

Cultivating a Compassionate Self through Meditation

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Table of contents

Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Chapter II: Literature Review	5
Understanding the Mind Buddhist Perspective.....	5
Critique and Controversy of Mindfulness in Western Psychology.....	7
Mindfulness Meditation in Buddhist Psychology.....	8
The Applied Concept of Mindfulness in the West.....	9
The Nature of Compassion and Self-Compassion	10
Western Perspectives on the View of the Self	14
Buddhist View of the Self	15
Review on: Empathetic Feelings, Prosocial Behavior	16
Chapter III: Method	17
Methodology and Philosophy.....	17
Participants	18
Procedure.....	19
Ethics.....	19
Chapter IV: Data Analysis	20
Thematic Analysis.....	20
Chapter V: Results	21
Themes	21
Theme 1 - The Psychological Art of Meditation.....	21
Theme 2 - Cultivation of a Compassionate Human Being.....	28
Theme 3 - Understanding who we are Through Meditation	32
Theme 4 - Buddha Nature	35
Chapter VI: Discussion.....	37
References.....	40
Appendices:.....	54
Appendix A	54
Appendix B	55
Appendix C	56
Appendix D	57
Appendix E.....	58
Appendix F.....	60

Declaration

‘I declare that this thesis that I have submitted to Dublin Business School for the award of BA (Hons) Psychology is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated, where it is clearly acknowledged by references. Furthermore, this work has not been submitted for any other degree.’

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ABSTRACT

Contemplative traditions for millennia contemplated Compassion as a fundamental part of humanity, and in recent years, it has received major scientific interest. This paper is an attempt to provide a deeper understanding of Buddhist Meditational practices in cultivating Compassionate contact. Using a qualitative methodology, this study explored meditational insights of five advanced meditators, using semi-structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis, within essentialist/realist approach. Four themes emerged {1} the psychological art of meditation, {2} the cultivation of compassionate human being, {3} understanding who we are through meditation, {4} Buddha nature. Although further research is essential, the current state of evidence illustrates participant's meditational experiences and the potential benefits for the individual and the society.

Chapter I: Introduction

Brief History of Buddhist influence in contemplative research

Buddhism is the older of the world's universal religions. In the last fifty years Buddhism has gained many followers in Western countries. Convenient travels, virtually instant communication, immigration brought together the Eastern with Western cultures. Tibet for many centuries remained unknown and mystical and only when the Communist Chinese invasion occurred in the 1950's that forced ruthlessly a third of the entire Tibetan population into diaspora brought their religion and culture to the rest of the world (Anand, 2003). Although Tibetans Buddhists have undergone significant hardships, manifest a psychological flexibility. Research indicates the reason might be within the Buddhist philosophy (Sachs et al., 2008; Keller et al., 2006).

Buddhist meditative practices, in their multitude of varieties, illuminate the importance of knowing one's own mind. All traditional Asian Buddhism share the same features and offer multiple approaches to mindfulness and meditational practices. For the vast majority of traditional Buddhism, meditation practice in everyday life is essential, along with a lifestyle that nurtures wholesome contact (Dunne, 2015). The concepts of '*Wisdom*' and '*Compassion*' are the corner stone in Mahayana Buddhist Philosophy (Gyatso, 2000). Buddhist meditation utilizes introspection and awareness as methods of discovery of the human mind (Hasenkamp & White, 2017).

The dialogue between East and West is one of the most compelling events of our century, with the example of a series of dialogues between the Dalai Lama and representatives of science hosted by the *Mind & Life Instituted*, which are designed to bring a deeper understanding of the

human mind and its potential (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). The growing interest of meditation and related mindfulness practices derived from Buddhist traditions has documented various benefits, including various physiological and psychological changes (e.g., Jazaieri et al., 2013; Jazaieri et al., 2014; Mascaro et al., 2013; Stellar et al., 2015). Furthermore various forms of meditation including, mindfulness, and compassion are being rigorously studied in an attempt to alleviate suffering while enhance well-being (Leiberg et al., 2011; Sedlmeier et al., 2012).

The discovery of meditation benefits occurred with recent neuroscientific findings demonstrating that the adult brain can still transform through life time experiences (Ricard et al., 2014).In their study (Stellar et al., 2015), proposed that compassion is associated with activation in the parasympathetic nervous system through the vagus nerve. In order to fit with the Modern Western lifestyle, Buddhist practices have been widely decontextualized from the original Buddhist view and aim, and recontextualized as clinical interventions (Davidson, 2010; McMahan, 2008). The most well-known clinical adaptation of Mindfulness inspired by Buddhist sources is Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 2011).One of the many currently unfolding trends of the Mindfulness-based Interventions (MBIs) is to offer effective treatments in a variety of psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, stress reduction(Khoury et al.,2013).

In Buddhism, Compassion, conceptualized as a state of mind, or way of being ,where [by] you extend how you relate to yourself and others (Davidson & Harrington, 2002a, p. 98).Several interventions have shown to be able to enhance compassion, such programs as Compassion Cultivation Training (Jinpa, 2010), Compassionate Mind Training (Gilbert & Irons, 2005), Mindful Self-Compassion (Neff & Germer, 2013), Mindfulness –based Stress Reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 1982), and other compassion based contemplative practices such as

Loving Kindness Meditation. More specifically LKM and CM when combined with cognitive behavioral therapy are proven to increase participant's levels of compassion while providing useful methods for different psychological problems (Hofmann et al., 2011).

From an evolutionary perspective, compassion is thought as an protective and nurturing mechanism, since it facilitates the care of vulnerable offspring (De Waal, 2010). Evolutionary Biology tends to emphasize the importance of individuality, therefore in the Western Culture there is a strong emphasis on the cultivation of the *-Self-* as a separate independent identity. Universal morality gains a lot of attention in the recent years in regards to the biological capacity for empathy. Offering and taking care of the immediate environment first (family, friends) is thought to be the initial stage to be satisfied before the individual can expand their help towards others (De Waal et al., 2017). In the Confucian Philosophy is illustrated how the care and love, benevolence towards the family members, can be further reflected towards social interactions (Tu, 1985). East Asian thought emphasizes the importance of '*learning to be a human*', a process in which the individual follows the '*path of knowledge*', the path of understanding one's mental states and emotions (Tu, 1985). Asian traditions and more specifically countries like Tibet, and India assert that long-term meditation is the way for an individual to achieve the highest goal of human life, described as '*enlightenment*' (Alexander & Langer, 1990). Buddhist meditational practices aim to increase positive mental states and subsequently influence behavior, in a way to uproot the causes of suffering (i.e., greed, hatred, delusion), (Gethin, 1998). Buddhists lay practitioners, lamas, yogis, throughout the centuries have devoted their lives in a single common goal, to pursue the *path of a Bodhisattva*, for the '*benefit of all sentient beings*'. For the Mahayana Buddhist practitioners the path to happiness is to '*cherish others*', to be reborn as a

human, from life after life, until all *beings are liberated* (Lama, 1994; Rinchen/ Atisha, 1997; Shantideva, 1981)

Researchers have suggested that meditation increases prosocial behavior perceptions of living a more meaningful life (Donald et al., 2019). The cultivation of compassion and prosocial behavior, have received major scientific focus over the last years (Ricard, 2015; Singer & Bolz, 2012 ; Jazaieri et al., 2013; Weng et al., 2013). In their study (Clobert et al., 2015) provided evidence that Buddhist concepts automatically activated prosocial attitudes and tolerance.

Even brief engagement in Mindfulness Meditation is shown to enhance compassionate behavior (Lim et al., 2015). Additionally, emerging research has linked compassion to positive elements, such as happiness and self-esteem (Mongrain et al., 2011).

In their study (Leiberg, Kllimecki & Singer, 2011) proposed that compassion training is a strong motivator for prosocial behavior. However, it has to be acknowledged that the empirical investigation into the nature of compassion it is still in its infancy (Singer & Kilmecki, 2014). Buddhist contemplative and psychological traditions offer an array of practices that will potentially benefit the individual into leaving a more fulfilled happier life.

This paper will aim to theoretically add and further explore the psychological elements of meditation in cultivating compassion according to the Buddhist Tradition. What could be the underlying inner mechanisms that are employed during meditation and are able to transform and nurture mental states? The study will further explore if meditational practices could influence meaningful social interactions, strengthen relationships, and expand love and kindness towards others. Qualitative in nature the research questions will aim to explore the mediational experiences, ideas, and insights of the participants into the vast and interesting field of Buddhist

practices and principals. To gain access to appropriate subjects with authentic experiences is challenging, for the reason that such individuals often lead a secluded lifestyle. Acknowledging the complexity of the issue this study aim to add insights and cultivate a deeper understanding about how long term meditation can offer solutions to some of the developed world's most perverse problems.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Understanding the Mind Buddhist Perspective

While in the West there is an excessive interest in mainstream education very little emphasis is given to the mind and the way it functions, and even more little is taught about being mindful and compassionate towards oneself and others (Gilbert & Choden, 2014). Buddhist extensive explanations though stand firm for over twenty-five centuries of philosophical debate and experiential validation of mental states. Buddhist philosophy is known for the introspection of mental states through meditational practices. Buddhism asserts that higher states of consciousness can be empirically tested (Wallace, 2009). According to the Buddhist Philosophy the brain does not produce consciousness, but it does condition consciousness (Wallace, 2003).

In the last four decades there is an exponential interest in Buddhist meditational practices therefore becomes entirely understandable why the psychological component in the Buddhist Theories, should be thoroughly examined. It is important to be familiar with the foundational *Theory of the Mind* according to the Buddhist thought which derived from the ancient source (Abhidhamma Pitaka). According to the Buddhist scriptures, “*All sentient being possess Buddha Nature, the potential to become a Buddha*”, therefore according to these texts mindfulness training enables the realization of *impermanence*, understanding of the *nature of suffering*, and a

deeper understanding into the view of the *–Self–* (Grabovac et al., 2011). The ultimate goal according to the Buddhist Psychology, engaging in mindfulness training is to achieve “*–Enlightenment the- state beyond sorrow–*”. The *Lotus Sutra* says, “*All sentient beings have the Buddha nature (Buddhata)*”, when the right conditions arise, the seed of *Buddha nature* will naturally grow within the individual. Therefore to practice means to enable the potential of this seed to manifest. The Lotus flower is a common and special symbol in Mahayana Buddhism since it signifies a *–Bodhisattva–* a human being committed to act in a responsible manner, and help others to elevate their suffering (Reeves, 2008). The *Lotus in the Mud* is a metaphor of great importance often used in Buddhist terms to highlight the interconnection of suffering-pain and compassion. In order for an ordinary being to become a *Buddha*, he needs to cultivate the *Bodhisattva path* among ordinary people (Watson, 1997). The mud represents life, our dark side; egocentrism, fears, lust, anger, competing motivations. However, the mud also supports the Lotus flower to blossom. Amidst a harsh environment, life struggles, the individual can grow into a compassionate, carrying being. Compassion arises when we deeply understand our own suffering and therefore the suffering of those around us. According to the Buddhist Traditions, Mindfulness Training, will naturally enhance the experience of compassion. Meditation is a technique which help the individual identify his flows, while enhancing his level of awareness. When meditation is implemented into a daily practice it leads to mental peace, a calm mind and heart, and naturally the individual will enjoy more happiness and peace. Developing the mind is a gradual process and depends upon many causes and conditions. Cultivating a compassionate attitude while developing wisdom are processes that inevitably take time. Within the Buddhist doctrinal framework moral ethics and the development of mindfulness are very much related to warm-heartedness (Gyatso, 2000). Unethical behavior in Buddhism is considered (physical

harm, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, etc.), and therefore these mental attitudes are considered uncondusive for the cultivation of calmness and clarity of the mind, and cannot support the practice of meditation (Grossman, 2010).

Critique and Controversy of Mindfulness in Western Psychology

It is apparent that Western psychology and psychotherapy in the recent years has realized the need of focusing on the human flourishing and potential, how the mind works, rather than being preoccupied with negative traits (Goleman, 2004). The integration of Buddhist Psychological Model of the Mind and practical techniques has been a flourishing innovation particularly in newer psychotherapeutic approaches. Although Mindfulness programs seem to have great popularity in the West, is often the case that people tend to have great expectations when engaging in meditational practices like expecting immediate results and comfort. This misconception could be rooted in the lack of proper mindfulness training that therapists themselves have to undergo in order to facilitate such guidance, and many times are inadequate trained (Dimidjian & Linehan, 2003). It should be noted that Mindfulness is not panacea for all conditions, especially with psychiatric populations, it needs cautious and skillful approach (Roomy, 2017). The importance of mindfulness training and the cultivation of self-compassion for professionals, is proposed by Germer and Neff (2013) as a way to facilitate beneficial interventions. Psychotherapists and other professionals, having prolonged self-experience could potentially benefit individuals discover their inner potential, beyond the emotional struggles and situational difficulties of everyday life (Makransky et al., 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Mindfulness Meditation in Buddhist Psychology

Within Buddhism and its various schools the concept of mindfulness is vast, additionally with a plethora of meditational practices for systematic mental training and human development (Lopez, 2012). The importance of mindfulness is crucial across Buddhist traditions since its theorized as the foundation for psycho-spiritual development (Purser & Milillo, 2015) this section aims to introduce a brief summary of the Buddhist literature on mindfulness.

Buddhist meditation stems from a 2,600-year- old philosophical doctrine, which aims to lead individuals accomplish their human potential while living a fulfilled life. The word ‘meditation’ is derived from the Latin *meditari*, which means to ‘engage in contemplation or reflection’. The word *mindfulness* originally comes from the Pali word *sati*, which means having awareness, attention, and remembering (Bodhi, 2000). Mindfulness (Pali: *sati*; Sanskrit: *smrti*; Tibetan: *dranpa*), is the foundation of Buddhist Meditative Training, and is defined as ‘bare awareness’ of moment to moment experiences without judgment. However, in the full spectrum of Buddhist meditation techniques ‘bare awareness’ is only one among the vast methods to cultivate mindfulness (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

In the *Pali Abhidhamma*, there is a clear distinction between Mindfulness and bare attention. Mindfulness is described as a wholesome mental factor that can be developed, therefore the factor of Mindfulness cannot co-exist with negative states of mind, as it brings forth only positive virtue mental states (Wallace, 2011), an example will be of a sniper waiting to shoot, he is using bare attention, but his intention is unwholesome. Meditation teacher Jack Kornfield (2011) stated, “*You can’t meditate after a day of killing and stealing. It just doesn’t work*” (p. 276).

In Zen tradition Mindfulness meditation, guides the practitioner to the depths of the vastness, pureness of the mind, free of preconceptions, and judgments, free of the illusion of a separate identity, therefore the compassion naturally arises since it was always there waited to be discovered (Suzuki, 2010). In inner silence there is clean clear awareness that has the power to transform and nourish conditions of happiness already present within each individual (Hanh, 2010)

The Applied Concept of Mindfulness in the West

Mindfulness meditation has been widely studied and adopted in relation to psychological well-being, attention, working memory, and cognition (Purser & Milillo, 2015). However, some newly researchers and Buddhist scholars, have identified the link between mindfulness and ethics in regards to wholesome behaviors (Greenberg & Mitra2015), or as a psychological process of living a life with care (Dreyfus, 2011). Mindfulness training encouraged by interventions such as MBSR and MBCT are found beneficial. More specifically in a systematic review MBCT found to be effective in reducing anxiety and depression symptoms (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011). Mindfulness Based Reduction Interventions and more specifically Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR, Kabat-Zinn, 1990), is an 8-week program of intensive mindfulness (moment –to moment awareness) applied into everyday life of the individual. MBIs proved successful in a range of clinical and non-clinical psychological cases when compared to control trials, with empirical evaluations in their effectiveness of treating a variety of symptoms including anxiety, depression, work stress, and antisocial behavior.

A positive psychological intervention provided encouraging results in regards to meditation and skills taught during the intervention, more specifically participants that continued

their meditation(LKM) after the intervention reported more positive emotions when compared with the ones that stopped (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2010). A 9 week CCT training found significant improvements in compassion attitudes towards others. The study highlighted that components of compassion can be cultivated during formal meditation training (Jazaieri et al., 2013).

Mindfulness in the context of self-compassion derived from the Buddhist Theories can provide a better understanding and integration into Western Psychology (Roomy, 2017). Mindfulness training aim to help the individual understand, and enhance compassion for oneself (Kuyken et al, 2010) and others (Condon et al., 2013). Moreover the benefits derived from such practices are far beyond the improvements in attention and stress reduction (Purser & Milillo, 2015), therefore the study aims to take this explorative step forward.

The Nature of Compassion and Self-Compassion

The meditative Traditions confidently assert that we can develop Compassion like any other form of art through dedication and diligence (Feldeman & Kuyken, 2011).In order to understand self-compassion we need first to consider what it means to feel compassion in general. According to the Buddhist Theory of The Mind compassion as a mental power, eliminates tendencies towards cruelty and negative emotions (Makransky et al., 2012). There are several definitions about compassion, in the current section we will examine the meaning and qualities of compassion in the Buddhist Tradition and in the scientific literature respectively.

In Western psychology compassion is considered as an emotion, whereas in Buddhism it is portrayed as a mental state when properly cultivated it allows positive states of mind to flourish (Ladner, 2009). The cultivation of compassion through meditation is emphasized as a

potential solution for a variety of individual problems, societal, even global ecological concerns (Ricard, 2015). Compassion has been taught and practiced for millennia in the Buddhist Traditions. The Sanskrit term for compassion is 'karuna', "*the intention and capacity to relieve and transform suffering and lighten sorrows*" (Hanh, 1999, p. 172). According to Buddhist scriptures compassion training occurs in stages, at the very beginning, one's compassion is simply the wish to *free others from suffering*. At a more advanced levels the practitioners having realized *impermanence* and *selflessness*, and furthermore having insights into the ultimate nature of reality (*emptiness*) are able to generate immeasurable compassion (Ekman & Ekman, 2017).

HH Dalai Lama (1995) defines compassion as: "*an openness to the suffering of others with a commitment to relieve it.*"

*"Whatever joy there is in this world/All comes from desiring others to be happy, / and
Whatever suffering there is in this world, / all comes from desiring myself to be happy."*

Shantideva, 111.

In Mahayana Buddhism the concept of Universal Love is central, and is based upon the concept of equanimity for all sentient beings, the notion that all beings have the same wish to be happy and do not want suffering. Compassion is characterized as a state where there is understanding into the nature of suffering and active commitment to relieve it (Gilbert & Choden, 2014).

Moreover, the current Dalai Lama (2003) emphasizes the importance of Self-compassion:

"Compassion starts with yourself first, and then in a more advanced way your aspiration will embrace others"

In his book "*Healing Anger*" (1997), HH Dalai Lama differentiates two types of Compassion, firstly, compassion towards the loved ones and close friends, this type of compassion is based on *attachment towards ones-self*, and secondly, *genuine compassion* which can be extended towards strangers even enemies.

In Tibet the practice of '*Tonglen*' meditation, also known as '*taking and sending*', portrays the symbolic '*exchanging self for others*'. In this practice the practitioner visualizes taking upon him all the suffering, pain, of sentient beings, in every in-breath, while *giving his/her* own virtues and resources, in every out-breath. According to the Buddhist American Nun Pema Chodron, the power of the practice of *tonglen* awakens the compassion within the individual while eliminates the concept of self-cherishing thought. Humans often when they encounter people in unpleasant situations tend to feel distress, which brings confusion and resistance within their being. The practice of '*tong-len*' could be applied in everyday life situations, from personal painful situations, to emotionally complex situations with family, friends or even strangers (Chodron, 2001).

Human compassion from a Buddhist perspective can be trained and cultivated through meditational practices. Various techniques on meditation are taught by the historical *Gautama Buddha*, among them; *The Four Immeasurables* or *The Sublime states of Mind* are described as immeasurable equanimity, love, joy, and compassion, (Rinpoche, 2006). Loving-kindness (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*), are traditionally practiced in the Buddhist framework, as two of- *The Four Immeasurables* – the other two attitudes being, joy (*mutida*; i.e., joy in the others joy), and equanimity (*upekkha*; being calm and even-tempered), all emphasize the importance of a meditative mind that has transmuted afflictive states and their causes (Khyentse, 2007). Loving-kindness and compassion have a strong link in the Buddhist Psychological view of the

Mind (Buddhaghosa, 1975). Mahayana Buddhism stresses the importance of '*Bodhichitta*', is Sanskrit word that means '*the Mind of Awakening*', by practicing *Bodhichitta* the practitioners are known as (Bodhisattvas) undertake spiritual practice for the primary purpose of benefiting others (Rinpoche, 1999).

According to Gilbert (2010) a compassionate individual has the capacity not only to acknowledge the suffering in another person and the will to help, but also has the ability to act in a non-judgmental way while being able to tolerate his own emotions. Compassion involves three elements; Kindness, mindfulness and common humanity (Pommier, 2010 as cited by Strauss et al., 2016). In addition, Goetz et al. (2010), defined compassion from an evolutionary view as a "*the feeling that arises in witnessing another's suffering that motivates a subsequent desire to help*" (p. 352).

Many early studies on the training of compassion attempted to identify the insights and experience of life time meditators typically Tibetan Buddhist Monks, as compared with novice meditators. In their study (Engen & Singer, 2015b) suggest that Compassion can be employed as an effective emotion regulation technique even outside a traditional meditative context.

Western psychotherapy embraced Buddhist concepts of Compassion (Germer & Siegel, 2012). In psychotherapy a depressed mother could be motivated to care for her children but the overwhelming negative emotions compel her into disconnection from her offspring. In a Compassion focused therapy setting the aim would be, to help the individual into motivation switching, into gaining confidence that they can be helpful rather than be harmful (Gilbert 2014). Christopher Germer and Ronald Siegel (2012), postulated that compassion is an active state of working in alleviating someone's suffering and not merely feeling empathy for their suffering, in a conceptual level. In a recent review, Strauss et al., (2016) proposed that compassion is a

complex construct encompasses five elements: (1) recognition of suffering, (2) recognition of the universality of suffering in human condition, (3) feeling empathy for the person suffering, (4) acceptance and tolerance (e.g. fear, anger) of one's own feelings of distress as a response to the other persons suffering and (5) motivation to act to alleviate suffering.

Love and kindness meditation (LKM) or Compassion Meditation (CM) occur in stages starting, with the *-self-*as an object of one's compassion, and in later stages it encompasses family members, friends, and finally ones enemies and strangers (Lama, 2002). These practices are believed to support the cultivation of positive mental states by enhancing the view of one's *Self* in relation to others, while eliminate negative states like hostility and anger (Sheng-Yen, 2002).

In a short-term affective intervention study researchers tried to distinguish empathy from compassion, and furthermore aimed to investigate brain areas associated with positive and negative, socio-affective and motivational states. Subjects were divided into two groups, one group meditated on love and compassion while the other group worked only on empathy. The study revealed that empathy training increased negative affect and activated related brain regions, whereas in compassion training the effect was reversed, effects were strengthened by positive affect (Klimecki et al., 2013).

All contemplative traditions share the fundamental practice of compassion training. Matos et al., (2017) in their study illustrated that compassionate training for two weeks was associated with positive psychological outcomes, while even brief engagement in mindfulness meditation alters compassionate behavior (Condon et al., 2013).

Western Perspectives on the View of the Self

There is an interesting tension of the *Self* and its function, as a permanent concept within Western Psychology (Grossman, 2010). Social cognitive –approaches emphasize the importance of strengthening the sense of *self* as a way establish relationships and self-esteem (Xiao et al., 2017). Western Psychology described the function of the *Self-I-* as an individualistic basic need to satisfy and gain power (Shonin et al., 2014 ; Doner, 2010). Alternatively in recent years there is an exponential interest in the development of self-compassion trough meditation (Neff& Germer, 2013), or compassion towards the self and others (Gilbert & Choden 2013, Irons & Beaumont, 2017).

Buddhist View of the Self

According to the Buddhist teachings the notion of the *self* is considered fundamental in the deeper understanding of the functions of the human mind. Buddhist scripts emphasize how consciousness creates the phenomenal world similar to the *dream state* (Thurman, 1987).

Buddhist psychology asserts, that there is a mistaken belief of an independently existing '*I*', or what is so called '*Self*'. The analysis of the illusory '*I*' is beyond the scope of this paper, therefore the reference will remain brief. In the Mahayana Tradition the practitioner through rigorous meditational practices trains in; a) great compassion, b) bodhicitta, c) no dual wisdom (emptiness).Through analysis the practitioner contemplates the impermanence of all things (including the *self*) and the interdependence of all phenomena. (Gyatso, 2000).In Mahayana Buddhism *wisdom* and *compassion* are believed essential in the practice and are illustrated '*like the two wings of a bird*' (Rinpoche, 2006; Dahl et al., 2015).

A deeper understanding on how different mediational practices affect the notion of the *Self* either deconstructing or reconstructing lead to profound meditational experiences (Tang et

al., 2015; Dahl et al., 2015). This paper hypothesize that meditation practices could cultivate positive mental states enabling socio-psychological flourishing of the *self*.

Review on: Empathetic Feelings, Prosocial Behavior

Several Buddhist practices are employed by the practitioner in order to generate compassion towards others (Dahl et al., 2015). The Dalai Lama often refers to ‘*basic human values*’ and strengthens the importance of cultivating Universal Ethical Principles, that will contribute a peaceful life, while protecting the environment and respecting cultural diversity (Lama, 2003). Meditation is considered as a tool to increase empathetic and compassionate feelings that could enhance an individual’s prosocial behavior (Condon, 2017).

Over the past years there is a growing interest into prosocial psychology and its relation to altruism (Preston, 2013; Ricard, 2015), as well as compassion (Singer & Bolz, 2012). Prosocial emotions and behaviors are often highlighted as crucial not only for the individual’s well-being, but also for the greater good of the society. In their systematic review (Luberto et al., 2018), emphasized that meditation –based interventions can increase positive social behavior, and benefits can be not only for the receiver but also the doer. Additionally studies emphasized an increased sense of social-emotional connectedness with others (Ashar et al., 2016), and the way meditation fosters improvement in social-emotional well-being (Kirby et al., 2016).

Prosocial behavior is defined as an act which is undertaken with no expectation for reward or personal gain (Eisenberg et al., 2007). Empathy has been described as the process in which an individual has the capability to share and be influenced by other people’s emotions, and therefore could be motivated to act prosocial. Batson (1991) in his theoretical model was the first to highlight the distinction between empathy and personal distress. In the former, a person

could apprehend another's mental state or condition, therefore feel a *sympathetic concern* which is the major component of prosocial behavior. In the latter, *personal distress* characterizes the individuals experiences of situation in a self-focused aversive manner, therefore feelings of anxiety, worry, and discomfort might arise as a response. Both empathic concern and personal distress responses may arise when observing someone in discomfort (Singer & Lamm 2009). It has been proposed that empathic concern influences altruistic motivation and helping behavior, whereas personal distress influences egoistic motivation in his attempt the individual to avoid personal uncomfortable emotional states (Decety & Lamm, 2009).

In their systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized control trials (Luberto et al., 2018), reported significantly great improvements after meditation training in pro-social outcomes. In her study Singer and colleagues emphasized the important distinction between empathic distresses which creates emotional exhaustion, versus compassion. The difference the scientists concluded is, empathy indeed could trigger empathetic responses in individuals and furthermore give rise to compassionate feeling without a sense of increased distress (Klimecki and Singer 2012). It could be concluded that empathy and compassion share many facets however they cannot be considered synonymous. Additionally empathy could also be surmised as an indispensable initial part for the cultivation of compassion and altruistic behavior.

Chapter III: Method

Methodology and Philosophy

This study used a qualitative thematic analysis methodology to examine the meditational insights, thoughts, and experiences of long term participants in regards to meditation and the cultivation of compassion. Thematic analysis facilitates analysis into a meaningful account from

a large amount of data derived from multiple participants (Boyatzis, 1998). Qualitative methodology is considered appropriate for the investigation of new areas and disciplines, since the interviewing method enables access into personal experiences and narratives (Seidman, 2013). During Qualitative study the researcher is aware of the biases, and assumptions he might carry into the study (Maxwell, 2005), however, this point can have a positive dimension since the researcher could contribute personal experience with the aim to enrich the study (Sternberg, 1996). An inductive thematic analysis of semantic information from interview transcripts was used in order to form 'bottom-up' themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally in the current study, thematic analysis is used within essentialist/realist approach. Thematic analysis was found more appropriate and flexible for answering questions such as those introduced in the current study that aimed to explore diversified perceptions and experiences of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants

Participants were recruited with the aid of snowball sampling, on the basis of recommendation of the Resident Teacher of the Buddhist Center, face-to-face or by email. Four participants of European origin, experienced in the Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Practices, participated in the study (3 male, 1 female, 55 to 70 range of years). Their experience ranged from (12 to 30 years) of meditation (see Appendix A). Inclusion criteria for participants were; having a meditational practice on a daily basis, practicing meditation for five years and above, considering meditation as an essential part of life. Exclusion criteria considered any participant that would not meet in full the inclusion criteria. Criteria were particularly selected and participants purposefully recruited with a long range practices in an attempt to explore a wide range of perceptions in regards to meditation and compassion.

Procedure

Participants received a consent form with information about the nature of the study, a demographic questionnaire, and a debrief sheet (See Appendix B,C,D). Written consent was obtained from all participant prior to the interview while the confidentiality of the participants was assured. Participants received no remuneration for their participation. Data was gathered and audio-recorded, using semi-structured interviews which is the most common method for collecting qualitative data (Braun &Clarke, 2013). To help give the interview a framework, an interview schedule was used which can be seen in Appendix E. Interviews lasted approximately 30minutes to 50minutes and were arranged individually, as for the three of the participant's recommendations in the *Buddhist Meditation Centre*, and one participant in the National Gallery of Ireland. Participants encouraged to reflect on experiences and perceptions in relation to the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Seidman, 2013). Interviews conducted with enthusiasm in a friendly atmosphere.

Ethics

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, ethical considerations were taken into account in regards to the sensitive information that potentially might be revealed during the interview. All personal identifiable information was anonymized. Participants were assigned a letter that was coded against their true identity and held electronically on a secure server, with a password.

The study design was approved by the Psychological Ethics Committee (PSI code of Ethics) at the Dublin Business School. Participation in study was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw, or have a break and resume the interview later. Consultation support was offered as an option, at the end of the study.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

All four interviews were audio-recorded on mobile phone iPhone7 (using the phone recording app) and fully transcribed. NVivo V.12 software was used to organize and analyze and store the data. Electronic data will be deleted one year after the completion of the study.

Thematic Analysis was chosen as a method of discourse extraction from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The design of the study follows the steps as per Braun and Clarke (2006), and involves a six-phase process. Step 1) reading and re-reading the data several times. This step involves transcription of the interviews and reading participants' responses.

2) Generating initial codes; this step aimed to identify common concepts while coding them throughout each transcript, whether similar or even contrasting. Overall, majority of the raw data was included in the coding and resulted in the generation of 210 codes. During the process new codes have been generated and sometimes existing ones were modified. The codes were kept as direct participant codes, in a way to minimize the researcher's interpretation bias.

3) Searching for themes; in this step codes are grouped into first-order themes, according to commonalities between them. Additionally some codes with significant meanings assigned to more than one theme. This process resulted to 214 codes and 9 themes. At this step a thematic map created to aid visualization.

4) Reviewing themes; this step included review and refine of the first-order themes into second-order themes, in order to adequately capture the contours of the coded data.

5) Defining and naming themes, this step further refined and linked the data into the final four themes.

6) Producing the report. This final step relates to the final production of thematic analysis. The thematic map that emerged and a-Word cloud- captured the most frequent words can be seen in appendix F

Chapter V: Results

Themes

Thematic Analysis identified four predominate themes in the data:

1) The Psychological art of meditation, 2) The cultivation of a Compassionate human being, 3) Understanding who we are through meditation, 4) Buddha nature

Theme 1 - The Psychological Art of Meditation.

An initial theme in the analysis captured, as whole, participant's experiences, thoughts, insights of meditation practice throughout the years. All participants expressed their opinion of what is meditation as a practice, its significance and potential. Participants noted that when meditation practice has been established, mental clarity comes forth along with inner strength that helped them deal and find purpose in life. Moreover participants shared their thoughts if meditation can be practiced by everyone and the importance of motivation in the practice: (see Table 1 for more illustrative quotes)

‘in meditation you can see very quickly that there are some possibilities, it is not that you are changing straight away, but you can see that things are not exactly the same, you can see some less solidity in the walls of your prison’ (Participant A, male)

‘So as far as I’m concerned, what I do when I sit down to meditate is, to practice what I want to take into my whole life, so I do it formally and then informally during the day. So when I answered the question for how many years you practice? Informally? All day long!’ (Participant B, male)

Additionally participants clarified the misconception of being a/not Buddhist and the practice of meditation. They emphasized that the true value of the practice is the ability of the individual to actually understand her/his own mind patterns deeply and integrate the wisdom of the practice into everyday life:

‘Yeah I think so, it’s not a matter of being Buddhist or not that’s irrelevant, the key thing in meditation is whether the person is beginning to understand something about themselves and become to understand the waves of thought’ (Participant D, male)

Table 1

<p>Theme 1 The psychological art of Meditation Illustrative quotes</p>	<p>‘You see meditation as I understood in the years are two factors, and one is the settling- calming meditation- calm abiding, sit quietly and let the mind be peaceful’</p> <p>‘Meditation is the only way you will find in your life to experience your mind, from the moment you start experiencing your mind then you start to see what’s going on there, then you have a chance to be able to change’</p> <p>‘First of all we have to differentiate meditation as a method, and meditation as a state of being or mind’</p>
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	<p>'I could see the world with different eyes, and that is exactly what kept me going. Because suddenly makes more sense, and of course when things start to make sense, then is more easy to cope with, that's the idea'</p> <p>'because you are meditating your mind gets more clear'</p> <p>'it does give me a way to start the day , it balances me to face the day, and especially when I was working in a very challenging job, I will be often dragged to go to work, and sitting it short of helped me'</p> <p>'I think it depends on the person doesn't it? I think it's good for children to sit still for at least 10m a day, it might be hard for them (laugh) but it will be good to calm them down ,give them different aspect of life'</p> <p>'Yeah I believe anyone can, or I can say I don't know, can psychopaths? Can sociopaths learn meditation? I don't know. Maybe anyone who is genuine motivated can right? I would imagine psychopaths aren't motivated and therefore cant. Like awareness is great if you want to be a sniper it helps to focus, it helps you to be aware of your anxiety and all the things that can interfere with that shot, you are about to kill somebody, does this make it good?'</p> <p>'Well I don't know, because I do hear that sometimes they train people who are in the army who are going out to fight, and maybe have to kill people, so they are trained in mindfulness meditation, so it gives them more confidence or something, so those stuff kind of disturb me, Samurai warriors, some Zen practitioners I met were fierce so I don't know the answer to that'</p>
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Subtheme a) Mind-workshop-different stages.

The accounts of the participants reflected the different levels of experience they developed through the practice and how they started identifying their own flows and strengths (see Table 2). For instance, one participant recounted her initial formal contact with meditation practice:

‘so through his connections {*Teachers connections*} I went to a temple in Japan, so I did a lot there as you can imagine, they don’t let you off you have to do it all! (laugh) you can’t excuse yourself, you have to get up at -3 and 4- in the morning and you do lots of sitting my legs really hurt (laugh) it was a little humiliating the challenge. I felt not equal to it, but both- harsh and kind - was a funny mixture’ (Participant C, Female)

One participant used a Classic Buddhist illustration the ‘mud’, and the ‘*Diamond Mind*’ which represents clarity/ Primordial Wisdom, in order to explain the different ‘mental work’ each individual has to do:

‘I can only go back to me being a beginner because it’s so much difference about how everyone reacts, because everyone’s ‘*crap*’ is different, so what they get rid of once they get scrubbing is different, so a mad person mud has a lot of pebbles and stone, and another’s person mud has lots of cauldron, the ‘*Diamond*’ going to be the same when you get there, but the mud is different’ (Participant B, male)

Another participant explained in a similar vein, the challenges the practitioner faces as the meditational experiences become more profound:

‘Well again this is a very big question, but generally I found that meditation is not something easy, it seems easy when you read about it, or hear about it, in fact meditation in one way, is something very simple, and could be seen as something natural but although its simple is not easy ‘ (Participant D, male)

Table 2

Subtheme a) Mind-	‘We can use the word transform but it doesn’t necessarily mean that meditation works this way, transform is quite a strong word but what
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workshop-different stages	changes in meditation primarily is understanding, there is a certain kind of clarity which is emerges through meditation, and through that the mind and the problematic area ,are understood’
Illustrative quotes	<p>‘We could say that there are different levels in meditation let’s put it this way, we can come initially when we meditate with different patterns that we have, we begin to recognize them , for instance I might have a pattern of anger and jealousy, that I wasn’t really aware before so I become aware of that, and I identify it, once I identify it I can work with it, now that’s one aspect ‘</p> <p>‘I would say that in within a very short period of practicing meditation I could see changes but not necessarily good changes! (laugh)’</p> <p>‘When you get less obsessed with that, then your mind is more relaxed and you don’t give a damn if people see you this way or that way, etc .Because you know your poisons, because you know what’s going on, you have no fright, so when someone comes to you and say you are an ugly person, yeah?..so what.?’</p> <p>‘I couldn’t describe it, it’s completely different now than what it was 6months ago, and 6 months ago I would say now -no I wasn’t meditating-, I was doing something else, and 6 months ago I would say the same thing about the previous 6 months, because it keeps changing’</p>

Subtheme b) the development of awareness through meditation

The current subtheme represents participants skillful development of ‘awareness’, how it helped them recognize their habitual negative patterns, emotions, thoughts, their life situation, and therefore how through this understanding, change emerged (see Table 3):

‘your only way out of your mess through meditation is to become aware of *your mess!* Of *your mud!* (Laugh)’ (Participant B, male)

‘In the *Vipassana* tradition is very much like stay with *-the one who knows,-* you know?, there are all these things running ,what running inside your head thoughts, emotions, so

the one *who knows can say*; this is anger , so if you really concentrating when you are sitting, all these things arise, emotions and memories ,all sorts of things come up, but it helps to remember that all these are phenomena that will pass, they arise and pass, some of them are nice , some of them are ridiculous, but is also- *one who knows*- and is aware so that's a good place to be, if you are challenged in ordinary life , you can remember this..' (Participant C, female).

One participant illustrated the 'unsatisfactory nature of mind', and the link between awareness and compassion in the following experience:

'you can't be compassionate if you don't know somebody is suffering, and this is for me when the meditation comes in, when you become aware that you are suffering, in detail in the fine grain of your suffering, not '*just oh! My auntie died last week I'm very upset*', I'm suffering every minute, of every day, because I keep wanting things to be different... that's suffering as well, when I make my tea I say; '*maybe I should had coffee!*' Right? (Laugh)

This same participant shared his insight on how the development of awareness, helped him be aligned with the 'needs' of other people in every day encounters as follows:

'And I'm actually doing it now, and I'm doing it automatically now, without thinking, I help people all the time, small things, I'm not saving the world or anything, I'm just doing small thing that I wasn't doing before because I wasn't aware that people needed help, awareness again..'

Similarly another participant emphasized how the practice helped her become aware of other peoples suffering with a more open mind:

‘I make it a practice to give something, the practice helped me be more aware of peoples difficulties, I suppose we have lots of beggars in this country, homeless people in this country Dublin so it helped my attitude to not to be so judgmental ‘ (Participant C, female)

Table 3

<p>Subtheme b) The development of awareness through meditation Illustrative quotes</p>	<p>‘So for someone starting now the benefit is to begin to become aware, aware of what is actually happening .To be calm, to be aware of their mud, in fine detail right?’</p> <p>‘Become aware that you have habits, become aware not I’m an anxious person ,but I have a habit of being anxious , I have a habit of anxious thinking, I’m not anxious I have a habit so, when I don’t want to go and talk in front of people because I get anxious ,I have a habit thinking that way I have a habit that people will judge me ,I have a habit that they won’t like me, so I can change my habit by being aware , that’s all it is, it is not written in stone! I can change the habit by first being aware of the habit and then literally saying; I will choose a different thing’</p> <p>‘Meditation implies that you develop awareness, you become more aware so you become more aware of your habitual patterns, and if there are destructive patterns we become more aware of them’</p> <p>‘ to me awareness, awareness, awareness, of everything. Awareness is the key to everything, once you are aware everything changes’</p> <p>‘therefore as we become more aware we begin to have more control over them you could say, and see them and maybe we can begin to understand that they are not helpful for us, or others, so we develop some understanding and then when necessary we can apply a brake harness ‘</p> <p>‘it keeps changing, because when you are sitting on the cushion now it’s a different mind sitting now with different intentions, motivations whatever it is right? Than I was sitting years ago, now I don’t sit to meditate to overcome anxiety, but also my mind is different’</p> <p>‘What kept me going is that I knew – absolute- if I would stop, I would go back to –no sense- when I was before’</p> <p>‘I think I’m becoming more aware that everyone is suffering every moment every day, and actually not suffering is the exception, does this makes sense? So if somebody is in a moment of not suffering. That’s the</p>
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	exception, by large in most people's lives, I'm not talking about extreme suffering I'm talking about, what the Buddhist call the 'dissatisfaction of everything'
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Theme 2 - Cultivation of a Compassionate Human Being

This main theme captured participants reflections on the concept of Compassion, how through awareness and understanding of the '*nature of the mind*', and the notion of the '*Self*', the practitioner further develops and expands his Compassion through certain practices. The practitioner comes soon to the realization that '*all beings wish to be happy and don't want suffering*' and therefore stops gradually 'being preoccupied with his/her own problems and needs (See Table 4):

A participant explained how Compassion starts with *-one's self-* as an initial step, and in later stages in the practice the practitioner moves beyond the concept:

'Particular point in meditation and this I would say at beginners levels or not just beginners, is this aspect of accepting '*oneself loving oneself*', seems to be necessary and it can happen through meditation but there will be a certain point in meditation where you will go beyond that'

(Participant D, male)

The same participant illustrated on Compassion further:

'I think so, very definitely one could say that could be the aim of the specific practices connected with compassion, would be to develop a *Universal compassion*, where there is a state of compassion where is there for all sentient beings- human beings and animals- and so forth'

Another participant emphasized how compassion arises naturally in situations, when for example he was asked how he will act if he will understand someone being unconscious on the street:

‘Definitely. Seeing what is going on there, I have no idea, is just you cannot resist. You can’t resist not only for the person but also for an animal. You have to act’ (Participant A, male)

The same participant illustrated how certain meditational practices enhance the Compassion within each individual:

‘Yes, it is like different keys opening different doors, all practices we are doing are actually to lead, to give the chance for our own compassion to shine, so there are many different practices, for the reason that we have many different minds, so we definitely need lots of practices, so that’s how it works’

Encapsulated under this main theme are two subthemes, each of which focus on and describe different elements of Compassionate development, the rise of certain qualities, behaviors and attitudes the person acquires on the path.

Table 4

<p>Theme 2 The cultivation of a Compassionate Human Being</p> <p>Illustrative quotes</p>	<p>‘so there are certain things in Buddhist thinking that are recommended in a way to how we relate to others, but when its actual inner change and I’m talking about compassion the person the way he sees others the relationship will change naturally’</p> <p>‘Compassion to me is about awareness of suffering, so in order to be compassionate one must be aware of one’s own suffering and aware of the suffering of others’</p> <p>‘If you are practicing meditation, definitely your mind will open, definitely your mind will be more sensitive to others, and definitely your compassion will show itself to others, but meditation for oneself, compassion for oneself? If you really want to be compassionate to you meditate! That’s it!’</p>
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	<p>‘So now I would say it’s the same with self-compassion its already there, for me I was working on things like anxiety, depression, anger, jealousy all the poisons, right? That’s how we call them in Buddhism, once you start to see something that you haven’t work on, and this is self-compassion’</p>
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Subtheme a) Levels on Compassionate Training

This first subtheme represent participant’s ideas about the development of Compassionate person in an advanced stage (see Table 5):

‘so this is called in the traditional way *-Bodhicitta Motivation- the Compassionate Mind* , so the meditator in principal takes responsibility of everyone , feels responsible for the world and all the beings, when really one takes it on board is not the matter.., I should add that this might seem too much, *I’m responsible for every being, ...so on..*. But the strange thing is when a person has that motivation, they become very free in themselves paradoxically why? Because they don’t think about themselves anymore! (Laugh) that’s a big topic....’ (Participant D, male)

The same participant explained the reason behind Compassionate action:

‘Well I think basically compassionate person doesn’t have fences, most of us have a lot of fences we have a lot of defenses, we have a lot of electric fences (laugh)’

Table 5

Subtheme a) Levels on Compassionate Training	<p>‘there is a another dimension to compassion which is of a different order, but that’s a very difficult topic maybe the very being of who you are in essence there is a compassionate nature which is there but is like is sleeping, that has to be discovered it has to be recognized’</p>
Illustrative quotes	<p>‘First of all it has to be allowed to flower like the lotus that’s the meaning the lotus is flowering in the muddy pond but it doesn’t mind, in fact it nourishes and is not stained,! if you actually see a lotus its quite amazing! so this lotus is there in the -human heart- mind -but because of ignorance basically it remains in the mud ,the mud is too thick(laugh)’</p>

Subtheme b) Compassion in everyday life

Participants reflected on notions of *what is a Compassionate person in action?* What might be the characteristics the person could poses in a gross and more subtle level? Participants all agreed that Compassion is inborn human quality that has to be cultivated in order to flourish (see Table 6). A participant illustrated his personal encounter with a nurse, as a Compassionate human being in action:

‘there was a nurse in Saint James hospital and I never met anyone like her, and she was a country woman a real solid woman, no nonsense, very straight forward no glamour, all she cared about was work and not a work as in a career, I’ve never met anyone like her before, criminals, people who were robbed ,people blind, she would just walk in, and she treated them as if they were one of her own children, the strange thing was ,she was not Christian, she was not Buddhist, she was just Nori’ (Participant B, male)

The participants emphasized how compassion can be cultivated within the individual and how specific practices like *Tonglen*, stabilize and expand the levels of Compassion.

‘Yes there is one basic practice called ‘Tonglen’’ and that is by looking at one self, then you extend to your parents, to your friends, but you start first with easy targets, like parents, friends and people that you like very much, and then you move to people towards people you don’t know, and then you go to people you hate, people that annoying you to the core, you cannot have Compassion only for people you like, it’s absurd. Compassion has to be for everybody, including animals, everything. The more you practice the more the compassion shines’ (Participant A, male)

Table 6

<p>Subtheme b) Compassion in everyday Life</p>	<p>‘when I was working in the hospital they were many compassionate people nurses, and doctors, they were very compassionate and kind generous people, I just think it’s a human thing’ ‘I think human beings are generally compassionate and Buddhism is so emphatic about compassion you try to make the default reaction to people ‘ ‘Well I mean I feel I would do something, I will see what is going on there, get help for the person I wouldn’t walk by, but a little detail when we see people on the street we might walk by them, I generally look at the person just that human contact I think it makes a difference sometimes little connection with the person in a human level ‘</p>
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Theme 3 - Understanding who we are Through Meditation

In this theme participants reflected on their meditational experiences, how through the practice they (developed acceptance and love towards their selves, and how this reflected into their relationships with other people: (see Table 7)

‘so in working towards our motivation, the ways we see ourselves, we often have a very limited a negative self-image, and this self-images are just patterns, and one has to see that there are lies, there is a big lie of who you are, and what you are, so it is possible to work with these patterns to develop a sense of softness’s towards oneself, not to be so harsh and critical, and then we can extend towards others’ (Participant D, male)

This participant accounts further reflected how the practitioner might face challenges during this psychological process:

‘so you may very quickly in meditation discover and get in touch with the space that is there, there is an inner space there is an outer space, and then you will begin to notice and learn about yourself, you will start to be acquainted with your own mind and thoughts that it can be distressing (laugh) but not necessarily so..’ (Participant D, male)

In more advanced stages (as it is been stated earlier) the practitioner moves beyond the *Self-concept* and enters more subtle stages of practice of deconstructing the notion of the *Self* which aid the enhancement of Compassion, this participant explained this point as follows:

‘There is No self, so the more you are making yourself important, the more you are getting away from what you are looking for’ (Participant A, male)

The same participant elaborated on this point further, what is an obstacle for developing Compassion:

‘that is what is stopping us from being compassionate because we are so much focusing on our own problems that we are so much overwhelmed but it so we don’t see anybody else because we are in pain, and that pain and suffering, is stopping us from being compassionate’

Table 7

<p>Theme 3- Understanding who we are through meditation</p>	<p>‘Oh yeah, less selfish, less self-centered I think.. (laugh) but how can I describe it, the main thing I actually noticed over the years, is that I’m less solid about, is not that I’m not solid about my belief, is not point about that, is that I accept and I understand other people as I didn’t before’</p>
<p>Illustrative quotes</p>	<p>‘I suppose according to the teaching is not enough to be compassionate only towards others, you have to be towards yourself too, and these, teachings come into when you get short of in a state when you beaten yourself up, you hold on to things you regret, so whenever that comes ,you have to be aware isn’t really appropriate these are things happened in the past and you are not the same person anymore so I suppose the teachings help us in a way’</p> <p>‘When I said earlier when you start getting worst that what’s the worst is! The unconscious starts to say well now al right you are listening to me and I’m going to tell you ! in other words for the first time in your life you decided to listen to the unconscious and is gonna give you some(***)(laugh)’</p> <p>‘You have to understand –I am-, when I say I am I deliver a package of absolute concept, I am like this like that, but I am actually fixated on that and im going to show that to the world, every single instant of my life so all that time im spending being obsessed with I’m showing to the world who I am, I have no</p>

	time to check what's happening in the subconscious, I'm too busy doing that , run the show'
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Subtheme a) the maturation process of the Self

The current subtheme captured the participant's experiences in relation to the self, how understanding of nonconductive patterns bring a sense of responsibility and commitment to change for one's self and beyond:

'I would describe this as more ,a way of maturity ,in which it happens when one practices meditation intelligently, and this maturity can take place, then it appeared to be somehow a significant change in the person's life, but not necessarily in a dramatic way, but mostly in the traditional Buddhism meditation it's more like a maturing, its more seeing ,and in the beginning is not even obvious that a change is taking place ,the meditator might begin to see that something begin to change in his life and that has been my own experience' (Participant D, male)

'Oh! My God I can change them! If I can change them, then I'm responsible for being anxious and nervous! I might not be responsible of how I became to be anxious, because this could have happened when I was 5 or 6-7 years old, but I'm responsible of not changing the habit, and that is a great way of not changing to say; *'it's not a habit is who I am'* and then I don't have to change- *it's who I am-, not it's just a habit!* Oh! *Don't tell me that! Now I have to change!* , *I don't want to work on it now, I was happier when I was ignorant'* (Participant B, male)

Table 8

<p>Subtheme a) The Maturation Process of the Self</p> <p>Illustrative quotes</p>	<p>‘perhaps in a more accepting way one of the most striking experiences I had in this respect was with my father, I entered a long retreat quite a few years ago, I was in retreat for 4 years, and before I went into retreat I would say, I had difficult situations with my father and I came out of retreat, and I felt that is if my father has changed and not me , and he appeared to be much more open and friendly than how he was before, but in fact I found that some things within me have changed , that kind of idea that I had for my father disappeared so actually I experienced him really different , and that was a very significant change for me’</p> <p>‘Oh yeah, less selfish, less self-centered I think.. (laugh) but how can I describe it, the main thing I actually noticed over the years, is that im less solid about, is not that I’m not solid about my belief is not point about that is that more like that I accept and I understand other people as I didn’t before’</p> <p>‘I think suffering actually (laugh) my own confusion the sense of meaningless of the life I was surrounded (laugh) so basically my own confusion, my own problems that I had with my background and the place I was born culturally , I was in revoke against everything, so I felt meditation when I read about it appealed to me’</p>
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Theme 4 - Buddha Nature

In this theme participants agreed that are many inspiring ‘manifestations of Compassionate humans’ on the world, from every day people, to world leaders, spiritual teachers. Each one of them could be considered a role model of leaving a life dedicated to the collective benefit of humanity (See Table 9):

‘Oh! Yes many. Starting by Akong Rinpoche, Lama Yeshe Rinpoche, Tai Situ, HH the Karmapa, HH the Dalai Lama, there are plenty on this planet. There are all great practitioners, if you want to see what it looks like, look at these people. They are all different they all express it in a different way, but is the same thing.

There is no a specific type of a compassionate person, you are 84,000 different types!’ (Participant A, male)

The same participant clarified Buddha *nature* further:

‘We all have this fabulous nature, because if didn’t have it, there is no point to meditate’

Table 9

<p>Theme 4 Buddha nature</p> <p>Illustrative quotes</p>	<p>‘To actually get in touch with his absolute True self, with actually what they really are, what people we really are. Which is Buddha, there is no difference, we are all Buddha’</p> <p>‘you can see it in people like the Dalai Lama that he is well known, but also many people I’ve met that are not known, and I see that they have that beautiful quality’</p> <p>‘let’s say Adolf Hitler has mud the size of a football stadium (laugh) and Mahatma Gandhi has a tiny little dirt, so he has to chip clean a little bit to see the diamond, but the diamond is still there , so you don’t have to develop the diamond because its there , so to me it’s already there’</p> <p>‘I think so but you see, if we take compassion or love and kindness in Buddhist thinking, these are already there within the consciousness of the human being’</p> <p>‘Emile! (a teacher)(Laugh) he is kind and open and dedicate to dharma, and he is funny so this is great warming thing, a leader maybe? I like <i>Jacinda Ardern</i> , she gives good example, she is the Prime Minister of New Zealand, she is young she got a baby after she became the prime minster anything she says is always kind i remember it was a terrible shooting , a terrible atrocity when the mosque was attacked, and she said ‘it’s not the Muslim faith ‘ this is not New Zealand, New Zealand is very civilized country’</p>
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Subtheme a) Realization of the common human condition

All participants shared their insights on how through meditation the practitioner acknowledges the suffering that perpetuates human existence. This realization nurtures Compassionate behavior and action (see Table 10).

‘but it is actually our nature to help each other it’s like the *Diamond* we talked about, that’s what ‘*Diamonds*’ do! They help each other right? So when you get rid of all the *mud* and the *crap* and everything else you just get people helping each other because we are only , we are all one thing, when you stop helping is when you separate yourself from the world ,but when we are helping we are all one thing working together’ (Participant B, male)

Table 10

<p>Subtheme a) Realization of the common human condition</p> <p>Illustrative quotes</p>	<p>‘it wasn’t like I have a wonderful mind or anything I was desperate! (laugh) and I think a lot of desperate people will learn how to do it, and they will carry it on in the long run, but there are a lot of people are not desperate because it’s a nice thing to do!(Laugh)I can’t think of anything else..you have to be desperate’(laugh)</p> <p>‘But because you know these five poisons and you know you have them, the judgment is dropped. There is no need for judgment anymore you just say welcome to the club! You understand why this person acting like that, very easily you don’t need to be a psychologist to get that (laugh) that’s the point!’</p>
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Chapter VI: Discussion

This study has illuminated the meditative experiences of long term practitioners in regards to Compassionate contact and attitude. Four main themes emerged from this research:1) the psychological art of meditation, b) cultivation of a Compassionate human being, c) Understanding who we are through meditation, d) Buddha nature. Participants expressed their beliefs on how Compassion can be cultivated through meditational practices, the benefits on individual level and beyond. Findings lend further support to previous research on Compassion as a mental state that can be nurtured and cultivated through meditational practices and long term commitment (Feldman & Kuyken, 2011; Dahl et al., 2015). The benefits of having cultivated a compassionate heart through meditative practice not only for the receiver but also for the doer

(Luberto et al., 2018), illustrated many times during the interview process, as participants reflected on how small everyday things can make other people happy.

Participant's reflections on mindfulness and the cultivation of awareness aligns with the research and the development of programs like MBSR (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). More specifically participants emphasized how meditation brings gradually a sense of maturity and responsibility of one's actions. Similarly MBSR guides participants into self-acceptance, for the purpose to help the individual acknowledge his life situation and further develop resilience in order to deal more effectively with life challenges (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Moreover, the study findings are in accordance with (Matos et al., 2017; Neff & Germer, 2013), where Compassion practices CMT, and MSC are proven beneficial on subjects over all wellbeing, mindfulness and increased self-compassion. Participants noted how through practice they subdued distressing emotions and personal struggles, therefore leading a more peaceful life (Khyentse, 2007). The study showed that participants perceived Compassion as action, not only limited to the people close to them, while they emphasized the importance of genuine human contact (Ashar et al., 2016; Kirby et al., 2016).

When considering the findings presented in this study it is important to be aware of the limitations. A greater diversity sample is needed in future studies in order to enhance understanding from a multicultural approach. Participants were three White male, and one woman, a greater sample of participants would further enrich knowledge of the issue. Additionally, the study explored meditation and the development of Compassion, on a basic level, however this basic understanding is considered foundational into the vastness of the Buddhist Psychology. Future research should also include a wide range of meditation formats such as *Deity Yoga* in Tibetan Buddhism,

which involves certain visualizations and rituals. Higher levels of practice as mentioned by participants aim to actualize *-Bodhichitta-* the Compassionate mind ,for the benefit of all sentient beings (Lama, 2002, ; Rinpoche, 1999). An intellectual understanding as a first step of mental transformation, and cultivation of compassionate feelings was attempted through this study. All participants acknowledged how daily spiritual practice benefited them in many ways, with the ultimate goal of accomplishing the human potential (Lama, 2012).

The benefit of clinicians developing an openness to proactive communication between them and experienced teachers of meditative traditions, in order to bring skillful concepts of Compassion into the clinical practice has been proposed by (Makransky et al.,2012).Engagement in Compassion cultivation trainings can bring benefits in many aspects of an individual's life. Engaging in long term meditational practices could have important implications on the field of compassion research, education, mental health care, and the society as a whole. The issues explored in this study will hopefully raise awareness and enhance the Compassionate motivation and action starting in an individual level. Compassion is a protective mechanism towards aversion and fear with a transformational healing capacity (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Mindfulness practices point into exploring one's mind, and further enhance understanding of the common human condition, and in Buddhist context this is achievable through certain practices that been employed for millennia.

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Appendices:

Appendix A

Participant's demographic information

Participant pseudonym	Age	Gender	Years of practicing meditation	Approximate hours of meditation per day	Meditation as an essential part of life	Chronic or mental illness
Participant A	55-64	male	31	2h minimum	yes	no
Participant B	55-64	male	12	3-4h	yes	no
Participant C	Above 65	female	25	50m	Yes	no
Participant D	55-64	male	30	60m	yes	no

Appendix B

Participant ID: _____

Interviewer: Chrissa Simeonidou

Date: / /

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me. My name is Chrissa Simeonidou. I am a student in the BA (Hons) Applied Psychology in Dublin Business School. I am currently undertaking a research study entitled; *cultivating a Compassionate Self through Meditation*. I am speaking with you today so that we can get a better understanding of how Buddhist meditational practices, help individuals develop compassion and the impact of such practices in a social behavioural context.

Your answers will be treated as confidential. We will not include your names or any other information that could identify you in any reports we write. Thus, responses cannot be attributed to any one participant. For this reason, it will not be possible to withdraw from participation after the questionnaire has been collected.

We will destroy the notes and audiotapes after we complete our study and publish the results in line with DBS policies.

This interview is expected to last for approximately 30-40 minutes. If any of the questions do raise difficult feelings for you, contact information for support services are included on the final page.

Participation is voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part.

Signature

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Please indicate your gender

Male

Female

Please select the category that includes your age

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65 or above

How many years have you been practicing meditation?

5 years

Above 5 years (indicate the exact number) _____

Are you meditating daily? Please indicate the duration in total

Yes No Duration: _____

Would you consider meditation as an essential part of your life?

Yes No

Do you have any chronic or mental illness?

Appendix D

Debrief Sheet and Information

Thank you for taking the time to be involved in this study.

The overall aim of this study is to explore how long term meditational practices help individuals cultivate compassionate attitudes towards others.

If any issues emerged as a result of participating in this study, below are contact details of support groups which can help.

AWARE: 01 661 7211

The Samaritans: 116123

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact me, Chrissa Simeonidou [REDACTED]@mydbs.ie

My Supervisor can be contacted a

Aoife Gaffney

[REDACTED]@dbs.ie

Appendix E

<p>Topic 1 (10minutes)</p>	<p>Topic #1: Meditation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is meditation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sub, question why should someone meditate? 2. How did you came across the Buddhist path and meditational practices? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sub question; what made you want to engage deeply in meditation? 3. How you would you describe the experience of engaging in meditational practices throughout the years of your practice? 4. How can a quite meditative sitting can cultivate insightful and transformative mental states? 5. How can meditation help you accept and love yourself? 6. How someone through mediation can learn to have self-compassion and then expand this sense towards others? 7. Can someone engage in meditational practices without being Buddhist? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sub question; what you think it will be the major benefit of the practice for a beginner?
<p>Topic 2 (7 minutes)</p>	<p>Topic #2: Compassion</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How you would describe a compassionate individual? A) Are there any specific characteristics or mental attributes the person should possess? 2. Can you describe any differences in your behavior (in relation to others) throughout the years of your practice? Probe; Can you give me an example? 3. Can the Buddhist concepts enhance compassion and altruism? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sub, question how these concepts are related? 4. Can meditation be used as a universal tool for cultivating compassion? 5. Can anybody learn how to practice compassion meditation? 6. Can Compassion for the ‘Self’ be the basis for Compassion towards others? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sub question how can this be cultivated? 7. Can a simple meditative practice can create positive feelings of kindness, and compassion even towards strangers? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sub question, a) how can this happen? b) Are any particular steps the mediator has to follow in order to expand his compassion towards strangers? 8. Can you name a person that you feel is an example of a compassionate person in action?(alive or dead)

<p>Topic 3 (7 minutes)</p>	<p>Topic #3: Cultivation of the Self</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What according to the Buddhist view of the mind <i>transforms</i> during meditation? 2. How meditation influences self-control? A) Is self-control important in the practice? B) If yes/no why is important? 3. What is your definition for habit? Would it be possible to change habitual patterns in our behavior? 4. How can the long term meditation practice bring to the individual a sense of responsibility and maturity towards himself and towards others? 5. What makes an individual engaging in compassionate meditational practice to actually want to help others? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sub question; what is the underlying motivation? 6. Could meditation in healthy populations, and outside of a religious context could influence prosocial behavior? 7. How an individual through his inner experiences can relate to the outer world? A) How he can transfer his inner experiences and relate to every day encounters from family, friends up to strangers? 8. In the event you see a person on the street lying on the floor seemingly unconscious, what you are more likely to do? 9. How can long range meditative practices help us identify conscious and unconscious behavior patterns? A) And what we can actually do about them?
<p>Final thoughts (6 minutes)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you have any final thoughts about the study that you would like to share? <p>Thank you for your time.</p>

