The Potential of Mindfulness-based Social and Emotional Learning in Social Justice Pedagogy: Deconstructing Hegemonic Masculinity Through Emotional Education

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Abstract

This research examines a mindfulness-based social and emotional learning training focused on empathy and compassion to assess its potential to support gender equality in education. This qualitative study follows a training with thirteen year 9 boys in an East London secondary school to explore their experiences with mindfulness-based social and emotional learning. Through observation, interviews, and a focus group, the study examines how participants navigate their masculinity throughout the training. Utilizing a feminist framework, this research explores how power operates through emotions to enforce or resist hegemonic masculinity. This research is situated within a critical analysis of the increasing commodification of mindfulness as a neoliberal tool for stress reduction that obscures the greater conditions of injustice producing it.

The study found that despite deep resistance to the training's emotional content initially, the training effectively challenged normative hegemonic masculine conditioning around emotional avoidance in participants. The training supported participants to become more open to give and seek emotional support and discuss emotions. Rather than pathologizing emotions, as social and emotional learning interventions are often critiqued for, this training explored emotions with an emphasis on contextualizing their source and fostering reflexivity of emotions and the impact of actions connected to emotions. These skills are critical to address the way that gendered power is asserted through emotions, without closing down critical pathways to mobilize them as a resource for social action. The research found that the training encompassed an ethical framework, absent in many school-based mindfulness trainings, which contributed to the cultivation of social empathy among participants. The research revealed that the mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training supported emotional competencies imperative to resist hegemonic masculinity and challenge gendered emotional practices and ideologies that enforce patriarchal power. This study contributes to a body of research on how mindfulness and social and emotional learning can support social justice education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background: Mindfulness, Neoliberalism, and Education

Over the past few decades, mindfulness has spread throughout the US and Europe. Mindfulness is an estimated $4 billion industry; over 100,000 books sold on Amazon have a variation of 'mindfulness' in their title (Purser, 2019). Severed from their roots in Buddhism, (Ng, 2015a; Purser & Loy, 2013) mainstream mindfulness trainings in the West have been adapted to fit a variety of settings, from inside corporate offices like Google, Goldman Sachs, and Apple, to US military trainings, prisons, and schools (Levin, 2017). The term 'McMindfulness', coined by Miles Neale, refers to the way the expansion of mindfulness in the West has become commodified and decontextualized from its roots in a Buddhist ethical framework (Purser, 2019). Critiques of current mindfulness discourses scrutinize how it has been reconstructed as a self-help technique and minimized to a means of stress reduction (Walsh, 2018; Ng, 2015b; Purser & Loy, 2013). While the reduction of stress may be a desirable outcome given the challenging material conditions of daily life under neoliberal capitalism, this framing is problematic when it positions stress as a phenomenon of an individual nature, detached from any link to the insidious structural inequalities that produce it (Purser & Loy, 2013). The critique here lies not with mindfulness practice itself, but rather with its commodification as an extension of neoliberal governmentality (Walsh, 2018). Purser (2019, p. 17) notes, 'void of a moral compass or ethical commitments, unmoored from a vision of the social good, the commodification of mindfulness keeps it anchored in the ethos of the market'.

Mindfulness programs have also greatly expanded across schools, with a growing body of research supporting their implementation. However, school-based mindfulness trainings are also critiqued for reinforcing the neoliberal marketisation of schools, with mindfulness studies focusing largely on benefits connected to performativity, such as behaviour regulation, stress reduction, better focus, and increases in standardized test scores (Reveley, 2015; Purser & Loy, 2013; Cannon, 2016; Forbes, 2012). Mindfulness has been commodified as an individualizing neoliberal technology that responsibilizes

students for their personal wellbeing and stress management, while obscuring the larger systems of inequality shaping them. Bikkhu Bodhi, a prominent American author and Buddhist monk, cautions: 'absent a sharp social critique, Buddhist practices could easily be used to justify and stabilize the status quo, becoming a reinforcement of consumer capitalism' (Purser & Loy, 2013).

However, in its original Buddhist context, mindfulness transcended reduction as a tool to mitigate the destructive emotional impact of neoliberal capitalism. Mindfulness in its Buddhist context is intended to be a transformative practice based in critical inquiry and ethical dimensions that seek to end suffering, what's known as *duhkka* (Purser & Loy, 2013). It is imperative that we examine how to best reimagine secular mindfulness to restore its ethical framework and liberative potential to support education that builds social justice. Indeed, mindfulness alone does not possess the capacity to dismantle the profound structural oppression endemic in our society. However, it may serve as a pedagogical tool to support the deconstruction of deeply embedded inequalities in an educational context. In this research, I do not intend to question the value of therapeutic mindfulness to support in reducing stress and producing a variety of other benefits to mental health and wellbeing. Rather, I seek to interrogate how mindfulness has been co-opted and commodified as a neoliberal technology and explore the transformative potential of mindfulness to support in the deconstruction of inequalities on an individual and collective level. This research is intended to examine how mindfulness-based practices can be integrated to support broader social justice pedagogy, and more specifically, gender equality education.

Although emotions are salient in the reproduction of gendered power, feminist pedagogical approaches that work to deconstruct inequality in gender relations rarely address them (Pease, 2013). This study investigates the implementation of a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training in an East London secondary school with adolescent boys in order to examine their experiences with the training in relation to emotions and masculinity. This research employs a social constructionist approach to emotions, which seeks to understand how they play a role in gendered power relations. The study assesses the possibilities of mindfulness-based social and emotional education in addressing hegemonic masculinity enacted through and

reinforced by practices, behaviour, and ideologies relating to emotion. There is a pressing need to explore meaningful ways to address gendered social conditioning around emotions that sustains hegemonic masculinity, while dismantling deeply internalized emotional attachment to male privilege and power. This research employs an intersectional feminist framework to examine how mindfulness-based social and emotional learning might support education for gender equality. This study contributes to the field of research exploring the potential of mindfulness-based social and emotional learning interventions as a 'disruptive technology to transform prevailing systems' (Ng, 2017).

Defining Mindfulness and Social And Emotional Learning

Mindfulness emerged in the US in the 1970s, when Jon Kabat-Zinn developed mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) to alleviate chronic pain and a variety of medical conditions for patients at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Kabat-Zinn conceived mindfulness as 'a universal human capacity' which could be cultivated amongst patients to alleviate the suffering they experience. A widely accepted definition of mindfulness is 'awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally' (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). 'Mindfulness-based interventions' encompass a broad range of programs, which may be delivered and structured in dramatically different manners. Thus, significant variation among programs must be considered when assessing mindfulness-based interventions. However, mindfulness-based educational interventions often share a number of fundamental tenets. Mindfulness is considered a contemplative practice that fosters the 'expansion of awareness' through meditation and other exercises, with a central focus on being open, receptive, and non-judgmental (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Through these techniques, practitioners bring their attention 'to the thoughts and feelings that arise' in a non-judgmental manner (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). In the context of a social justice-oriented approach to mindfulness, it is important to clarify the common mindfulness concept of 'non-judgmental acceptance'. Beth Berila (2015, p. 24), employing an anti-oppression framework, points out an important distinction between accepting *our response to oppression* and accepting *oppression itself*, where she argues mindfulness should only

incorporate the former. Berila (2015, p. 24), notes that mindfulness is 'a way of validating our own experiences and feelings, rather than perpetuating the violence of oppression by condemning our own reactions'. In other words, non-judgmental acceptance of our emotional responses and radical resistance can and should coexist.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) involves recognizing and managing emotions, establishing healthy relationships and empathy for others, and making responsible and ethical choices (Zins & Elias, 2007). SEL involves the integration of feeling, thinking, and acting in education (Zins & Elias, 2007). SEL is often defined by categories of: 'self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making' (CASEL, 2019). SEL aims to foster a mindset of mutual respect, highlighting the value of group cohesion through cultivation of tools for resolving differences through communication and emotional skills (CASEL, 2019). One central component of SEL is the cultivation of empathy. In this research, I will refer specifically to *social empathy*, which Segal (2011, p. 266-267) describes as 'the ability to understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and as a result gain insight into structural inequalities and disparities'.

Mindfulness and SEL overlap in some aspects, though SEL has a more defined focus on building cohesive communities and developing interpersonal skills, while mindfulness, as it is commonly taught in schools, has a greater emphasis on developing self-regulation and self-awareness (Brensilver, 2016). Dunham (2018) notes: 'whereas mindfulness works from the inside-out, SEL addresses students' needs from the outside-in'. While understanding and monitoring one's inner selves is important, Dunham (2018) suggests students also need to develop social and emotional competencies on an external level, like 'conflict resolution, goal-setting, and relationship building', central components of SEL. Thus, mindfulness and SEL have many complementary components when implemented in school settings to support students develop themselves holistically, with attention to both internal and interpersonal growth. The intervention studied in this research involves a mindfulness-based social and emotional learning training.

Research Rationale

It is important to contextualise the reasons for focusing this research on boys amidst ongoing 'moral panic' over the low educational achievements of so-called 'failing boys' (Epstein et al., 1998). These narratives largely attribute the educational achievements of girls to be at the expense of boys' success in school (Martino & Meyenn, 2001). Aside from the profound failure of these accounts to grasp the pervasive gender inequalities girls face in the education system, these narratives construct the interests of boys and girls as inherently in competition (Martino & Meyenn, 2001), while entirely disregarding the existence of nonbinary students. Narratives of the 'failing boys' circulate within a wider overarching discourse of male victimhood. Discourses on boys' emotional inexpressivity operate along similar lines, often centring mental health and emotional victimhood, while failing to address the fundamental role boys' and men's emotions play in reproducing patriarchal privilege (Pease, 2012). Both discourses have been evoked to usher more resources and attention to boys, while simultaneously minimising the systemic gender inequality girls face. It is imperative to meaningfully address the social and emotional challenges facing boys and men. However, it is critical to do so while not essentializing these dimensions to a mere male victimhood that conceals the way normalized masculine emotionality enforces hegemonic masculinity. Thus, this research conceptualizes expression of emotions in men and boys as 'socially situated political processes' that can enforce and reproduce patriarchal power (White & Peretz, 2010, p. 404).

It is essential that schools actively incorporate curriculum that challenges cis-heteropatriarchy, sex and consent education, discussions that critically examine hegemonic masculinity, sexism training, and gender inclusive policies. Nonetheless the deeply internalized nature of men and boys' emotional attachment to privilege and power produces substantial barriers to achieving the immense transformation required through gender equality curriculum (Pease, 2012; Barnes, 2012). Berila (2015) notes how anti-oppression pedagogy often falls short in helping students fully embody and integrate their learning into their lives, citing how mindfulness education can play a fundamental role in supporting students to self-reflect and engage in critical inquiry. This research approaches boys' emotions with a critical framework that examines how

they are implicated in the creation, enforcement, and reproduction of gendered power to better understand the possibilities of engaging with emotions in feminist educational interventions. This research conceptualizes emotions as political and deeply intertwined with context and social relations, in contrast to much of the existing research on mindfulness and SEL, which treats emotions as an individual pathology, disconnected from their relational nature (Pease, 2012).

Aim of the Research

This research seeks to critically assess the possibilities of mindfulness to support social justice education. This study examines how mindfulness-based, SEL might be effective in supporting pedagogical approaches for gender equality. The study aims to investigate adolescent boys' relationship to emotions within the context of a mindfulness-based social and emotional learning intervention. The research seeks to contribute to a broader pursuit of gender equality education, exploring how to address the gendered socialization around emotional expression in boys that reproduces gendered power. This dissertation investigates how adolescent boys experience a mindfulness-based social and emotional learning training and how their relationship with and perceptions around masculinity shape their experiences. The research is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do adolescent boys experience a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training?

2. How do adolescent boys navigate their masculinity through a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training intervention?

3. What are the limitations and possibilities of a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training viewed through a feminist intersectional lens?

Theoretical Framework

Essential to this research is Judith Butler's (1990) conceptualization of gender being *performed*, rejecting a biologically determined characterization of gender identity as intrinsic to a person. Rather, Butler (1990) notes how the performative nature of

gender is built on, and strengthened by, societal norms. Butler (1990, p. 33) notes:

> Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a
> highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance
> of substance, of a natural sort of being.

A conceptualization of gender as unstable and discursively produced is useful to examine how boys continuously negotiate their masculinity across space and time. Gender can be understood as an continuous process of socialization involving a 'dynamic project of the self, something that must be constantly made and remade as part of everyday life' (Lupton, 1998 p. 105).

This research draws on Critical Masculinity Studies, with particular emphasis on the work of R. W. Connell (1995) and her concept of 'hegemonic masculinity'. Hegemonic masculinity is characterized by expressions of masculinity that function to affirm and bolster the dominant position men occupy in society. I employ Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) adapted theory of hegemonic masculinity, to emphasize the existence of multiple masculinities rather than a single, fixed version of masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasize the hierarchization of various masculinities, which indicates how hegemonic masculinity not only operates to subordinate women and nonbinary people, but also marginalized expressions of masculinity. This framework is useful to provide insight into how emotions are involved in the process of negotiating masculine power, as well as marginalizing certain expressions of masculinity. Kimberley Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality is also particularly salient in exploring the intersection of race and gender to assess the possibilities and limitations of mindfulness-based school interventions. As Crenshaw (2015) notes, 'intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power'.

This research employs a Foucauldian lens to critically examine the ways that mindfulness may be appropriated in schools a 'technology of the self,' (Reveley, 2015) within the context of regimes of neoliberal performativity (Ball, 2012). In Foucault's Collège de France lectures on *The birth of biopolitics* (2008 cited in Lorenzini, 2018), he

suggests a nuanced conceptualisation of neoliberalism that accounts for the enactment of dynamic governmental technologies with the potential to shape both individual and collective behaviour in the formation of a new type of 'subject'. He frames neoliberalism as a governmentality that does not merely permeate the political and economic realm, but rather penetrates the cultural and social dimensions of life more deeply (Oksala, 2013). Neoliberalism infuses economic metrics into all spheres of existence, extending even to those which are in no way monetized (Brown, 2005). This framework is particularly significant in examining increasingly neoliberal school contexts, where performativity and a results-focused orientation is dominant. This positioning constructs students as 'entrepreneurs of the self', imbued with a market rationality and responsibilized with their own well-being and success, with no attention to the external conditions and barriers at play (Foucault, 1988; Ng, 2015a). Critiques of mindfulness and SEL interventions point to their construction of neoliberal subjects, through training 'self-regulation' of negative or 'deviant' emotions (Purser, 2019). This framework is integral to critically question and challenge the neoliberal co-opting of mindfulness-based SEL pedagogy in school settings as a tool to regulate the normalization of the neoliberal subject's emotional skills, while obscuring the broader societal factors shaping them.

Research Structure

This dissertation consists of five chapters. This first chapter has set out the context and rationale for the research, as well as the objectives and theoretical framework for the study. Chapter Two encompasses a review of relevant literature relating to mindfulness and SEL initiatives, masculinity and boys, and emotions. Chapter Three sets out the study's methodology and offers details about the approach of the study itself, with insights into the way the study was constructed and conducted. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study and consists of a discussion of the significance of the findings within the wider context of the research. Finally, the dissertation closes in Chapter 5 with recommendations based on the studies' findings and a reflection of how this research may contribute to the field more broadly.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This research seeks to explore how mindfulness-based social and emotional learning can support gender equality education. This chapter investigates the existing literature relevant to the study in order to situate it within the broader research context and build on the existing work in the field. It begins with a review of literature on mindfulness in education, examining critiques of how mindfulness initiatives bolster neoliberal agendas. Employing a Foucauldian analysis of emotional intelligence, the following section examines how mindfulness and SEL initiatives can be co-opted as tool in the conditioning of normalized emotional regulation. The chapter then moves to explore social constructionist perspectives on emotions, examining how power plays a role in the formation and expression of emotions. I then turn to literature on gendered power, examining how boys construct masculinity at school, with close attention to how emotions are implicated in this process. I utilize an intersectional feminist framework to examine emotions like anger, with an emphasis on the intersections of race, gender, and class pertinent in their formation and expression. Finally, I identify a gap in research that explores mindfulness-based social and emotional learning's potential to transcend neoliberal commodification in order to support gender equality education that challenges hegemonic masculinity and strengthens social justice pedagogy more broadly. I close by indicating how this study seeks to contribute to education research centred on social justice.

The Neoliberalisation of Mindfulness in Education

The current educational context in the UK is greatly influenced by neoliberalism. Educational institutions have become increasingly 'business-like' (Ball, 2012, p. 20), characterized by the expanding privatization of schools, with a growing emphasis on competition, standardisation, and output (Bailey, 2018). Performativity and productivity are central features of schools' operations, as assessment is increasingly used to measure and quantify virtually all aspects of education, with a particular emphasis on

student performance. Ozga (2008 cited in Ball, 2016, p. 1054) describes 'regimes of audit, inspection, evaluation and testing,' as well as the utilization of measurement and comparison, as a form of 'governing by numbers'. Students are thereby reduced to test results, expected to perform, regardless of the material conditions and structural inequalities they may face both inside and outside of the educational institution. Within regimes of neoliberal performativity (Ball, 2012), reforms and new initiatives implemented in schools are largely moderated and judged by their congruence with quantifiable outputs that directly enhance performance.

There is a prevalent misconception among mindfulness practitioners and educators that mindfulness is an apolitical practice. In his book, *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality,* Robert Purser (2019) discusses how mindfulness does not operate in a political vacuum, but rather is deeply influenced by neoliberalism. 'Mindfulness' originates from the word *sati*, which translates to 'remembrance' or 'recollection' from the Pali language, through which the Buddha's discourses were composed (Sharf, 2015). *Sati* is one element of a much larger Buddhist tradition, which encompasses an expansive ethical and philosophical framework that includes not only principles of non-harming and non-violence, but also interconnectedness and liberation for all sentient beings (Cannon, 2016). The early Buddhist institution, or the *samgha*, involved a renunciate community where interrogation and 'critique of mainstream social values and cultural norms' was deeply integrated, premised on the notion that liberation requires radical change (Sahrif, 2015, p. 478). Purser (2019) notes that mindfulness in its original Buddhist context embodies consciousness of that which leads to insight, as well as a discernment of what does not.

However, Purser and Loy (2013) argue that severed from its original liberative purpose and social ethics, mindfulness can be minimised to a trivial therapeutic tool for 'self-help'. Mindfulness, as it is commonly taught in the West, can 'fetishize the present moment' (Purser, 2019, p. 111), resulting in what East Asian Buddhists have termed 'meditation sickness' (Ahn, 2007 cited in Sharf, 2015, p. 476). 'Mediation sickness' emerges from an excessive focus on 'inner stillness' and a lack of critical inquiry (Ahn, 2007 cited in Sharf, 2015, p. 476). Mindfulness is then reduced to a therapeutic tool for stress reduction and strictly quantifiable results, stripped from ethical reflection that

involves the original Buddhist aims of 'vigilant awareness of the consequentiality of one's actions' (Purser, 2019, p. 82). As a result, the prospect of radical change and liberation through mindfulness is dramatically minimized, if not entirely erased.

As it is 'easily assimilated by the market', Purser (2019, p. 19) argues, mindfulness can be co-opted as a technology to maintain the status quo and bolster a neoliberal agenda. Magid and Rosenbaum (2016 cited in Purser, 2019, p. 100) caution that eradicating mindfulness of social context leads to its adaptation to 'the deep-rooted individualist, materialist, and secular structures of Western culture — including the culture of science as itself a technique for achieving control'. Indeed, the problem here does lie in its secularization, but rather in the co-opting and appropriation of certain Buddhist practices, decontextualized from their ethical framework. Buddhists distinguish between *samma sati,* or 'right mindfulness', and *miccha sati, '*wrong mindfulness' (Greenberg & Mitra, 2015). 'Right mindfulness' embodies intentions that involve ethical scaffolding, with a primary focus on alleviating suffering on both an individual and universal level (Greenberg & Mitra, 2015). Someone committing an injustice or act of oppression could indeed be practicing mindfulness, yet the quality is 'wrong mindfulness'.

Reduced as individualised self-help practices that fail to acknowledge the wider social structures producing inequality and the very stress that mindfulness offers to reduce, mindfulness can seamlessly be adapted as a neoliberal technology to produce resilient 'entrepreneurs of the self' (Foucault, 1988). The ideal 'mindful subject' is constructed with the capacity to manage the emotional turmoil produced by the daily injustices and uncertainties of neoliberal capitalism (Purser, 2019), with subdued agency to challenge larger systems producing these conditions. In this way, mindfulness can be appropriated to reinforce the neoliberal, capitalist systems and structures that produce the very suffering from which Buddhist practices seek liberation (Doran, 2018).

A Foucauldian Analysis of Emotional Intelligence

A number of studies on mindfulness emphasize emotional intelligence (EI) as a central benefit (Baer, 2011). Emotional intelligence is commonly defined as the capacity to identify and manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others

(Goleman, 1996). EI is frequently peddled as a metric to indicate a person's potential 'success in life' (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008) and is touted by corporates as a key tenant to employability. An article from the World Economic Forum cited EI among the ten main skills a person needs to 'thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution' (Gray, 2016). EI is highly sought after by schools and corporations implementing mindfulness programs which market increased EI as a central benefit. Yet, there is a lack of consensus among academics regarding exactly what EI encompasses, as well as the dubious nature of its quantifiability (Murphy, 2006; Harms & Crede, 2010; Mayer et al., 2008; Zemblyas, 2007). Mayer et al. (2008) critique constructions of EI embodying a vast range of arbitrary traits, while challenging notions that EI represents a viable indicator of 'success'. EI tests, which generally consist of self-reported questionnaires, (see SPECTRUM Database, 2019) are standard among studies on mindfulness (Baer, 2011). Such testing often involves formulaic questions that seek to calculate and quantify multi-faceted dimensions of human expression and emotionality. Galasinski (2004, p. 13) notes: 'The frequent use of questionnaires supposedly referring to emotions, when in fact they are not much more than lexical labels, makes the research even more problematic'.

Through a Foucauldian lens, EI testing resembles a regulatory tool utilised in the construction and normalization of an archetypal neoliberal subject's emotional faculties as flexible yet 'tightly governed' (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 249). Zemblyas (2007, p. 19) contends that the testing and quantification of EI in schools involves a slippery slope of getting 'caught in the obsession for performativity, efficiency, cultural assimilation, moral self-control and normalization of emotional "skills"'. SEL is prone to promoting neoliberal performativity agendas with a vested interest in the policing of emotions through self-regulation and normalization of conduct. Teaching normative emotional regulation with this agenda functions to subdue strong or 'deviant' emotional reactions that young people experience in response to the unjust conditions they witness and experience in daily life. de Boise (2015, p. 50–51) suggests that what 'counts' as an emotion is constituted by efforts that have historically and systematically operated to discount the behaviour of particular groups and individuals on the basis of race, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and class. This form of emotional policing serves to

reinforce neoliberal systems through the perpetuation of the inequalities that uphold them (Illouz, 2007 cited in de Boise, 2015).

A central critique of mindfulness and SEL initiatives is their tendency to psychologize and depoliticise emotions. This conceptualisation premises emotions as something internal, severing them from their relational nature with the outside world. Purser (2019, p. 120) notes: 'By pathologizing strong feelings, and teaching children "emotional literacy", the curricula of mindfulness in schools instils a strong sense of "correct" behaviour'. In other words, emotions are conceptualised as being in need of self-management, thrusting individuals into a perpetual state of personal development and self-improvement. Kovel (1980 cited in Purser, 2019, p. 110) explains:

> A purely psychological view of human difficulties is a handy way of mystifying social reality, and it requires no feat of imagination to comprehend how capitalist society would come to reward the psychiatric profession for promoting a special kind of psychological illusion.

This purely psychological framework bolsters an individualistic responsibilization of the self that drives neoliberalism, disconnecting our emotional reactions from structural inequalities that shape them. This individualizing process effectively dislocates emotions from the collective consciousness essential for social action (Lyman, 2004). Mindfulness becomes a near-sighted stopgap to the severe material conditions individuals face on a daily basis, rather than an awakening and path to radical transformation (Purser & Loy, 2013). Furthermore, this orientation promotes deficit discourses which propagate the notion that students possess shortcomings which are in need of improvement, rather than the larger structures oppressing them (Cannon, 2016). These discourses are deeply racialized and play into white saviour ideologies present in many mindfulness initiatives (see *Room to Breathe*, 2013) designed to save 'troubled' youth of colour in 'inner-city' schools (Cannon, 2016).

Indeed, mindfulness and SEL interventions have been appropriated in schools to serve a neoliberal agenda. However, I attribute this not to an innate quality of these teachings, but rather due to their malleability. I agree with Reveley (2015) that

emotional management strategies and affect-based techniques taught in school do not inherently disempower students or instil a neoliberal disposition. Furthermore, I contend with Cook (2016 p. 149) that neoliberalism is not a 'totalizing ideology', and there are available avenues to 'recognize collective and structural causes of suffering at the same time as seeking practices of subjectification for improving wellbeing'. Subjectification comprises of the various ways a person transforms themselves into a subject (Foucault, 1988). Cook (2016, p. 149) problematizes the notion that 'practices of subjectification' are inherently serving neoliberal agendas, suggesting that through supporting practitioners to 'turn toward' difficulty, mindfulness 'fits comfortably within a framework of subjectification and reflexive self-governance'. Employing this framing to understand the possibilities of mindfulness-based SEL interventions to transcend reductionist individualising, self-help conceptualizations, I head Reveley's (2015, p. 90) caution that 'anyone engaged in Foucault-inspired critique must be careful not to tar all positive education self-technologies with the same brush'.

Reveley (2015, p. 85), citing Gros (2005) describes the tension in a Foucauldian assessment of subjectivation which arises when examining the constitution of the neoliberal subject:

> Foucault transposes the concern with subjectivation to the time of his writing, identifying especially in classical Greek 'practices of the self' the basis for a new ethics of self-care and, in turn, a resistant form of subjectivity. This watershed moment in Foucault's thinking has led scholars to identify an inherent tension between a subject constituted by technologies of power and knowledge, and an agential self-creating subject.

'Ethical self-care' is distinguished by an imperative to unearth and address unrecognized habits, while developing new pathways to relate and interact in the world that embody ethics of responsible citizenship (Ng, 2017). Foucault emphasizes the important distinction between a relational approach to self-care, from 'self-indulgent' and individualising forms (Ng, 2017). Reveley (2015, p. 90) suggests that school-based mindfulness training that fosters emotional self-awareness can support the growth of an

'emotionally aware, resistant subjectivity' among student practitioners, integral to building collective action and challenging neoliberalism. More broadly, these competencies are imperative to undertaking the work to dismantle inequalities that sustain current power paradigms. Mindfulness-based interventions that address the emotional aspects of students' lives can help cultivate emotional competencies that support in resisting neoliberalism (Reveley, 2015), while also challenging gendered emotional conceptualisations, practices, and expressions that enforce patriarchal power. However, as discussed previously, situating educational initiatives that address emotions within an ethical framework, with attention to how power circulates through our emotional lives, is essential to transcending the mere construction of neoliberal subjectivity and forging a pathway to their liberative potential. Healey (2013) introduces a reimagined concept of mindfulness, termed 'civic mindfulness', which involves a reorienting to a shared awareness of collective duty in the face of injustice. Indeed, there is a strong imperative among mindfulness educators and researchers to investigate how mindfulness-based practices may be taught as a means to challenge social inequality, as well as critically engage with the ways they may be enforcing it.

Emotions as Sites of Power: A Social Constructionist Framework

Emotions are examined across a broad range of fields including psychology, neurology, physiology, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology, each with vastly different frameworks. Even within these fields there are significant divergences in conceptualisations of emotions; there is often a lack of consensus on what an emotion even encompasses. Lupton (1998, p. 10) points to two main categorizations among literature on emotions: 'emotions as inherent' and 'emotions as socially constructed'. I will focus on sociological approaches to emotions that reject the former biological determinist view of emotions as genetically programmed, instead focusing on how emotions circulate within social systems, with attention to 'the implications for selfhood and social relations of emotional experience and expression' (Lupton, 1998, p. 15). In this research, I will not attempt to address the conceptualizations of emotions across these fields, nor will I manage to encompass the wide range of diverse sociological perspectives on emotions. Rather, I will focus on social constructionist views of

emotions (see Averill, 1980; Lupton, 1998; Kemper, 1991; Parkinson, 1996; Galasinski, 2004), which understand emotions as learned and shaped by social and cultural forces. Employing a social constructionist approach to emotions will support this research in an investigation of how emotions operate to reproduce and sustain inequality.

Social scientists have extensively studied emotions, with attention to their relationship with socialization and the inscription of cultural meaning around emotions (Gordon, 1981). Hochschild (1979) suggests that individuals undertake 'emotional work' in which they moderate emotional responses when they are deemed inappropriate for a given situation. According to Hochschild (1979), emotions are governed by 'feeling rules', which operate as shared social norms that govern what individuals perceive they are supposed to feel in a particular situation. Through 'feeling rules' emotional responses are classed as normal or 'deviant' (Walton, Coyle, & Lyons, 2004), influencing the way that emotional expression is negotiated and managed by individuals. The relationship between power and emotions is central to the 'micropolitics of emotion' that operates through these frequent judgments about emotions' appropriateness and legitimacy (Shields, 2005 cited in Shields, 2006 p. 64). Utilising a Foucauldian lens, 'feeling rules' can be conceptualised as a form of productive power which informs the creation of 'regimes of truth' that dictate emotional behaviour (Foucault, 1975). 'Feeling rules' impress a form of covert social control through a prescribed internalization of the notion of a 'normalized' ideal subject (Foucault, 1975). In other words, individuals are socially conditioned to internalize a shared, unspoken emotional script that dictates what emotions they should be feeling according to their context and associated social dynamics. Aspects of class, gender, and race, play a significant role in moderating this process, as I will discuss later.

Social constructionist frameworks examine emotions as more than simple anatomical responses, but rather as resources that can be utilised by individuals to gain social 'positioning' (Walton et al., 2004, p. 3). Through this framework, emotions are conceived as significant sites for the 'reproduction macro-societal processes,' (Pease, 2012, p. 127) significant in the manufacturing and enforcing of privilege. Sociologists have studied extensively how emotions are salient to both maintain existing power differentials as well as in gaining power (Averill, 1980; Kemper, 1991; Parkinson, 1996;

Galasinski, 2014). Kemper (1991) suggests that emotions are actualised when individuals comprehend a gain or loss of power in a given situation. Furthermore, Fields, Copp, & Kleinman (2006) discuss how in social interactions among high status groups, differences are reinforced between the group and subordinate groups as a means to maintain and validate their dominance. Within this theoretical understanding, gender scholars localise men's emotional expression and inexpression as a method of societal power (Sattel, 1976; Pease, 2012) acknowledging that gender inequalities are central in its production and reproduction.

Emotions and Gendered Power

Lutz (1990 cited in Walton et al., 2004, p. 3) proposes that 'any discourse on emotions is also, at least implicitly, a discourse on gender'. Psychological research on emotion has often focused on investigating whether men and boys and women and girls possess innate emotional differences (Shields et al., 2005 cited in Shields et al., 2006) Shields et al. (2006, p. 65) point to an array of research that documents the shortcomings of such approaches (see Bacchi, 1990; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994). One of the many problematic elements of developmental approaches that naturalise gender differences is that they perpetuate the notion of the 'unemotional man', which positions boys and men as innately emotionless or incapable of expressing any emotions. Galasinski (2004) troubles this construction of men's lack of emotions as an essentialist view of masculine emotionality, which fails to address the complexity of men's emotional lives. Rather, Galasinski (2004, p. 5) suggests a framework that treats emotions as a 'contextually embedded social practice'. Citing Bamberg (1976), Galasinski (2004, p. 5) distinguishes that emotions can be understood as different discursive practices, rather than a single category of 'emotion' and 'emotional talk'. Referencing Hearn (1993), Galasinski (2004, p. 5) problematizes the reduction of emotions as mere psychological states that happen to us, suggesting instead that discursive practices bring emotions into existence. Thus, gaining insights into emotions in boys and men requires an examination of the gendered social practices through which emotions are constructed and brought into existence.

Discourses of the 'unemotional man' in the West position masculine emotional behaviour as 'emotionally sterile' (Lupton, 1998, p. 113) and endangered due to an innate inability to express emotions. Feminist scholars are often wary of the discourses on men's emotional inexpressiveness that entangle with narratives of the 'wounded male psyche' (Robinson & Hockay, 2011 cited in Pease, 2012, p. 130). This trepidation is warranted given the emergence of a distinct male victimhood which obscures the way emotions are constructed, deployed, and withheld in order to maintain power. However, discourses of normative emotionality serve the preservation of heteropatriarchal power to subordinate women and nonbinary people, as well as men who do not conform to normative masculine expression (Seidler, 1997). Countering the 'unemotional man' discourse, Shields et al. (2005) advocate for an approach that moves away from describing gender differences in relation to expected emotion to one that focuses on the social forces that create, regulate, or preserve these differences, as well as prescribe meaning to them. Using these approaches to men and boys' emotional lives provides a useful framework to unearth gender power dynamics that influence and are reproduced in emotional behaviour.

Lutz (1996 cited in Galasinski, 2004) suggests the 'unemotional man' construction is less of a reflection of men's emotional inexpressivity but instead an articulation of the 'emotional woman'. In other words, the archetype of the 'unemotional man' only exists with the construction of the 'emotional woman', where emotionality is coded as feminine and inherently irrational (Lupton, 1998, p. 113). This construction perpetuates a false binary with strong, rational, and masculine on one side and weak, emotional, and feminine on the other (Walton et al., 2004). This dichotomy positions men as more rational and 'in control' as a means to reinforce their dominance (Lupton, 1998, p. 113). de Boise (2015, p. 787) critiques assumptions that men are 'unemotional', suggesting that men's displays of emotion are 'culturally, historically and situationally context-specific'. Furthermore, discourses of the 'unemotional man' fail to recognize the expressions of normative masculinity involving aggressive, angry and jealous emotions (Galasinski, 2004). In addition, they ignore context specific displays of 'softer' emotions such as crying in specific circumstances deemed appropriate in masculinity performance, like at sporting events (de Boise, 2015). Shields et al. (2006)

cite a study by Robinson and Johnson (1997) that revealed how participants referred to female targets as being more 'emotional' than the male targets in the study. Similarly, participants in a study by Timmers et al. (2003 cited in Shields et al., 2006) were found to believe that men express anger more frequently than women. Yet despite this, women's emotional behaviour is classified as 'emotional' while men's is not (Shields et al., 2006), revealing how gender hierarchies operate through emotional classification currency that is context-specific and culturally situated (de Boise, 2015). Social norms define specific overt emotionality being closely related to femininity, etching it into social scripts to delineate subordinate status.

Emotions play a distinct role in the performance of gender (Butler, 1990). Shields et al. (2006, p. 67) suggest:

Gender performance verifies the authenticity of the self, and emotion performance is measured in terms of its authenticity. Therefore, successfully doing gender validates emotion at the same time as successfully doing emotion validates gender.

Here, Shields et al. (2006) suggest that 'doing emotions' is a way of 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In other words, social scripts about emotional behaviour, expression, and values serve to authenticate and construct gender identity. Like gender, emotions exist in a perpetual state of coming into being, as their meaning is assigned and negotiated within a specific space and time. Through an evolving process of doing masculinity, Shields et al. (2006), citing Sattel (1976), argue that boys (particularly referencing white, middle-class boys) learn to restrain emotional behaviour such as sadness and empathy. As men, this amounts to accrual of 'emotional capital' (Cahill, 1999), which is heavily classed and racialized, and leveraged to validate dominance and reinforce perceived 'rationality' (Shields et al., 2006). Pease (2012) suggests that emotional inexpressiveness and the severing of empathy can be traced to a gender socialization process designed to prepare men and boys to hold positions of authority, as a means to detachment them from the effects the oppression they might be required to commit against subordinate groups. In other words, empathy is

internalized as a threat to the accrual of a gendered power which depends on subordination of women, nonbinary people, and men who do not sit within the upper echelons of the hegemonic masculine hierarchy (Connell, 2005).

Boys and Masculinity at School

Researchers have extensively investigated how adolescent boys' emotional behaviour at school is intimately tied to the continuous process of constructing, performing, and negotiating masculinity. A small body of research exists that documents the way that humour is utilized in the formation and maintenance of masculinities in school environments (see Barnes, 2012; Manninen, Huuki, & Sunnari, 2011; Measor, 1996). Barnes' (2012) research on a program called 'Exploring Masculinities' in an Irish school with white working-class adolescent boys reveals the salience of humour utilised in the performance and preservation of a 'defensive masculine identity'. Barnes' (2012, p. 239) study revealed how classes that challenged the boys' deeply held conceptions of masculinity were met with humour, utilised as a resource to preserve 'the boundaries of "acceptable" masculinity' and police other boys who did not adhere to the dominant masculine social norms. Barnes' (2012) findings ultimately revealed that the programme did not succeed in meaningfully disrupting participants' firmly embedded concepts of masculinity. Barnes (2012, p. 249) notes: 'perceived as a threat from the outset, it faced an almost insurmountable task in seeking to dislodge this influential construction of masculinity'. Barnes' (2012) research reveals the distinct barriers involved in education interventions that seek to challenge dominant discourses of masculinity, which are reinforced by the institutionalisation of hegemonic masculinity through broader systems and educational practices.

SEL interventions also face similar responses of humour and sarcasm from adolescent boy participants. Gallagher's (1998 cited in Martino and Meyenn, 2001, p. 48) findings of an emotional literacy program for secondary school boys in Australia also revealed challenges with 'sarcastic and combative postures'. Class discussions perceived by adolescent boys to be 'emotional' were circumvented through various forms of humour as a means of resistance and rejection. This research reveals how humour is deployed as a valuable 'gendered resource of status' (Huuki, Manninen, & Sunnari, 201,

p. 370) that supports adolescent boys to articulate their masculine dominance and bolster status among their peers. Kemper (2006) suggests that groups members use humour and jokes as a means to increase status by publicly entertaining the larger group. Research by Frosh et al. (2002 cited by Barnes, 2012) has also noted how adolescent boys internalise the reality that hegemonic masculine status will only be afforded to a small dominant group of boys, which leads them to inhabit the 'middle way'. This involves simply complying with social hegemonic masculine norms without displaying any open resistance. Divergence from these norms or direct challenges to them results in mockery, bullying, and other forms of social ostracism (Frosh et al., 2002 cited in Barnes, 2012).

Oransky & Marecek's (2009) study with US high school boys showed how participants reported that public displays of 'hurt or upset feelings' would face ridicule from other male peers. They found that when faced with the scenario of one of their male peers seeking emotional support, responses included encouraging them to either suppress emotions perceived as uncomfortable or use a form of distraction to manage their distress (Oransky & Marecek, 2009). Taunting and teasing were utilised to affirm boys' masculine status, while reciprocation of this behaviour was cited as essential to maintain or recuperate the masculine status of the individual who was the object of such mockery (Oransky & Marecek, 2009). Furthermore, Pascoe (2013) notes how homophobic bullying is utilised as another means among adolescent boys to gain power amongst peers and police deviant emotionality. Pascoe (2013, p. 94) discusses how a struggle for power and dominance can be actualised within a specific interaction among boys, where homophobic bullying and humour are enacted as an 'interactional resource'. Boys that are perceived to be behaving in a 'feminine' manner are labelled as gay in an attempt to otherize and distance this behaviour and punish it through harassment (Pascoe, 2013). Thus, homophobia is also a salient feature of normative gender socialization of boys into heteromasculinity, as sexuality plays a significant role in how masculine emotion is disciplined and regulated among boys.

It is important to mention that humour is not inherently regressive. There is an important distinction to interrogate between mocking and certain expressions of humour utilized to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity and nonharmful forms of joking

utilized as an alternative means for boys to relate and connect to others. Simply policing all forms of humour shuts down yet another pathway for emotional expression among boys. Joking in the classroom can also serve to keep the students 'onside' and keep them coming back to class (Barnes, 2012, p. 243). Thus, it is essential to recognise the relational nature of humour in a classroom, with attention to how power may be articulated through is application.

Oransky & Marecek (2009, p. 219) note that a number of studies on masculinity (see Buhrmester, 1996; Rose & Rudolph, 2006) have found that adolescent boys' friendships 'provided them with autonomy and status, not social support, empathy, or nurturance'. Boys in these studies reported being unlikely to turn to their peers for emotional support. However, Oransky & Marecek (2009, p. 219) caution against the application of psychological approaches that position boys as constrained by a 'gender straightjacket', as they passively embody 'top-down' all-encompassing gender socialization on emotions. Citing a London study by Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman (2003 cited in Oransky & Marecek, 2009, p. 220), they highlight how adolescent boys switched from 'stoic, tough postures and more expressive and emotionally vulnerable stances in accord with the demands of different social situations'. This echoes conceptual frameworks by other gender scholars that emphasize emotions as contextually embedded and culturally situated (Galasinski, 2004; de Boise, 2015). The notion that boys and men inherit and internalize social scripts on their gender to which they are bound strips them of their agency. More problematically, it erases all sense of responsibility for the way that boys and men enact power and subordinate others through the deeply entwined process of 'doing gender' (Zimmerman, 1987) and 'doing emotions' (Shields et al., 2006). Thus, while still acknowledging the existence of normative social codes of masculinity, Oransky & Marecek (2009, p. 219) propose a conceptual framework that places focus on the contextually located ways that individuals engage with, conform to, negotiate, or reject these codes through an ongoing process of enacting gender.

Masculinity and Anger

Hearn (1993 cited in Lupton, 1998) also challenges the innately 'unemotional man' archetype, pointing to discourses of men as emotionally volatile, which are commonly drawn upon as justification for being 'overcome' by emotions and perpetuating violence. Emotions like rage and anger have been closely associated with masculinity (Pease, 2012) and are often problematically considered 'rational' responses to a situation by men, as a result of gendered power (Lewis, 2000 cited in de Boise, 2015). In addition, emotions like anger are commonly falsely attributed to precede violence (Galasinski, 2004) through a model that suggests men's violence is built on anger. Due to this, conceptual frameworks for anger management construct violence prevention through control of men's anger (Pease, 2012). However, Pease (2012) warns that attributing emotions as the underpinning for the violence committed by men is largely deployed as an excuse utilised to diminish men's accountability when violent actions are most prominently related to the articulation of power when it is perceived as being threatened. Citing LeDoux (1996), Lyman (2004, p. 135) critiques psychological approaches to anger that reduce it to 'reason losing control of the emotions', arguing that 'emotion' and 'reason' do not correlate to real neurological systems.

Lyman (2004, p. 135) advocates for an understanding of anger that transcends psychological models to acknowledge 'the political use of language to devalue certain kinds of speech'. The psychologizing of anger functions to depoliticize anger, yet anger must be understood through critical examination of power (Lyman, 2004), with acknowledgement of factors such as gender, class, and race and their effect on emotional experiences (Pease, 2012). Drawing on Foucault (1983), Zemblyas (2004, p. 22), explains 'anger is not a "psychological property" of individuals . . . but an indispensable aspect of a communicative negotiation that produces subjects and relations'. Holmes (2004, p. 213) refers to the '*situ-relational* character of anger', emphasizing the importance of how anger plays a role in the construction of subjects and relations across different situations, informed in part by emotional discourses. In other words, it is essential to recognize the situational nature of anger across varying social relations and contexts, noting the way that anger is both producing and produced by social relations.

Shields et al. (2006, p. 73) references Clark's (1990) findings that emotional expression reflects an individual's positioning within social hierarchy, where expression of anger portrays 'a sense of violated entitlement', while sadness connotes helplessness. Indeed such positioning can be changed within an interaction, as emotions are deployed to construct social status. Boler (1999) makes the distinction between 'defensive' anger, rooted in a perceived threat to power, and anger against a perceived injustice. Kalish and Kimmel's (2014) notion of anger in the form of 'aggrieved entitlement', a gendered emotion, referenced particularly in the context of white boys perpetrating school shooting, leads to a need for revenge resulting from humiliation perceived as a form of emasculation. 'Aggrieved entitlement', they argue, is formed by a culture of hegemonic masculinity, which instils a sense of entitlement in boys to power that encourages them to act with violence in response to a perceived threat or attack on their masculinity (Kalish & Kimmel, 2014). While anger and violence stemming from 'aggrieved entitlement' may be defended by claims of a perceived injustice, ensuing violence is ultimately deployed as a means to restore a lost sense of power.

Stereotypes around gender and emotion are constructed on the notion that men express 'powerful emotions', while women express 'powerless emotions' (Fischer, 1993). Lyman (2004, p. 134) notes how public expression of anger is only viewed as permissible when it operates as 'a resource for the dominant'. When anger is expressed by subordinate groups it often arouses anger from those who hold power, as it is understood to threaten their dominance (Pease, 2012). Therefore, women's anger, particularly that of minoritized women and women of colour in response to the injustices they face, has historically been silenced, as it threatens white patriarchal power (Lorde, 1981 cited in Olson, 2011). Meanwhile men effectively preserve a monopoly on the expression of anger. However, while men may be implicated in the silencing of women's anger, due to the intersections of race, class, and gender and the negotiation of both dominant and subordinate identities, boys and men of colour are also subject to the policing of anger. Halberstadt et al.'s (2018) research, for example, reveals how teachers enact 'anger bias', in which racialized perceptions of emotions result in the disproportionate misidentification of anger in black male students. By these means, black boys are largely constructed as being angrier and thus more violent.

Tropes of the 'angry Muslim' (Khoja-Moolji & Niccolini, 2015) impact the perceptions and subsequent policing of Muslims' emotional expression. Lawler (2014) also points to how English white working class boys have been constructed as angry and lacking value through nostalgic narratives of 'the angry young man' found in theatre representations. For groups with a minoritized identity, such as black and brown and working class boys, normative constructions of their masculinity vary, as perceptions of masculinity are negotiated based on their intersections with other aspects of identity. In other words, stereotypes about some forms of masculinity are conceived as 'angrier', while anger is often pathologized as a means to devalue emotional reactions to injustice and further marginalise certain groups.

While acknowledging that anger can be a destructive force within and outside of education, Zemblyas (2007) problematizes the eradication of anger in school settings. Zemblyas (2007, p. 19) notes how school-based programs on emotional intelligence and emotional literacy, rooted in neoliberal performativity, can result in the policing of students' emotions. With a focus on emotional self-control and regulation, emotions, and particularly anger, are silenced as students are subject to the 'normalization of emotional "skills"'. Purser (2019, p. 42) argues that mindfulness programs also participate in the placation of anger, which he suggests leads to 'neutering the politically generative potential of emotions by consigning feelings of anger, sadness, or disappointment to the realm of personal pathology.' Furthermore, Lyman (2004, p. 142) drawing on Nietzsche (1967), warns against the development of 'free-floating' anger, which emerges when the cause of oppression is not identified and addressed. Because 'free-floating' anger is absent of conscious connection to its root cause, it may manifest unexpectedly after the fact in destructive ways, rather than serving as a useful resource to mobilize for social action. Lyman (2004) also cites Scheler's (1961) use of the concept of 'ressentiment' in reference to the repeated emotional stress created by non-conscious anger, which may result from structural inequalities that lead to individuals experiencing strong feelings of anger that they are prohibited from expressing. This is particularly salient for groups with intersectional identities, like boys and men of colour that are subordinated in one way and dominant in another. Anger resulting from subordination may be unconsciously internalised or policed in a particular setting where

that identity is marginalised, and re-emerge in the form of 'free-floating' anger against people that occupy a lower status.

As Audre Lorde (1981 cited in Olson, 2011) notes, anger is also a powerful tool against injustice. Peters (2012 cited in Reveley, 2015, p. 89) advocates for 'the positive rehabilitation of anger', which involves mobilising anger as a transformational tool of non-violent political action. de Boise (2015, p. 788) citing Illouze (2007) suggests:

> Rather than thinking about emotions, or particular emotions, as inherently progressive or regressive for men . . . it is equally important to consider how emotions fit into, and circulate within, neoliberal-capitalist, patriarchal frameworks as a way of maintaining inequalities.

Along these lines, Shields et al. (2006) points out that specific emotions themselves are not an expression of power, rather emotional behaviour reveals gendered perceptions about who can express an emotion that connotes power, in what way, and in what context. Thus, rather than viewing anger as inherently 'destructive' and in need of emotional self-regulation (Purser, 2019), it must be contextualised within its discursive construction. Zemblyas (2007) advocates for discernment of the causes and roots of anger as an essential practice in educational settings, in order to avoid the domestication of anger to injustice which moves people to resist against it. Lyman (2004, p. 141) sees anger as an essential tool to activate political and social movements, which require connection of 'unfelt or unconscious emotional responses to injustice to become conscious and articulate'. In other words, policed anger must be connected to its source as a reaction to inequality, enabling the oppressed to unearth their repressed and silenced emotional reactions and draw on them in resistance-building. An important element of this process is connecting individual anger to collective emotional reactions to injustice, which is essential in creating collective action (Lyman, 2004).

Anger in the emotional lives of boys of colour is complex and must be interrogated and examined, rather than simply accepted as a default for boys or silenced and neutralised as an inherent threat. Given the axes of their dominant gender identity, their subordinated racial identity, and other aspects of their identity with which

these inevitably intersect, anger may be drawn on both to reinforce dominance and subordinate others and also as a powerful tool against injustice. Thus, structuring pedagogy to interrogate the way that power operates through emotions and emotional behaviour opens transformative pathways to challenge both privilege and oppression. This research seeks to explore how a mindfulness-based SEL intervention may enforce or resist authoritarian practices of emotional self-regulation in accordance with particular 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979) that deem certain emotions as inherently regressive.

Mindfulness and the Social Justice Research Gap

Over the last decade, a rapidly expanding body of research has surfaced demonstrating the numerous benefits of school-based mindfulness interventions on students (McKeering & Hwang, 2018). However, academics and scientists agree that mindfulness research is still in its infancy, while research on mindfulness with young people in educational settings is even less developed (Purser, 2019). Still, research is rapidly expanding. In England, as many as 370 schools will take part in one of the world's largest trials, conducted by Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families in partnership with UCL to explore a variety of ways to support mental health and wellbeing, including mindfulness techniques (Doyle, 2019). The study seeks to expand current research on mindfulness and mental health education through evaluating the effectiveness of various methods and approaches, with the goal of building a strong base of evidence to support schools in determining best practices and methods (Doyle, 2019).

Despite the significant proliferation of research on mindfulness in schools, many of the existing studies are entangled in the neoliberal performativity bind, whereby research is designed to produce results that can convince marketized, result-driven schools and institutions of its value. Some scientists and mindfulness scholars also point out that researchers are sometimes selective in how they convey the benefits of mindfulness (Kerr cited in Ng, 2015b). School-based mindfulness studies are largely quantitative, primarily focusing on benefits such as behaviour-management, better grades and test scores, and EI. While these results are desirable and indeed beneficial in

many ways, such studies can further entrench the monopoly of 'results-focused mindfulness' (Purser, 2019, p. 155). In addition, such studies place pressure on mindfulness training programs to adapt their programs to fit the market demand for measurable outcomes. My intention is not to challenge the validity and quality of such quantitative findings on the benefits of mindfulness when implemented in schools, though critical assessment of mindfulness studies is crucial. Nor do I seek to reduce the importance of exploring the potential of mindfulness as a means to support mental health. Rather, I advocate for a critical examination of the broader implications of how we implement, study, and frame mindfulness. A systematic review of mindfulness-based school interventions with young adolescents by McKeering and Hwang (2018, p. 595) noted that: 'The exclusion of qualitative data exploring students' experiences of learning and practising mindfulness omits valuable information that could be used to better inform implementation of MBIs [mindfulness-based initiatives]'. Thus, there is an imperative to expand existing research to focus more deeply on student voices in their experiences with mindfulness. Furthermore, I suggest that the liberative potential of the practice, which is less easily quantifiable, is often disregarded among mindfulness interventions and studies alike. As Ng (2017) notes, 'mindfulness in education offers an opportunity to reorient education away from narrowly conceived instrumental ends towards broader ethical and socially-engaged ones'.

The intervention researched in this study is explicitly focused on empathy and compassion, not as a by-product of mindfulness, but as the core focus of the training itself. This sets it apart from other mindfulness programs' 'trojan horse' approach, which strictly markets 'results-based mindfulness' (Purser, 2019, p. 156). Purser (2019) notes how this approach communicates mindfulness through neurological terminology that focuses on measurable outputs, while haphazardly willing the emergence of the less-valued outcome of increased compassion as a covert by-product. The packaging of mindfulness is congruent with a performative neoliberal output-orientation that characterises the UK education system. As a result, there is a significant gap in research investigating school programs that incorporate both SEL and mindfulness, while actively focusing on the cultivation of compassion and empathy. Furthermore, mindfulness

studies often ignore factors such as gender and race and rarely employ a sociological lens with a theoretical framework on gender and masculinity (Blum, 2014).

While sociological perspectives on emotions largely acknowledge the dynamic ways that power operates through and is constitutive of emotional discourse, there has been little work done to understand how pedagogical approaches engaging emotions can challenge heteropatriarchal power (see Pease, 2012). White & Peretz (2010, p. 404) suggest that acknowledging the intertwining of emotions and masculinities as 'socially situated political processes,' opens up possibilities to explore how patterns of emotional expression and behaviour enforce patriarchal ideology. At the same time, mindfulness-based practices foster a number of qualities that can support in education for social justice. One fundamental tenet of mindfulness is learning to sit with and reflect on difficult thoughts and emotions. Berila (2015) suggests that mindfulness is valuable in education that centres on unlearning and resisting oppression by supporting students to sit with and actively reflect on the privilege they possess, as well as oppression they have experienced.

Much of the literature on boys' emotional expression indicates a strong socialization to avoid emotional expression constructed as unmasculine. Oransky & Mereck's (2009, p. 235) research showed boys avoiding emotional disclosures to peers, instead 'blocking it out', as well as avoiding friends when they were upset. Rather than avoiding or suppressing emotions perceived as uncomfortable, mindfulness teaches the cultivation of a non-judgmental awareness of discomfort with a reflective approach that supports understanding its source. Pease (2012, p. 135), with reference to Boler (1999), discusses how a 'pedagogy of discomfort', involving the engagement of the emotions that men construct as 'uncomfortable', offers a powerful educational approach to confront the resistance that arises from challenging gendered power. Berila (2015, p. 15) echoes Pease's sentiment, contending that mindfulness techniques can serve as a pedagogical tool in service of anti-oppression education, pointing to the ways students 'recognize deeply entrenched narratives they use to interpret the world . . . and become more intentional about how they respond in any given moment'. However, there is a lack of research exploring how mindfulness and SEL initiatives may encourage the

cultivation of skills to support young people in engaging with a 'pedagogy of discomfort' and in deconstructing gendered emotional conditioning.

This study is intended to address this research gap through the utilization of a feminist sociological approach to examine gender in a mindfulness-based SEL training in a school-based context with adolescent boys. This research seeks to expand the body of literature that investigates the emotional experiences and expressions of adolescent boys with attention to power dynamics. Within this framework, this work will assess the possibilities and limitations of engaging with boys' emotions through a mindfulness-based SEL intervention to support education that seeks to foster gender equality and social justice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed the relevant literature to the study. I have examined pertinent literature on mindfulness in education, highlighting critical analysis of the neoliberalisation of mindfulness. I critically examined emotional intelligence with a Foucauldian lens and detailed various social constructionist perspectives on emotions as sites of gendered power. I explored various ways masculinity is constructed by boys in a school-context, with an emphasis on emotionality. I closed the chapter pointing to the gap in research that explores mindfulness-based SEL programs in education oriented towards gender equality and social justice. In the following chapter, I will outline the methodological approach to this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will provide a description of the methodological foundations of the study. This chapter details background information on the study, the sampling method, an explanation of the research methods, the limitations of the research, and the

approach to data analysis. The research is informed by the following three research questions:

1. **How do adolescent boys experience a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training?**
2. **How do adolescent boys navigate their masculinity through a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training intervention?**
3. **What are the limitations and possibilities of a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training viewed through a feminist intersectional lens?**

Background on the Study

This research was conducted over the course of a five week mindfulness-based SEL training in an East London secondary school. The training was designed to be 10 sessions long, though was delivered in this context over the course of 5 double lesson sessions of 1 hour and 45 minutes each, held during the students' regular class time. The training studied in this research is a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training created for secondary school students, designed and delivered by a London-based charity called Mind with Heart. The training, called 'Connected with Others', explicitly focuses on empathy and compassion as the central component of the training. Built on the principles of SEL, the training emphasizes the importance of connection with others, developing compassion for oneself and others, and identifying and managing emotions. The session structure is interactive, with several debates, pair-sharing, class discussions, videos, art exercises, writing exercises, games, and personal reflection. Each session involves several meditations that centre on the themes of awareness, compassion and kindness, and sitting with and accepting challenging emotions.

Methods

The chosen method for this research is qualitative, combining participant interviews, a focus group, and observation of the training sessions. Each training session was observed and documented through the use of extensive field-notes. Interviews with

3 randomly selected participants were conducted before the training and again after the training was completed with the same participants. In addition, a focus group was conducted after the training was completed with all participants. All interviews and the focus group were recorded and transcribed. A qualitative approach was chosen for several reasons. As discussed previously, the existing research on mindfulness is largely quantitative and focuses on the measurable impact of mindfulness, primarily through a psychological and neurological lens. However, since this research utilizes a sociological lens to examine gender in a mindfulness-based educational intervention, a qualitative approach provides a richer and deeper means to investigate the complex dimensions of adolescent boys' experiences with emotion and masculinity, which are not easily quantifiable. An ethnographic component was included in the study to unearth subtle gendered behaviour and practices of masculinity that play out in the classroom.

Observation

Given that masculinity is often performed as a relational practice between boys (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), observation was an important component of the study to investigate how group dynamics influenced gendered behaviour and how this played out in the mindfulness training. Observation of the training was incorporated to discover potential changes in the participants' behaviour and interactions with the training as the sessions progressed. I utilized an unstructured observation method because it adopts a holistic approach that enables the researcher to provide a rich range of data (Wittenberg, 2000). Unstructured observation also provides more room for unanticipated behaviour to be considered, without the limitation of a particular frame prior to data collection (Wittenberg, 2000). The observations were recorded using extensive field notes, but were not recorded using recording software, which was avoided given its potential to be interpreted as invasive by participants and subsequently impact behaviour. Thus, one disadvantage of this approach is that certain interactions and behaviour may have been missed in the observation process. However, given that the study contains over 8 hours of observation, there is ample data to document nuanced behaviour and expressions throughout the training.

Interviews and Focus Group

The research questions in this study focus largely on student experience throughout the mindfulness training to better understand the intersections of gender, emotionality, and masculinity. Given this, qualitative methods of interviews and focus groups were the most fitting to create space for student voice and reflection on the experience of the training. The interviews were semi-structured with open questions to allow as much freedom as possible for students to explore their feelings and reflect on their experiences. This allowed for topics that were more alive to the students' personal experiences to be explored in greater depth. The focus group also involved semi-structured questions, utilized to start group conversation about how the participants experienced the training. The focus group was conducted during the last 20 minutes of the fifth training session. Due to time restrictions in the students' schedules, additional time for a focus group could not be accommodated. As a result, the focus group was very brief.

Whereas quantitative methods applied to mindfulness research typically focus on quantifying the impact of the intervention through participant surveys and questionnaires, a qualitative approach is useful to understand students' experience with the training. Amidst the current neoliberal climate, where even the emotional expressions and experiences of children are heavily quantified, the methodology of this study itself is designed as a resistance to the relentless quantification of students in nearly every sphere of their existence. This research honours the importance of creating space for student voice and lived experience when researching, assessing, and designing educational interventions, challenging neoliberal agendas that treat students as 'fungible', interchangeable consumers (Radin, 2001).

Participants and Sample

The study included 13 participants in year 9, aged 13-14, who all identified as boys, with a majority from a Bangladeshi ethnic background. The group was selected by the head of year using purposeful sampling to reflect a range of participants who identify as 'boy' across year 9, in order to represent the larger year group. However, ultimately the sample selection method was impacted by school scheduling, which in

part determined which students' academic timetables would enable them to participate in the allotted session times, reflecting aspects of convenience sampling. Indeed, the head of year's judgments about what constitutes a group of boys 'reflective' of the larger year group will have impacted the participant selection. However, given the time restraints of the school, this was the only sampling method available. 15 participants were originally selected and invited to participate in the training and research, but 2 out of the 15 did not opt in to participate in the study.

In terms of the general student population at the school, around half of the students are from a low income background, eligible for Free School Meals, according to the latest Ofsted report (Ofsted Report, 2013)[1]. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium is considerably above the average. The largest ethnic background at the school is Bangladeshi and majority of the students are Muslim. Around 90% of the school population speaks English as an additional language (Equality Information and Objectives, 2016)[2]. The school is considered to be an average size secondary school for London and is categorized as an 'outstanding school' by Ofsted (Ofsted Report, 2013). The school's name is not mentioned in the study to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Positionality and Limitations

One of the potential limitations of the research is my positionality as a white American woman in my twenties researching masculinity in adolescent boys primarily of a Bangladeshi ethnic background. These aspects of my identity distance me from the lived experience of the students and undoubtedly play a role in how the participants interacted with me throughout the research. My gender, age, whiteness, and lack of cultural proximity, compounded with the challenging nature of emotional content could have contributed to a lack of comfort during the interviews and observation. However, after the first training session, participants seemed to pay little visible attention to my presence during observation. In the final round of interviews following the training's

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[1] This source was omitted from the reference list to protect the anonymity of the school and students.
[2] This source was omitted from the reference list to protect the anonymity of the school and students.

completion, interviewees spoke more and with increased ease, indicating a greater sense of comfort with my presence and/or the subject matter. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the potential impact of my positionality.

Denscombe (2014, p. 244) notes that the role of a researcher is to offer an understanding of the data, rather than an 'objective universal truth'. My own experiences interacting with masculinity also informs the way I identify what data 'glows' (MacLure & Koro-Ljungberg, 2013) based on what has resonance for me. However, I believe that this positionality also strengthens a rigorous feminist framework, acknowledging that indeed 'the personal is political' (Hanisch, 2000), and emotions are heavily influenced by our experiences with social conditioning, power, and context. Furthermore, my own conceptions of 'what constitutes evidence of emotional experience' (de Boise, 2015, p. 790) is an inherent influence in how I analysed the data. Thus, the research was approached with strong awareness of this positionality and its potential influence in the study.

Another potential limitation of the study is the small sample size of 13 participants, reflecting a reoccurring critique among mindfulness studies. However, unlike other quantitative studies on mindfulness in schools, this qualitative study intends to take a more in-depth look at student experience with a mindfulness-based training, rather than measure particular quantifiable skills gained. This study does not seek to make sweeping generalisations about mindfulness-based interventions in schools. Rather, this study is designed to focus on the experiences of boys with a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training in a deeper manner. Thus, while the smaller sample size may limit sweeping conclusions that the study can infer about mindfulness-based trainings in general, this study ultimately has different aims. This study seeks to open up a pathway to further research that investigates how mindfulness-based SEL can support social justice education.

Research Ethics

Given that the research involved children, child protection and safeguarding was considered of utmost importance through the research design and implementation. The study involved a comprehensive process to receive consent from both the participants

and their guardians to ensure that all parties were well-informed about the study and understood what it entailed before choosing to participate. Consent forms that used an 'opt-in' approach were used to obtain consent from all participants and their guardians (see appendix I & II). The forms included an information section about the nature of the research to ensure students knew what to expect before opting in to participate. Participants were also offered the opportunity to ask questions about the study before the training commenced. During interviews, due to the potentially sensitive nature of questions that explored topics around masculinity and emotionality, participants were informed that they could skip any questions they did not wish to answer and were reminded that they could withdraw at any time. Interview and focus group questions were designed to be as open as possible, with careful consideration not to impose constructions of masculinity onto participants. Furthermore, all interviews were confidential and pseudonyms were used in this research to protect the anonymity of participants. The schools' safeguarding policies were also reviewed before conducting data collection. The study was thoroughly reviewed and approved by an ethics board at UCL's Institute of Education.

Data Analysis Approach

In order to analyse the data collected, I utilised thematic analysis, which enabled me to investigate and assess classifications and patterns in the data (Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2008). As Namey et al. (2008, p. 138) notes, thematic analysis 'moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas'. Following the data collection, I approached the data analysis by first transcribing all interviews and typing up observation field notes. After familiarizing myself with the data, I coded the data using descriptive coding as a means to summarize and identify salient features, as well as patterns and themes. I developed themes based on the content itself and then carried out an additional series of coding themes informed by existing concepts and theories drawn from the literature, focusing on what was relevant to the research question. I analysed the data with a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995), highlighting actions, behaviour, and comments that I interpreted as important in its formation, enforcement, and

reproduction. I utilized discourse analysis to explore the relationship between knowledge and power, using an intersectional lens to compare the data with previous research on adolescent boys (Luke, 1997). This analysis was useful to understand how discourses of masculinity circulate among boys at school across time and space. After coding the data, I collated the codes and pertinent data extracts to examine what broader themes emerged. I then refined the themes by comparing them with the data and referring back to the research questions to choose the ones with strong relevance to the aims of the research. I compared the data collected before and after the training and studied the field observations over the course of the training to notice similarities, differences, and patterns. I arrived at four different themes, which I examined closely and developed, drawing on specific data extracts and analytic narrative.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to detail the methods and approach utilised in this study. This chapter sought to provide insight into the rationale for a qualitative approach, as well as the research methods, and data analysis approach. The chapter was also intended to recognize the limitations of the study and outline its ethical framework. In the following chapter, I will discuss the results of the data analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study through three data collection methods: observation, interviews, and focus group discussion. The sections of this chapter are organised by themes that emerged throughout the data during the data analysis. The following themes will be discussed in this chapter: Emotional Expression and Humour as a Tool of Hegemonic Power, Facing Uncomfortable Emotions, Anger and Reflexivity, and Social Conditioning. Each section also provides a discussion of the findings and their implications.

Emotional Expression and Humour as a Tool of Hegemonic Power

During the first two training sessions, there is a palpable sense of discomfort among the students, which is largely managed through the use of humour. During meditations, which typically occur two to three times per session for several minutes each, participants regularly erupt into laughter. Indeed, some of the laughter appears to be attributed to a general discomfort with sitting still in silence for meditation, which is unsurprising for those who are fairly new to the practice. However, it is important to mention students are not completely new to mindfulness and meditation, as they had been experiencing short mindfulness sessions facilitated by a phone application twice a week throughout the year during their PSHE prior to the training. During meditations, two participants, Tareq and Atif, often make eye contact across the room, seemingly encouraging other students to succumb to laughter. Students glance around the room to read the expressions on the other boys' faces, appearing to assess if they should buy into the mindfulness meditation practices, which involve silently sitting still as the facilitator leads a scan of the body. Tareq and Atif appear to not want to be seen by their peers taking something 'too seriously' (Barnes, 2012, p. 245) that may threaten their established conception of masculinity. Humour is regularly drawn on by the students as a tool to cope with the training's content related to emotions. This behaviour is reminiscent of what Measor et al. (1996) and Barnes (2012) document as the utilization of humour and disruption by boys in the classroom to assert their control when they feel the content challenges deeply imbedded conceptions of masculinity.

This is further demonstrated during the initial Connected with Others training session in a debate in which participants are broken into two teams to argue if social media prevents or encourages connection. The facilitator calls the group together and asks for one speaker from the team arguing that social media discourages connection to share their arguments. All the students on the team look down at the table, trying to avoid being called on to share in front of the group. After a moment of uncomfortable silence, the facilitator asks Anas if he would mind sharing:

Anas: [Timidly] We discussed that it is better to communicate in real life as it
               boosts you emotionally.

Atif: [Raises eyebrows] Emotionally? [Said sarcastically, looking at Tareq for approval. Sporadic laughter throughout the classroom]

Anas: [Continuing tentatively] Sometimes people are not able to express their true colours from behind a screen. Like someone may seem happy on screen but may be sad and depressed in real life.

Tareq: [Turns to Atif, making a sad face. Atif and Tareq laugh to one another as others join in, some seemingly unaware of the initial comment or gesture.]

During this activity, even the mere mention of the word 'emotionally' triggers laughter among the students. Humour and mockery are deployed by Atif and Tareq to emphasize their masculine status and distance themselves from buying into the emotional content of the session. Humour is used as a means to cope with the uncertain terrain and 'softness' of curriculum around emotions, while maintaining and reinforcing hegemonic masculinity through a legitimization of dominant masculine discourses that invalidate emotional expression (Connell, 2005). The emotional content of the class seems to trouble Atif and Tareq's investment in non-emotional forms of masculinity. The initial resistance to the program carried out through humour is reminiscent of Gallagher's (1998) findings of an emotional literacy program for secondary school boys in Australia (cited in Martino and Meyenn, 2001), which also reveals challenges with 'sarcastic and combative postures'.

During the interview before the training, Tareq elaborates on this perception of dominant masculine discourses:

Interviewer: Do you think it's difficult to express emotions being a boy?

Tareq: Yeah cuz you know how society goes like boys . . . boys don't have emotions, boys they're hard, they're not going to cry, they're not, they're not going to be soft, yeah it's kind of . . . you know. It's a bit . . . it's fine. I don't mind, it's okay, but it's a bit weird, like how like girls . . . like apparently for them it's fine to show emotions but for boys it's not, like

you're not allowed to show emotions, you can cope with it. You're fine, you don't need to speak with anyone, you don't cry.

As Tareq speaks, he seems to navigate the tumultuous terrain of his internal conflicts with the gender stereotypes he is confronted with, which connect to discourses of masculinity and femininity. Tareq's tone subtly reflects his lamentation for the gender conditioning to which he feels bound, yet he attempts to obscure it with indifference. Tareq's reflection about societal conditioning that 'boys don't have emotions' is reflective of the 'unemotional man' discourse through which boys and men are constructed as innately emotionless. Tareq's comments embody the process of 'cultural work' that adolescent boys take on at school to ensure their status within mainstream masculine discourses that distance boys from the 'emotional woman' discourse (Epstein and Johnson, 1998 cited in Barnes 2012, p. 244).

In the one-on-one interview before the training, Tareq speaks and behaves differently to the classroom setting with his peers. In the classroom with his peers, he appears to be focused on being the class clown in the initial sessions to diffuse uncomfortable situations. However, one-on-one, Tareq is earnest and deeply engaged in his responses. Tareq describes the way that he perceives the joking of his peers to avoid situations involving serious and emotional discussions:

Interviewer: Could you speak to friends about emotions?

Tareq: No, they wouldn't take it seriously, I think like it'd probably be a joke to them. Or maybe they might, like one or two. But you know how friends are like, most of the time it's all about joking around. I don't think they would take it seriously. But even if they did I wouldn't really feel comfortable to talk to them about my emotions. Or what kind of emotions? It depends, for example if it's something to do with like exams or something or like school or education I probably talk to them because I've got classes with them, but if it's to do with something else outside of school I probably wouldn't talk to my friends, maybe an adult.

Tareq's comments suggest an understanding that only certain kinds of emotions about specific topics are permissible within the male hegemonic order. The stress of school is understood as a shared experience that is considered acceptable to disclose among peers, while emotions relating to life outside of school is susceptible to mockery. Tareq's comments reveal that sharing emotions with friends related to life outside of school is understood as a challenge to their conceptions of masculinity. As such, emotional expressions are policed and regulated through the use of humour. Tareq's description reveals how humour is deployed to shut down discussion classified as being related to 'emotion'. Hegemonic status is asserted through jokes that serve as a 'gendered resource of status' (Huuki, Manninen, & Sunnari, 2010, p. 370).

Throughout the course of the training, the participants show a dramatic shift in their relationship to discussing and sharing about what they understand as emotions and their use of humour as a tool of hegemonic masculine power. During the meditations in the fourth and fifth training sessions, the students sit without the frequent glances that seem to seek approval from their peers or outbursts of laughter and commotion characteristic of the first several sessions. Although the occasional joke or funny gesture is made, these are significantly less frequent and pass quickly without devolving into a substantial distraction as they had before. In the beginning of the training, Atif often disrupts the class, frequently seeking to distance himself from the emotional content of the training. In an interview following the completion of the training, Atif reflects on his transformation:

Interviewer: What was it like to be a boy on the training?

Atif: At the start it was kind of weird but now it's okay, I feel more alright with it now. Because I've experienced it already with other boys, the sessions.

Interviewer: What felt weird about it?

Atif: Talking about your emotions to boys, they're more like your friends usually, talking about deep stuff . . . I thought they wouldn't understand it, but now I think they can.

As Atif's comments emphasize, the boys become significantly more comfortable talking about emotions and develop increased confidence to express emotions with their peers. During a focus group following the end of the training, the manner in which students discuss emotions is dramatically different from the initial training sessions. The boys listen intently to one another and do not interrupt with joking or laughter. They speak openly and candidly about emotionality and the impact that the training had on them:

Jovan:	It allowed me to be more open because I thought the emotions I had, it was just me and no one else experienced them but as the sessions went by I learned that other people experienced the same things so it allowed me to be more confident in opening up.
Interviewer:	Did anyone find before this training it was difficult to express emotions with others?
All:	Yeah [nodding in agreement]
Interviewer:	Why?
Atif:	You didn't feel safe talking to them about it, cuz you never know what they might say. . . .
Atif:	You might get judged.
Khan:	Or you might not feel comfortable. . . . Because before it's just like a bunch of boys and if you say something they could judge you, but because we were here with a teacher experiencing this we were able to talk to him and get his advice and they wouldn't take a pick out of you.
Jovan:	Yeah it helped us mature.

Here, the boys recognize a transformation in themselves over the course of the training in regards to their ability to 'open up' and express emotions. Khan's comment 'before it's just a bunch of boys' is indicative of the shared expectation prior to the training that a group of adolescent boys will inherently judge and mock their peers for speaking about emotions as they play out dominant masculine social conditioning. However, at the end of the discussion, Jovan reflects on how the training helped them

mature. After the training, being able to discuss emotion is now seen as a sign of 'maturity' rather than a threat to masculinity that needs to be diffused and shut down. Khan indicates how the mindfulness training provided a 'safe' container, supported by a positive masculine role model, to show vulnerability and emotionality, previously deemed 'unsafe' and prone to judgement. As Jovan explains, this new sense of 'safety' among other boys develops through the training, normalising the notion of having and expressing emotions. Here, the development of empathy plays an important role in eroding the masculine status seeking that played out in initial training sessions through humorous, disruptive outbursts and techniques of avoidance of emotional content. After the training, Atif reflects on supporting friends emotionally:

Interviewer: If a friend came to you needing emotional support is there anything that you would do differently having had the training?

Atif: Now I would understand what they are feeling as well. Because before I didn't really understand or would like to help. Now I like understand or like I would like to help because I know how it would feel to be in this position.

In the beginning of the training, merely hearing a peer say the word 'emotionally' made Atif revert to humour as a coping technique to diffuse the emotional content and maintain masculine status. However, after the training, Atif reflects on how he would like to support friends emotionally. This erosion of hegemonic masculine conditioning around emotional expression and provision of emotional support opens up new avenues of empathy for other boys, as Atif exemplifies through his increased understanding and openness to being in a position of emotional need. Atif's comments seem to reflect the cultivation of empathy and compassion through an increased ability to understand the perspective of a peer in emotional need and a deepened desire to help others.

The participants' transformation in opening up to masculine emotional expressivity and the erosion of the use of humour to maintain hegemonic status at the conclusion of the training contrasts Barnes (2012) research on the 'Exploring

Masculinities' educational program with adolescent boys. This program ultimately 'failed to achieve any serious disruption to the boys' deeply entrenched understandings of masculinities', enforced and maintained through the unwavering use of humour (Barnes, 2012, p. 249). In contrast, the Connected with Others training directly addresses emotions throughout the training, working through an embodied process to dismantle deeply internalized gender conditioning. Thus, these findings suggest the that mindfulness-based SEL may be valuable to support educational programs explicitly focused on gender equality through deconstructing hegemonic masculinity that operates through emotional avoidance and the use of humour.

Facing Uncomfortable Emotions

The Connected with Others training supports participants to face emotions they perceive as uncomfortable, offering alternative pathways to socially conditioned masculine practices of emotional avoidance. In the beginning of the training, mindfulness is viewed by participants mainly as a means to forget about stress and feel calm, reminiscent of critiques of the neoliberal co-opting of mindfulness as 'self-discipline, disguised as self-help' that trains practitioners to reduce stress and adapt to the very system that producing it (Purser, 2019, p. 8). However, as the sessions progress, some participants begin to understand mindfulness not as a way to merely forget about or placate emotions that they construct as challenging, but rather as a way to face these emotions. In session 3, when asked to reflect about mindfulness, one participant describes mindfulness as a means to 'take away' difficult emotions and be in the moment. To this comment, Riad responds by explaining his understanding of mindfulness not a means to *forget* but rather a way to *cope* with those emotions.

In an interview following the mindfulness training, Atif reflects on his shifting relationship with his emotions:

Interviewer: If you felt sad before doing the training, how would you handle it?

Atif: I would just keep it to myself, I wouldn't really talk to anyone.

Interviewer: Is there anything you would do before the training to help you cope?

Atif: Something that made me relax, like doing sports or something, just take my mind out of that.

Interviewer: And now would you approach it differently?

Atif: [nodding] Try to talk about it, but also do what I did before, but also talk about it.

Atif's approach to difficult emotions prior to the training embodies a socially conditioned masculine reaction to emotions perceived as difficult through methods of emotional avoidance. In line with previous research on adolescent boys (see Frydenberg & Lewis 1993), Atif's approach to coping with sadness prior to the training is reflective of wider trends where adolescent boys' normalized coping mechanisms for emotions constructed as uncomfortable are achieved through external avoidance methods such as sports. Due to the gendered social conditioning that teaches boys they must not seek emotional support or express emotional vulnerability, they employ methods of emotional avoidance to 'take their mind off of it', as Atif notes.

However, the Connected with Others training involves substantial conversation about challenging emotions, as well as activities about noticing and sitting with uncomfortable emotions, rather than avoiding them. In addition, the trainings' focus on empathy and compassion fosters understanding and acceptance of others who are in a state of emotional turmoil and in need of support. As a result, the training contributes to the dismantling of gendered social conditioning around emotional expression that encourages the avoidance of 'vulnerable' emotions. This opens up possibilities for the boys to address emotions more directly, rather than solely relying on outward methods of emotional avoidance. Riad reflects further on how the training transformed his approach to dealing with uncomfortable emotions:

Interviewer: Having had the training if you felt an emotion that made you feel uncomfortable now would you approach that any differently?

Riad: I would have put it differently, for example if I was sad before I wouldn't like tell anyone, but now that made me think about it. [If] I get it off my

chest, I'll be able to get some advice and be confident with people I'm talking to.

Riad's comments reveal a newly developed sense of 'confidence' in seeking emotional support. Atif and Riad's reflections underscore how the training impacts the boys' approach to emotions like sadness, which are socially constructed as vulnerable and therefore unmasculine. The boys' comments reveal how the training contributes to the erosion of gendered coding of these emotions as inappropriate and antithetical to masculinity.

This deconstruction of emotional avoidance is central to challenging masculine fragility. Masculine fragility emerges when men and boys perceive their masculinity and masculine dominance to be threatened, responding with disproportionate defensiveness or other tactics of avoidance. As indicated in reference to previous research (see Barnes 2012, Manninen, Huuki & Sunnari 2011; Measor, 1996), challenges to hegemonic masculinity elicit strong emotional responses, as deeply-held beliefs and worldviews are brought into question. In a number of ways, masculine fragility functions similarly to white fragility, which both operate as a 'safety mechanism' (Berila, 2015, p. 140) to preserve oppressive systems of white supremacy and patriarchy respectively. As a result of a refusal to face the inherent benefits from and complicity in oppressive systems, both forms of fragility manifest as a 'weaponized defensiveness' (DiAngelo, 2018). This functions as a form of control to shut down meaningful engagement with how privilege and power maintain inequality. Through 'the sociology of dominance' (DiAngelo, 2018) people in positions of power are socially conditioned with emotional mechanisms to avoid interrogation of their privilege and positions of vulnerability that may threaten it. Thus, challenging hegemonic masculinity must involve the dismantling of men and boys' deep emotional attachment to privilege and the profound emotional discomfort that follows from confrontation with the pervasive impact of patriarchy. This process involves sitting with difficult emotions such as shame, sadness, and a sense of loss (Pease, 2012).

This training contributes to a broader 'pedagogy of discomfort', that supports boys in learning to face the challenging emotions that surface when 'cherished beliefs

and assumptions are challenged' about privilege and masculinity (Pease, 2012, p. 135). Engaging with emotions is not only essential in deconstructing gendered emotional social conditioning, but also to confronting the resistance that arises from challenging privilege and gendered power. As Berila (2015, p. 140) notes, anti-oppression pedagogy is significantly strengthened when students learn ways to sit with the uncomfortable feelings that arise when 'deeply held paradigms are questioned'. Thus, by opening up alternative pathways for boys to sit with and express uncomfortable emotions, this training supports in deconstructing the masculine normalization of emotional avoidance as a tool to preserve hetero-patriarchal power.

Anger and Reflexivity

Unlike 'vulnerable' emotions that dominant masculine discourses classify as a threat that should be avoided, anger is largely encouraged as an emotional tool to articulate and reinforce masculine dominance. Consistent with previous research (see Walton et al., 2004; Brody, 1993), prior to the mindfulness training, participants understand expressions of 'anger' to be the main socially acceptable, if not inevitable, practices of masculine emotionality. In an interview before the training, Tareq reflects when asked about boys' level of comfort expressing anger and sadness:

Tareq: Oof, uhhh I think they feel more comfortable expressing anger cuz as I said it before, stereotypes, like boys are quite angry, oh wait that's another masculine thing, like boys should be angry and strong and they should express it through like raging and being angry. And yeah I think boys would be more comfortable expressing it in an angry way and especially as stereotypes say and as society says, boys are like hard. I don't know why I think that but yeah that's what I think. I don't really have a reason.

Here, Tareq recognizes the gendered 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1990) that govern emotional expression among boys. In line with previous research on men and boy's emotional expression (see White & Peretz, 2010), anger is constructed to be

'masculine' while sadness is considered 'feminine'. Tareq's comments echo similar findings that reveal how adolescent boys report being unlikely to express feelings such as sadness with other adolescent boy peers (Buhrmester, 1996; Rose & Rudolph, 2006 cited in Oransky & Marecek 2009 p. 219). Anger is then understood as the central, if not only, vehicle of expression for all emotions among boys.

Similar to Riad's previous comments on avoidance of emotional expressions of sadness prior to the training, Tareq internalizes the expression of sadness as being 'emotionally deviant' (Hercus, 1999 cited in White & Peretz, 2010). Emotional expressions of sadness are understood as opposing societal expectations of normative masculine behaviour and are therefore excluded from the way that Tareq conceptualizes and performs masculinity. Emotional expressions deemed 'unacceptable' threaten patriarchal masculine status and would be subject to the kind of joking and mockery previously discussed as a means to diffuse their potential to erode this status. Tareq appears to possess both a strong awareness of deep social conditioning at play here, yet also demonstrates a lack of understanding of why he is conditioned to these patriarchal norms around emotional expression. Regardless, Tareq expresses a sentiment of being deeply bound by these social norms. In the initial pre-training interview he elaborates:

Tareq: If society tells me not to do something I'll probably not do it. If it's like a stereotype then yeah I'd probably not cry or tell my emotions to anyone or show my emotions, I'll just deal with it myself.

Reminiscent of other moments in the initial interview, Tareq's comments reveal a sense of apathy towards stringent gendered social norms, yet such sentiment is underlaid with a subtle mourning and confusion. After Tareq finishes speaking, he looks down at the floor and sighs, pausing for a brief moment, seemingly lamenting these realities and then quickly glancing at my notebook and back to me with eyebrows raised. I interpret this as a signal that he is ready to move on.

During the third training session, the class turns to an activity where students create abstract drawings of the way that 8 different emotions feel. Students share their drawings with the rest of the group, as they point out the similarities in their interpretations of the way each feeling is felt. There is no visible mocking or joking during the activity. This class opens up possibilities for the boys to discuss the range of emotions they feel, while normalising the notion that boys experience a broad range of emotions. This contributes to the challenging of traditional hegemonic masculine notions of boys only being 'tough' and expressing emotions solely through anger.

In the same session, students also take part in a brainstorm on the whiteboard of different kinds of emotions they feel. Words such as 'sad, angry, anxious, melancholy, disappointed, depressed, shy, content, and emotional' are written up on the board. After students have written an extensive list of emotions, they are asked to examine one emotion more deeply. Anger is selected and students brainstorm different variations of anger and list the words on the board, as they are asked to note the distinction in the way each feels. The class discusses the diversity of emotions that relate to anger, examining their subtle nuances:

Facilitator: Are there any [emotions] that are easier or more challenging to recognize in yourself?

Anas: Sadness or maybe feeling depressed.

Khan: Yeah I agree. And I think it can be difficult sometimes to know the kind of anger you feel cuz you may feel overwhelmed or just, you know . . . . [makes a motion with his fists]

Anas: Yeah you might be really fuming, sometimes you don't know what is even causing it.

Facilitator: So through taking a mindful approach, we simply turn our attention to notice exactly what we are feeling and can then reflect on why we are feeling it. And we can then develop mindfulness in our actions around that emotion.

Unlike many emotional literacy programs that involve the 'domestication' of anger (Lyman, 2004), the class explores various types of anger without policing students on what is appropriate, acceptable, or righteous. Throughout the session, students have an opportunity to develop an understanding that a wide range of emotions are felt by everyone, though they may be experienced differently. This element of the session troubles individualistic discourses of anger that function to disembody collective consciousness of anger towards injustice (Zembylas, 2007). Although a social constructionist approach to emotions tends to challenge notions of 'the universality of emotions' that veer into biological determinism, I contend that the lesson's approach functions to deconstruct the biologically determinist gendered discourses of emotionality. The session challenges masculine discourses that construct boys as innately 'unemotional' or only capable of certain emotions, which serve to enforce their dominance and power. In addition, the emphasis of reflexivity promotes an investigation of how context shapes emotions, acknowledging that emotions are relational rather than mere internal states. Through this, the training opens up a pathway to build collective awareness, an integral component in mobilising emotions towards action against injustice.

Students are encouraged to explore different kinds of anger and reflect on how each emotion feels and how it is nuanced. Participants are never told not to feel anger or to try to 'control' their anger, rather they are encouraged to question it and seek to understand it. The facilitator explains how mindful practices focus on becoming more reflective of our emotions and their sources. Through this, students are invited to foster a connection to the source of anger and emotions more broadly and reflect on it. In an interview after the end of the training, Riad shares about the shift in his reaction to feelings of anger:

Interviewer: And what about having had the training, if you were to experience a feeling of anger, now do you think you might approach it in a different way?

Riad: [nodding] I think before I take any action, I think if it's right or not. If it's

not right I try to calm myself down. Probably an example of calming

myself down is using the mindfulness techniques by focusing on my

breathing, so putting my hands on my knees and resting and relaxing.

Interviewer: Can you explain a bit more what you meant if it's right?

Riad: So what I mean if it's right . . . if I'm going to cause harm to

the other person whether it's physically or verbally, and causing harm to

other people isn't right. And people should think about their actions

before they actually do it.

Riad's remarks reveal a nuanced understanding of how mindfulness techniques

can provide the space for meaningful reflection about the impact of actions on others.

Rather than simply suppressing the anger, Riad points to the importance of reflecting on

anger and how it might be manifested in actions that could impact others. Riad seems to

refer to 'calming down' not as a way to merely placate and 'domesticate' that anger

(Lyman in Zembyalas, 2007), but more as a means to create space to reflect on it. Here,

mindfulness is not merely evoked as an individualized tool of personal stress

management, but rather as a means to approach emotions in an effort to co-exist with

others in a more peaceful and just manner.

As previously discussed, anger is largely constructed as acceptable only when it

functions as 'a resource for the dominant' (Lyman, 2004 p. 134). Women are heavily

policed on any visible expression of anger and often considered overly emotional

(Ahmed, 2004), while men are expected to express themselves solely through anger,

which is largely mobilised to further subordinate women. However, anger, as Lorde

(1984) has pointed out, can be a transformative resource in education. Anger that arises

from injustice serves as a powerful tool to mobilize for political and social movements

that challenge such oppressions (Zemblyas, 2007). Pedagogical approaches to anger are

critical to examine in SEL initiatives, and particularly in those with students whose

identities sit within axes of both oppression and dominance. In this training,

participants' identities as boys, holding both positions of privilege/dominance in society,

as well as minoritized individuals of colour facing racialized oppressions, converge to

create a complex relationship to anger. Anger can be exploited as a tool of power to

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subordinate, while it can also be mobilised as a critical political resource to challenge inequality from the position of the subordinated. Herein lies a challenging imperative to both confront masculine dominance played out through the expression and monopolised ownership of anger, while not reverting to the complete 'domestication' of anger (Lyman, 2004). As I have previously pointed to, common practices in SEL initiatives embody the latter, depoliticizing and silencing anger in the interest of shaping 'emotional intelligence' (Zembylas, 2007, p. 15). This form of emotional control compounds with hegemonic masculine policing of emotional expressivity, creating a complex bind limiting any 'appropriate' emotional expression in boys. As I have referred to previously, due to the intersections of race and gender, boys of colour navigate a continuous negotiation of both dominant and subordinate identities; on the one hand they are told that anger is the only means to express emotions and maintain masculinity, while on the other, this very anger is routinely policed due to a racialized 'anger biases' (Halberstadt et. al 2018).

However, in this mindfulness training, anger is normalised as an emotion, without imposing narratives around an inherent nature of being good or bad. Rather the training emphasizes the importance of contextualising it and reflecting on it. This approach to anger is particularly salient in a current educational landscape that relentlessly seeks to police emotion, and particularly anger, with disproportionate policing of students of colour (Halberstadt et al., 2018). As I have previously discussed, such emotional policing often operates through deployment of EI competencies that involve emotional mastery as a 'technology of the self' (Foucault, 1988; Reveley, 2015) that imbues individuals with new rationalities about how, when, and where to express emotion based on what is 'fitting' 'appropriate' and 'intelligent' (Hughs, 2010 p. 34). Indeed, the mastery of emotional reflexivity is among these emotional competencies, deployed in EI rhetoric as a tool to discern between what is appropriate or inappropriate in certain settings (Hughs, 2010), reinscribing existing social order and power. However, in this training, reflexivity is taught not merely as a means to discern between the acceptable and the inappropriate, but rather as a way to foster greater understanding of and openness to emotions. This approach fosters the interrogation of the roots of anger before it is aligned with actions that rearticulate male dominance and subordinate those

positioned lower in the hegemonic masculine hierarchy. Development of reflexivity can then lead to unearthing 'free-floating anger' (Lyman, 2004, p. 140) through a reconnection with anger's source, opening up avenues for the connection of the personal and the political (Hanisch, 2000). Increased reflexivity towards anger and emotions more broadly can also enable boys to meet women and girls' anger with greater compassion and understanding, in contrast to the historical policing of women's anger to their oppression by men. Thus, reflexivity is not only an emotional tool that can be utilised to maintain social order, but can also be harnessed to disrupt it.

While the training itself is not designed to address gendered power and thus does not directly discuss anger in the context of men's power, it effectively challenges hegemonic masculine conditioning that seeks to eradicate 'vulnerable' forms of emotional expression that threaten dominance. At the same time, it encourages reflexivity of emotions like anger that are often exploited as a tool reinforce dominance. It must be acknowledged that in the context of a mindfulness-based training that does not have an explicit gender equality focus, the potential for the boys participating to understand the gendered power differentials behind emotions is limited. Understandably then, this training falls short in dissecting how men's violence has been justified through anger. While the training does not alone accomplish the work of unearthing deeply embedded beliefs about gendered power, this pedagogy offers promising potential for inclusion within explicit gender equality programs that address this dimension directly. The Connected with Others training reveals how a mindfulness-based SEL approach in empathy and compassion could support gender equality education as a pedagogical method of embodied practices in challenging hegemonic masculine emotional conditioning.

Social Conditioning

Another prominent theme throughout the training is the way that participants navigate social conditioning throughout the training. I have already mentioned several examples of how the training contributes to the deconstruction of hegemonic masculine conditioning through emotions during the intervention. However other aspects of the

training are perceived by participants as a means of policing, enforcing neoliberal conditioning at school.

On the way to the classroom for the mindfulness session, I pass a teacher in the corridor barking orders at students: 'straight line, no talking, spit your gum out, fix your tie, tuck your shirt in'. As I pass another classroom, students file into the room as they are instructed by a teacher before getting halfway into the classroom: 'Alright, coats off, backpacks on the floor, sitting down, no talking'. Students shuffle in with their heads down. Later in the mindfulness session, the facilitator introduces the lesson and begins a meditation with the students:

Facilitator: Settle in and begin to come into mindfulness posture. Sitting up straight. You can cross the ankles or feet flat on the ground. Shoulders wide. Hands rest lightly on the knees. Chin slightly tucked, mouth a little open. Gaze gently in front. [Laughter and restlessness in the room]

Facilitator: It's not about blocking out distractions, it's about not getting distracted by them. [All heads turn down robotically, as if they are being disciplined]

Facilitator: This is not a behaviour thing, it's not like you are bad boys. . . . It's not about how you look, this is about finding power within yourself.

Amidst 'regimes of performativity,' pervasive in schools, students are conditioned with an orientation toward visible performance outcomes (Lyotard & Foucault, cited in Ball, 2012 p. 19). In the context of the current UK educational system, where students are repeatedly told how to sit, how to behave, how to dress, and even how to think to be an ideal neoliberal subject (Reveley, 2016), students' reactions to the mindfulness meditations suggest an interpretation of the exercises as another form of control impressed on them. Although the verbal cues provided by the facilitator come in a gentle calming tone, in contrast to the teacher giving orders in the corridor, it nonetheless evokes a similar reaction among students. This moment is salient in revealing how affect transmits beyond words, or indeed gestures and tones. Although the facilitator attempts to deconstruct this conditioning by reassuring students that the meditation guidance is 'not a behaviour thing', similar reactions among participants

persist through several sessions. Furthermore, the facilitator of the Connected with Others training is a middle-aged white man who presents as middle class. This dominant identity, compounded with the position of authority a facilitator leading young people is afforded, constructs an inherent power asymmetry between the facilitator and the students. The internalization of neoliberal performativity combined with these power differentials creates conditions to steer students to inhabit a 'docile' subjectivity (Foucault, 1977).

A similar conditioning can be seen when the facilitator asks the students at the beginning of another session to provide a recap about their experiences the week before and what they learned. One student replies by reading verbatim the activity completed from his workbook.

Facilitator: Don't tell me what you think I want to hear. I want you to reflect
                 genuinely on what you experienced.

These moments of the training further demonstrate the deep neoliberal conditioning present amongst the students. Within such a strong culture of evaluation and testing under the UK's neoliberal education system (Ozga, 2008, p. 264 cited in Ball, 2016), the students revert to regurgitation of information in order to deliver what they perceive will be the 'correct' answer, rather than genuine engagement with their experiences. However, the facilitator's comments show an effort to transcend this conditioning and encourage students to develop skills of reflection. After some encouragement from the facilitator, students are able to express their own reflections. These moments show the importance of ensuring mindfulness is not another form of neoliberal policing of students. These findings indicate that even something as simple as the way a meditation is presented or how questions to students are approached are important junctures that require active resistance in the way the sessions are facilitated in order to avoid perpetuating discourses of neoliberal conditioning. Without attention to these paradigms in the implementation of mindfulness interventions, the prospect of mindfulness attaining its liberative potential is dramatically reduced.

In the fifth session, the lesson involves a component that directly addresses the idea of social conditioning and conformity. The session includes a video where a man in tattered clothing is depicted laying outside of Liverpool Street Station groaning and calling out 'help' on the pavement. This portion of the video is intended to depict 'the bystander effect', where passers-by do not intervene due to social conformity of not taking action. When a man dressed in a suit is shown in the same position moments later, he is helped almost immediately. When asked about his reflections of the video, Tareq responds:

Tareq: Why would you not just help them? You shouldn't care about what other
              people say around you, you should do your own will and do what you
              think is right . . .
Interviewer: Did the training change your ideas about that at all?
Tareq: Yeah probably, I would say so. I would say you need to be showing
              respect to anyone, lower, above you . . . anyone, younger, older, anyone,
              just show your respect. Even if a homeless man . . . why would you not
              help a homeless man, what . . . what's the difference between you two?
              You guys are all humans.

The conversation in the training session that follows the video clip described above involves discussion of the conditiongs that lead to people becoming homeless, as well as introducing on the idea of implicit bias. In Tareq's reflection, he both identifies the importance of a common humanity and highlights the notion of respect regardless of difference. Berila (2015, p. 138) notes, 'while experiences of power, privilege, and oppression cannot be collapsed into sameness, they can provide points of empathy to remain open to each other's perspectives.' Thus, educating on *social* empathy, which involves teaching contextual knowledge to develop an understanding of the structural inequalities that impact people's experiences, is important for developing a sense of empathy that both honours difference in experience and common humanity (Segal, 2011, p. 266-267). This is critical to social justice education more broadly. The lesson culminates with a discussion about what prevents people from showing support and

care for others, discussing how embodying a mindful approach in daily life can help in becoming more aware of the situations of those around us and more reflective of how our actions impact others. Here, the lesson embodies the principles of 'civic mindfulness', involving the cultivation of a collective awareness and imperative to act in the face of injustice (Healey, 2013).

Tareq's reflection demonstrates how this lesson contains messages that encourage students to resist power hierarchies through the cultivation of social empathy and compassion. The training's focus on social empathy helps to transcend an 'us' and 'them' mentality, which is central to fuelling oppression (Berila, 2015). As Segal (2011, p. 268) notes, one of the most meaningful avenues to challenge structural inequality is to create a means for people to 'gain deep contextual knowledge and have experiences that create empathic insights into the lives of people who are oppressed'. The aspect of the lesson that examines the 'bystander effect' and social conditioning to follow social norms more broadly also has salience in pedagogical efforts to dismantle hegemonic masculine conditioning. Given the pressure boys face to socially conform to normalized expressions of masculinity, as demonstrated previously, this lesson is significant in challenging notions of masculine social conditioning. Furthermore, the lesson contributes to the deconstructing of gendered stereotypes that condition men and boys' with the notion that they cannot show care and support for others due to such qualities being associated with the feminine. This lesson and student reflection reveal how the Connected with Others mindfulness-based training is situated within an ethical framework, an aspect that many mindfulness trainings are critiqued for lacking.

During the final interview with Riad, he responds to a question about if he thinks empathy and compassion are important to learn about:

Riad: It might not sound as important like when you have other things like maths and science, but really when you think about it, it could be one of the most important things that people feel around the world.

Despite social conditioning that says empathy and compassion are not as culturally valued as math and science, Riad's comments show a resistance to these

paradigms. While Riad's general sentiment here is reflected by the majority of the participants, one student notes another opinion during the focus group:

> Arthur: I found it a bit of a waste of time because the teachers are saying like we should do maths instead and we're wasting time on our studies and we're going to flop our GCSEs.

While the other participants in the focus group quickly counter this outlying comment with responses detailing why they felt the training was valuable, Arthur's comments are salient in reflecting the external pressures that students face, which may impact their views and experiences with mindfulness-based interventions. It cannot be known from the data over a short span of 5 weeks how much of an impact these sessions had in breaking down neoliberal conditioning in the long term. It is highly unlikely that a 5-week intervention could fully deconstruct such profound conditioning, which is constantly reinforced by the educational system itself, as well as neoliberal society as a whole. However, one thing is clear: mindfulness and SEL trainings do not exist in a vacuum (Purser, 2019). Programs that seek to resist neoliberalism and contribute to social justice must acknowledge the conditioning students have before coming into the training - whether it be around neoliberal performativity and/or hegemonic masculine conditioning- to ensure that mindfulness trainings do not work to inadvertently enforce it. This training shows that explicit attempts to disrupt such conditioning, while impactful in some ways, also face challenges in unearthing deeply imbedded sociocultural values.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have documented the findings of this study collected from observation, interviews, and a focus group discussion. I outlined the four major themes that emerged through the data analysis: Emotional Expression and Humour as a Tool of Gendered Power, Emotional Avoidance, Anger and Reflexivity, and Social Conditioning. Within each section, I discussed their significance and implications in detail. In the next

and final chapter of this dissertation, I will outline recommendations based on the findings of this study and concluding comments.

Chapter 5: Concluding Implications and Recommendations

Introduction

In this chapter, I summarize the study and provide recommendations for further research and related programs informed by this study. To close, I provide final concluding comments on the insights that have arisen from this research.

Summary of the Research

Throughout this research, I have discussed how mindfulness in school contexts can be exploited as a form of neoliberal governmentality that responsiblizes individuals for their wellbeing, severing awareness to the very systems of oppression harming it. I have examined critiques that suggest mindfulness has been disembodied from its original ethical framework and reduced to an instrumentalized self-help tool, diminishing its liberative potential. I discussed how mindfulness and SEL initiatives are often critiqued for psychologizing and pathologizing emotions to regulate and normalize the emotional faculties of young people, effectively disconnecting emotionality from the larger social structures and inequalities that shape it. Through this study I have shown how a mindfulness-based SEL training with an explicit focus on social empathy and compassion can re-contextualize this ethical framework, opening up pathways for mindfulness to support social justice education. In studying the impact of the Connected with Others mindfulness-based SEL training with year 9 boys in an East London school, I sought to address the following research questions:

1. How do adolescent boys experience a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training?

2. How do adolescent boys navigate their masculinity through a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training intervention?

3. What are the limitations and possibilities of a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training viewed through a feminist intersectional lens?

In addressing these questions, I discussed how participants navigated their masculinity early in the training through a deep resistance to its emotional content, which manifested through humour utilised as a tool of emotional avoidance to preserve hegemonic masculinity. However, as the training progressed, the participants' use of humour and emotional avoidance diminished, as participants' resistance lessened to emotions constructed as uncomfortable and formerly perceived to threaten the boundaries of 'acceptable' masculinity. I also discussed how instead of policing and depoliticizing anger, as SEL interventions are often critiqued for, this training explored anger with attention to its source, which I suggested is imperative to opening up pathways to mobilize anger as a resource for social action. I showed how the training encouraged reflexivity of anger and other emotions, as well as the impact of actions which are connected to these emotions. I suggested this is also crucial in addressing the way that gendered power is asserted through anger. The findings demonstrated that following the training, participants were more open to support their friends emotionally and seek emotional support from others, deconstructing alliances with dominant masculine discourses of emotional avoidance. I showed how the training supported participants to cultivate social empathy, which I argued is an imperative capacity in achieving gender equality and building social justice. While I discussed how the training was unable to resist some of the existing neoliberal social conditioning among participants, I demonstrated how the training had a profound impact on supporting participants to resist dominant masculine conditioning and reflect on social conditioning more broadly. I have argued that these emotional competencies cultivated through the Connected with Others training are imperative to resist hegemonic masculinity and challenge gendered emotional practices and ideologies that enforce patriarchal power.

Recommendations

This study opens up pathways for further research that explores mindfulness and social and emotional learning in the context of how it might support social justice education. As one important step to advancing the research in this field, I advocate for more qualitative research that seeks to better understand the experiences of students with mindfulness and SEL, rather than focusing solely on demonstrating benefits through surveys that seek to quantify students' emotionality. A central imperative of decolonizing mindfulness involves deconstructing what Cannon (2016, p. 401) describes as a 'hierarchy of knowledge' that strictly values scientific findings over 'the lived experience of mindfulness practitioners'. I acknowledge the challenges mindfulness educators and researchers alike face in the midst of neoliberal educational agendas that place central value on measurable outcomes. However, as I have previously discussed, obsession with quantifiable results leads to a dramatic reduction of mindfulness and its liberative potential. Even referring to mindfulness as a 'pedagogical tool' as I do in this research is somewhat reductionist, though necessary to frame these practices within current educational structures. Still, I encourage researchers and educators alike to actively resist these paradigms wherever possible, while acknowledging the challenges of undertaking research in the current context. Though this research examines mindfulness-based SEL as a 'tool' in an isolated intervention, I recognize that brief, outsourced mindfulness and SEL interventions are another symptom of neoliberal education. I advocate for further exploration of how these practices could be more deeply and holistically embedded in a school's ethos and curriculum, and specifically within curriculum engaged in gender equality and social justice.

Given that the intervention researched does not have an explicit focus on gender equality, definitive conclusions regarding the impact of integrating mindfulness and SEL practices into gender equality and social justice education more broadly are limited. As such, while the training challenges patriarchal gendered emotional conditioning, it understandably falls short in making an explicit connection to the origins of such norms as a tool to enforce and maintain masculine power. While I suggest that the training researched includes components of social empathy, absent from many mindfulness and SEL programs, a lack of explicit focus on social justice more broadly limits the potential

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of the valuable social and emotional development and unconditioning offered by the training. This, however, is an area that holds significant potential for mindfulness-based social and emotional education, with a curriculum specifically designed to address masculinity, power, gender inequality, and social justice more broadly. I have discussed how other initiatives targeting masculinity (Barnes, 2012, p. 249) failed to disrupt boys' 'deeply ingrained connection with constructions of young masculinities', suggesting that pedagogy addressing hegemonic masculinity can be significantly strengthened by applying approaches of mindfulness-based SEL. Indeed, deconstructing hegemonic masculinity in boys, when it is perpetually reinforced by the systems and structures around them, is complex and multifaceted work that will not happen over the course of a brief weekly training alone. However, this research reveals how a mindfulness-based SEL training can play a role in the complex work of deconstructing hegemonic masculine social conditioning through encouraging reflexivity, cultivating social empathy, and supporting students to face uncomfortable emotions. These qualities and skills all hold valuable potential in feminist, anti-oppression, anti-racist pedagogy. There are already promising developments in mindfulness initiatives committed to social justice. For example, Rhonda Magee's (2016) 'Mindfulness-based ColorInsight Practices' include pedagogy that incorporates race and privilege, while contextualizing oppression. 'The Mindfulness Allies Project' (Blum, 2014) brings critical awareness of socioeconomic status and race into mindfulness through creating an approach rooted in an antiracist pedagogy to teach mindfulness in low-income communities. This research contributes to this field of socially engaged mindfulness and paves the way for future research to investigate the integration of mindfulness-based SEL in gender equality education.

Conclusion

While mindfulness can be a transformational practice, it is essential that mindfulness practitioners, educators, and researchers not be disillusioned to think that mindfulness alone is capable of transforming the insidious structural inequalities entrenched within the education system. I do not mean to suggest in this research that mindfulness or social and emotional learning will repair our deeply troubled schooling system, nor do I imply mindfulness alone is capable of dismantling the patriarchy.

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However, I have shown throughout this dissertation how a mindfulness-based training with a focus on empathy, compassion, and emotional connection can support the deconstruction of normalized masculine conditioning around emotionality and emotional expression. Addressing the way that gendered power operates through emotions is one critical means to challenge hegemonic masculinity, which is essential to building gender equality. Indeed, given the deeply entrenched inequalities in the UK's education system, schools must make radical systemic changes to address and actively resist the insidious oppression within the institutions, curriculum, and school practices. Schools must adopt pedagogical approaches that are multifaceted and educate the whole student in order to unearth the deep internalization of inequalities that manifest on an emotional and personal level in students' lives. The integration of mindfulness-based social and emotional learning is one approach that could support in this critical work of expanding education centred on gender equality and social justice more broadly.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Parent and Carer Consent Form

7th March 2019

Dear Parents / Carer,

I am writing to inform you that as part of our PSHEE programme your child will be asked to take part in our Mindfulness sessions.

Mindfulness is a technique you can learn which involves making a special effort to notice what's happening in the present moment (in your mind, body and surroundings).
This programme of study will run over five weeks, with one session a week. The aim of this programme is to equip your child with the tools of connecting with themselves and others. The skills your child will learn will support them throughout their education but also life after school. For example, dealing with stress and anxiety with examinations and work, becoming more self-aware, how to respond to thoughts and feelings and being kinder to yourself.

The program is part of a research study of mindfulness-based trainings in school. Please see the following page for more information and sign.

This is a fantastic opportunity for your child to be involved in, however, please do not hesitate to contact me for any more information.

Kind Regards,

Learning Coordinator of Year 9

About the Mindfulness Training Research

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am a master's student in the Social Justice and Education program at the University College London's Institute of Education. I am conducting research on mindfulness and am researching this training as a part of a study for my master's dissertation. The research explores boys' experience with the mindfulness-based training, seeking to better understand their perceptions and experiences of the training and how gender might impact such experiences. I am interested in understanding how mindfulness interventions might be a tool for social justice education. I will sit in to observe the training sessions and will ask some participants to voluntarily participate in an interview/focus group before and/or after the training. Participation in the training and research is optional and participants can withdraw at any time. All names and identifying information in the research will be made anonymous. The study was thoroughly reviewed by an ethics board and is under UCL's General Data Protection Regulation, with University College London as the data controller for this project.
For more information, see: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/ucl-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr.

I very much hope that you and your child would like to take part. Please be in touch with the Learning Coordinator of Year 9 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

_____
MA Candidate in Social Justice and Education, UCL

Please sign below to consent to your child's participation in the mindfulness-based training and the research study.

Name of Student _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____   Date _____

Appendix II: Student Information Sheet and Consent Form

Student Information about the Mindfulness Training and Research

For the next 6 weeks, you will be asked to participate in a mindfulness-based empathy and compassion training. The training will be part of a research study.

Who is doing the study?
I am a student researcher at a London university called UCL. I study mindfulness and gender.

What is the study about?
I want to learn how boys experience a mindfulness training. I want to understand participants' experience with training and ideas they have about it. I will explore how gender might impact such experiences.

What will the study involve?
1) A researcher will sit in to observe the training sessions. (You must consent to this to participate in the training)
2) The researcher will ask some participants to voluntarily participate in an interview and/or focus group before and/or after the training. (You can still participate in the training if you do not wish to participate in this part)

Will my name show up in the research?
No. All names and identifying information in the research will be made anonymous.

Do I have to take part in it?
No. If you for any reason do not wish to participate in this research you can decide not to participate in the mindfulness training. You can also decide to stop at any time. Participation in interviews/focus groups is completely voluntary and if you are asked to participate in an interview/focus group and you do not want to participate, you do not have to.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to speak to the Year 9 Learning Coordinator.

Sincerely,

Researcher at UCL

☐
Yes, I agree to take part in the study.

☐
No, I do not agree to take part in the study.

 Student Name_____   Date_____

Appendix III: Interview I Participant Questions Guide (pre-training):

What is your age? What is your gender?

Have you ever heard of mindfulness? If yes, what do you think about it?

What does empathy mean to you? Do you think empathy is important? Why?

How do you feel about talking about your emotions?

Do you think it is difficult to express emotions as a boy? Why or why not?

Do you feel comfortable expressing emotions with your friends? Why/why not?

Do you think boys feel judged for expressing emotions?

What does compassion mean to you?

Do you ever feel pressure to act a certain way because you are a boy?

Do you think boys feel more comfortable expressing anger or sadness?

What kinds of qualities are masculine in your opinion?

Have you ever had a time a friend was going through something difficult and came to you for support?

Appendix IV: **Interview II and Focus Group Participant Questions Guide (post-training):**

What did you think of the mindfulness training? Did you find it beneficial in any way? How so?/ Why not?

Did your opinions of mindfulness change throughout the training?

Did the training have an impact on the way you would handle any situations in your life?

Has the training impacted the way that you think about emotions at all?

After the training, if you experienced an emotion that felt uncomfortable would you approach that any differently from before? How?

If a friend came to you that needed some emotional support, would you handle that situation any differently than you would have before you experienced the training? If so, how?

What was it like to be a boy in this training?

Was there any part of the training that was difficult or uncomfortable for you? Why?

What does empathy mean to you? Do you think empathy is important? Why?

Did the training impact your view or understanding of empathy?

Do you think it was worth it to have the mindfulness training instead of your regular lessons?

Do you think empathy and compassion is something that is important to learn about?

Did the training change your opinion or perspective on anything?