works to open up an analytical space between interpretative response and conceptual explanation. This analytical space appears to operate between the processes of interpretative undermining and over-mining. Interpretative undermining operates when the particularities of our experience of a given situation tend to shape our interpretation of the things and processes that are under consideration. Interpretative undermining does, of course, have strong links with phenomenology and the idea that things are like they are because that is how they are for me (Harman, 2010), and Harrison's aforementioned notion of subjective transcendence. Interpretative over-mining tends to operate in the other direction, as we interpret particular situations and phenomena on the basis of the metaphysical triggers that they stimulate within us (Harman, 2014). The cultivation of bare attention does not prevent the triggers to interpretive and under and over-mining occurring. What it does seek to do is enable us to hold some interpretative ground between these seductive prompts within which situational observations and conceptual abstractions can support rather than close off curiosity and more open forms of inquiry.

The epistemological significance of bare attention became apparent to us as part of our own assessment of the MBCEPP programme. During the course of the 8-week programmes we ran, it became clear to us from both formal (in group) discussion and informal feedback that the MBCEPP was something of a success. Participants were reporting that they were benefitting greatly from the programme and were keen to promote mindfulness more widely throughout the civil service. As this feedback started to emerge, we noticed that it began to shape our own experience of the programme. We started to see the programme as a transformative process, that was making a real difference to people's lives. Moreover, we noticed how our own positive emotional association with the programme started to affect our interpretation of the effectiveness of the programme as a whole. Quickly the thought the MBCEPP was effective morphed into assumptions that it was effective in the specific ways in which we hoped it would be (particularly in relation to the development of behavioural empowerment, the building of psychological capital and changes in the broader policy-making process). Our own mindfulness practice, which was carried out as part of the MBCEPP course (and more generally), did not stop these emotionally charged epistemological leaps occurring, but it did make us more aware that this processes was occurring. The cultivation of forms of bare attention around the MBCEPP appeared to enable us to more openly acknowledge that we were still not sure what the programme had achieved and to articulate the intention to find out more.

While mindfulness offers one way in which scholars can re-inhabit the more-than-rational processes through which knowledge and theory are formed in and of itself, it is no guarantee of more nuanced forms of geographical interpretation. What mindfulness does appear to offer, however, is some protection against the most pernicious forms of reductionism that emerge out of seemingly innocent, automatic responses to interpretative prompts. To put

things another way, it makes it much more difficult to use our lack of consciousness of why we think about/respond to something in a certain way as a basis for asserting some form of objectivity. In their pioneering work on mindfulness and habit, Lea et al. (2015) suggest that mindful techniques can cultivate 'dialogues with the self', in and through which the cognitive processes through which we make sense of the world become the object of conscious attention. On these terms, Lea et al. argue that mindfulness can bring epistemological habits into consciousness, and support the generation of new reflective habits of cognitive self-awareness.

The idea of bare attention also has important implications for geographical methods. We have already discussed the methodological significance of giving attention to our own attention, but the processes associated with the cultivation of bare attention have further implications for qualitative forms of interpersonal research. In broad terms, the practice of bare attention provides a supportive context within which to consider our role in the production of particular research encounters. This type of perspective does, of course, echo the methodological emphasis that is placed on positionality and open witness within existing geographical work in feminist and non-representational traditions (Dewsbury, 2003). In more specific terms, however, the notion of bare attention resonates most strongly with Bondi's mobilisation of psychotherapeutic insights within geographical research (2003). Focusing specifically on qualitative interviews, Bondi considers how psychotherapeutic counselling practices can illuminate the *intra-psychic* and intersubjective exchanges that surround the research process. Echoing the attenuated reactivity associated with bare attention, Bondi argues that psychotherapy is predicated on the counsellor/interviewer

[b]eing emotionally present, and allow[ing] the interviewee's material to trigger feelings, whether of sadness, joy, anger, fear, protectiveness, disgust, or whatever. At the same time, the interviewer sustains the capacity to think about these responses, and is not incapacitated by them. (2003, p. 71)

We argue that mindfulness techniques facilitate the 'oscillation between observation and participation' that Bondi's work pursues. What mindfulness more specifically offers, however, is a practice-based pathway to developing an engaged, but not overwhelming, psychic space within which intersubjective research can be pursued.

The methodological implications of bare attention became apparent in the MBCEPP in a series of different ways.<sup>8</sup> In relation to both the ethnographic research and qualitative interviews we carried out, it was noticeable how, echoing Bondi, mindfulness appeared to establish a distinctive *intra-psychic* space for research. In the context of the MBCEPP programme, however, this *intra-psychic* space was not just about being emotionally present to the research situation, but about the more open expression of emotion and feelings. During the mindfulness sessions, interviews and group feedback, it was noticeable how talking about emotions appeared to gain a sense of validity and normality. People thus openly discussed their fears and anxieties, problems they were encountering with sleep, challenging family situations and the emotional landscape of the workplace. Given that mindfulness practices are dedicated to paying attention to felt sensations and emotional response, it is perhaps to be expected that such themes would emerge within discussion in and around the programme. But it did appear that the cultivation of bare attention made the surfacing and discussion of often-unacknowledged aspects of emotional life easier for both those being researched and those carrying out research. In the group feedback sessions we ran, participants also reflected on the fact that collectively practising mindfulness training,

and discussing the insights that it facilitated with colleagues, gave legitimacy to the more general discussion and acknowledgement of emotional issues within a professional setting. Within this context, participants observed how they had become much more open about how their emotional responses to people and situations were shaping the decisions that they were making, and wanted these issues to be more openly discussed and accepted. Because mindfulness cultivates a sense of collective study of, and interest in, emotional experiences, it appears that as a research methodology, it has the potential to extend the psychic-space of research identified by Bondi. This extended psychic space incorporates not only the mindfulness researcher and subject, but also the mindfulness group of which they are a part. In instances where the mindfulness groups routinely share everyday (work)spaces (as was the case with the MBCEPP programme), it appears that the inter psychic space of collective learning could extend into various forms of quotidian life.

When it came to conducting interviews with participants (following the 8-week programme), the implications of mindfulness extended beyond establishing an emotionally rich psychic space. In keeping with the ethos of the MBCEPP programme, we felt that it was important that interviews should be carried out in as mindful a way as possible. Mindful interviewing was facilitated by practising short mindfulness practices before certain interviews, but also involved the more deliberate cultivation of bare attention during the interview process itself. Our attempt to conduct interviews in a more mindful style provided two important insights into the nature of the interview process. First, we became much more aware of our tendency to assess the relative success and failure of an interview as it was in progress. This assessment of the interview appeared, in part, to be based on the responses of the interviewees to the interview situation, and in particular the extent to which they appeared to be happy, anxious, confident or unresponsive. It also derived from the extent to which the interviewee was able to provide the forms of insights into the programme that we were hoping to elicit. Taken together, we noticed how this ongoing meta-assessment process affected both our emotional response to the interview situation (and the extent to which we became excited or defensive in our demeanour), and our ability to attend to the content of what interviewees were actually saying. Second, we became much more aware of the anxieties that emerged when interviewees appeared to be diverging from the key questions and schedule that we had established for interviews. While we developed a semi-structured style of interview, it was clear that effectively addressing certain questions was an important step in helping us to address our research objectives and those of the civil service officials with whom we were working. Ultimately, we noticed how our attempts to get interviews back on track often prevented us from acknowledging why certain tangential discussions had emerged and why they may have been more significant to the discussion than we thought. For example, we noticed a tendency of interviewees to want to discuss the course in relation to the cuts in resources that were being experienced within the public sector in Britain. One participant thus observed,

There [are] a lot of people who were under a lot of stress because of what they have to deliver and cuts in resources, staff cuts. You know, more and more we are expected to do more and more with less resources. So I think that the course [MBCEPP programme] can help people to just entitle them to a general sort of health and wellbeing. I think that it can help people to manage their stress levels and how they manage things generally. [MBCEP Participant]

Because the MBCEPP programme was focused on exploring the role of mindfulness in facilitating critical behavioural learning as opposed to offering overt therapeutic benefits, we



observed a tendency to initially see such insights as a distraction. However, by paying attention to our tendency to ignore (or dismiss) such views, we have come to see these reflections as vital insights into both the contextual constraints that the development of progressive behavioural policy face, and the underlying therapeutic motivations that inform people's decision to participate in mindfulness training (even when it is framed in more-than-therapeutic ways). In these contexts, mindfulness appeared to not only support the cultivation of a supportive inter-psyhic space between researcher and researched, but also facilitated the emergence of more awareness (and sometimes regulation) of the researcher's analytical and emotional relationship with the research project of which they are a part.

It is perhaps too easy for us to overstate the methodological significance of mindfulness (it is after all impossible to know precisely what the impact of mindfulness ultimately was by the way we conducted our research, or how it may have been different without mindfulness). Nevertheless, we feel that the potential methodological impacts of mindfulness are captured effectively in the sentiments of one MBCEPP participant. They observed,

[practising mindfulness] raises your own awareness of perhaps your own personal prejudices and reactions when dealing with others [...] but the thing with civil servants – this is a cliché – is that we're not really supposed to have opinions. But of course we do. We have to have professional opinions, which might not necessarily align with our personal opinions. But I think that [the course] facilitates the ability to do that. Because you have to engage in a form of double think at times. And a course like this facilitates the ability to be able to think along a different lines than the one you might be automatically inclined to fall into. [MBCEPP Participant]

It appears that mindfulness enabled this civil servant be much more aware of the role that their subjectivities played in their work and decision-making. Despite the studied objectivity that is expected of civil servants, it is apparent in this case that an awareness of subjectivity facilitated by mindfulness contributed to a different form of objective perspective. This is an objective perspective that bases its claims to objectivity on a more open acknowledgement of the subjectivities that inevitably inform it. Conducting research on and through mindfulness techniques facilitated a very similar experience for us as researchers. While our position as researchers within the project was predictably legitimated in part through assumptions of objectivity, mindfulness, and the associated cultivation of bare attention, allowed us to acknowledge more freely the varied subjectivities that informed our research both to the research participants and ourselves.

## **Counter psychologies and radical geographies**

We are sitting in an irregular shaped circle with our chairs pressed against the wall of the meeting room. The 8 weeks of the MBCEPP programme has now passed and we have returned to meet participants on the programme to get their feedback on the course. We begin the session with a 20-min mindfulness practice, which combines elements of the different practices we have learned (breath and body, sounds and thoughts). We now enter a group discussion about the 8-week programme. One of the first themes to emerge is the fact that despite participants' desires to continue with mindfulness practices, they report how difficult this is to achieve without the dedicated time and space that the programme provided them with. One of the participants reports the programme has enabled them to become more aware of their habits and achieve new forms of self-regulation over them. Other participants reflect on how the course has enabled them to cope with the demands

of their workload and the emotional distress they experience in everyday life. Suddenly the discussion begins to change direction and takes on a very different feel. Participants reflect on the fact that 'mindfulness is not going to make impossible lives possible' and start to discuss the broader systems that appear to get in the way of more mindful living. Suddenly the discussion has moved on to the changing structure of the civil service and the expectations of line managers and those in the broader political system. The discussion moves on to Thatcherism and broader deliberations of how change can be achieved in complex systems.

I notice the change in the focus of the group discussion, as participants move from an account of their own experience of mindfulness to its impact on how they see the world around them. This isn't the first time that political themes have been discussed in the course, but I notice the strong feelings that are now being expressed in the room and the tensions that they seem to be generating. In some ways I feel awkward being involved in this discussion: it appears to have disrupted the ethos of calm that had previously characterised the course. At one and the same time I am energised by the nature of this form of feedback on the programme: Is this an indication of the potential radical impacts of mindfulness?

In this final section, we briefly consider the specific relevance of mindfulness for work in one specific field of human geography: the broadly defined arena of psychoanalytical geographies (see Bondi, 2005; Callard, 2003; Pile, 2010; Vanolo, 2014). The emergence of critical psychoanalytical perspectives in geography has generated significant interest in the more-than-rational, and, in particular, more-than-conscious aspects of social power and human behaviour (for an excellent critical overview of this process see Callard, 2003). While psycho-geography's concern with the more-than-rational aspects of human existence resonates strongly with mindfulness, the critical, anti-essentialist ethos of related geographical inquiry is suggestive of radically oriented applications of mindfulness. To these ends, this section moves beyond discussions of methodology and epistemology to consider the potential contributions of mindfulness to the broader politicisation of psychology.

In considering the radical political potential of mindfulness, it is important to acknowledge those critiques that have questioned the social value of mindfulness precisely because it tends towards a de-radicalisation of the self and society. Mindfulness is often categorised alongside other therapeutic forms of social intervention condemned for supporting the production of highly individualised, and politically passive subjects that are ideally suited to neoliberal hegemony (see Butler, 1997; Furedi, 2003; Rose, 1985, 1990). In a recent analysis of the mindfulness movement, for example, Barker argued that mindfulness has actively contributed to the production of extended systems of therapeutic surveillance and intervention that have essentially resulted in the medicalisation of every moment (2014). In this context, Barker argues that mindfulness interprets our inability to pay attention as a form of disease, and searches for cures to this pathology within personalised systems for monitoring attention.

In response to these critiques of mindfulness, it is instructive to consider Bondi's not unrelated defence of the use of psychoanalytical techniques within geography. Bondi has argued that therapeutic techniques such as psychoanalysis 'contain politically subversive possibilities' (2003, p. 497). According to Bondi, in facilitating enhanced forms of personal autonomy and empowerment, psychotherapy can generate resistance to the psychological norms of neoliberalism (and in particular consumerism, competition, vanity and aggressive individualism). Although mindfulness is an inherently apolitical practice, we claim that it contains many of the same radical psychological capacities as psychotherapy. In one context,

this can be seen in relation to mindfulness' ability to enable people to become more aware of the political and commercial exploitation of the collective unconscious. It also relates to the capacity to recognise the ways in which our own anxieties, compulsions and emotional responses are constantly being involved in a form of psychologically destructive self-governance. In this context, it is instructive to reflect on some of the reported impacts of the MBCEPP programme.

A key insight that emerged from the MBCEPP programme was that mindfulness could provide a platform of social resistance that moved beyond the personal. In this context, it was interesting in the aforementioned programme feedback session that several participants reflected on the impacts that mindfulness training had on their understanding of and relation to the systems that they operated within. One participant thus reflected that mindfulness at one and the same time 'helps you cope with the system and makes you fundamentally challenge the system.. To these ends, a recurring theme mentioned by participants was that in opening up a greater (bare) awareness of the reality of a situation that you find yourself in (and by being able to deal with the pain that this may cause), mindfulness training appeared to facilitate an ability to acknowledge the injustices of the systems we work within and a recognition of the falsities of expression and action that protect it. It is important to acknowledge that the radical potential that participants on the MBCEPP programme identified within mindfulness emerged in the context of a programme that was deliberately not cast as a therapeutic intervention. It is also crucial to recognise that participants on the MBCEPP felt that the potential of mindfulness to facilitate change at an organisational level was dependent on developing teams of mindfulness practitioners. Given the fact that mindfulness can be delivered on more-than-therapeutic terms, and can be delivered to teams, it is our contention that it could provide a context to deepen and extend work on the development of radical psychologies within psychoanalytical geography, and take related research interventions into a range of new spatial settings.

In addition to the broad radical potential of mindfulness, it could also offer a more specific counter-point to contemporary manifestations of psychological power. As we mentioned earlier in this paper, mindfulness practices have not been alone in the attention they have brought to the more-than-rational aspects of the human condition (see Ariely, 2010; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Emerging insights from new behavioural sciences into the more-than-rational aspects of human behaviour have led to new interest in the psychological and neurological sciences within governments throughout the world (Behavioural Insights Team, 2011; Sunstein, 2013). The emergence of more psychologically oriented governmental techniques have been critically analysed by geographers who have considered both the ethics and efficacy of related public policy developments (see Gill & Gill, 2012; Jones et al., 2011, 2013; Whitehead et al., 2011). Some argue that these behavioural experts are using new behavioural insights to change the conduct of the public while this same public remains ignorant of how and why their more-than-rational natures are being exploited (Jones et al., 2013; Rowson, 2011). In essence, related policies close off the 'psychic space' of empowerment identified within the work of Bondi (2003). It is in this context that mindfulness could facilitate greater public awareness of the insights of the behavioural sciences and how they relate to the cognitive and emotional components of their own lives.

While it is difficult to image how mindfulness practices could be scaled up in the same way that nudges have been, mindfulness can nevertheless serve as a potent reminder of the forms of psychological empowerment that some argue are missing within mainstream

behaviour change policies (Jones et al., 2013; Rowson, 2011). There is also significant scope for geographers to test the role of mindfulness-based practice as a context for specific behavioural interventions. Early work in this direction (in geography and beyond) has focused on questions of habit and addiction and has considered whether the development of psychological self-awareness may actually be an effective and empowering way of changing long-term pathological behaviours (see Armstrong, 2012; Lilley & Whitehead, 2014). Exploring the connections between mindfulness and behavioural government was, of course, a central aim of the MBCEPP we have outlined in this paper. At an individual level, participants noticed that mindfulness had enabled them to become more aware of some of the unconscious and embodied dimensions of their decision-making (particularly in relation to biases and habits), and had facilitated some agency (or sense of control) over these behaviours. At a more strategic level, it is at present difficult to assess the impacts of the MBCEPP on the nature of behavioural policy itself. However, as the different policy-making teams we are working with embed mindfulness practices into their work, it should be possible to get a much clearer sense of the radical potential of mindfulness within public policy.

### **Conclusions: reflections on mindfulness and geography**

In this paper, we have explored potential areas of dialogue and practice between mindfulness and geography. We have argued that mindfulness is at one and the same time an analytical perspective, research method and object of study that has direct relevance for a series of areas of work within the discipline. While mindfulness has implications for all areas of human geography, we have introduced specific disciplinary areas of inquiry for which it has direct relevance. It appears, for example, that mindfulness could provide a practical context within which to develop and augment the skills and capacities that could support analyses of affect, emotion and the more-than-rational within human geography. We have also explored how mindfulness might extend the intra-psychic spaces of investigation associated with psychoanalytical geography from the interpersonal and therapeutic to the inter-social and more-than-therapeutic. Finally, we have considered how mindfulness could contribute to emerging work on habit systems and behaviour change within political geography, and open up new forms of action research-type studies into psychological empowerment.

Beyond these specific areas of relevance, we have also set out what we perceive to be the main implications of mindfulness for the discipline of geography more generally. Through reflections on our own study, and utilisation, of mindfulness techniques (as part of our programme), we have emphasised the contribution which mindfulness can make to geographers' often-unacknowledged relations with attention. We have seen that mindfulness can offer a form of methodological training and framework that can serve to support researchers in their attempts to attend to the illusive fields of embodiment and affect. We have also considered the ways in which the cultivation of bare attention can change researchers' relations with the affects they seek to study and which shape their research experiences. While not explicitly considered within this paper, it is also interesting to speculate on what the potential contribution of mindfulness could be to the work of political and economic geographers who are concerned with the strategic spatial and historical connections between attention, self-governance and capitalist modernity (Hannah, 2013). Ultimately, the invitation to (re) inhabit attention that mindfulness offers has implications for how geographers approach questions of objectivity, subjectivity and judgement. In relation to questions of objectivity

and subjectivity, mindfulness has the potential to raise important questions concerning the role of acknowledging subjectivity within the broader pursuit of some form of objective positionality. In the context of judgement, mindfulness would appear to offer a practical context within which to support forms of flexible judgement that are open to change in the nature of the things that are being studied. In this context, and indeed in many others, mindfulness has striking similarities within the broader analytical goals of post-structural geographical inquiry.

## Notes

1. In this reflection, and the personal reflections that follow, is the lead author of this paper.
2. The responses noted here are actually taken from two one-and-a-half-hour mindfulness 'taster' sessions we have run with civil servants. These sessions were the prelude to civil servants participating in a full 8-week mindfulness programme.
3. We have subsequently run other two other versions of this course, which we also reflect upon in this paper.
4. Mindfulness is now being used within the UK's National Health Service as a 'recommended treatment' for depressive illnesses.
5. It is important at this point to draw a line of distinction between mindfulness and clear comprehension. While mindfulness supports the development of a 'lucid awareness' of what is happening in the here and now, it does not necessarily involve comprehension (*ibid.*, p. 22). In *buddha*-dharma, while clear comprehension is supported by the practices of mindful observation, comprehension involves a cognitive dimension, which translates observations into interpretations of what is happening (*ibid.*, p. 22). In *buddha*-dharma, the interpretation of carefully observed phenomena usually involves positioning observation within the broader canon of the dharma. In more secular applications of mindfulness, clear awareness may be pursued through other frameworks for understanding social and psychological life.
6. It is important to note that although mindfulness prioritises present-centred awareness, the present is not the only thing that can be subject to mindful contemplation. Dreyfus (2013), for example, asserts that it is possible to develop a non-judgemental awareness of past events (memories) and future plans.
7. We note here that the final quantitative and qualitative evaluations for two of the trials is still being completed, and that the broader evaluation of policy impact is ongoing.
8. We deployed four main methods for evaluating the MBCEPP programme. First of all, as active participants in the MBCEPP, we were able to develop ethnographic insights into the experience of those participating on the course (particularly when large and small group discussions were held within the weekly mindfulness training sessions). Second, we conducted three online surveys (conducted before, immediately after and 6 months after the completion of the 8-week programme). Third, we carried out a whole group 2-h feedback session at the end of the programme. Fourth, we conducted in-depth interviews with selected participants on the programme.

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