ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCES AND EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES OF REGULAR MINDFULNESS MEDITATION PRACTITIONERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
OZYEGIN UNIVERSITY

BY

ITIR ERKAN

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

DECEMBER 2019

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband and my ‘safe haven’ Emre,

for constantly supporting me through this process,

for the compassion and acceptance that you provided so generously,

for the open arms to cry on difficult times,

for all of the little things that you do to show how much you care,

and for your love and kindness you have for me and for all of the human beings.

ABSTRACT

Using attachment theory as the framework, this qualitative study focused on the experiences of the emotion regulation strategies and romantic relationships of regular mindfulness meditators with at least two years of practice and their meditation-naïve or non-regularly meditating partners. The Turkish mother-tongue sample consisted of 8 heterosexual and 2 same-sex couples. Semi-structured interviews were held separately with each partner. Thematic analysis yielded 7 themes and 13 subthemes on three levels: intrapersonal, relationship, and the perspective of the non-regularly meditating partners. Three intrapersonal themes (numbers) and four related subthemes (letters) were revealed: 1) meta-awareness; 1a) impermanence of emotions; 2) shift in emotion regulation capacities; 2a) decreased intensity of emotions; 2b) staying with negative emotions; 3) shift in the relationship with oneself; 3a) self-compassion. Three relationship themes and seven subthemes emerged: 4) experiential shift in stressful situations; 4a) less negative reactivity; 4b) fewer conflicts; 5) transformation of the emotional bond; 5a) self-disclosure of emotions; 5b) decreased anxiety about the relationship; 6) transformation of the romantic relationship; 6a) being present during sex; 6b) compassion and acceptance for the partner; 6c) re-defining of boundaries. One theme and two subthemes emerged from the non-regularly meditating partner's data: 7) general positive effects of regular practice; 7a) observing the peaceful mood of the partner; 7b) observing less negative reactivity of the partner.

These intrapersonal themes indicated the importance for the regularly meditating partner of meta-awareness and enhanced emotion regulation and self-compassion. These were reflected in the romantic relationship as less reactivity, less anxiety, more self-disclosure, and enhanced compassion and acceptance for the partner, which attachment theory would associate with a more secure relationship. The partners of the regular meditators confirmed the relational and individual

shifts due to their partner's regular mindfulness practice. Integrating attachment theory with regular mindfulness practice can thus be a valuable approach for couple and family therapy. Regular mindfulness practice, even for one partner, may also be beneficial during couple therapy. Future research can focus on the effects of mindfulness practice on specific periods or situations in romantic relationships. It can also investigate the relationship between the unique emotion regulation strategies promoted by regular mindfulness meditation and potential shifts in the attachment styles of both partners.

ÖZET

Bu kalitatif çalışma en az iki yıl sure ile düzenli mindfulness (bilinçli farkındalık) meditasyonu uygulayıcılarının duygu regülasyon stratejilerine ve romantik ilişki deneyimlerine ve onların meditasyon yapmayan veya düzensiz yapan partnerlerinin romantik ilişki deneyimlerine, bağlanma teorisi perspektifi üzerinden odaklanmaktadır. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler, ana dili Türkçe olan 8 heteroseksüel ve 2 eşcinsel çift ile yapılmıştır ve görüşmeler her bir partner için birebir olacak şekilde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Tematik analiz sonuncunda, üç farklı seviyede 7 tema ve 13 alt tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu üç seviye; içsel kişilik seviyesi, romantik ilişki seviyesi ve düzenli meditasyon yapmayan partnerin perspektifi olarak belirlenmiştir. İçsel kişilik seviyesinde üç tema (sayılar) ve dört ilişkili alt tema (harfler) oluşmuştur: 1) meta-farkındalık; 1a) duyguların geçiciliği; 2) duygu düzenleme stratejilerinde değişim; 2a) duyguların azalan yoğunluğu; 2b) zor duygularla kalabilme; 3) kendiyle ilişkide değişim; 3a) öz-şefkat. Üç romantik ilişki teması ve yedi alt tema ortaya çıkmıştır: 4) stresli durum deneyiminde değişim; 4a) daha az negatif tepkisellik; 4b) daha az tartışma; 5) duygusal bağın dönüşümü; 5a) duyguları ifade etme; 5b) romantik ilişki ile ilgili azalan kaygı; 6) romantik ilişkinin dönüşümü; 6a) cinsel ilişki sırasında anda olma; 6b) partner için şefkat ve kabul; 6c) sınırları tekrar belirleme. Düzenli meditasyon yapmayan partner seviyesinde bir tema ve iki alt tema belirmiştir: 7) düzenli meditasyon pratiğinin genel pozitif etkileri; 7a) partnerde gözlemlenen genel sakin duygu durumu; 7b) daha az tepkiselliğin partnerde gözlemlenmesi.

İçsel kişilik seviyesindeki temalar, düzenli meditasyon uygulayıcısının meta-farkındalığının, gelişmiş duygu düzenleme becerilerinin ve artan öz-şefkatin önemini vurgulamıştır. Bu temalar romantik ilişkiye, daha az tepkisellik, daha az kaygı, daha çok duygularını ifade etme ve diğer partner için artan şefkat ve kabul olarak yansımıştır. Bağlanma perspektifinden bu sonuçlar

partnerler arası daha güvenli bir bağlanma olarak ilişkilendirilmiştir. Düzenli meditasyon uygulayıcılarının partnerleri de düzenli pratik ile gelen bu bireysel ve ilişkisel değişimleri onaylamıştır. Çift ve aile terapisi alanında bağlanma teorisini düzenli mindfulness meditasyonu pratiği ile entegre etmek değerli bir yaklaşım olabilir. Sadece bir eşin bile devam ettiği düzenli meditasyon pratiği çift terapisi sırasında yararlı olabilir. Gelecek araştırmalar, meditasyon pratiğinin özellikle romantik ilişkinin özel dönem ve durumlarına etkisine odaklanabilir. Ayıca mindfulness pratiğinin getirdiği eşsiz duygu düzenleme becerileri ile her partnerin kendi bağlanma stillerindeki potansiyel değişimler arasındaki ilişki de gelecek araştırma konuları olabilir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, my teacher and my dissertation chair Asst. Prof. Fehime Senem Zeytinoğlu Saydam. She generously supported and guided me through the whole processes with her feedbacks and with her kind and warm attitude. As a couple and family therapist and also as a mindfulness practitioner, she leaded me beautifully with her insightful approach. I am deeply thankful to her for her empowerment, which she generously provided for me.

I also would like to express my gratitude to my members of my dissertation committee: Assoc. Prof. Nilüfer Kafescioğlu and Asst. Prof. Alev Çavdar Sideris. Assoc. Prof. Nilüfer Kafescioğlu supported this study and me with her very 'to the point' feedbacks but also with her genuine enthusiasm she showed for my study. Beyond this process she is an inspiring teacher, with her many academic achievements and also with her honest and loving personality. Asst. Prof. Alev Çavdar Sideris, with her great experience as an academic consultant, guided the study with her important suggestions. Also as my former teacher, she believed in my good will in becoming a couple and family therapist and supported me, that I will be grateful forever.

I also would like to thank, İrem Ortaç, Gökçe Ceren Akyıldız, Aylin Subaşı, Feride Gürsoy, Dide Çelen Ramok Arıman, Arım Arıman, Beril Akdeniz, Darina Cücülayef and Zeynep Aksoy for their recruitment efforts and their support. Without their time and energy this study wouldn't become alive.

I also would like to thank my volunteered participants, whose names will always stay with me. I am deeply thankful for trusting me with the sensitive information about their intimate relationships. I am grateful for their time and effort and also for their inspiration that they gave

me about regular mindfulness practice.

I am deeply grateful for my Özyegin CFT cohort and my teachers and supervisors; Asst. Prof. Selenga Gürmen; Sibel Usluer Erenel MA, MS; Asst. Prof. Gizem Erdem; Neylan Özdemir MA and Özüçam administrative personnel Tuğçe Bağcı MA and Saniye Ihtiar for their support and guidance. I learned a lot from all of them. I am deeply thankful for their kindness and support. I am grateful for being a part of this great family.

I also would like to thank to the teachers and students of Dr. Ali Babaoğlu Jungian Psychodrama Institute. During my ongoing psychodrama education, they were a big help for me having a deeper awareness of my hardship during this process and they provided a safe space where I could express my anxieties and frustrations and the emotional support that I needed.

Lastly I want to thank my mother, my father, my mother in-law and my father in-law who passed away during the writing process of this dissertation. They supported me unconditionally and always believed in me that I can dream big and fulfill them too. Nothing would be possible without their love and care for me, which I will be grateful forever.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"You cannot find the truth in this life just by going into a retreat and hearing the echo of your own voice. Only in the mirror of another human being you can see yourself completely."

~ Şems-i Tebrizi

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the romantic relationship experience of regular mindfulness meditation practitioners, their emotion regulation strategies and the relational and personal observations of their non-regularly-meditating partners. Attachment theory is used as the framework of this study. In this introductory chapter, three main topics are discussed: (a) the meaning of mindfulness as a Buddhist construct and its use in Western Psychology; (b) the different types of mindfulness meditation; (c) the integration of mindfulness into the field of couple and family therapy.

1.1 What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness, which is derived from Buddhist philosophy, has received increasing attention over recent decades in Western psychology. Mindfulness is the English translation of the word *sati* from Pali, a 2,500-year-old Buddhist language. Sati means awareness, attention, and remembering (Germer, 2005). Mindfulness as a therapeutic tool entered Western psychology through the significant efforts of John Kabat Zinn (1982), who prepared a six to eight-week program called Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center during the late seventies. MBSR is an outpatient program based on mindfulness meditations and stress-related interventions. It was first applied to cancer patients forced to endure chronic pain to enhance their ability to cope with and regulate their pain via the direct

attention characteristic of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1982).

As a pioneer of mindfulness-based interventions in Western psychology, Kabat-Zinn (1994) described mindfulness as simply "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (p. 4). Inspired by the fact that Asian languages refer to heart and mind with the same word, he later claimed that mindfulness includes also "an affectionate, compassionate quality within the attending, a sense of openhearted, friendly presence and interest" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Because of its Buddhist roots, Kabat-Zinn (2011) was concerned that it would be misunderstood as a New Age fashion or Eastern mysticism and not accepted as a commonsensical, scientific, and legitimate tool for medical care. He therefore, put a lot of effort to introduce the term mindfulness as a 'secular' construct. Nevertheless, following years of scientific research on mindfulness-based interventions and many attempts to define it operationally, Kabat-Zinn still stressed that its Buddhist roots should not be forgotten. For example, he quotes the beautifully described mindfulness definition of the monk Nyanaponika (1962): "The unfailing master key for knowing the mind, and is thus the starting point; the perfect tool for shaping the mind, and is thus the focal point; the lofty manifestation of the achieved freedom of the mind, and is thus the culminating point" (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Accordingly, he described mindfulness as the view, the path, and the fruit together as one.

Since its introduction to Western psychology, a debate has continued around its definition as a construct. There is still no universally accepted definition of mindfulness and its underlying concept. To give some examples, Brown and Ryan (2003), who developed the dispositional Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), defined mindfulness as "the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present" while Bishop et al. (2004) suggest

that it is a “process of regulating attention in order to bring a quality of non-elaborative awareness to current experience and a quality of relating to one’s experience within an orientation of curiosity, experiential openness, and acceptance”. Hayes and Wilson (2003) note that there are many different descriptions of mindfulness and ambiguities around this term. In some contexts, it is referred to as a technique; in others as a collection of methods, a psychological process, or sometimes as an outcome. Notwithstanding these many different definitions, it is most often associated with attention, awareness, memory, and/or discernment as a mental faculty (Van Dam et al., 2018).

1.2 Mindfulness Meditation

With these different descriptions in mind, mindfulness meditation as discussed in this study is used as an umbrella term for different types of meditation techniques from the Buddhist tradition (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Three different mindfulness meditations are mostly taught in Western culture: focused attention (concentration), open monitoring (mindfulness *per se*), and loving-kindness meditation and compassion (Salzberg, 2011). Germer (2005) described focused attention meditation as a laser light beam that brings light to any object it encounters. These internal objects are mostly a specific part of the body (body scan) or the sensation of the breathing. This meditation does not aim to form a solid focus on the object but rather to notice when the mind wanders and bring attention gently back to the specific object. Open monitoring meditation involves a wider range of objects in any given moment. These may be sounds in the environment, sense stimuli like the wind on the skin, or inner experiences like emotions, thoughts, beliefs, etc. The Pali translation of open monitoring is *vipassana*, meaning ‘seeing clearly’. Loving-kindness meditation and compassion is about the quality of awareness. This meditation aims to warm up the emotional experience of the meditator to bring kindness,

connection, comfort, and compassion for him or herself and for others.

Mindfulness is not an alternative way of thinking or an ability that is only learned through meditation practice. Rather, we are all mindful to some extent, as Kabat-Zinn (2003) points out: "We are all mindful to one degree or another, moment by moment" (p.145-146). This is also called *trait* or *dispositional* mindfulness in the literature. Trait mindfulness is the amount of mindfulness people already have without meditational practice, although such practice is known to effectively cultivate mindfulness (Karremans, Schellekens & Kappen, 2017). Accordingly, Kabat-Zinn (2005) defines mindfulness meditation as a practice that provides a "scaffolding" to enhance the state or skill of mindfulness.

There are many ways to learn and practice mindfulness meditation. While it forms the core of Buddhist practices, it is also an important part of yoga teaching, with many yoga teachers and practitioners using meditation in their daily or weekly routine. Interest in yoga and mindfulness meditation is also growing in Turkey because of widening interest in psychological well-being generally. Technology is also supporting this by offering many meditation applications that are widely used, both in Turkey and globally.

Individuals can also attend courses and programs to learn to practice meditation. Due to its use in clinical settings, mindfulness meditation has become widespread. MBSR courses, for example, are now conducted to incorporate meditation into people's normal lives to cultivate mindfulness as a trait. MBSR involves structured group work with weekly gatherings. It includes focused attention, open monitoring meditation, mindful yoga, and loving and kindness meditations while participants are given homework to support the training process. In Turkey, MBSR courses have been held for several years while mindfulness meditation is spreading

rapidly as a psychological well-being tool.

1.3 Mindfulness in Couple and Family Therapy

The research and clinical implications of mindfulness have mostly focused on the individual experience since its debut into the Western psychology, although there has been growing interest in the last decade in the relational aspects of mindfulness, specifically how it can be implemented into the field of couple and family therapy. Thus, Gehart and McCollum (2007) reviewed how Buddhist psychology's impact on equanimity is also a priority in Couple and Family Therapy (CFT), and how both traditions have many similar concepts and practices. They further note that cultivating mindfulness can transform our relationship with suffering, which is significant for any therapeutic context.

Gambrel and Keeling (2010) reviewed how using mindfulness with couples and families might enhance communication skills, emotional regulation, empathy, and relationship well-being. They also stress that theoretical development is necessary to combine systemic theory with mindfulness, suggesting that Buddhist notions of interconnection might form the basis for this.

Gehart's (2012) book, 'Mindfulness and Acceptance in Couple and Family Therapy' is a very comprehensive work on how to apply mindfulness and compassion to couple and family therapy. It guides couple and family therapists on how to implement mindfulness and its associated practices into their clinical practice without proposing a specific approach to using mindfulness. The authors described their goal as proposing many different intervention options for using mindfulness in the clinical setting so that practitioners can use them flexibly in their specific clinical settings. The book also gives a clear framework for developing case conceptualization, identifying goals, intervening to make changes in relationships, developing

treatment plans, and practicing self-care for therapists from a mindfulness and compassion perspective.

Beckerman and Sarracco (2011) suggest including mindfulness practices in emotionally-focused couple therapy (EFT). They argued that, although EFT and mindfulness practices seem very different at first glance, the non-judgmental observation sub-trait of mindfulness may help the couples to understand their attachment-focused emotional processes better. They further argued that mindfulness and EFT may both help increase each partner's awareness about their own responsibilities in the conflicts they experience.

Atkinson (2013) developed a couple therapy approach called Pragmatic Experiential Therapy for Couples (PET-C) in which 8-week mindfulness training is implemented into therapy for distressed couples. This integrates empirical findings of the indicators of a dysfunctional relationship with methods for expanding the couple's emotional and social capacities. PET-C therapists encourage their clients to attend mindfulness training while supporting them with other methods like guided meditations about affect regulation during stressful conflicts.

Siegel (2014) advocates that mindfulness-based interventions in couple therapy, such as deep breathing and bringing the focus of the client to the here and now, may foster toleration and understanding of those intense emotional states that can harm the health of a relationship.

Similarly, Lord (2017) proposed using mindfulness meditation directly in couple therapy, which she named the 'Meditative Dialog'. Both partners engage in a 10-minute meditation while sitting close with eyes closed. They then talk to each other using guidelines given earlier by the therapist. She describes this intervention as a process "to speed up the change processes" so that the couples can deepen their dialog and become more intimate with each other.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses two main topics: (a) Bowlby's attachment theory and Adult Attachment Theory, and the relevance of adult attachment theory to mindfulness; (b) a review of the literature on mindfulness and romantic relationships.

2.1 The Rationale for Using Adult Attachment Theory as the Theoretical Framework of This Study

Adult attachment theory was chosen as the framework of this study because it gives a suitable perspective about what is functional or not in a romantic relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Attachment theory is mostly regarded as a theory of emotion regulation (Brubacher, 2017). Shaver and Mikulincer (2014), for example, claim that attachment theory has become a powerful formulation for emotion regulation over more than three decades. It explains how adult attachment insecurities can be formulated as up or down regulation of affective states. The main focus of this study is to explore the dynamics of romantic relationships through the lens of the attachment system and its emotion regulation functions.

2.2 Overview of Attachment Theory

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1982) is valuable for understanding human social and emotional development. As the father of this theory, Bowlby conceptualized this innate force as an attachment behavioral system that protects an individual from potential danger by upholding closeness to an attachment figure who cares and protects. It is one of the favorite constructs in Western psychology because it enables a valid conceptualization of human behavioral motivations, both inter- and intra-relationally. Attachment theory is frequently researched, with strong evidence that it is independent of gender, language, and country of origin (Van IJzendoorn

& Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010).

Bowlby (1969) described attachment as one of several complex and innate behavioral systems. The others are exploration, caregiving, and mating. He focused mainly on attachment theory – the primary bond between caregiver and child – and believed that other systems can only become functional once a secure bond is established between child and primary caregiver. The primary function of this system is proximity maintenance between infant and attachment figure, or primary caregiver, to protect the infant from dangers. Sroufe and Waters (1977) proposed that 'felt security' is the main goal of this system. This widened construct enabled the evaluation of the infant in terms of internal and external circumstances in the theory. This expanded it to a more organizational framework for human behavior. Felt security is achieved when the caregiver is available and attuned to the infant's search for support. The infant's stressful emotions are thereby regulated so that he or she starts to internalize this sensed security, which is called a 'secure base'. This internalized felt security turns into a resource for the individual that can be accessed internally without proximity-seeking behavior (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The attachment figure, which can be the mother or father, is also subject to context. For example, grandparents, friends, teachers, leaders, or a romantic partner can also be attachment figures depending on the individual's context (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Once activated by a stress factor like hunger, pain, or ambiguous circumstances, the attachment system innately forces the infant to search for and regenerate closeness to the attachment figure. In contrast, once the attachment figure is internalized so that the individual does not need to seek physical proximity in all situations, representations of a supporting and caring attachment figure may be enough for felt security. The individual can then continue with non-attachment-oriented acts like exploring the world.

An infant that regards the attachment figure as unstable, untrustworthy, or physically and emotionally unavailable begins to develop other strategies to proximity seeking to regulate their emotions. These are termed secondary attachment strategies, specifically hyperactivation or deactivation strategies (Bowlby, 1982). When the attachment system is hyperactivated, the infant experiences anxiety regarding availability of the attachment figure and is worried about maintaining closeness with the attachment figure. Hyperactivation is mostly correlated with the caregiver's unpredictable behavior and irregular availability (Main, 1990). Deactivation strategies include repressing stressful emotions and showing unresponsiveness to the attachment figure. It also includes a dismissive strategy regarding regulation of negative emotions. Deactivation strategies are often associated with neglectful, disapproving parenting (Main, 1990). Hyperactivation and deactivation are constructed as two dimensions: anxious attachment style and avoidant attachment style. An individual whose attachment strategy is low on both dimensions is regarded as having secure attachment (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002).

2.3 Working Models

According to Bowlby (1982), the attachment system has a biological foundation because newborns are dependent on their caretakers for protection danger. Bowlby therefore believed that this dependency is crucial for survival and rejected the idea that it is an immature act for adults (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Instead, he argued that even the most autonomous and mature adults seek proximity after stressful or dreadful events.

Internal working models are cognitive structures that develop during childhood and adolescence. They form the foundations for new relationships in adulthood. The earlier models guide the individual about how the self, the other person, and the relationship is processed and inferred through information processing and interpersonal functioning (Simpson, Winterheld,

Rholes, & Oriña, 2007).

Working models are internalized through the repetition of attachment interactions (Bowlby, 1988). They are very significant because they not only direct feelings and behavior but also attention, cognition, and memory (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Bowlby claimed that attachment styles are stable over the lifespan, although updates are possible following environmental change. He argues that updating an attachment style is a slow and difficult task because, as a working model, our attachment style is present for most of our lives while playing a vital role in daily life. That is, when the environment changes, the working model is bound to change because of the adaptive trait of this mechanism (Bowlby, 1980).

2.4 Attachment Styles

One of Mary Ainsworth's significant contributions to this theory is her laboratory assessment tool for attachment: the strange situation. In a laboratory, the behaviors of both infants and their primary caregivers are observed in response to a physical separation and a reunion. This observational technique is used to infer the style of the attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Their work suggested three main categories of attachment styles: secure, ambivalent/anxious, and avoidant. Secure children experience their caregivers as a 'secure base', which leaves them confident in the availability and responsiveness of their caregiver.

In the strange situation procedure, securely attached infants showed distress when separated from their primary caregivers but were able to regulate this stress and continue to explore. In the reunion, these infants expressed joy and were eager for physical contact before returning to play with the toys provided. Their mothers provided a secure base that acted like a springboard for

securely attached children to explore the world and pursue non-attachment-oriented activities (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Avoidant infants in the strange situation experiment showed little stress separated from the caregiver and avoided the caregiver in reunion. Home observations indicated that the mothers of avoidant infants tended to be emotionally rigid and angry while also rejecting their infant's proximity-seeking behavior (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Finally, anxiously attached infants became very distressed at separation but expressed conflicting and protesting responses when re-united. The home observations of these anxiously attached infants and their caregivers indicated disharmony and inconsistency in the caregiving process.

Main and Solomon (1990) later expanded the theory by adding a fourth category: disorganized/disoriented attachment. This is mainly characterized by instabilities between anxiety and avoidance in the child's attachment behavior. Disoriented infants demonstrate a breakdown of organized attachment strategies, such as primary, hyperactivating, or deactivating (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Disorganized infants vary between anxious and avoidant attachment strategies or act in odd ways, such as lying face down during a reunion or hiding (Main & Solomon, 1990). This kind of attachment is associated with discomforting, disorganized parenting. Research also shows that these infants suffer from unresolved losses or traumas related to their attachment relationships (Hesse, 1999).

2.5 Adult Attachment and Romantic Relationships

Hazan and Shaver (1987) were the first to associate attachment theory with romantic relationships. They suggested that the latter is also a process of attachment whereby partners are attached to each other, although this is experienced differently because of each individual's attachment style. Emphasizing that love is a multi-dimensional construct, they suggested that attachment theory offers a valuable framework for explaining some forms of love and the

underlying dynamics of different relationship styles. They also claimed that attachment theory provides a framework for describing what is healthy and unhealthy in a romantic relationship. They therefore hypothesized that the attachment processes of romantic relationships may mirror the variations of the different attachment styles assessed via Ainsworth's strange situation procedure (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Applying these categories of secure, avoidant, and ambivalent/anxious to adult participants, Hazan and Shaver (1987) found significant correlations between the frequencies of infant attachment and adult attachment styles. They also found that secure participants described their romantic relationship as trusting, friendly, supportive, and responsive. The duration of these relationships was longer than those of insecurely attached participants (10.02 years versus 4.86 years respectively, and 5.97 years for avoidant attached participants). Avoidant participants more frequently showed fear of intimacy, ambivalent emotions, and jealousy. Anxious/ambivalent participants revealed obsession about the relationship, a strong need for reciprocation and closeness, ambivalent emotions, and extreme sexual attraction and jealousy.

Since Hazel and Shaver (1987) developed the first self-report measure, there have been many attempts to conceptualize and measure adult attachment styles via self-report (Adult Attachment Questionnaire by Simpson, 1990; Adult Attachment Scale by Collins and Read, 1990); Attachment Style Questionnaire by Feeney, Noller and Hanrahan, 1994). This research revealed two major dimensions: *anxiety* about separation, rejection, or insufficient attention and care; and *avoidance* of intimacy, reliance, and emotional expression.

Bartholomew's (1990) unique contribution was combining these dimensions with the notion of working models of self and others. That is, she proposed that the anxiety dimension provided a model of the self, whereas the avoidance dimension was the model of others. Thus,

each dimension is a continuum with a positive and a negative pole, creating the following four types. Individuals with more positive models of both self and others are regarded as ‘secure’. Individuals with a positive model of the self but a negative model of others are called ‘dismissing’. Individuals with a positive model of others but a negative model of the self are ‘preoccupied’. Finally, individuals with negative models of both self and others are ‘fearful’.

Bartholomew’s conceptualized the dimensions as a cognitive process, a working model, whereas many attachment researchers focused mainly on the functional aspects of the attachment system and its effects behavioral and emotional processes (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

2.6 Mikulincer and Shaver’s Model of Attachment System Functioning

To emphasize the relation of the attachment behavioral system with other theories and social behavior, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) conceptualized adult attachment dynamics within a three-component model. Their main focus was to build a theoretical bridge between the attachment-related aspects of personality and the regulation of emotions and social interactions in adulthood. The first component is monitoring and appraisal of possible threats, which leads to activation of the attachment system. The second component is monitoring and appraisal of the availability and responsiveness of the attachment figure. If the attachment figure is available and sensitive to the needs of the individual, the attachment system is de-activated, enabling the individual to return to non-attachment-related behaviors. In childhood, the first and second stages are quick and direct because there are no cognitive inhibitions or restrictions. In adult attachment, however, many intervening phases are possible so the second stage can be experienced intra-psychically, such as recalling the thoughts about an attachment figure. The third component is triggered if the attachment is unavailable. It involves monitoring and assessing the viability of proximity regarding the attachment insecurity. The coping strategy may involve either

hyperactivation or deactivation, which respectively either intensifies efforts at proximity seeking or suppression of thoughts and emotions of oneself. Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) considered this component very carefully as the 'choice' between hyperactivation and/or deactivation strategies because this process might be an automatic reaction rather than a cognitive process influenced by life events. The reason they called it a choice was to underline different reactions to an unavailable attachment figure. They further developed the theory by stressing that throughout these phases, behavioral reactions may be automatic or deliberate. They also claimed that every component of their model is context sensitive and influenced by the individual's working models of the self and other. This biases the appraisal of the attachment figure and the subjective appraisal of threats (Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger, 2003). Their model also suggests that inner sources of threat, such as like images, dreams or negative cognitions, can trigger the attachment system.

2.7 Emotion Regulation Function of the Attachment System

Emotion regulation can be described simply as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (Gross, 1998, p. 275). According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2007), the attachment system by itself acts like a regulation device. That is, activation of the attachment system and proximity seeking in response to threat are efforts to regulate the nervous system. Thus, these strategies are crucial determinants of individuals' emotional responses. They also emphasized that the unavailability of an attachment figure during a time of threat or stress hinders proximity and feelings of safety. This then contributes to and intensifies negative emotions, hence poor emotion regulation (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019).

Securely attached individuals have a greater capacity than insecurely attached individuals

to experience their emotions with fewer alterations. Securely attached individuals can also use proximity seeking in an adaptive way as a regulatory strategy. Research shows that securely attached individuals are more optimistic and make fewer catastrophic inferences about potential dangers. Instead, they rely on their capacity to handle stressful situations. They are also more open and accepting about their emotions, and express and experience them without trying to avoid or alter them (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Secondary attachment strategies, such as attachment anxiety and avoidance, can be adaptive and functional when used with an inconsistent or unreliable caregiver. However, they may also be dysfunctional if constantly used as adults (Mikulincer & Shaver 2002). Secondary attachment strategies are associated with activation or suppression of negative thoughts and emotion, which can bias mental representations of the self and others.

Avoidant attachment strategies mainly include hindering or inhibiting emotions in accordance with the main aim of deactivating attachment-related needs. This is primarily done to avoid vulnerable feelings like anxiety, anger, sadness, shame, and guilt. More specifically, anger is also regarded as an investment into a relationship that is not in line with the avoidant individual's goal of independence. It is mostly suppressed or altered (Cassidy, 1994). Thus, avoidant attachment strategies involve ignoring one's own emotional experiences by denying or inhibiting such thoughts. Several studies have associated thought suppression with deactivation strategies (Edelstein & Gillath, 2008; Fraley & Shaver, 1997). Individuals with avoidant strategies focus their attention away from an emotion-eliciting material and hinder emotional facial expressions (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). They have the longest recall latencies in remembering negative experiences, especially when recalling sad or anxious memories, compared to both securely attached and anxiously attached individuals (Mikulincer, Orbach,

1995).

Turning to the other dimension of secondary attachment strategies, attachment anxiety is associated with directing the focus towards negative emotions and even amplifying them internally. The rationale behind this lies in the notion that anxiously attached individuals have an "unfulfilled wish to cause attachment figures to pay more attention and to get more reliable protection and support" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 191). To get that support and attention, such individuals tend to exaggerate threats, and their vulnerability or helplessness (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). They tend to be biased in appraising how they deal with stressful events. They also focus heavily on physiological expressions of emotions, recall threat-related memories, or ruminate on real or hypothetical threats (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Another anxious attachment strategy is heightening negative emotions by approaching a threatening situation and taking self-sabotaging decisions that make their actions more likely to end in disappointment. This strategy creates a vicious cycle of self-heightening distress even after the threat has diminished (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019).

2.8 Contact Points Between Adult Attachment Security and Mindfulness

Adult attachment security and mindfulness are frequently researched because of their positive impact on human mental and physical health. The first hypothetical associations between these two constructs were suggested by Ryan, Brown and Creswell (2007), and enlarged by Shaver, Lavy, Saron and Mikulincer (2007). Ryan et al. (2007) pointed out several similarities and possible connections between felt security (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and mindfulness. From a developmental perspective, they argued that infants with loving, sensitive, and reliable caregiving tend to be more securely attached, better able to regulate their emotions, and therefore more mindful. As they put it, "the development of mindful awareness and capacity for self-

observation is facilitated by providers who can be attuned to, mirror, and resonate with the infant's experience" (Ryan et al., 2007, p. 180).

Various research findings also indicate that secure attachment, emotion regulation, and mindfulness use similar neural pathways (Siegel, 2007). Although the connection is still being explored, the neural organization of affect regulation, executive function, and attention are related to secure attachment and mindfulness. Ryan et al. (2007) also noted the bi-directionality of attachment security and mindfulness, such that secure adult attachment is related with dispositional mindfulness (Stevenson, Emerson, & Millings, 2017) and Ryan et al. (2007) hypothesized that mindfulness may foster secure adult attachment via being open and nonjudgmental towards the partner's experience. Secure attachment may also foster compassion towards human suffering and compassion is also regarded as an outcome of mindfulness (Stevens, Emerson, & Millings, 2017). Another connection is the positive effects of secure attachment and mindfulness on mental and physical health. Securely attached adults are more capable of regulating their emotions without using deactivating or hyperactivating strategies. Similarly, mindfulness also cultivates an open and nonjudgmental awareness of the experience of the self and the others so that the person has no need to distort reality and can therefore be more flexibly responsive. This kind of perspective helps individuals to regulate their emotions more effectively and not to react during a conflict automatically.

Highlighting the Buddhist origins of mindfulness, Shaver et al. (2007) argued that the goal of mindfulness itself is not just about "healthy emotion regulation but also a sense of responsibility for and kindness toward all human beings - in fact toward all sentient beings" (p. 266). They therefore criticized American psychologists for removing mindfulness from this wider perspective to make it more secular, more individualistic, and less relational. They believed that

mindfulness would benefit much from an attachment framework perspective because this could associate mindfulness with social and developmental constructs. In order to make that link, Shaver et al. (2007) emphasized that the relationship with loving and consistent attachment figures is internalized in oneself so that the person can identify him or herself with this attachment figure. In this way, the individual is better able to use adaptive self-regulation techniques and can recall these memories in response to a stressful event. This internalization of the representations of the positive and supportive aspects of this special bond integrates with working models of the self and can be used again in stressful times. Shaver et al. (2007) described this further:

> "People who possess such self-representations and have acquired greater coherence of mind as a result of interacting with attachment figures who also exhibit coherence of mind and coherence of discourse find it easier to remain mindful of what is happening within and around them, analyze problems (including other people's needs) more accurately and quickly, mobilize effective coping strategies, and more easily endure inevitable periods of upheaval, loss, or trauma. This is the process by which interaction with loving and coherent attachment figures gradually strengthens and sustains authentic self-esteem, the capacity for stable mindfulness, and effective emotion regulation" (p. 499).

Shaver et al. (2007) made another important link by showing the connection between loving kindness and mindfulness, and how this is central to Buddhist psychology. Loving kindness in Buddhist psychology is not just for the others but also for the self (Chödrön, 2003). Shaver et al. (2007) claimed that this is similar to internalizing both sides of a caring and loving attachment relationship. Another similarity they brought out is that the main goal of mindfulness meditation is to focus on whatever arises without grasping to it or suppressing any arising thoughts or emotions. They further investigated how practicing mindfulness may help with

attachment insecurities. More specifically, they noted that attachment anxiety is mostly described as obsessing or grasping attachment-related thoughts while avoidant attachment is mainly described as suppressing thoughts and emotions related with a close relationship.

Interpersonal neurobiology (Siegel, 1999) provides an interdisciplinary framework that integrates developmental psychology, attachment theory, systemic theory, mindfulness, and neuroscience. It is mainly founded on the hypotheses that the development of the infant's brain happens through the relationship with his or her primary caretaker. The brain is physically altered by this early relationship, which affects how the mind itself operates. As Siegel (2003) points out: "The brain becomes literally constructed by interactions with others. As we participate in the 'co-construction of each other's minds, intimately sculpting the unfolding of our mutually created life stories, we find that our most intimate personal processes such as self are actually created by our neural machinery that is, by evolution, designed to be altered by relationship experiences" (p.18). To build a healthy and secure relationship, the attunement of the caregiver with the child is crucial while the child can only regulate itself through the relationship with the caregiver (Stern, 1985). To attune to another, we use our senses to get signals from the other person. After the mirror neuron system perceives this state, the insula changes the limbic and physical states to 'mirror' what we perceive from the other. This attunement enables emotional resonance (Siegel, 2007). The interaction of the mirror neuron system with the insula, superior temporal cortex, and other regions forms the resonance circuit. Siegel (2007) highlights that it is also important to attune to ourselves to attune to another person. When it is in a mindful state, the brain uses the same resonance circuitry as for empathizing and attuning with others. Siegel (2007) further suggests that "with mindfulness seen as a form of intrapersonal attunement, it may be possible to reveal the mechanisms by which we become our own best friend with mindful practice" (p.16).

Siegel (2007) also claimed that mindfulness meditation and attachment security have

similar impacts on the middle prefrontal cortex. This brain area is important for both social interactions and self-observation. It is also involved in neural integration between the body and brain areas like the limbic and cortical regions, and our social experiences. This neural integration is claimed to be a result of an attuned relationship. Likewise, mindful awareness as self-attunement may have a similar impact on neural integration. This hypothesis is supported by research using magnetic resonance (MR) imaging to detect anatomical changes in the brain (Engen et al., 2018; Lazar et al., 2005;).

The relationship and directionality between attachment and mindfulness is being still explored. A recent meta-analysis of 33 quantitative studies (Stevenson, Emerson, & Millings, 2017) concluded that there is a significant negative correlation between attachment anxiety and avoidant dimensions, trait mindfulness, and its five sub-traits (acting with awareness, non-judging, non-reactivity, observing, and describing (Baer et al., 2008). The only exception was the lack of a significant correlation between attachment anxiety and the observe sub-scale. The overall effect size between these two constructs was moderate (anxiety, r+ = -.36; avoidance, r+ = -.28). Three studies reported no significant relationship between total mindfulness and the avoidance dimension of attachment insecurity (Edwards 2014; Maniaci, 2015; Rowe, Shepstone, Carnelley, Cavanagh, & Millings, 2016). One study showed no significant relationship between attachment anxiety and trait mindfulness (Rowe, Shepstone, Carnelley, Cavanagh, & Millings, 2016).

This meta-analysis included only cross-sectional studies using self-report surveys to measure attachment and mindfulness. Longitudinal studies are therefore needed to investigate the directionality between these constructs. Stevenson, Emerson, and Millings (2017) suggested that their meta-analysis could encourage researchers to further investigate how attachment security

and mindfulness are related.

This qualitative study is to explore how these links between attachment security and mindfulness might actualize and which intrapersonal and relationship level traits might be potential mediators between these two constructs. The qualitative nature of this study makes it possible to explore many aspects of mindfulness, which might be related with secure attachment in their relationship.

Pepping, O'Donovan & Davis (2013), conducted a study to associate mindfulness and attachment theory, where they explored the differences between the two groups of individuals; meditation-naïve; and experienced meditators. The participants were 290 undergraduate students. 225 of them had no experience of mindfulness meditation practice, while 65 of them had a current weekly practice. Adult attachment was measured by the Experiences in Close Relationships Revised, (ECR-R), (Fraley et al. 2000) while mindfulness was measured by The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (Baer et al. 2008). The results showed that for the non-meditators the two attachment dimensions explained for 18.8 % of the variance in the total mindfulness score while for the regular meditators this variance is 43.3%. Moreover, for the experienced meditators, the relationship between attachment anxiety and mindfulness was moderated by the meditation practice. The other dimension, attachment avoidance and mindfulness was not moderated by the mindfulness practice. An interesting finding of this study is that the mean levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance were similar between these two groups indicating that the mindfulness practice seems to have no effects on these attachment dimensions. The authors associated this theoretically that the individuals with lower attachment securities might be more willing to engage in a mindfulness training due to its emotion regulation function and the mean levels for the experienced meditators could be the elevated levels of

attachment security but due to its cross-sectional nature of the study, the baseline levels of attachment dimensions are unknown. A limitation of this study is that the duration of the weekly meditation practice and also the time period of the regular mindfulness practice was not indicated. A weekly meditation practice of five minutes or 45 minutes may reflect on the results differently. Also the novice regular mindfulness practitioner and the long-term mindfulness practitioner might have different levels of attachment anxiety or avoidance, which is not differentiated by the researcher. This study is important to show that the attachment security and trait mindfulness has a stronger relationship with regular meditation practitioners.

To understand the relationship between trait mindfulness and attachment security, researchers have also analyzed the contact points between emotion regulation strategies, attachment insecurity dimensions, and trait mindfulness (Goodall, Trejnowska & Darling, 2012). Stevenson, Millings and Emerson (2018) recently investigated the relationship between dispositional mindfulness, attachment security dimensions, and emotion regulation strategies, and their prediction of coping and wellbeing in an online survey of 174 students. The following measures used: Experiences in Close Relationships Revised (ECR-R) (Fraley et al., 2000) for the two attachment insecurity dimensions, attachment-related anxiety, and attachment-related avoidance; the Adult Disorganized Attachment Scale (ADA) (Paetzold et al., 2015) to measure adult disorganized attachment; Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, short form (FFMQ- SF) (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011) for dispositional mindfulness and its five subscales; and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) (Gross and John 2003) for emotion regulation strategies in two subscales: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Exploratory factor analysis revealed a two-factor solution accounting for 47 % of the variance. Factor 1, which accounted for 33 % of the variance, was named ‘resilient mental

functioning' because three subscales of FFMQ-SF loaded onto it: acting with awareness, non-judging to inner experience, and non-reacting, while the cognitive reappraisal scale from the ERQ measure loaded negatively onto attachment-related anxiety from the ECR-R. Factor 2, which accounted for 14 % of the variance, was labeled 'disorganized emotional functioning'. The acting with awareness and describe subscales of the FFMQ-SF measure, expressive suppression from the ERQ, attachment-related avoidance from ECR-R, and the disorganized attachment subscale from ADA all loaded negatively onto Factor 2. The factor structure also supported the view that the relationship between emotion regulation and mindfulness may be bi-directional. That is, individuals with adaptive emotion regulation strategies also showed higher dispositional mindfulness and vice versa.

2.9 Mindfulness and Relationship Satisfaction

Empirical research into the effects of mindfulness on romantic relationships is still in its early stage. However, many studies have investigated the potential benefits of mindfulness meditation and trait mindfulness on romantic relationships, including several correlational studies that used self-report measures. A meta-analysis (McGill, Adler-Baeder, & Rodriguez, 2016), focused on 12 effect sizes from 11 different sources (one publication had two different studies so both were included) indicated that the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction was statistically significant with an overall effect size of .27. The studies included in this meta-analysis concentrated on the effects of dispositional mindfulness on relationship satisfaction or relationship quality. These quantitative studies used self-report measures for both constructs. The post-test results of a mindfulness-based intervention were not included in the analysis. The effect size metric used was Fischer's z score. The effect size of .27 was moderate (small = .10; moderate = .30). The authors argued that the significant correlation between

dispositional mindfulness and relationship satisfaction validates the importance of implementing mindfulness-based interventions into educational relationship programs (Gambrel & Piercy, 2014a, 2014b).

To integrate the mindfulness literature with knowledge of the dynamics of romantic relationships, Karremans, Schellekens and Kappen (2017) proposed a theory-driven model of why and how mindfulness influences romantic relationships through a dyadic perspective. They argued that mindfulness in relation to romantic relationships involves "consciously paying attention to feelings or thoughts that may directly or indirectly affect the relationships" (p. 31). Being mindful in the relationship is also associated with being aware of one's distressing emotions and thoughts because of conflicts or stressors outside the relationship. Paying attention to that tension non-judgmentally should prevent the individual responding automatically towards their partners and being able to alter their response. The mechanism of this association is assumed to involve four processes: awareness and monitoring of automatic and otherwise implicit responses, emotion regulation, executive control, and self-other connectedness.

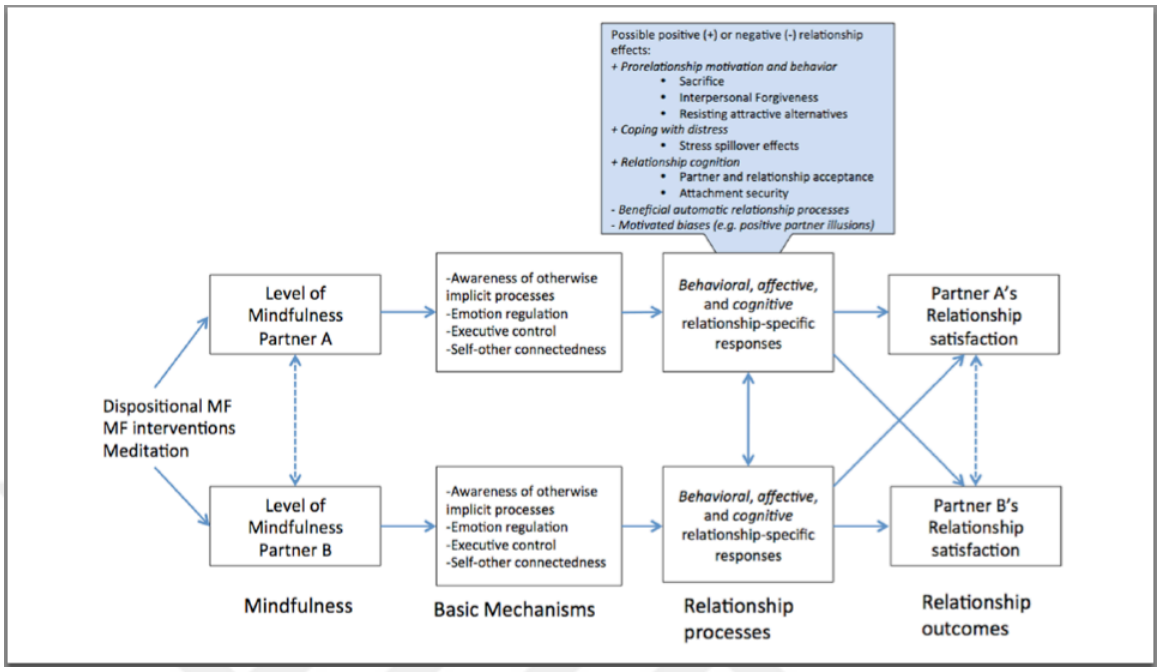

Figure 2.1: Theoretical model of Karremans, Schellekens, and Kappen (2017). This diagram is printed with the permission of Johan Karremans.

Awareness of automatic responses is promoted through being non-judgmentally aware of one's own inner emotions and thoughts. The authors suggested that mindfulness fosters being conscious awareness and the ability to observe one's own thoughts and emotions. This means one's behavioral and emotional predispositions can be noticed, which may otherwise be left unseen and acted on automatically. The association of mindfulness and romantic relationships through *emotion regulation* is that being mindful helps the person avoid identifying too much with a negative or difficult emotion while being aware of the transient nature of affects. *Executive control* includes numerous cognitive processes, such as task switching, updating, and inhibition. These alter impulsive behavior so that the individual can pursue a certain objective. Mindfulness meditation and training guides the individual to focus and then refocus on the present moment. That is, this practice seems to support the executive control mechanism through neural development and through the acceptance of one's own emotional states (Teper & Inzlicht, 2013).

Self-other connectedness is associated with increased empathy and understanding, which helps in building connections with others, because knowing ourselves seems to foster our abilities to understand the other better.

Karremans, Schellekens and Kappen (2017) further proposed that mindfulness may affect romantic relationships through three different processes: a) *prorelationship motivation and behavior*, *b) copying with stress,* and *c) relationship cognition*. Mindfulness is associated with pro-relationship motivation through awareness of otherwise automatic responses from better executive control and emotion regulation features. However, mindfulness itself is not considered a motivator for transformation in a relationship. Commitment to the relationship is considered a potent moderator. That is, if an individual is not strongly committed to a relationship, being aware of that state may not motivate a transformation in the relationship.

Emotion regulation skills can be improved through mindfulness. This is then associated with greater relationship satisfaction (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). However, the authors also underlined the effect that improved emotion regulation skills might have on external stressors to the relationship, such as work stress or sickness. The effects of stress spillover may also happen automatically, without awareness. The authors emphasized that the stressor should be first noticed by the individual. Then, mindful awareness can play an important role.

They further connected mindfulness with relationship cognition and beliefs in that people in a relationship hold some ideal thoughts and beliefs about their partners. When there is a discrepancy between these ideals and the actual partner, relationship satisfaction may decrease. One of the main strategies of the partner who experiences these discrepancies is trying to change or control the other partner. However, this may also reduce relationship satisfaction. Partner acceptance is important in this situation. That is described as the capacity to recognize and accept inadequacies of the partner, without the wish to change those. Given that acceptance is also at the

core of mindfulness, acceptance of present situations, which is cultivated through mindfulness, could be also help increase awareness of the cognitions of a partner's shortcomings. Having a more accepting perspective regarding the ups and downs of a relationship also increases relationship satisfaction and maybe prevents relationship deterioration. The authors further combine attachment security with mindfulness to show how mindfulness can provide a 'safe haven' for oneself in threatening situations. This could help a partner become more accepting and less reactive.

Lastly, Karremans, Schellekens and Kappen (2017) discuss which types of couple can benefit from mindful awareness. Based on their model, they suggest that mindfulness might be associated with relationship satisfaction because it "buffers the relationship from the impact of distressing factors and relationship-threatening situations … A plausible prediction is that mindfulness may not make an already happy relationship even more happy, but that it may prevent the onset of the relationship decline in times of relationship distress, and may put relationships that are essentially committed but deteriorating back on track" (p. 38).

In line with this theory-driven model reviewed above, Kappen, Karremans, Burk, and Buyukcan-Tetik (2017) conducted three studies to investigate whether partner acceptance moderates the relationship between trait mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. The first two studies ($n_1 = 190$; $n_2 = 140$) used self-report measures to investigate the relationship between trait mindfulness and partner acceptance, and also partner acceptance and relationship satisfaction. The first study found a positive correlation between trait mindfulness and partner acceptance, partner acceptance and relationship satisfaction, and trait mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. The variables were also tested in every role, such as dependent, independent, and mediating. The preliminary results indicated that they were multi-directional. The second study replicated the findings of the first study. The only methodological difference was the usage of the

long version of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (Baer et al., 2008) instead of the short version. The results were similar to the first study. Partner acceptance mediated the relationship between trait mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. There was also some evidence for multi-directionality between these variables. The third study was conducted with MBSR graduates (n_3 = 118) and their partners (53 couples). There were significant correlations between partner acceptance and trait mindfulness, and partner acceptance and relationship satisfaction. However, the relationship between trait mindfulness and relationship satisfaction was non-significant.

Mediation analysis of the dyadic data provided preliminary evidence that one partner's trait mindfulness was indirectly associated with the other partner's higher relationship satisfaction. The partner who did not participate in the MBSR course was better accepted by his/her partner if that partner was high in trait mindfulness. The study thus sheds light on the role of trait mindfulness in romantic relationships and the mediating effect of partner acceptance between these two constructs.

Adair, Boulton, and Algoe (2017) examined whether one partner's perceived responsiveness mediated between trait mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. Perceived responsiveness is defined as perceiving the partner as an understanding, validating, and caring person. It is associated with attunement of couples in their relationships. The study used self-report measures from 127 couples to measure trait mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. The couples then participated in a discussion task before evaluating their partner's responsiveness. The results of the actor-partner interdependence mediation model revealed that the partner's perceived responsiveness mediates the association between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction.

To investigate the mechanism linking trait mindfulness and relationship satisfaction, Kraft,

Haeger and Levin (2017) conducted a cross-sectional study with 138 undergraduate students. The hypothesis was that the two primary facets of mindfulness, acceptance and awareness make a greater contribution to relationship satisfaction when both are high than their individual effects. The results showed that acceptance and relationship satisfaction were positively associated whereas awareness had no significant effect on its own. Moreover, high levels of acceptance were only significantly associated with couple satisfaction when awareness was moderate or high. This indicated that a certain level of awareness may be necessary for acceptance to be useful in relationships.

This research has several limitations. These include non-dyadic data, cross-sectional design, young participants, and homogeneous participants. Moreover, the Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale used to measure the acceptance and awareness subscales has been criticized for being too narrowly conceptualized (Bergomi, Tschacher, & Kupper, 2013). Nevertheless, this research provides important findings for understanding the boundaries, limitations, or even the hindering effects of mindfulness on romantic relationships.

Khaddouma, Gordon and Strand (2016) investigated the relationship between the five facets of mindfulness (observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-reactivity, non-judgment) and relationship satisfaction when only one partner in a dyad participated in MBSR. Twenty MBSR participants and their non-participating partners completed self-report questionnaires of mindfulness and relationship satisfaction before and after taking the MBSR course. The results showed that overall mindfulness, the five facets of mindfulness and relationship satisfaction all increased for enrolled partners after participating in the MBSR course. Moreover, increased levels among MBSR participants of the acting with awareness facet of mindfulness were associated with greater relationship satisfaction for both partners. Increased

levels of the non-reactivity facet were also associated with greater relationship satisfaction, but only for non-participating partners and not for their own levels of relationship satisfaction. The authors concluded that the acting with awareness facet of mindfulness is especially important for understanding the mechanism linking mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. This is because it is associated with being able to be in the present moment and acting with purposeful attention rather than being reflective or unconsciously responsive. This benefits both parties. Non-reactivity was also associated with being less reactive to emotional or cognitive processes. Another interesting finding is that increases in the other three facets of mindfulness (observing, describing, non-judgment) were not associated with higher relationship satisfaction. This may be because the describing and observe facets are more cognitive and more intrapersonal features of mindfulness so they may not have a direct effect on relationship satisfaction.

To determine how trait mindfulness influences relationship satisfaction and vice versa, Khaddouma, Gordon and Bolden (2014) administered self-report measures of trait mindfulness (Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, FFMQ), sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction to 322 undergraduate students. The researcher hypothesized that the positive association between the facets of trait mindfulness and relationship satisfaction is mediated through the sexual satisfaction of the dating partners. The results showed that sexual satisfaction fully mediated the associations between the two facets of mindfulness, Observing (PE D .08, CI D [.02, .15]) and Non-judging of Inner Experience (PE D .11, CI D [.03, .19]), and relationship satisfaction. They concluded that the observing is important for an individual to focus on internal and external stimuli while non-judging of inner experience is useful for not criticizing experiences. The authors further suggested that these two facets of mindfulness contribute greatly to sexual satisfaction, which is also in line with theories of sexuality; that is, being attentive to what is

happening in the here and now and not being judgmental of one's own or partner's performance.

This study has several limitations, specifically non-dyadic data, non-generalizability from the mostly Caucasian sample, online sampling procedures, and the young adult sample limited to dating. Nevertheless, this study is important because it demonstrates the mediating role of sexual satisfaction on the association between mindfulness and romantic relationships.

Gillespie, Davey and Flemke (2015) conducted a phenomenological study as part of a larger qualitative study into the relational experiences of intimate partners after one has completed an 8-week MBSR course. The study explored the lived experience of 11 couples whose relationship had lasted at least two years. Two same sex couples are included in the data.

Three major themes and seven subthemes surfaced from the semi-structured interviews. The first major theme was *positive observation*, with two subthemes: *general positive perception* and *MBSR graduate's improved emotional balance.* The intimate partners described MBSR as generally positive and useful for the MBSR graduates. The second subtheme of improved emotional balance concerned the intimate partners' perception of increased calmness in the MBSR graduate partner.

The second major theme was *perceived impact,* which is associated with the perceptions of how the MBSR course affected both parties and their relationship. It had two subthemes: *perception of communications* and *impact on intimate partner and relationship.* Several intimate partners of MBSR graduates perceived less reactivity, more calmness, and acceptance in their partner, but these shifts were only emerging not as a behavioral shift in the resolution of conflicts in the relationship. The impact of MBSR was also very mixed, ranging from very positive to having a very little positive impact on the relationship.

The third major theme was meaning making, with three subthemes: *appreciation, incongruence of meaning,* and *continuing practice*. Several intimate partners were grateful and appreciative that their partners had participated in MBSR. However, partners offered diverse meanings and perceptions of meditation, which could make it difficult to implement meditation into couple and family therapy if the partners are differently motivated. The intimate partners of the MBSR graduates also indicated that MBSR was just the beginning while stressing the importance of continuing daily practice. Several partners said that the benefits of MBSR declined after 4 months if the graduates had not continued to practice much after the initial course.

The researcher concluded that the behavioral changes of MBSR graduates are only incipient and limited while the individual benefits of MBSR are not directly reflected in relational improvements. Most of the intimate partners of MBSR graduates report no relational shift. "The positive relational effects of mindfulness may increase through longer-term, consistent mindfulness practice by one member of the couple or through a couples' conjoint mindfulness training tailored to couples' specific issues and needs" (p. 405).

Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, and Rogge (2007) conducted two studies to investigate the relationship between trait mindfulness and romantic relationship satisfaction and distress. In the first, short-term longitudinal study, trait mindfulness, relationship satisfaction, self-control, and accommodation were measured in 89 college students and again with 82 participants 10 weeks later. There was a positive relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction, self-control, and accommodation at both time points. Moreover, mindfulness predicted all the other variables except accommodation.

The second study of 57 couples whose romantic relationship had lasted at least 3 months

investigated whether more mindful partners regulate themselves better during relationship-related stress. The study used a five-phase interaction sequence in which the partners argued about a selected conflict issue of their own. Self-report measures examined state mindfulness during the conflict task along with measures of feelings of felt love, respect, and commitment to the relationship.

The results showed that higher dispositional mindfulness was associated with less emotional stress during conflict. More mindful individuals were less anxious and angry when starting the discussion task. Higher levels of trait mindfulness were not associated with the quality of the communication during the task, although high state mindfulness predicted less aggression, less withdrawal, and more support. Similarly, Barnes et al. (2007) reported that higher trait mindfulness is associated with better communication skills, such as less verbal aggression and negativity.

Both studies have several limitations. Generalizability is an issue because the participants were all college students with high levels of relationship satisfaction. Reliance on self-report measures was another limitation while the researcher-coded observation methods could be supported by other methods to make the design stronger.

In one of the earlier studies to investigate the mechanism linking relationship adjustment and mindfulness, Wachs and Cordova (2007) hypothesized that dispositional mindfulness and marital adjustment would be related through the mediating role of emotion repertoire skills: "present-centered attention to the moment is partly characterized by a greater ability to tolerate the subjective experience of negative emotions. The rationale for an increase in emotion tolerance rests partly on noticing that paying sustained attention to ongoing experience puts the individual

in close proximity to his or her own thoughts and feelings, allowing the individual to grow more comfortable with his or her own emotional experiences" (p. 466).

The study used self-report measures of marital quality, dispositional mindfulness, and emotion repertoire skills (identification and communication of emotions, empathy, and anger reactivity) with 33 married couples. There was a significant correlation between mindfulness and marital adjustment with a medium effect size ($r = .37$). Dispositional mindfulness was significantly positively correlated with identification and communication of emotions, which supported their hypothesis regarding the mechanism linking mindfulness and relationship quality. They also provided some preliminary evidence for the association of dispositional mindfulness and empathy. However, empathy was not related to marital quality, which was anomalous given previous results in the literature. The other two dimensions of emotion repertoire skills, identifying and communicating emotions, and regulation of anger expression, fully mediated the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and marital quality. The limitations of this study included the use of non-dyadic data and reliance on self-report measures, especially for measuring emotional repertoire, as this may be hard to self-evaluate. However, its findings are still important because it investigated married couples and linked mindfulness and emotional skills in a relational context.

In Pruitt and McCollum's (2010) qualitative study, 7 experienced meditators using Buddhist and Christian practices were interviewed. The authors explored how the long-term meditation practice (minimum 10 years) influenced their intimate relationships. The participants were all Caucasian and five were female. The participants were between 52 and 70 years old. All had a master's degree or higher in their field. The participants conducted various forms of meditation. Four practiced *vipassana* meditation, two used centering prayer from Christian

practice, and one practiced mindfulness meditation. The participants had practiced meditation for 10 to 33 years. The authors used semi-structured interviews to ask about the personal traits the participants thought they had developed from meditation practice. Four emerged from the open-coding process: awareness, disidentification from thoughts and emotions, acceptance of the self, others, and situations, and compassion and loving kindness for self and others.

Awareness was defined as openness to bodily sensations and the emotions of oneself in the present. Awareness of bodily sensations also guided participants to be aware of their own emotional states. In line with 'awareness as a personal trait', the participants reported a new way of relating with their emotions and thoughts, which emerged as disidentification from thoughts and emotions, and being curious about their own states. This trait was not explained as denial, contrary to exploring one's emotions and thoughts with curiosity and openness, and not being caught up by identifying oneself with them. Participants also reported that acceptance was a personal trait that they assumed they had experienced due to meditation practice. They defined this trait as a "willingness to see oneself and life as it is, without trying to change the experience of the present moment" (p.140). It includes acceptance of oneself and one's limitations and misdeeds. Acceptance towards others was defined as accepting the differences between self and other without attempting to change them. This caused less fear and anger, and reduced the blaming attitude towards others. The fourth trait mentioned was compassion and loving-kindness. This involved the recognition of common human experiences, such as suffering and desire, and loving kindness as unconditional love of all human kind. Participants also mentioned compassion for the self as a link between being kind towards oneself and others.

Regarding the effects of these meditative traits on the participants' relationships, three common themes emerged: less reactivity, freedom and safety for the self and the partner, and a new, deepened experience of connection. The participants reported being less reactive as being

less caught up in overwhelming emotional states like fear or anger, which could be automatic responses towards their partners. Self-awareness of bodily states, thoughts, and emotions helped participants recognize their triggers so that they could choose not to react to overwhelming emotion-eliciting situations. The participants further elaborated that, while they were not free of judgments, they could disidentify with them, which helped them to listen to their partners without being reactive. Regarding freedom and safety, the participants noted that acceptance of self and other helped them to feel more free and safe in the relationship. This in turn made them more open and comfortable to show their true selves, and express love and acceptance toward their partner. This acceptance also supported intimacy greater emotional freedom for both partners. The third common theme, a new, deepened experience focused on unity and separation. Participants explained this as a connection and integration between all things as oneness. This theme also included separation, which participants described as the impossibility of understanding the other totally. Although unity and separation sound contradictory, the participants described these two concepts as complimentary and coexisting. Two other concepts mentioned within this new connection were intimacy and independence. As a consequence of felt unity, the participants expressed intimacy as an enthusiasm to share and be more open to connect with their partners. Independence arose from the sense of separation so that they are also relaxed doing some things alone, without needing another.

Pruitt and McCollum (2010) has been thoroughly reviewed here because of its similarities to the present study. There are several strengths to that study. Its qualitative nature provides a very rich context regarding the effects of long-term meditation practice on close relationships, and how the understanding of being in a relationship can be spiritual and self-healing. Another strength is the connection made between meditative traits emerging from doing meditation and their projection onto close relationships. The participants' different traditions of meditation

practice add richness because most studies in the field concentrate on mindfulness meditation and its effects. To include different traditions provides a more secular understanding of meditation, which is a concern for many Western mindfulness researchers and theoreticians. The limitations of this study were acknowledged by the authors as the small sample size, lack of diversity, absence of the perspectives of the participants' partners, and confounding variables like insight that comes from aging, therapy, and possibly from their own religions. The most important limitation for the reliability of the study, however, is the non-dyadic data taken only from meditators rather than from their partners. The authors did mention the techniques they used for coding, but a method or a methodology was not mentioned in the study. Although the inclusion of different religious practices is mentioned as a strength, it could also introduce bias because the literature on meditation has been investigating different meditation styles and their neurological effects on an individual (for a review, see Lippelt, Hommel, & Colzato, 2014). The findings from this research suggest that different meditation techniques are linked with different neural structures, hence different meditative personal traits. Thus, the study would have been stronger if the participants' meditation techniques were similar or the same.

In this literature section, several quantitative and qualitative studies have been mentioned. There are several studies with the focus on the trait mindfulness relationship satisfaction, which relies on self-reports of mindfulness. There are several criticisms on the self-report measures of mindfulness and how it may differ constructively from the outcomes with the meditation practice (Van Dam et al., 2018). Therefore, this qualitative study relies on the lived experience of mindfulness that comes from a regular practice. Further it is designed to shed light on the potential mechanism between the adult attachment security and mindfulness that comes from the regular mindfulness practice.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Background of the Problem

The intrapersonal psychological effects of dispositional mindfulness and mindfulness meditation has been researched for many decades in the Western psychology. However, more recent research has focused on the relational effects of mindfulness meditation. The literature mostly investigates dispositional mindfulness, which is assumed to be a trait that can be cultivated through meditation practice (Kabat- Zinn, 2003). The focus of this study is to explore the lived experience of the romantic relationship of regular meditation practitioners and the observations of their non-regularly-meditating partners. There is limited research into the relational effects of long-term meditation practice and I have found no study that takes both partners' views into account. This study therefore aims to address this gap, using a qualitative approach to reveal the many aspects of regular meditation practice and its effects on romantic relationships and the emotion regulation strategies of the meditators.

3.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experience of regular mindfulness meditation practice (minimum two years) of one partner in a romantic relationship, the emotion regulation capacities of regular meditation practitioners, and the relational and personal experiences of their non-regularly-meditating partners.

3.3 Research Questions

The main research question of this qualitative study is "What is the experience of being in a romantic relationship for the regular meditation practitioner and his or her non-regularly-meditating partner?" This leads to several sub-questions: a) Are there any effects of doing regular

meditation on the practitioners' emotional, cognitive, and sexual processes; and, if so, what are the reflections of these effects on their romantic relationship, regarding the emotional bond of their adult attachment system in the romantic relationship? b) How do the emotion regulation strategies of the regular meditation practitioner reflect on his or her romantic relationship? c) What are the observations of the non-regularly-meditating partner regarding any positive or negative effects of their partner's regular meditation practice?

3.4 Method

This qualitative study used Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is a "method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterned meanings or 'themes' in qualitative data" (Rohleder & Lyons, 2015, p. 95). Because it is a method rather than a methodology, it is flexible regarding possible implementations for many different kinds of research questions, including individual experiences, views, and perceptions, or making meaning out of social constructs. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this beneficial flexibility as being "not wedded to any preexisting theoretical framework and therefore can be used within different theoretical frameworks" (p. 81). The researcher can thus choose the epistemological position that best fits their research question and the theoretical framework of their study. This is more like an epistemological spectrum. On one end, TA is an essentialist/realist method. Its main assumption is that participants' views and perceptions can directly provide information and insight regarding their experiences. On the other end of this spectrum, TA can be a constructivist method. Its main assumption is that meaning and experiences are circumstances of different discussions and bound to social and cultural contexts. My stance regarding TA in this study lies in the middle of this spectrum. That is, I believe that the perceived experiences of my participants will reflect the meaning of doing mediation and its effects on their intimate relationships. At the same time, however, romantic relationships are social constructs that are lived very subjectively while

cultural influences are inevitable. More specifically, Turkish culture, which is more collectivistic than Western cultures, may or may not affect the participants' experiences. My position thus involves being aware of possible sociocultural influences on my study while assuming that the participants' insights can reveal the reality of the effects of mindfulness meditation on their intimate relationships.

TA is also suitable for different kinds of data and different sized datasets. However, it has been criticized for being insufficiently sophisticated and merely describing or interpreting the data set. On the other hand, when the research question, theoretical framework, and TA perspective are aligned, this approach can be regarded as a sophisticated method (Rohleder & Lyons, 2015).

Brown and Clarke (2006) also suggest that prior to performing the analysis, the researcher should answer several questions regarding their study. One important question is whether to use TA inductively or deductively. Although a purely inductive method is impossible because our theoretical approaches always influence our interpretation of data, I chose to start coding inductively, bottom-up from the data. That is, I aim to be more 'grounded' in the data, which is also a characteristic of TA (Brown & Clarke, 2006). Mindfulness also includes the premise of non-judgmentally looking at the self, others, and the world. It is thus intrinsically a bottom-up process, where the observed phenomenon is regarded as it is. My point of view as the researcher of this qualitative study is also aligned with this perspective so I aim to use TA as inductively as possible.

Another question to be answered is whether to code semantic or latent meaning. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the coded themes can have semantic or latent meanings, or both. Coding on the semantic level involves more searching for clearly manifested themes rather than

searching for latent meaning. On the other hand, a researcher who chooses to search for latent meaning expands the semantic meaning and looks for assumptions and ideas that could support the semantic meaning of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Being in the middle of the epistemological continuum, I chose to code both semantic and latent meaning. As previously mentioned, mindfulness is a construct that is hard to define in all its aspects. I believe that this is due to the perspective that mindfulness has both semantic and latent meaning. To capture this rich context, I therefore claim that both types of meaning making are needed.

A six-phase process strategy is used in TA to identify reoccurring patterns throughout the data set. Phase one involves becoming familiar with the dataset by reading and becoming truly aware of the data. It starts the analytical process by reading it as a data and marking possible analytical points of interest.

The second phase is coding. A code is a brief label to catch the essence of an analytical idea for the researcher (Rohleder & Lyons, 2015).

Once the coding has reached a satisfactory level for the research question, the third phase starts: searching for themes. A theme pinpoints a larger meaning than a code, so many related codes may be clustered under a potential theme. However, code rich in context may be recategorized as a theme. While good themes do not overlap, they can be related. Braun and Clarke (2012) describe themes as pieces of a puzzle that come together to build an image of the data.

The next phase is review. This involves checking the quality of the candidate themes. In this phase of TA, the researcher also checks if the coding has included and highlighted all the important data. The researcher should question the themes and further investigate if they really count as themes – if they have an important meaning for this dataset. The boundaries and coherence of the themes are also further questioned (Brown and Clarke, 2012). During this phase,

the themes are recursively revised and reshaped. A thematic map can be used to view the organization and relationships of the themes and build an overall structure (Rohleder & Lyons, 2015).

The fifth phase is defining and naming the themes. The data is analyzed to build the overall analysis. Writing a definition for each theme is helpful to clarify the conceptual and analytical phase. Data extracts to be used in the final report are also chosen along with the names for the themes.

The last stage is producing the report, although this might be misleading because a narrative draft report should be written as the researcher moves through the previous stages. Nevertheless, this phase is distinct because it highlights the importance of a final review of the analysis and produces the final report, which combines and integrates the findings with the research question, theoretical framework, and existing literature (Rohleder & Lyons, 2015).

3.5 Sampling Strategy and Inclusion Criteria

The main sampling strategy for this qualitative strategy was criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). The main criterion was that the meditation practitioner should have been practicing mindfulness meditation for at least two years and for 2.5 hours weekly prior to the study. The weekly criterion corresponds to the weekly meditation session of the 8-week MBSR course. Since MBSR is a well-researched course with proven benefits, its meditation durations and styles are taken as the minimum standard. The literature has no set definition for defining meditators as long-term according to my search. However, many studies described long-term meditation practices of least five years of experience (Lazar et al., 2005). The meditation that mindfulness meditators practice had to be one or more of the following mindfulness meditation styles: focus attention, open awareness, mindful yoga, or loving and kindness meditation based on the mindfulness practices in the MBSR course.

Another inclusion criterion was that the meditators should have been in a romantic relationship for at least two years prior to the study. To increase the potential diversity of the participants, co-habitation or marriage was not an inclusion criterion. This reflected the fact that, in Turkey, same-sex couples are unlikely to live together while same sex marriage is illegal.

Another criterion was that the regular mindfulness practitioner should have started regular practice during the ongoing relationship. This was important because it enabled the participants to more easily detect the positive or negative effects of their practice on themselves, their current partners, and their ongoing relationship.

The partner of the regular meditation practitioner was not required to be a regularly meditation practitioner because the main purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of a regularly practicing meditator being in a romantic relationship. Since regular meditation practice can be interesting for the other partner, they may also be trying meditation. Therefore, although it was permissible for the partner of the regular meditation practitioner to also practice some meditation, they were excluded if they defined themselves as regular meditation practitioners.

To find participants for this study, I contacted most yoga studios in Istanbul and Ankara. Mindfulness meditation is a popular practice, especially among yoga teachers. Most studios add meditation classes to their daily class schedules. I am also a yoga practitioner and an MBSR graduate. Snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to search for meditators among yoga teachers. Initially, I contacted most of the yoga studios to gain preliminary acceptance from the yoga teachers/meditators and their partners to participate in this study. Most participants were either yoga practitioners or yoga teachers who implemented meditation in their yoga practice.

Unfortunately, no participants volunteered from the community of MBSR teachers. This might be because MBSR courses have only been run for a few years so many regular meditation practitioners could not fulfill the study criterion of doing regular meditation for at least two years. Only one MBSR graduate participated in this study, although all participants had taken different meditation courses and attended meditation retreats.

Most yoga and meditation practitioners in Turkey are well-educated, high SES, and female. To increase the sample diversity, the researcher contacted the LGBQT-E communities in Turkey to include same sex couples so as to increase the generalizability of the results. Fortunately, two same sex couples agreed to participate.

Because of the predominance of women in yoga and meditation, a gender imbalance was expected. Indeed, only one regular male meditation practitioner and his wife were willing to participate despite the researcher's efforts to recruit more male meditation practitioners. This might therefore be a confounding variable in this study since the majority (9 participants) were female.

3.6 Trustworthiness Criteria

In qualitative research, the main goal is trustworthiness instead of validity and reliability, which are vital for quantitative research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are five criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and integrity.

Credibility means the study's findings are a true reflection of the stated experience. To improve credibility, this study involved interviewing both meditators and their partners to blend multiple perspectives to get a more accurate picture of the experienced romantic relationship.

Moreover, after the thematic analysis, I sent the findings to the participants to check if the extracted data matched their reflected experience. This step also improved the integrity of the study. To make the study more dependable and confirmable, I relied on continual expert checking from my dissertation chair (Asst. Prof. Fehime Senem Zeytinoglu Saydam), who is an experienced qualitative researcher. My dissertation co-chairs (Asst. Prof. Alev Çavdar Sideris and Assoc. Prof. Nilüfer Kafescioğlu) are also experienced researchers who guided me in designing and conducting the study through an audit trail.

Although qualitative research is not generalizable because of the limited number of subjects, this study aimed for transferability by its sensitivity to the diversities among the participants and the inclusion of two same-sex couples. This was also important to gain more accurate insights into romantic relationships within Turkey's LGBQT-E community.

3.7 Member Checking

After the data analysis a narrative summary of the results has been send via e-mail to the regularly meditating partner (RMP) and the non-regularly meditating partner (NMP) separately for having their feedbacks if the results were reflecting their statements. Seven RMP and seven NMP answered to the results via an e-mail or WhatsApp application. Kerem from couple H responded as the first one and thanked for sharing the results. He further stated that it is a very good summary and a thorough compilation of the different topics he discussed. Sena from couple C wrote about the results 'just as if they are my words' and thanked me for my efforts. Talya form couple A said that she really liked the way of summarizing the results and they are coherent with her statements. She further asked for the delivery of the whole study because she wanted to use the findings of the study also in her mindfulness classes. I responded that I will send it as soon as I get the approval from my institute. His husband Ufuk also confirmed that the results

were describing his experience correctly. Aysu and Baran from Couple K both confirmed that the results were coherent with their stated experiences. Peri and Esin from couple J wrote that they read both of the results together twice and said that they are very pleased how it described their experiences congruently. Gamze from couple G asked if this short summary will be in the study as it is. I further explained that it will be a chapter with several pages and what I sent was a summary of the findings of the study. Then she responded that it is harmonious with her statements. Her boyfriend Akın also responded as 'good summary' and indicated that it was coherent with his statements. Nihal form couple D confirmed the coherency of the results with her experience and also thanked me for caring this valuable information into an academic setting.

3.8 Interview Process and Data Collection

I conducted the interviews via the online application 'Skype'. The interviews were held separately so that each partner was not influenced by the answers of his or her partner. Prior to the interview, I sent the informed consent and demographic forms via e-mail (see Appendices A and C), and received the signed forms via post, courier, or e-mail with electronic signatures. I then agreed an interview date with each pair of participants, who were interviewed separately. The interviews with the regularly meditating partner took between 30 and80 minutes whereas those with the other partner took around 5-20 minutes. The interviews were audiotaped with the informed consent of each interviewee. The first interview pair was a pilot to test the questions before making necessary adjustments. Following close examination of this pilot interview with the dissertation chair, no changes were made to the questions. The pilot interview is not included into the study.

It took approximately four months to complete the interviews as it was not easy to find suitable couples because of my inclusion criteria, especially that the regular meditation

practitioner should have started to practice regularly during the couple's romantic relationship. Most yoga and meditation practitioners were approached for their assistance, and all participants were contacted this way.

The questions for the regularly meditating partner were about how they started meditation, how they experienced their emotions both before and after beginning regular meditation practice, their relationship story, their general relationship experience now, their sex life both before and after beginning meditation practice, and their ways of expressing their emotions, asking for support, handling stressful situations in their romantic relationship prior to their practice and their current experiences. The non-regularly meditating partner was asked four questions concerning the effect of their partner's regular meditation practice on themselves, their partners, and their relationship.

All interviews were transcribed and coded using the MAXQD data analysis program with expert checking by the dissertation chair. The six recommended phases of thematic analysis were conducted. Although theses stages gave clear guidance for the researcher, the process was more recursive within the phases, as Braun and Clarke described (2012). The emerging themes and subthemes were chosen after discussion with the dissertation chair. Seven themes emerged to represent the data in relation to the research questions. The subthemes were then chosen according to whether they appeared at least six times.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents (a) the demographics, (b) vignettes for each couple, (c) intrapersonal themes and subthemes, (d) relationship themes and subthemes, (e) theme and subthemes of the non-regularly meditating partner. The results are divided into three segments (intrapersonal, relational, and partner observations) because the research questions focused on these three levels. The links and associations between these levels will be discussed thoroughly in the discussion chapter.

4.1 Demographics

Demographic information for the 20 participants (10 couples) is presented in Table 1 below. To preserve their anonymity, each participant was given a pseudonym and a code. Number 1 designates the regularly meditating partner while number 2 designates the non-regularly meditating partner; each couple is designated by a letter. Table 2 presents the relationship status, relationship duration, and number of children. Table 3 presents the meditation practice information for each partner.

Table 4.1

Pseudonym (code), Gender, Age, Level of Education, Socio-economic status (SES), Religion, Ethnicity and Sexual orientation.

Pseudonym (code)	Gender	Age	Level of education	SES	Religion	Ethnicity	Sexual orientation
Talya (A1)	Female	33	Bachelor's degree	Upper middle class	Pure consciousness	Turkish	Hetero-sexual
Ufuk (A2)	Male	32	Graduate degree	Upper middle class	Agnostics	Turkish	Hetero-sexual
Mina (B1)	Female	43	Graduate degree	Upper middle	Muslim	No answer	Hetero-sexual

				class			
Can (B2)	Male	48	Bachelor's degree	Upper middle class	Muslim	White	Hetero-sexual
Sena (C1)	Female	33	Bachelor's Degree	Middle class	No religion	Turkish	Hetero-sexual
Ali (C2)	Male	41	Bachelor's degree	Middle class	No religion	No answer	Hetero-sexual
Canan (D1)	Female	45	Bachelor's Degree	Upper middle class	No religion	No answer	Gay
Nihal (D2)	Female	42	Graduate degree	Middle class	Yogi	Human	Bisexual
Selin (E1)	Female	44	Graduate degree	Upper middle class	Buddhist	Eastern Europe	Hetero-sexual
Metin (E2)	Male	51	Graduate degree	Upper middle class	No religion	Turkish	Hetero-sexual
İlkim (F1)	Female	39	Bachelor's degree	Middle class	Buddhism oriented	Turkish	Hetero-sexual
Emre (F2)	Male	41	Bachelor's degree	Middle class	No religion	Turkish	Hetero-sexual
Gamze (G1)	Female	35	Bachelor's degree	Middle class	No religion	Turkish	Hetero-sexual
Akın (G2)	Male	35	Bachelor's degree	Low middle class	No religion	Turkish	Hetero-sexual
Kerem (H1)	Male	40	Bachelor's degree	Middle class	No religion	No answer	Hetero-sexual
İclal (H2)	Female	39	Bachelor's degree	Middle class	No religion	Multi-national	Hetero-sexual
Peri (J1)	Female	41	Bachelor's degree	Middle class	Muslim	Turkish	Bisexual
Esin (J2)	Female	37	Bachelor's degree	Middle class	Alevi	Turkish	Bisexual
Aysu (K1)	Female	44	Graduate degree	Middle class	No-religion	Turkish	Hetero-sexual
Baran (K2)	Male	43	Bachelor's degree	Upper middle class	Muslim	Turkish	Hetero-sexual

Table 4.2

Couple, Relationship Status, Relationship Duration and Number of Children.

Couple	Relationship status	Relationship duration	Number of children
Talya and Ufuk (A)	Married	8 years	2
Mina and Can (B)	Unmarried and not co-habiting	6 years	-
Sena and Ali (C)	Unmarried and co-habiting	2 years	-
Canan and Nihal (D)	Unmarried and not co-habiting	3 years	1 (Canan-from previous marriage)
Selin and Metin (E)	Married	12 years	2
Ilkım and Emre (F)	Married	13 years	-
Gamze and Akın (G)	Unmarried and co-habiting	5 years	1
Kerem and Iclal (H)	Married	14 years	-
Peri and Esin (J)	Unmarried and co-habiting	10 years	-
Aysu and Baran (K)	Unmarried and co-habiting	4,5 years	1 (Baran –from previous marriage

Table 4.3

Pseudonym, Duration of regular meditation practice, Weekly minutes of meditation, Types of meditation and Meditation practice of the partners of regular practitioners

Pseudonym	Duration of regular meditation practice	Weekly minutes of meditation	Types of meditation	Meditation practice of the partners of regular practitioners
Talya (A1)	Approx. 3 years	210	Open awareness, focused attention	No experience
Mina (B1)	2 years	240	Open awareness, focused attention, body scan, loving and kindness	No experience
Sena (C1)	2 years	180	Open awareness, focused attention, body scan, loving and kindness	No experience
Canan (D1)	3 years	200	Open awareness,	Some experience,

			focused attention, body scan, loving and kindness	no regular practice
Selin (E1)	6 years	360	Open awareness, focused attention, body scan, loving and kindness	No experience
İlkim (F1)	2 years	420	Open awareness, focused attention, body scan, loving and kindness	Some experience, no regular practice
Gamze (G1)	2.5 years	200	Open awareness, focused attention, body scan, loving and kindness	No experience
Kerem (H1)	3 years	420	Open awareness, focused attention, body scan, loving and kindness	Some experience, no regular practice
Peri (J1)	2 years	150	Body scan, loving and kindness	Some experience, no regular practice
Aysu (K1)	2.5 years	280	Open awareness, focused attention, body scan, loving and kindness	No experience

4.2 Vignettes of the Couples

This section introduces each couple along with the researcher's observations and insights. Each vignette concludes with demographic information and the interviewer's evaluation of the level of relationship distress.

4.2.1 Couple A, Talya & Ufuk

Talya (RMP) and Ufuk (NMP) are a married couple with one child and another expected. This was the first interview following the pilot interview via SKYPE online application, and was the shortest. I interviewed Talya first then Ufuk separately so that they were not influenced by each other's comments. Talya is a yoga and meditation teacher, while Ufuk has no experience of

meditation. Talya described their relationship as a ‘not a problematic relationship before or after meditation practice’. At that point I thought that maybe I should check for the couple’s distress level via a questionnaire because I assumed that couples in a distressful relationship would benefit more from a regular meditation practice. However, following the data analysis, I abandoned this assumption because, even if the relationship is not distressed, couples seem to alter how they disclose their emotions and handle distressing events after starting regular meditation practice. In addition, including the opinions of both distressed and non-distressed couples enabled the data to be more heterogeneous. This was appropriate since my main interest concerned potential general intrapersonal and relational changes after one partner began regular meditation practice.

Talya’s relationship with her meditation practice was very strong. She described it as being ‘like a daily medicine’ and she was able to clearly see the difference it made in her ‘regulation of the nervous system’. I was surprised by this intellectual comment although my participants are well educated and mostly yoga or meditation teachers, which also brings an intellectual background.

It was interesting to hear from Talya that meditation was not easy for her or her husband initially because of the ‘hardship of looking into oneself in the beginning’. That comment was made by four other RMP, which made me realize that meditating regularly may not be an easy path. The comment resonated deeply with me because I was also struggling with my routine meditation practice. Talya also underlined that these personal changes due to meditation practice might also be challenging for her husband. At that moment, I felt doubtful about my research questions and my design, which remained with me throughout the interview process. It revealed itself as a subtheme about re-defining boundaries within the relationship. It also reminded me about the beauty and richness of

qualitative research, and its ‘broad’ perspective, and non-judgmental nature, which are also fundamental aspects of mindfulness.

The interview with Ufuk (NMP) was shorter because I only had four questions for him. The NMP interviews were more like ‘partner checking’ to see if the main effects of meditation practice reported by the RMP were also observable by their non-regularly meditating partners. That is, the interviews with NMPs aimed at a panoramic capture of these effects rather than providing more in-depth information.

Ufuk very clearly expressed the beneficial effects of the meditation. However, he commented that this transformation in the relationship was ‘not only about meditation but also other practices like yoga, and that this path of knowing oneself is influenced by many practices’. This comment was made several times in other interviews. I noted this as a limitation of the study but also to focus on my questions searching for distinctive changes after starting regular meditation practice.

4.2.2 Couple B, Mina & Can

Mina (RMP) and Can (NMP) have been in a romantic relationship for six years, although not living in the same house. Mina is a yoga teacher and Can is in finance. The interview with Mina took around 75 minutes. Mina and Can were both very enthusiastic about participating in this study because they both believed that meditation was helping their relationship a lot. They had previously broken up after the first year and remained separated for nine months. Beginning regular meditation during this time made Mina realize how she was holding onto being right, which in turn allowed her to become more open to seeing Can’s viewpoint. Can confirmed this by commenting that ‘if she didn’t do regular meditation practice we would have been separated for the second year’.

Mina described herself as being very moody and experiencing ‘strong ups and downs’ that were not easy for her to regulate. She was ‘expecting a lot’ from her boyfriend while ‘not knowing what to expect from herself’. These comments reminded me how important it is to have a good and compassionate relationship with oneself and how necessary it is for decreasing relationship-related anxiety. Fortunately, self-compassion and a deeper relationship with oneself were mentioned by many couples, which became a theme and a subtheme of this study.

Mina mentioned receiving a lot of counseling in the past. However, she concluded that meditation practice was ‘like a key for work in psychotherapy’. This reminded me of the importance of using meditation interventions in psychotherapy, and how it can be beneficial in couple and family therapy. I also noted how many different aspects can influence functionality and satisfaction in a relationship such as psychotherapy, maturation of the relationship, or stressors and resources.

4.2.3 Couple C, Sena and Ali

Sena (RMP) and Ali (NMP) had been in a romantic relationship for more than two years. Sena is a meditation and yoga teacher while Ali was working in the private sector. Sena started doing regular meditation right after they got together. Although they fulfilled the inclusion criteria of this study, Sena couldn’t easily detect any differences before and after starting regular meditation practice. After a while she became able to speak about her emotional and experiential shifts during the interview. Like all the RMPs, Sena had a meta-awareness of her emotions and her emotion regulation strategies along with deep insight into her attachment style and how it affected their relationship. Describing herself as ‘avoidant’, she concluded that she was ‘avoiding her boyfriend even in a very small conflict’. This was a fundamental change for her due to starting meditation practice

because, by becoming more aware of her intense emotions related to the relationship, she could now regulate them more easily.

Sena described their relationship as a ‘supporting relationship right from the start’ since she was going through a divorce and her boyfriend was a major support during this time. This reminded me that relationship distress and satisfaction vary widely between couples, so I should constantly consider this.

Ali (NMP) could easily detect the benefits of his partner’s meditation practice for herself and the relationship. It was also very reassuring for my research that such differences were easily detectable by the NMPs. However, being aware of my need for reassurance during the interviewing process, I tried to remain neutral during the interviews.

By this third interview (excluding the pilot), several themes were already surfacing from the data, such as enhanced emotion regulation capacity and meta awareness for the RMP and general positive affect and calm mood for the NMP. However, the relational themes remained more diverse since the dynamics of each relationship were dissimilar.

4.2.4 Couple D, Canan and Nihal

This was the first gay/bisexual couple I interviewed for this study. They had been together for three years, lived separately but worked together. Canan (RMP) is a meditation and yoga teacher while Nihal (NMP) is a yoga teacher. As the RMP, Canan offered many insights and intellectual knowledge about meditation, mindfulness, and Buddhism. Initially, the interview with her was like a lesson for me. As well as having a lot of experience with mindfulness, she was thinking, writing, and teaching about it. Having lost myself in the poetic beauty of her meditation lecture for a while, I had to remind both myself and her that the interview concerned her own experiences, especially her romantic relationship. From

that moment on, the interview was more about personal differences rather than the general effects of mindfulness meditation.

Canan, who had one child from a previous marriage, described her sexual orientation as gay while Nihal described hers as bisexual. Canan described their relationship as a very 'supporting, loving and fun' relationship. She said they also benefitted from working together and noted how lucky she was to have Nihal in her life.

Although their relationship seemed secure right from the start, Canan could still notice differences in herself and the relationship after starting regular meditation practice. This was especially so in terms of being aware of her automatic reactions and not acting on them, being able to regulate herself, and choosing better reactions. She also benefitted from these improved traits in her relationship with her daughter. I realized here that meditation practice can also be very useful for the family part of couple and family therapy, regarding its theorized effects on attachment security.

4.2.5 Couple E, Selin and Metin

Selin (RMP) and Metin (NMP) are a married couple with two children living abroad. Selin is a mindfulness teacher while Metin works for a corporation. When Selin contacted me via a Buddhist teacher, she said that they both met the criteria, but they were about to separate and divorce. I immediately accepted and thanked her for her willingness to participate in this study. Although I had some concerns beforehand, this particular interview added great depth to my understanding of emotion regulation and also to the concept of the 'romantic relationship' and what makes it functional or satisfying.

The intrapersonal themes were crucial in this interview because they clearly indicated that meditation cannot 'save' a relationship; indeed, it may even divide partners more by transforming the partners' relationships with themselves. As Selin put it. 'Ali has been

challenged into reality' because she discovered her over-tolerance and how it had harmed her.

Selin described their relationship as having 'no-emotional bond at all'. She said that 'she wanted to divorce because she couldn't get any emotional support at all, before or after her regular meditation practice'. She was aware that she had started the relationship with 'wrong motivations, like having a family and children are more important than the emotional bond'.

Selin is a long-term meditator with 6 years of practice. The way she described emotion regulation was very eye opening for me. Specifically, when I asked how she coped with strong emotions, she answered beautifully: 'I don't cope anymore; I just experience them as they are.'

To my surprise, Ali was very positive about her meditation practice, specifically how meditation helped her to become calmer in her reactions. On other hand, not to my surprise, he could not tell if the practice had affected their relationship at all.

As the fifth interview, this had a very different relationship dynamic to the others. The intrapersonal themes were more saturated while the relationship themes were still more diverse. Especially regarding the emotional bond, strategies differ in every couple. To capture these saturated relational themes, I believed I needed more interviews.

4.2.6 Couple F, Ilkim and Emre

Ilkim (RMP) and Emre (NMP) had been married for 13 years. Ilkim sells her own brand of candles while Emre is an architect. Ilkım started doing meditation having done yoga practice while Emre has no experience of meditation. They both described their relationship as a very 'decent' and 'not stressful' relationship.

The interview with Ilkim was one of the shortest, at around 30 minutes. In the beginning, I thought that she was not willing to reveal her relationship with her husband as she was trying to keep the answers short without too many details. While I felt a little frustrated initially, she gradually became willing to reveal more of her experience in the relationship. Ilkim was somehow exploring her relationship through my questions. It was interesting to hear how she changed her initial responses to questions after contemplating them.

In his interview, Emre offered an inspiring description of his wife's meditation practice:

> "*I have the feeling as if Ilkim has been practicing meditation since we met. She should have been doing it long before. She was like in that state of mind before but the description was missing. Mindfulness meditation describes her. It is a part of her. But neither I nor she was aware. Now it makes sense. Meditation is a part of her."*

4.2.7 Couple G, Gamze and Akın

Gamze (RMP) and Akın (NMP) are a co-habituating couple in a 5-year relationship. Gamze is a yoga teacher while Akın works as a store manager. They started their relationship online and experienced some stressful events about trust in the relationship. However, they got over this and stayed together. Gamze said:

> *"From a sensible point of view, maybe I should have left him. But I didn't feel that way, so I stayed. I am glad I stayed".*

Gamze's interview provided very rich details. I was very impressed by the vivid portrayals of her meditation experiences and internal states. She said that she had suffered from many psychological problems, such as suicidal thoughts and panic attacks, and that she had been on medication for a long time. However, meditation practice had enabled her

to discontinue her medication. She had quit her job to create time for meditation practice and had become a yoga teacher.

Gamze was also dealing with many attachment-related anxieties in her relationship, which she became aware of through meditation. Her boyfriend Akın also acknowledged this progress. As he put it, ‘she doesn’t create scenarios anymore’ after starting meditation. Although he gave very short answers to questions in his interviews, which I found uncomfortable, he was still able to express the essence of his opinions.

4.2.8 Couple H, Kerem and Iclal

Kerem (RMP) and Iclal (NMP) had been a married couple for 14 years. Kerem is a software developer while Iclal is a dance teacher. They both live in a small village in southern Turkey. During the time of the interview, Iclal was pregnant with their first child. Kerem was the only male RMP in this study, so I was excited when he contacted me to participate. He was very calm during the interview, with a profound knowledge of Buddhism. He told me about his journey of regular practice, during which he realized at some point that he was intellectually enjoying the concepts of mindfulness and Zen Buddhism yet could not start regular meditation practice. It was hard for him to be with himself in the beginning, so he enjoyed the intellectual side. I thought this was a very truthful insight about starting regular meditation practice. I was also enjoying reading about it, even writing this thesis about it, while not actually going deeply into the practice. However, following this interview, I began to meditate regularly and have kept this regular routine to this day.

The interviews with Kerem and Iclal touched me deeply because of the affection they described for each other. Kerem said he was ‘more loving towards his wife and towards everything in this world’ and how ‘he is full of gratitude’ while Iclal (NMP) portrayed their

relationship as ‘harmonious’ and that she was ‘sensing his full presence and openness’ in their relationship now.

After this interview, saturation of themes on every level seemed to be almost achieved. However, since I aimed to interview at least ten couples, I continued with the interviews.

4.2.9 Couple J, Peri and Esin

Peri (RMP) and Esin (NMP) were the second bisexual couple that I interviewed. They were living together and they both identified themselves as bisexual. They both worked in sales for different firms. While Peri was the RMP, Esin had some experience with meditation although she did not practice regularly. They had been together for ten years.

While Peri described herself and Esin as being a very loving and caring couple, she also admitted that their current relationship was ‘going through a crisis’ because Esin had had an affair eight months before. This process was very challenging for both because they defined their relationship as very healthy apart from this situation. To overcome this crisis, they were going to both couple and individual therapy.

Peri said that they chose to stay together but that what they were going through was very difficult for both of them. Peri said that her meditation practice had helped her profoundly during this process, especially when she was overwhelmed with many emotions. She claimed that she was able to choose not to react in a destructive way. Esin (NMP) was also experiencing many overwhelming emotions while describing this affair during the interview: ‘She is traumatized but I am also traumatized by my actions and by the severe self-blaming’. Other than this incident, the couple did not seem distressed. For example, Peri said that they had never ever had a fight prior to this incident, that they were always open in disclosing their emotions, and able to ask for support from each other easily.

As the second LGBTQ couple, it was very exciting for me to interview them as I was hoping to learn more from the insights of a bisexual couple. The interview with Peri took around an hour, and focused mostly on Esin's affair because that was the only stressful event she could find in her relationship. I found it odd that they had not had any fights prior to this affair. While I thought there might be something deeper here to explore, the structure of my interview focused on Peri's relationship, her meditation practice, and their interaction. I therefore kept the interview focused on these.

4.2.10 Couple K, Aysu and Baran

Aysu (RMP) and Baran (NMP), who were the last couple I interviewed, had been living together for four and a half years. Aysu is a psychologist who also wants to write her doctoral dissertation on mindfulness. Baran is an electrical engineer with no meditation experience. However, after seeing the benefits, he said that he 'might be doing it in the future'. Indeed, four other NMPs said the same.

Since she is a psychologist, the interview with Aysu was very fluent, and full of ideas and experiences. Being psychologically minded, she identified the anxiety in her relationship as 'separation anxiety', which made it very easy for me to code her data. On the other hand, this created a risk that she was 'analyzing' herself from her own perspective, which might be misleading for my study. As mentioned earlier, I chose to code as inductively as possible, so I tried to find the latent meanings of the experiences she described rather than taking at face value of her own psychological constructs mentioned.

Aysu claimed that before meeting Baran she had been in a very abusive relationship with her former husband and that relationship was very harmful for her. While she was getting divorced, she had met Baran in a mountain climbing club. He had been a great support for her during that time and also in their relationship. She was still suffering from

this ‘traumatic former marriage’, which made her anxious about losing him for no reason. When I interviewed them, Baran was about to go on a fishing trip for a few days. As he noted, ‘It is so much easier and better after her regular meditation practice that my trips are not a problem anymore’. They both described their relationship ‘more peaceful and beautiful than ever’.

While I achieved saturation by the eighth interview, this interview was still important to add data, especially on a relationship themes because this romantic relationship was very much affected by Aysu’s regular meditation practice.

4.3 Thematic Overview

Thematic analysis is not just about presenting the reoccurring patterns; rather, these patterns should be in line with the study’s research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My main research question was: What is the experience of being in a romantic relationship for the regular meditation practitioner and his or her non-regularly meditating partner? My sub-questions were: (a) Are there any effects of doing regular meditation on the practitioners’ emotional, cognitive, and sexual processes; and if so, what are the reflections of these effects on their romantic relationship, regarding the emotional bond of their adult attachment system in the romantic relationship? (b) How do the emotion regulation strategies of the regular meditation practitioner reflect on his or her romantic relationship? (c) What are the observations of the non-regularly meditating partner regarding any positive or negative effects of their partners regular meditation practice?

These questions organized the results into three levels of themes and subthemes: (a) *intrapersonal themes of the RMP*, to explore the practitioner’s emotional, cognitive, and sexual processes, and emotion regulation strategies; (b) *relationship themes of the RMP* to discover the experiences of being in a romantic relationship for the RMP and their

emotional bond in their adult attachment system; (c) *theme of the NMP* to describe their observations regarding of the effects of their partner's regular meditation practice and their general relationship experiences.

4.4 Intrapersonal Level Themes

The semantic and latent levels of the thematic analysis yielded three intrapersonal themes and four subthemes. The themes are both connected yet also describe distinctive parts of the data. Table 4.4 gives an overview of the three intrapersonal themes and four subthemes.

Table 4.4

Themes, Subthemes, and Reoccurrences from 10 regularly meditating partners

Theme	Sub themes		Reoccurrences from 10 RMPs
1		Meta-awareness of one's emotional experiences	
	101	Impermanence of emotions	6
2		Shift in emotion regulation strategies	
	201	Decrease in intensity of emotions	7
	202	Increased capability of staying with negative emotions	7
3		Shift in relationship with oneself	
	301	Increase in self-compassion	6

4.4.1 Intrapersonal Level Theme 1: Meta-Awareness of One's Emotional Experiences

This theme is named meta-awareness of one's emotional experiences because the participants described their current state as not just a simple awareness of emotional states, such as 'I discovered what I felt'; rather, they mentioned being aware of the working system of the mind and how they altered their way of observing their internal states. Prior to starting regular meditation, they described their way of feeling their emotions as intense

and uncontrolled whereas regular practice enhanced their ways of observing, understanding and accepting their emotional states.

Gamze, for example, portrayed her own meta-awareness process when answering the question 'How do you experience your emotions after doing regular meditation practice?' as follows:

> *"For example, you can disrupt the hypnotic nature of thoughts. The mind itself is hypnotic. To get out of that hypnotic state. For example when I am experiencing something negative, I tell myself; O.K. Use this Gamze! Than I start to observe my emotions; where is this emotion? How does it make me feel? ... In a way, you take a step out of that state, observing and staying with that. That's happiness. It may not be happy feelings all the time, but I like this process."*

Her comments reflect the hypnotic (ruminative) nature of the cognitional process and how she can detect that state while also not letting herself get caught up in it. She reflected on not just being aware of a negative emotion but using it to disrupt this hypnotic state. Although these emotions may not be positive, she describes this meta-awareness and the concluding disruption process as happiness.

When I asked Mina about her motivation to continue doing regular meditation, she said:

> *"When I practice meditation, my thoughts get clearer. With meditation, the picture gets clearer. It is like changing from standard picture quality to high definition or even changing to 4K Ultra HD. Within this shift to 4K, I can observe my thoughts, my reactions, and emotions. Simply observing myself. For example, today, while I was in the studio to give the yoga class, an earthquake happened. I observed my panic and*

fear. But there were students. I held that fear but did not repress it. After the class, I faced my fear and said, 'Yes. I am terrified.' I cried. Instead of repressing my fear, I let myself live it."

Mina's picture quality metaphor may represent different awareness stages: standard as no awareness, HD picture quality as awareness of thoughts and emotions, and 4K as meta-awareness. Moreover, the example she gave was from real life rather than emotional observation during meditation. It showed how she was able to observe the fear and experience it without repression at a suitable time. With meta-awareness, experiencing the emotions as they are seems to be much easier for RMPs. Five other participants also mentioned 'living the emotions as they are'.

Sena described her meta-awareness as a witness constantly observing her:

"I started to see the effects of my stressful childhood. There is someone in this world wandering in life. That person is me. But what happens inside of this person? I don't see that when I don't practice meditation. But with doing regular meditation yon can know that Sena. How does she live? How does she react? What does she feel and when? Regular meditation practice is like someone beside me, observing me, giving me feedback. Sometimes feedbask arises in the moment, like that's why you experienced that. Doing regular meditaiton is a place where I go deep with my awareness."

Here, Sena describes her awareness cultivated through meditation practice as an internal witnessing position that can also make cause and effect deductions about her cognitive and emotional states. This kind of meta-awareness of one's present and past emotions is portrayed here as an automatic state rather than an effortful process as in Mina's comment.

4.4.1.1 Subtheme 101: Impermanence of Emotions

Six out of ten RMPs underlined the benefits of being aware that emotions are impermanent, especially when experiencing negative emotions like anger, fear, or sadness. This impermanence is mostly experienced through meditation, in which meditators observe their emotional states, watching them come and go without any reactions. This is also described as a trait-like perception since knowing this feature of emotions provides a resource for coping with negative emotions. This also enables RMPs to avoid acting on their negative emotions immediately. Canan gave the following example:

> *"I don't lose myself and shout anymore. First of all, to know that emotions are impermanent works for me very well. This is very important for me. I learned that through my meditation practice. I can be angry in the morning but by noon that can pass. I can choose not to act on something that is not permanent. Before starting regular meditation, I didn't have that kind of awareness. I thought that anger or fear is persistent. Or I might have thought that when someone says, 'I hate you' that will end the relationship. But that's not the case. Also during a 45-minute meditation, a couple of emotions come and go. Boredom passes away and then anxiety passes away. You don't react to them, so you get used to the transitory nature of emotions. I don't say, 'This is my emotion.' There is distance between me and my emotions."*

This also illustrates how meditation itself is a practice of enhanced emotion regulation by teaching us the nature of thoughts and emotions. Via the practice of sitting during meditation and observing emotions, practitioners seem to get used to the nature of their own thoughts and emotions. This then seems to become a capability for the RMP to use in everyday life for any emotional processes. Canan also mentioned disengagement from emotions when she underlined

the distance between herself and her emotions. This disengagement from thoughts and emotions was also mentioned by half of the RMPs.

Aysu also underlined the importance of knowing the transient nature of emotions:

"I am no longer afraid of drowning in my emotions because I think like this now: 'I may feel like I cannot cope with it at this moment but actually it will pass!' Emotions are like clouds. But before starting regular meditation practice, my thought pattern was like: 'I will be alone and I won't be able to cope.'"

She described the thought pattern that preventing her from staying with her emotions before starting meditation practice. Having practiced meditation she finds that she does not reappraise her fear of being alone and being unable to cope as ignorance or repression. Instead, she still observes these negative emotions without distortion. She can repeat to herself in that moment that it is not a permanent emotion. When someone is experiencing a strong emotional state, it is not easy to stay mindful. Thus, her example seems simple, yet may be very hard to do in a stressful moment.

4.4.2 Intrapersonal Level Theme 2: Shift in Emotion Regulation Strategies

All RMPs reported changes to their emotion regulation strategies and their relationship with their emotions. Most of them even used the word 'mood' or 'emotion regulation'. This theme thus captures the transformation of emotion regulation and coping strategies. For example, five RMPs indicated that they repressed their emotions before regular meditation practice using several adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, such as sleeping, distracting oneself, reappraisal of emotions, talking to friends, aggression, or drinking. Two stated that whereas they used to drink alcohol to soothe themselves, this habit vanished with regular meditation practice.

After starting regular meditation practice, all participants noted a transformation in their emotion regulation and coping strategies. Five reported generally calmer mood and

disidentification from thoughts and emotions during a stressful event. They described this as an automatic change. Selin, for example, talked about her mood changes throughout her life:

"I was very moody until college than I repressed it and I was very depressed till I got married. You wouldn't notice it form outside. I repressed the depressive state after getting married ... Repression of emotions was bad for me. After seven months, maybe one and a half years later after starting my meditation practice, an emotion regulation ability started. After my meditation practice, I used mindfulness in my life. Now, I experience my emotion as it is. Like I let them be. But for some time, I used mindfulness to gain more control ... In the past, I used mindfulness to repress my emotions. Now that changed; I live with mindfulness."

Meta-awareness and the transformation of emotion regulation strategies are intertwined. Selin's account reflects a very profound awareness of the repression of emotional states along with meta-mindfulness: how she used mindfulness to repress her emotions. She was the most advanced meditator (6 years of regular practice), which might explain her deeper awareness capacity. Moreover, she described an emotion regulation capacity that she developed after approximately one and a half years. This 'ability' of emotion regulation may be a cognitive process that actually changes the brain structure. This topic will be discussed in the next chapter.

When I asked Tanya about the main motivation for doing meditation, she said:

"I think I found the formula for regulating myself because that was something I didn't know before. They were mostly aggressive and materialistic methods. This is a very big benefit for me. Well, I didn't have any mood disorder but I had daily anxieties. Now, I don't feel this way. There can be some incident that can create anxiety in my life, but my general mood has changed automatically after meditation practice."

Talya mentions an automatic mood change due to meditation practice and a change in her emotion regulation strategies. She was thus motivated by this enhanced emotion regulation capacity.

Kerem described how regular meditation has made him more aware of his emotions with more capacity to stay with negative emotions:

> *"With regular meditation, I gained an insight that everything evokes an automatic reaction. I also discovered that some of my automatic reactions are not very useful; maybe even harmful. When an internal feeling came that can make me react, I stay with that emotion and watch it go away. After that, I can go back to the intellectual side of myself and choose to act in a better way. Meditation makes you gain these capabilities...For the emotions, there were many insights that I discovered. For example, when I am angry, I may be sad before that. I can stay with that primary sadness ... Now I choose to get sad and stay with sadness with my heart's content."*

Kerem explains here how he is aware of his automatic reactions and the consequences of acting on them. He further explains the process of enhanced emotion regulation capacity to open himself to the experience of the emotion without following the internal urges that come with that emotion. However, he also underlines that these capacities came with regular meditation practice. He also realizes that the emotions he feels may be secondary to another emotion. With his meta-awareness of the system, he can now detect both of these emotions and can choose to be sad. Not avoiding negative emotions, and experiencing them as much as he wants, is also an indication of enhanced capacity for emotional experience.

4.4.2.1 Subtheme 201: Decreased Intensity of Emotions

The subtheme 'decreased intensity of emotions' was mentioned by seven out of ten RMPs. It describes how the perceived intensity of emotions declines with regular meditation practice.

Gamze noted this change in experience when I asked her how she lived her emotions before her practice:

> *"I used to live my emotions very intensely. Very, very intense. Now it is much lighter. And if an emotion arises and I lose my awareness, I come under the influence of the emotion. But I can escape that influence much more quickly. Sometimes, it can resolve immediately ... I live my emotions less intensely. At least negative emotions last shorter and sometimes I can include this in my daily meditation practice. During meditation, I observe the emotion and what is going on in me, so I am not caught up with the emotion anymore.*"

Gamze describes how the perceived intensity her emotions has changed with the help of her meditation practice. She also 'uses' her practice to explore an emotion to better understand it. Six out of ten participants described similar methods, such as using meditation to explore and understand emotional states.

In response to the question, 'How did you experience your emotions prior to your meditation practice?' Ilkim replied:

> *"Intense, very intense. But I was living these feelings inside of me and hurting myself with my thoughts. I was always on the edge and with ruminative thoughts. I realized that I was hurting myself after my regular meditation practice. Now I live my emotions much less intensely. Of course, things happen to hurt or upset me. Now, I am aware of the cause behind it and I am aware of the impermanence. I am calmer, and I don't shut myself down; in fact, I share my emotions with others. Meditation practice opened my heart; I began to talk much, much more."*

Ilkim's meta-awareness made her realize that she was hurting herself with her own ruminative thoughts. She claims to be more open to herself and others after this realization.

The reduced intensity of her emotions may be due to regular meditation practice and meta-awareness of thought patterns, which is theorized as transforming the cognitive structure.

4.4.2.2 Subtheme 202: Increased Capability of Staying with Negative Emotions

Seven out of ten RMPs mentioned increased capabilities of staying with negative emotions. That is, on experiencing a strong emotion like sadness or fear, they are less likely to use strategies like distraction or repression; instead, they just simply stay with that emotion fully. This capacity came from their meditation practice. As Peri put it:

> *"I never repress my feelings, but I also not hold on to them. I can stay with these negative emotions. I don't sublimate them and I don't ignore them because then I feel under pressure. My emotions are real. They exist. I don't ignore them. When I notice them, first I try to differentiate if they are real or not because sometimes they are not real. I don't believe in every thought I have now. There is a distance between me and my thoughts."*

Selin, who was going through divorce at the time of the interview, was feeling down that day. She described her experience of her mood as follows:

> *"I don't cope with negative emotions. I stay with them. I feel very shit today**.** I feel shit. I walk in the street feeling shitty. I do stuff and feel shitty. I wanted to eat some chocolate and I ate it. I don't cope with negative emotions. I live it as it is – a shitty day."*

Selin's response was very confrontational for me because she was embracing her emotional states while I was asking how she was coping with them. When I asked about her coping strategies, she perceived this as 'doing something instead of just being with her emotions'. This was also an assumption I made while I prepared the interview questions. It seems that long-term meditators with enhanced emotion regulation capacities are less likely to search for coping strategies.

4.4.3 Intrapersonal Level Theme 3: Shift in the Relationship with Oneself

This theme represents the altered relationship the participants declared having with themselves after doing regular mindfulness meditation. Almost all RMPs claimed that they were more attuned with their own emotions and thoughts, and more aware of their expectations. This is also connected with cognitive awareness. Two RMPs mentioned an increase in self-esteem while three participants mentioned feeling empowered. This theme is best illustrated by Aysu's comment:

> *"The world seems to be very dry sometimes. Some external factors are not the way you want them to be. Life has its own struggles. People can challenge you. I was feeling alone in the past. I didn't have the capacity to be with myself. Meditation made me friends with myself. We get along much better right now… There are many stimulating events in the world. There is also that voice in my head. I do mindfulness meditation to differentiate from that state, and to gain contact with myself. I do meditation to see and know myself better."*

Mina also explained how she does meditation to be more like herself:

> *"Meditation makes me 'me'. There are like layers over me. Some roles that I perform during the day ... and also there are daily stresses. When I am more 'me', I can express my emotions so much more easily. When I am not 'me', I behave according the expectations of the others. My roles take charge and they manifest, not me."*

Mina describes a distinction between her own manifestation and her roles' manifestations. We all have different roles in society. Mina explains here how she is more connected with herself after her meditation practice, even in the different roles that she performs during her day. This deeper connection with herself seems to help her become more open to expressing her feelings.

4.4.3.1 Subtheme 301: Increase in Self-Compassion

The subtheme ‘increase in the self-compassion’ was mentioned by six of the ten RMPs. This subtheme covers the perceived increase in one’s capacity for self-compassion (and also for others). Participants reported a sincere curiosity in both their own suffering and that of others. For these RMPs, negative emotions weakened in their intensity whereas they seemed to experience positive emotions more intensely:

> *“Now meditation has transformed me. Wisdom. There are some new things happening in me. There is a sincere curiosity in me about the suffering of others. I am more curious when I am listening. The problems I experienced with Metin should have opened my heart. I am aware of a glimpse of compassion and what it means. It opens my heart. There is a big difference. Nothing is like in the past. Also about loving myself: when I saw myself in the mirror, I didn’t like my butt or some other parts of me. That has disappeared. There is love for myself growing inside me. That love is blooming.”*

Selin described above the love and compassion she has cultivated in herself and also for others via her meditation practice. Although she was going through a divorce at the time of the interview, she was able to notice her elevated capacity of love and compassion. Gamze made a similar comment when asked about her emotions and how she experiences them after her regular practice: *“There is an increase in my positive emotions. There is an increase in feelings like love and compassion for myself and for others.”*

4.5 Relationship Themes of Regular Meditation Practitioners

The thematic analysis revealed three themes and seven subthemes regarding romantic relationship experiences, which relate to the main research question of this study. Table 4.5 gives an overview of these themes and subthemes.

Table 4.5

Themes, Subthemes, and Reoccurrences from 10 regularly meditating partners

Themes	Sub Themes		Reoccurrences from 10 RMPs
4		Experiential shift in stressful situations	
	401	Less negative reactivity	9
	402	Experiencing fewer conflicts	6
5		Transformation of emotional bond	
	501	Self-disclosure of emotions	7
	502	Decrease in anxiety about the relationship	6
6		Transformation of the romantic relationship	
	601	Being present during sex	7
	602	Enhanced compassion for and acceptance of partner	6
	603	Re-defining the boundaries	6

4.5.1 Relationship Level Theme 4: Experiential Shift in Stressful Situations

All the couples described how practicing regular meditation had induced difference or new experiences in stressful situations. This experiential shift is closely related to the intrapersonal themes, especially enhanced emotion regulation strategies, because partners in a romantic relationship may struggle to regulate their overwhelming emotions during stressful incidents. Each couple seemed to have developed different methods to handle a stressful argument, such as staying together or giving pauses. Three RMPs even indicated that they found their conflicts progressive. Kerem, for example, claimed that he sees conflicts with his wife as ‘opportunities for working on myself’.

Three RMPs reported that blaming attitudes during a conflict had decreased for both parties while two RMPs claimed that they now give ‘feedbacks’ instead of blaming others. Three RMPs said that they can talk much more easily about their fights. The RMPs’ enhanced emotion regulation due to regular practice seems to reduce their stress levels, as Kerem said:

"My stress level has decreased a lot. When a stressful emotion arises in me, it can dissolve in seconds, so that there is nothing much that I contribute to a stressful situation. When my wife was stressed out in the past, she was projecting it on to me and I was interfering: 'You shouldn't think like this; you should do this, etc.' I was using immature strategies to get her out of that stress. Now, the difference is that her stress doesn't influence me a lot. Now those feelings are transformed into compassion or just noticing that my wife is under stress, and I now approach her with an open and supportive attitude. In the past, I would be stressed if she was stressed. Now, I think like how can I help her. Of course, stage by stage. First, I am not getting stressed a lot; then I can help the other under stress."

Kerem's experiential shift is dramatic because he described attuning to another person's emotions without the interference of his own. In a conflictual situation, where the stress is elevated quickly, to stay in this position of empathy and understanding seem to be very adaptive for their relationship, which is a shift his wife also acknowledged.

Mina had severe problems with serious fights with her partner Can early in her relationship, prior to starting meditation practice. Mina and Can both claimed that Mina's regular meditation practice had prolonged the relationship, and that they were able to build a more adaptive relationship with time. The way they acted in their conflicts had changed after her regular practice, Mina claimed. She described one strategy that they had developed during fights:

"We stop. Now we have learned that. We stop together. I sometimes meditate. I take a deep breath. For a while we stay together. I don't try to escape. We talk. If the negative situation continues, we stop again. We may solve it another day or maybe later that day. This way, we can solve them much more quickly."

Talya illustrated how she and her husband Ufuk had transformed their way of handling stressful incidents:

"When something challenging for both of us comes up, we can talk about this more calmly. Rarely, but we had some conflicts. Now, I try to talk from a non-blaming perspective and he is more understanding right now. There is a difference."

What is remarkable for both Talya and Mina is that this shift was also noticeable for their partners. Talya's husband Ufuk is perceived as more understanding while Mina and Can can talk together about their stressful events.

4.5.1.1 Subtheme 401: Less Negative Reactivity

Nine out of ten RMPs mentioned being less negatively reactive towards their partners or someone they are related to. They described this negative reactivity as an automatic response in a stressful situation, especially when angry or fearful. The participants claimed to have more control over this automatic behavior. This experiential shift seems closely related to meta-awareness and emotion regulation capacities on an intrapersonal level.

Sena described it as follows:

"With mindfulness meditation, I can respond without my urges interfering. For example, when someone's angry, not reacting automatically but talking more calmly or talking when I am calmer. It is the same with love and with happy emotions. They are also not so intense; instead, more grounded now. Of course, there are still times when I lose my temper but still I am abler to talk instead of react."

Peri talked about the very difficult phase of the affair in her current relationship and how she was able to negatively react less to a very overwhelming situation:

"I am glad that I meditated during this phase because it was not like a classic affair. The confession period took a long time, like five months. It was a very abrasive period. The

emotions were intense. I could have got caught up with these overwhelming feelings and I could have acted on them; maybe I could have even been violent. But I wasn't. I was able to stop myself. I am sure of this. Being able to stop is so important because those urges are very powerful; they can easily control you. But I didn't let them control me. Maybe, I was not one hundred percent successful, but most of the time I was able not to react according to my urges."

Although Peri and Sena seem to be describing different stress levels, the shift of not reacting negatively is clear. Although there are many emotions, especially when you are in a conflict, regular meditation practice seems to make it more possible for RMPs to stop and choose a wiser reaction.

4.5.1.2 Subtheme 402: Experiencing Fewer Conflicts

Six out of ten participants said that they experienced fewer conflicts in their relationship after starting meditation practice. While acknowledging that they and their partner still might not agree on some things, this experiential shift enabled them to avoid turning disagreements into stressful conflicts. The RMPs' enhanced ability to remain calm seems to be reflected in the relationship as experiencing less fighting. The subtheme of 'experiencing fewer conflicts' was also closely related to 'less negative reactivity' since being less reactive during a conflict makes it less likely for stress levels to rise. Thus, a reduction in conflictual situations is one benefit of the RMP becoming less reactive.

Mina described the stresses she had early in her relationship when she used to react negatively, even hurting her boyfriend emotionally, and how her meditation practice changed her behavior. Although she clearly describes the positive effects of meditation practice, it is important to note that she also received counseling during that period and practiced yoga, both of which may have helped her at some level:

"Before my meditation practice, I was drinking heavily and when I was drinking, I became very destructive. I drank till I got into a mood where I didn't know what I said. I used to say to him [her partner] many hurtful things. My sweetheart accepted it at that moment, but in the morning, he was heartbroken. And these feelings were piling up in him. That's why we broke up after nine months. I was able not to act like that with the positive effects of my meditation practice. We don't upset each other anymore. Very rarely. There are sometimes things that we don't agree on but now they don't turn into a fight. We both are more understanding with each other."

4.5.2 Relationship Level Theme 5: Transformation of the Emotional Bond

This theme was named 'transformation of the emotional bond' because all RMPs described a shift in their way of emotionally bonding or experiencing intimacy with their partners. This theme captures this transformation, in which RMPs described the change in their perceptions of their relationships after practicing meditation. They mentioned various experiences from the earlier period: nagging when something was not the way they wanted; constantly being jealous, experiencing strong anxieties about the course of the relationship, feeling threatened in the relationship, needing to control the partner, experiencing insecurity about the partner, and not being able to ask for support.

Regular meditation transformed the following areas in particular: asking easily for support, reducing relationship-related anxiety (jealousy, anxiety about breaking up, etc.), being able to express emotions more easily and openly. For four participants, this transformation of the emotional bond created greater intimacy in the relationship.

Kerem described how he learned to look deeper into his feelings and thoughts when he felt distress in the relationship, and how his expression of love towards his wife had been transformed through regular meditation practice:

"There are things that we cannot solve, or which makes us angry or distressed in a relationship. When this is the case, we should work on ourselves. In the past, I was trying to change her. For example, I didn't like some of her behavior. The benefit that regular meditation practice brought to me is that, instead of trying to change my wife, I am interested in my side, my feelings and perceptions … And my way of showing love to her was different before. It was pretentious. I was thinking like 'Now, I have to show some affection', and I acted on these opinions. Of course, my wife understood this, and she tested me if it was real or not. Right now, I show my love for her when I really feel it and in the way that I feel it.

Mina described how meditation improved the way she communicates her thoughts and emotions with her boyfriend, and how she was able to express her feelings about their earlier breakup more honestly:

"Most of the time, we repress our fear and stay silent because, when we say our fear out loud, we also face our fear. Repressing it is easier. That's why we should be more open and honest with our feelings. A few weeks before, I said to Can, "The day you broke up with me, I thought you would ask me to marry you. Just imagine the shock I went through!" I really felt that, in my meditation practice, how much more honest I am with my emotions. However, I was able to say these sentences after five years. I learned to regulate my emotions because I always thought that, when I show my emotions, others would think that I am weak. That is a schema that the culture or the family imposes on you. I was under that pressure. Now I am much, much more relaxed. It is not hard for me to say, 'I love you' anymore. Like it used to be."

Another important trajectory of this theme is 'to be able to ask for support'. Because this was mentioned by five RMPs, it was not qualified as a subtheme because of the majority cut off.

Five of the participants said that they were more able to ask for support from their partners while the other five reported no change and concluded that they had always been able to ask for support. Thus, the dynamics of the relationship play a distinctive role in this matter. Ilkim noted how it was easier for her to ask for help after starting meditation practice:

> *"I can easily tell if I need any support. I can tell. It can be physical support, like 'I am very tired, would you please vacuum the house?' Before regular meditation practice, I couldn't ask like this. I was thinking more like, 'If he is supporting me he is, if not then he is not.' Now I express them."*

Or, as Sena put it: *"He does what he can do. I can ask for his support. Maybe I can ask more easily now. I can talk about it."*

4.5.2.1 Subtheme 501: Self-Disclosure of Emotions

Seven RMPs stated that they can more easily and more clearly talk about their own emotional states to their partners after doing regular meditation. They described themselves as previously being either more emotionally inhibited or they unable to express them clearly or without anxiety. With this shift, these RMPs also indicated that they were more caring about their partners' feelings.

Gamze reported an enhanced capacity of self-disclosure of her emotions in her relationship and noted how she benefitted from this:

> *"I had big problems in that area. I couldn't talk about my feelings. They were growing in me, but I couldn't talk about them. I frowned or withdrew into myself, or I implied them instead of expressing them straight-forwardly. Now, I can talk about how I feel much more easily. This is a big benefit for me – and for him too, I guess. My unstated emotions where growing in me like a snowball. That energy was growing in me. I couldn't cope and withdrew even more."*

Sena explained how she expresses her emotions with a caring attitude:

> *"I can more easily talk about my emotions. I tell Ali that I want to talk about this and that. I don't keep this to myself. But sometimes I do when it is not the right time. I care for him more now. I tell myself, 'Now is not the right time to talk. I will talk later.' I also tell him that I want to talk about this later."*

Four of these seven participants reported how their partners' self-disclosure of their feelings had also shifted. They perceived that their partners had become more open to showing and talking about their feelings. Ilkim explains here how her husband's emotional expressions altered after she began regular meditation practice:

> *"In fact, Emre was more withdrawn in the past. I don't know how this happened; maybe he learned from me. Now, he is more open with his feelings. For example, in the past, he was never angry. In fact, he was getting angry, but he didn't show it. Now, when he is angry, he shows it – which is very nice, I think."*

4.5.2.2 Subtheme 502: Decreased Anxiety about the Relationship

Six out of ten RMPs indicated that regular meditation practice helped them to decrease or eliminate anxieties related to their relationship. These included being jealous of the partner, anxiety about an imagined break-up, anxiety about separating from the partner, anxiety about partner's opinions of them, anxiety about loneliness, and anxiety about getting into a conflict. This subtheme reflected how these anxieties were transformed or even eliminated. Some RMPs claimed that their awareness and observations of these anxieties and related emotions helped them to experience them less.

Here, Aysu describes how her anxieties about her relationship distorted her perceptions of her partner's behavior, and how she has avoided this with regular meditation practice:

"I was anxious before. Now, it is not like that. That is the most important reflection of my meditation practice to our relationship. I am abler to live through these anxieties; not controlling them. I can cope now. For example, because I was so anxious, I could never understand that he was not going anywhere and I was anxious that he would leave. He never left but I couldn't see that. However, I experienced two divorces. I was able to end the relationship with a very pathological man. There are so many things I did cope with. I couldn't see that in the beginning. With my meditation practice, I am able to see my own power. I am better with myself and I am less afraid of being alone because being alone is not that scary ... I think we are at the peak of our relationship. I don't think – I know. For me, although I feel these anxieties of losing him, they are much more regulated. He knows me better now; I know him better. I can wait for him, for his emotional processes. We have better communication right now."

Sena similarly explains here how she was able to see a dysfunctional pattern in her reactions to imagined threats (such as a breakup), and how she was able to transform this pattern:

"For example, I had a thought that a little conflict can be a threat to the future of the relationship or it will ruin this relationship and we will break up. That was actually a perception of threat. I was either fighting or fleeing. I was behaving like 'I will fight for this relationship of I will flee from my partner'. I withdrew from my partner and lived my resentment. Or I froze; not saying anything to my partner ... I was living like this. I realized this from the mindfulness meditations. Now, I don't see these little conflicts as threats. I find them progressive ... I can manage my anxieties more inside me and this way, it is not a burden for him. I think that makes it more of a healthy relationship."

4.5.3 Relationship Level Theme 6: Transformation of the Romantic Relationship

All participants described a transformation of their romantic relationship. Seven explained that they had become more compassionate and accepting towards their partners. However, this was not just a passive tolerance but more like the acceptance of the partner as who he or she really is. Three RMPs indicated that their relationship was more peaceful after regular practice while four felt that they both know their expectations and needs in the relationship better and five said that they were more self-regulated so that they no longer took personally every comment of their partners. They also claimed to be less resentful towards their partners. Three participants claimed to be less dependent because they feel more empowered in the relationship. In addition, they found that their anxieties about the relationship had lessened and become more easily regulated, although they had not entirely disappeared.

Before practicing meditation, three participants said that they had tolerated certain behaviors or situations in the relationship. However, meditation made them aware of this tolerance, so that they now challenged their partners by not tolerating that behavior or situation anymore. Selin, for example, who was about to get divorced, described this change as follows:

> *"I was letting my husband to oppress me for some benefits of course. I was saying to myself: 'We have a family. He provides for us. We live an upper-class life. Good income. We live well.' And I tricked myself that everything would be allright in the end. Yet, I shouldn't accept his mean and rough behaviors towards me. I realized that after a while from my regular meditation practice. I was not accepting at that moment when he was mean; also because my body was reacting. It gave me signals. I had been repressing these signals and my emotions. I was saying to myself, 'You should manage this. It is not easy to manage men.' I was trying to tolerate this. Now, I feel empowered in the relationship and I am also more aware of his hardship, his pain. I understand him much better now."*

It is also important to notice that four RMPs said that starting their regular practice might have been hard for their partners because of the perceptual and behavioral changes that the RMP went through. Talya, for example, described beginning meditation practice as 'going to not-so-great places' and mentioned how she struggled during this initial phase:

> *"In the beginning, I was thinking that I had a better relationship because I was doing what should be done without questioning. We should go there; O.K. we go there. With my meditation practice, I was more aware of my existential responsibility. This might have been challenging for my husband."*

Participants also described how they became abler to give space to their partners and how their partners were also more willing to give space to them, which they felt as a positive impact. For most RMPs, the relationship's dynamics and its personal and relational boundaries were altered and re-designed after they began regular practice, especially those who had been more distressed.

Regarding their sex life, besides being more present during sex, which appeared as a subtheme, four participants described that they are experienced more pleasure and harmony during sex. Three indicated that they were able to talk more easily to their partners about their needs, expectations, and the pleasures they experienced.

4.5.3.1 Subtheme 601: Being Present During Sex

The subtheme 'being present during sex' arose because seven RMPs indicated the benefits of being present during sex and how it improved the quality of their sex lives:

Talya described this shift as follows:

> *"I feel more mindful in our sexual relationship. When we are together, I feel more present and we express this to each other. I don't know if it was different for him too, but for me, I am more present."*

Mina, who described her previous sexual relationship as ‘poor’ because she wanted to have sex all the time without even asking herself if she wanted it or not. She believed that to be able to hold a man in her arms, they should have a very active sexual relationship. This perception and their sex life was transformed after she started regular meditation:

“I get much more pleasure than before and also there is harmony now. Being present. Meditation keeps me in the present. It is the priceless feature of meditation for me.”

Canan also explained how her sex life changed and how meditation affected this:

“To focus on the moment is what makes any action beautiful. Like eating or sex. In the past, during sex, it was for me like, ‘What is new? Surprise me!’ But now, to get aligned with your body and emotions in the present moment and to have sex like that changes the whole sexual action. Having sex without thinking about before or after makes the experience so different. I think meditation plays a big role in this.”

4.5.3.2 Subtheme 602: Improved Compassion for and Acceptance of Partner

Six partners described how they were more compassionate and understanding towards their partners after regular meditation practice. They defined this as being able to be more considerate about their partners’ suffering or other emotions such as fear or anger. These RMPs indicated that they now understood their partner’s situations and their challenging emotions better and were able to prioritize their partners’ best interests much more in such situations.

Peri, for example, described how she is much more considerate about her partner’s emotional states and how her perspective about her girlfriend has changed with meditation practice:

“With regular meditation practice, a lot of compassion towards my partner was evoked in me. I am much more understanding towards her. My ability for empathy has improved. I don’t look at my lover just as my lover; I am more aware now that she is a human being

with many different emotions, and that she can be hurt by others. I am more considerate about not hurting her."

Kerem described how his enhanced emotion regulation capacity for getting out of stressful situations has transformed him in their relationship, and how this has helped him to be more understanding towards his partner:

"With my meditation practice, a 'capacity of letting go' has been developed in me. Thus, when something happens between us, I can let it go more easily, so I can get out of that stressful state easier, which made me much more understanding towards my wife."

4.5.3.3 Subtheme 603: Re-Defining the Boundaries

Six RMPs indicated that they were now more mindful about their boundaries and the partner's in the relationship, and how they were able to adjust the relationship dynamics since starting regular meditation practice. They described this as being individually more aware of their needs and expectations while also becoming better at giving enough space for their partners. These adjustments made their relationships more peaceful and flexible. Aysu, for example, described how her relationship had been transformed after she relaxed, stopped pursuing her partner Baran, and learned to differentiate herself from him:

"I am more relaxed now. I leave him alone if he needs it because, when there is a distressing situation, all he does is to shut down or leave the place. But now, there is an easier solution. If I feel very bad after a fight, I go and hug him and then leave him alone and he does what he wants to do. There is a big space for both of us now, when I don't pursue and corner him … I learned to differentiate myself from him. When I am able to do that, there is a lot of space for him in the relationship."

Talya described how her own awareness of her expectations and needs changed her behavior towards her husband, and how this shift altered their relationship:

"Before my meditation practice, I was doing some stuff like rituals, going to the mother-in laws, etc. because it needs to be done. Now, I can say clearly no to the things that I don't want to do. In the past, I was doing these things for the sake of my husband. Now, if I don't want to do it, I don't – and I don't want my husband to be in the same position either. Our relationship is much more flexible now. Our relationship supports us as two separate individuals."

4.6 Theme of the Non-Regularly Meditating Partner

The partners of the RMPs are called non-regularly meditating partners (NMPs) because some had no experience while a few had some experience but did not practice regularly. They were asked four questions about if and how meditation practice affected their partners, themselves, and their relationship. The interviews were short and designed as partner checking of the RMP to see if the intrapersonal or interpersonal changes they reported were also noticeable by the NMP.

One theme and two subthemes emerged from the data. All participants said meditation practice had positive effect on their partner, themselves, or both while nine noticed direct or indirect positive effects on their relationship.

Table 4.6

Theme, Subthemes, and Reoccurrence from 10 non-regularly meditating partners

Theme	Sub Themes		Reoccurrence from 10 NMPs
7		General positive effects of meditation practice	
	701	Observation of partner's peaceful mood	8
	702	Observation of less reactivity in the meditating partner	7

4.6.1 General Positive Effects of Meditation Practice

This theme covers all the positive effects on the RMP and the relationship mentioned by NMPs. All participants reported some positive effects of their partner's regular meditation practice on themselves. NMPs observed that the RMP was calmer, more grounded, and peaceful. Three NMPs found their partners to be more compassionate and loving while four said that their partners showed more positive regard in stressful situations and better coping abilities. Three NMPs said that their partners were less angry and less rushed in their actions. Two believed that their partners had become more able to understand incidents clearly after regular practice, and were more cooperative and less stubborn. Seven found these behavioral changes positive. NMPs particularly noticed behavioral changes in their RMP when they experienced conflicts.

Iclal illustrated the general effects of her husband Kerem's regular meditation practice:

"He is aware of the notion that 'what is going on in his life is about him'. Of course, there are external factors, but he is aware that he is a part of these external factors and he acts responsibly. He is more aware, more present, and more empowered. That makes him a more loving, compassionate, and caring person."

Regarding the general positive effects on the relationship, seven NMPs agreed that the individual benefits also helped their relationship. Eight NMPs found the RMP to be less reactive in stressful situations, which became a subtheme. They implied that their relationship had become more peaceful and less problematic, with better resolution of stressful events in the relationship. Four NMPs said that they argue less now while one NMP suggested that their relationship would have ended before if their partner had not begun meditation practice.

Nihal described the effect of her partner's regular meditation practice on their relationship as follows:

"I feel more relaxed now; I can communicate with her more easily, and I feel like I am understood. There is harmony between us. We have fun together."

Four NMPs indicated that their partner's meditation practice made themselves calmer while three felt they had become more open towards their partner and able to ask for support more easily. Four NMPs said that meditation had also attracted their attention although the other four indicated no interest. Nevertheless, all believed that meditation was beneficial for the meditator.

Ali described how he supports his partner's meditation practice:

"I am not a meditator. I don't find it strange to do meditation. I support my girlfriend even though I don't do it. I want her to do more meditation and yoga. I support her in the best way I can."

4.6.1.1 Subtheme 701: Observation of Partner's Peaceful Mood

This subtheme, which was mentioned by seven NMPs, reflects observations that the RMP had become more peaceful, serene, centered, and in control. This perception concerns the general well-being of the NMP's partner. Can, for example, described this as follows:

"*I saw only positive effects of her meditation practice. I think she is more grounded about daily stressors. Less angry. We live in Istanbul. There are many stressors like traffic, or even a conversation with another person can make you angry. I think she is much less angry; much, much less. She is much calmer. She can see a situation more clearly."*

Baran gave an example how meditation practice had helped his partner Aysu:

"For example, I am going to Göcek for fishing with three of my friends. Normally, this could be a problem for us. She would start asking me, 'Why are you going' or 'What do you know about fishing' etc. Before starting meditation, she was more anxious. Not just about me. Generally, this anxiety was affecting her badly. I think she is calmer now. Meditation has this kind of effect on her."

Can and Baran illustrate two kinds of anxiety here. The one Can describes more concerns the regulation of daily anxieties whereas Baran describes anxiety related with the emotional bond. Both NMPs, however, find that their partner has become calmer.

Regarding the effects on the relationship, Akin described the effects of his partner's meditation practice:

"I think Gamze has psychological well-being and a calm mood now. She has a more positive attitude and she is more understanding. There is a change that happened in her… Because she sees things more clearly, we don't have ridiculous arguments. Parallel to this, our relationship is more peaceful with fewer problems. The tension has dropped nearly to zero."

4.6.1.2 Subtheme 702: Observation of Less Reactivity in the Meditating Partner

Eight NMPs reported less reactivity in their partner's behaviors in stressful situations. They described this shift as 'more appropriate of mature reactions', 'being less caught up with negative emotions', 'not giving instant negative reactions', or 'being more grounded and in control in a stressful situation.' They noted that this change affected both their own romantic relationship and other relationships. As Can put it:

"Mina is calmer and sees things more clearly. She can handle a conflict or a stressful event much better after starting meditation. She is much calmer in the arguments. She is much less reactive, but in a good way. Not as becoming silent when someone else yells at you. That's not what I meant. She can stay in a negative situation, without herself being negatively reactive."

Metin observed similar benefits of meditation on his partner Selin:

"I think meditation has very positive effects on her. I don't know if it affected the relationship. In my opinion, because she can observe her own emotions, she is more in

control of her emotional reactions. She can control her reactions, or she can be aware of her reactions later. There are fewer stressful events in our relationship now."

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This qualitative analysis has explored the experiences of regular mindfulness meditation practitioners in a romantic relationship, their emotion regulation capacities, and their emotional bond with their partners. It has also investigated the experience of their partners, who are either meditation naïve or non-regular meditators regarding their current romantic relationship.

The main research questions guiding the study were: "What is the experience of being in a romantic relationship for the regular meditation practitioner and his or her non-regularly-meditating partner?" Related sub-questions were: a) Are there any effects of doing regular meditation on the practitioners' emotional, cognitive, and sexual processes; and, if so, what are the reflections of these effects on their romantic relationship, regarding the emotional bond of their adult attachment system in the romantic relationship? b) How do the emotion regulation strategies of the regular meditation practitioner reflect on his or her romantic relationship? c) What are the observations of the non-regularly-meditating partner regarding any positive or negative effects of their partner's regular meditation practice?

Ten regular meditation practitioners and their partners in an ongoing relationship were interviewed separately using a semi-structured interview method. The interview questions were guided by attachment theory as the framework of this study, to explore the hypothesized intrapersonal and interpersonal changes after on partner started regular meditation practice. The transcribed data was subjected to a thematic analysis, which yielded seven themes and 13 subthemes on three levels: (a) intrapersonal, (b) relationship, and (c) theme and subthemes of the non-regularly meditating partners.

This chapter discusses the results to comprehensively address the research questions given above by examining the seven themes and 13 subthemes for the meanings described by the

participants. These themes and subthemes will then be linked with the literature to identify common and contradicting points with previous research findings. Next, it will identify the connections between the findings of this study and attachment theory and its emotion regulatory function. Because the main research question of this study concerns the RMPs' relationship experiences, this chapter will explore how intrapersonal themes are reflected in relationship themes. My aim in this section is to reveal both new and existing theoretical trajectories between the intrapersonal effects of mindfulness meditation and adult secure attachment as a functional relationship framework.

5.1 Theme 1: Meta-Awareness of Emotional Experiences

The first theme, 'meta-awareness of one's emotional experiences', refers to being aware of the working system of the mind, and being able to observe the influence of cognitive and emotional processes on general affect. This theme does not just concern awareness of thoughts and emotions but also involves not identifying oneself with these thoughts and emotions. The 'observing witness' position that some participants described reflects how this phenomenon involves observing and gaining insight about the lived experience of one's thoughts and emotions.

The word mindfulness is translated as awareness and attention from the Pali language (Germer, 2005) while *vipassana* is translated as insight in English. Awareness and insight are the foundations that mindfulness is built on. This theme covers both phenomena while being transformed into meta-awareness: 'awareness of being aware'. Metacognitive awareness is a feature of cognition whereby one can see one's thoughts and emotions as transient rather than a part of the self or images of reality. It is also closely related to meta-cognitive insight, which is defined as "the way mental phenomena are experienced as they arise" (Teasdale et al., 2002).

Farb, Anderson, Irving, and Segal (2014) theorized that mindfulness practices foster an exclusive way of emotion regulation. Within this, meta-awareness makes a unique contribution of raising awareness of the emotion regulation strategies and the ruminative nature of the mind while fostering a shift within the self.

Karremans, Schellekens, and Kappen (2017) offered a theory-driven model to explain why and how mindfulness affects romantic relationships. Their model has four steps, initiated by awareness and observation of otherwise hidden thoughts and emotions. This intrapersonal feature, which seems to be cultivated through meditation practice, is also associated with the relationship level in terms of awareness of one's automatic behavior towards the partner. This was also one of the main findings of this study, as will be discussed later.

My findings are also in line with Pruitt and McCollum's (2010) qualitative study, which is most similar to this study. The first trait they found was 'awareness', which they defined as being aware of one's thoughts and emotions in the present moment. As a consequence of this awareness the participants in that study reported a new way of relating with their emotions and thoughts, which emerged as disidentification from thoughts and emotions, and being curious about their own states. Similarly, five RMPs in this study described their disidentification from thoughts and emotions, although this did not become a subtheme.

Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) defined deactivation or hyperactivation strategies as 'choices' because they stressed that this 'choice' might be either an automatic reaction or a cognitive process. The link between awareness and the attachment system might be that the cultivation of meta-awareness through mindfulness practice may result in being aware of these otherwise implicit dynamics of the attachment system. This could enable partners to develop a more profound understanding of their attachment-related emotion regulation strategies.

Ryan et al. (2007) attempted to link attachment theory and mindfulness theoretically. They argue that non-judgmental awareness of oneself and the other can help partners in relationships to distort reality less, thereby reducing their use of deactivation or hyperactivation strategies. The RMPs in my study made similar connections in their descriptions.

This theme is particularly important because developing meta-awareness of one's thoughts and emotions is the primary goal of many psychotherapy modalities (Rice & Greenberg, 1984). Mindfulness meditation can thus complement and support any psychotherapy modality through this unique contribution.

5.1.1 Subtheme 101: Impermanence of Emotions

The subtheme that emerged from the first theme was 'impermanence of emotions'. Participants described it as 'knowing the transient nature of thoughts and emotions especially when there is a negative emotion like fear, anger, or sadness'. They defined this insight as important and helpful for them because it made it easier for them to stay with negative emotions.

Safran and Segal (1990) describe this phenomenon as 'decentering': the capacity to perceive one's own thoughts and emotions as impermanent and as intentions of the mind, but not as a feature or part of the self, or not necessarily part of the reality. They stress that it is a potential mechanism for change in psychotherapy, especially for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, whereas inability to decenter makes people vulnerable to psychological and social maladaptation. Fresco et al. (2007) emphasized how decentering is related with meta-cognitive awareness in their study measuring decentering capacities. Regarding the prevention of depression, they found that 'Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy' is an effective method to teach individuals to observe their own thoughts and emotions, and relate with them from a decentered perspective. Similarly, Teasdale et al. (2002) assigned 100 patients recovering from depression to MBCT or

the usual treatment. MBCT group participants decentered far more, and had lower relapse rates than the control group.

5.2 Theme 2: Shift in Emotion Regulation Strategies

This theme described how participants experienced a transformation in their relationship due to changes in their emotions and emotion regulation strategies after starting regular meditation practice. They also mentioned many coping strategies prior their practice. They reported generally calmer mood and disidentification from thoughts and emotions, which had provided great benefits.

Farb, Anderson, Irving and Segal (2014) define mindfulness as a regulatory strategy, functioning mainly on attention deployment alongside strategies exclusive to mindfulness training. They underline that mindfulness training or meditation differs from other goal-oriented regulatory strategies. For example 'being happy or content or experiencing less of the negative emotions' is a common goal for emotion regulation strategies because all creatures tend to pursue pleasure and avoid pain (Mauss & Tamir, 2014). The focus on mindful emotion regulation is not on diverting attention but promoting exploration of introspective states without considering whether they are perceived as negative or positive. Similarly, regular meditation practitioners describe their emotion regulation strategies not as diverting themselves from negative thoughts and emotions but simply staying with them.

Mindful emotion regulation and the regulatory strategies of the attachment system differ extensively. For example, avoidant attachment strategies include hindering or inhibiting emotions in accordance with the main aim of deactivating attachment-related needs, primarily to avoid vulnerable feelings like anxiety, anger, sadness, shame, and guilt. Anxiously attached individuals tend to exaggerate threats, and their own vulnerability and helplessness. They also tend to recall threat-related memories or ruminate on real or hypothetical threats (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019).

Mindfulness encourages superior regulatory outcomes than expressive suppression, rumination, or distraction (Farb, Anderson, Irving, & Segal, 2014)..

5.2.1 Subtheme 201: Reduced Intensity of Emotions; Subtheme 202: Increased Capability of Staying with Negative Emotions

'Staying with negative emotions' describes non-judgmental exploration of emotional states and is a unique feature of mindful emotion regulation. Some participants claimed that they no longer 'cope' with their difficult emotional states anymore; rather, they just experience them without the need for distortion or avoidance.

Compared with attachment-related regulatory functions like deactivation or hyperactivation, individuals use both regulatory strategies either automatically or deliberately to avoid intense emotions or heighten ruminative strategies to get the attention, protection and support that they perceive they need. The goal-oriented regulatory strategy of the attachment system differs drastically from mindful emotion regulation strategies.

These subthemes are links to understand this transformation of emotion regulation in greater depth. The RMPs in this study found that being able to stay with their negative emotions was a distinctive internal shift. They felt that this ability, which they applied in their daily life, had been enhanced by their regular meditation practice. It had not been an effortful change that was learned.

Brefczynski-Lewis, Lutz, Schaefer, Levinson, & Davidson (2007) conducted an important neuroimaging study of novice and long-term meditators. In novice meditators there was a general cortical and limbic activation during meditation, which is associated with effortful cognitive processes. In contrast, experienced meditators displayed very little neural activation in these areas, which was interpreted as reflecting a structural change in their neural circuitry in that a mindful state can be achieved without cognitive effort after long-term practice. The participants

in my study also noted a ‘decrease in the intensity of the emotions’ compared to before they started their regular practice.

5.3 Theme 3: Shift in Relationship with Oneself

This theme focuses on the alteration in the participants’ relationship with themselves after regular meditation practice, such as better self-attunement, empowerment, self-trust, and a better, deeper connection with themselves. The subtheme was increased self-compassion, defined as a perceived increase in compassion for themselves and for others.

This theme can be associated with enhanced self-attunement, as Siegel (2007) described it. He highlights how important it is to attune to ourselves in order to attune to others. He claims that, to be in a mindful state, the brain uses the same resonance circuitry used to empathize and attune with others. He even described this self-attunement from mindfulness practice ‘as being friends with one self’. The participants of this study similarly noticed a deeper, better, richer relationship with themselves, and viewed mindfulness practice as a way of connecting with that ‘friend’.

5.3.1 Subtheme 301: Increased Self-Compassion

Neff (2009) notes the differences between Western and Buddhist understandings of compassion. From a Western perspective, compassion involves understanding and acceptance of others’ suffering whereas, in Buddhism, compassion for the self is as important as compassion for others. The participants in this study also mentioned compassion for others in relation to enhanced self-compassion following regular meditation practice. Neff (2009) describes the three modules of self-compassion: “self-kindness versus self-judgment, a sense of common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification”. He suggests a ‘compassion circle’, which can manifest itself for the self or others as an ‘interdependent set of motives’ for caring for the well-being of others, sympathy, empathy, tolerance of distress, and non-judgment.

Stevenson, Emerson, and Millings (2017) hypothesize that secure attachment may foster the capacity for compassion regarding human suffering. They argue that compassion is also an outcome of mindfulness. Shaver, Mikulincer, Sahdra, and Gross (2017) describe attachment security as the basis for kindness to both the self and others. They associate the attachment security that comes from both having a supportive and responsive family of origin and adaptive romantic relationships with the cultivation of a positive framework towards the self and others. They also emphasize that anxious and avoidant attachment styles hinder self-acceptance and self-approval capacities while obstructing kindness to others. Neff and Beretvas (2013) studied self-compassion and attachment security in both partners in romantic relationships. They found that higher self-compassion was significantly related to both relationship satisfaction and attachment security, suggesting a possible bi-directionality between attachment security and self-compassion. Neff (2009) argues that compassion should not be confused with compassionate love towards others because the two concepts are only weakly associated (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005).

The two subthemes of increased self-compassion and enhanced compassion for the partner were closely related in this study, and both mentioned by the majority of participants. In line with previous research findings described above, Selin's comments confirm the need to distinguish between compassion and compassionate love. As an RMP, Selin portrayed both enhanced compassion towards herself and her husband. However, she did not define this as an enhancement in their compassionate love since she had decided to divorce her partner having started regular meditation practice.

Pruitt and McCollum (2010) also found close connections regarding the subthemes of increased self-compassion and enhanced compassion for the partner. They defined their qualitative findings as 'compassion and loving kindness for self and the others', which

participants described as a growth of love for others and compassion for all the suffering of human kind. This is very similar to the descriptions of the participants of my study.

5.4 Theme 4: Experiential Shift in Stressful Situations

All of the couples described some kind of an experiential shift in stressful situations in their relationships following regular meditation practice. The majority mentioned 'less negative reactivity' during arguments or 'experiencing fewer conflicts' than before they started meditation. These comments were represented by two subthemes.

Once one partner had started regular meditation, most couples reported using new strategies during arguments, such as stopping whenever there were increased negative emotions, not blaming their partner, or giving feedback to each other. They were also able to talk about stressful events more calmly. They found that their stress levels decreased with regular practice, which was reflected in the relationship as fewer conflicts. Most participants claimed that they could now respond to their partners in stressful situations without being reactive while they benefitted from this new trait especially during crises to prevent their distress escalating.

5.4.1 Subtheme 401: Less Negative Reactivity; Subtheme 402: Experiencing Fewer Conflicts

Siegel (2007) describes the effect of mindfulness training in reducing negative reactivity as the 'disengagement of the automatically coupled pathways of the mind (energy and information flow)' and freeing from the enslavements of the prior learning through the enhancement of the self-observation skill". MRI studies of long-term meditators and MBSR graduates show that meditation practice has helped them to become less negatively reactive to triggering stimuli (Cahn & Polich, 2009; Goldin & Gross, 2010). This change is associated with reduced amygdala activity and increased activity of the attention-related frontal circuitry.

This description by Siegel (2007) relates to meta-cognitive awareness and mindful emotion

regulation capacities, which were also intrapersonal themes in this study. He further explains that mindfulness training not only concerns awareness of stimuli here and now, but also involves 'executive and metacognitive prefrontal functions'.

The 'less negative reactivity' subtheme of this study is also correlated with Pruitt and McCollum's (2010) finding of 'less reactivity'. Their participants also represented this theme as not reacting automatically according their emotions during stressful situations.

Karremans, Schellekens and Kappen (2017) associate the process of 'prorelationship motivation and behavior' with being aware of otherwise automatic responses, which in turn encourages better executive control. Although it is an important benefit of mindfulness, they underlined that it is not the only factor in transforming romantic relationships. Similarly, in this study, the regular meditation practice of one partner and resulting decrease in automatic reactivity did not directly transform the romantic relationship. Nevertheless, all NMPs acknowledged this shift in their partners and the positive effects of this trait.

Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, and Rogge (2007) used a discussion task to assess the relationship between trait mindfulness and self-reported romantic relationship satisfaction and distress. The more mindful participants were less anxious and angry, and had better communication skills, which is similar to the present subtheme of 'experiencing fewer conflicts.'

Wachs and Cordova (2007) reported similar findings to this theme. Their quantitative findings showed the regulation of anger expression fully mediates the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and marital quality. This demonstrates that reducing reactive expression in stressful situations is an important determiner of the quality of the relationship.

Negative reactivity is also associated with attachment security. From their quantitative study of college students, Wei, Vogel, Ku, and Zakalik (2005) found that attachment anxiety and avoidance strategies are associated with negative mood and relational problems, such as negative reactivity or emotional cut-off. Negative reactivity mediated the association between attachment anxiety and relationship problems but not that between attachment avoidance and relationship problems. This is thus an important finding for understanding the link between the subtheme of 'less negative reactivity' and the attachment security system.

5.5 Theme 5: Transformation of the Emotional Bond

This theme describes with the change in the emotional bond that RMPs experienced with their NMPs. Participants were asked about the possible effects of their regular meditation practice, their coping strategies for relational stress, their support-seeking behavior, and their emotional communication with their partner. RMPs indicated that they can more easily ask for support from their partner and more easily self-disclose. They are also less anxious about relational stresses and more intimate with their partners. Two subthemes were identified from the comments of the majority of participants: self-disclosure of emotions with their partners and decreased relationship-related anxiety.

5.5.1 Subtheme 501: Self-Disclosure of Emotions with Partners; Subtheme 502: Decreased Anxiety About the Relationship

These two subthemes represent the main dynamic behind the transformation in the partners' emotional bond. They are closely related to the attachment system and its avoidant and anxious attachment regulation strategies.

According to Hazar and Shaver (1987), the regulatory strategies of avoidant adults are associated more with fear of intimacy, ambivalent emotions, and jealousy. In contrast, the

regulatory strategies of anxious or ambivalent adults were obsession about the relationship, a strong need for reciprocation and closeness, ambivalent emotions, and extreme sexual attraction and jealousy. The two subthemes identified in this study explain the changes that RMP reported in their regulatory strategies following regular meditation practice.

Being able to share emotions more easily may be linked to less use of avoidant attachment strategies because an avoidantly-attached adult tends to suppress thoughts and emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). This can be associated with emotional withdrawal, which four RMPs mentioned experiencing prior to their meditation practice. Anxiously-attached adults tend to seek proximity with their partners because of their anxieties about the availability of their partners. Parallel to this, the subtheme can also be linked with down regulation of de-activation strategies by the more anxiously-attached participants. Thus, these strategies can be understood as a continuum with anxious and avoidant poles (Bartholomew, 1990) in that the two subthemes indicate that regular meditation made these RMPs more securely attached.

Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) propose an adult attachment model with three components that define these regulatory strategies as mostly automatic because of the working models that operate automatically. This feature of the attachment system also relates to the subtheme of less negative reactivity in stressful situations. That is, RMPs were able to choose their reactions instead of acting automatically from their learned experiences with their childhood attachment figures.

If the attachment system is accepted as an emotion regulation device, then the two intrapersonal themes in this study (shift in the emotion regulation strategies and transformed relationship with the self) may help RMPs. That is, they can access and use their own emotion

regulation strategies more while relying less on attachment-related hyperactivation and deactivation strategies. In addition, the descriptions of securely-attached adults in the literature review are reflected in comments by the participants of this study. These include making fewer catastrophic inferences about relationship stressors, having greater self-trust, being better able to cope with relationship stress, and being more open with their own emotions.

Wachs and Cordova (2007) measured the effect of identification and communication of emotions, empathy, and anger reactivity on marital quality and mindfulness. High levels of dispositional mindfulness were associated with high levels of identification and communication of emotions. These results are also in line with the subtheme 'self-disclosure of the emotions'. Similarly, Pruitt and McCollum (2010) revealed a theme of intimacy, which is also parallel to my subtheme because they described intimacy as being more open towards the partner and allowing more emotional freedom for both parties.

In this study, half of the RMPs said they could seek support from their partners more easily after starting regular meditation practice. Support-seeking behavior is an important part of the attachment system to develop trust and a secure relationship in adult romantic relationships (Collins & Feeney, 2000). Florian, Mikulincer and Bucholtz (1995) measured the relationship between perceived availability of emotional and instrumental support and attachment styles in 150 undergraduate students. They found that the more attached participants perceived their attachment figures as more available for emotional and instrumental support than less securely attached individuals.

Enhanced support seeking and giving behavior between partners can also help create a more secure bond. This theme is important for understanding how regular meditation practice

encourages a secure bond between partners in the present study.

5.6 Theme 6: Transformation of Romantic Relationship

This theme represents the transformation in the romantic relationship following one partner's regular meditation practice. According to the participants, their relationship became more peaceful while they were more compassionate and accepting towards their partner in the relationship. Regular meditation also made them more aware of their needs and expectations from the relationship and less resentful of their partner. They explained that these changes indirectly helped to transform their relationship.

5.6.1 Subtheme 601: Being Present During Sex; Subtheme 602: Improved Compassion and Acceptance of the Partner; Subtheme 603: Re-defining the Boundaries

The participants described being present during sex as being more aware of the bodily sensations of themselves and their partner in the present moment. They associated this with a more harmonious sex life.

Khaddouma, Gordon, and Bolden (2014), reviewed in the literature chapter, reported that sexual satisfaction fully mediates the associations between the two facets of mindfulness, observing and non-judging of inner experience.

Mindfulness has been used to treat sexual dysfunctions recently (Stephenson, 2016), although the underlying mechanism behind its effect is still being explored. The comments of the participants in this study also indicated that awareness and the attention deployment of mindfulness meditation may help them to be sexually present, which is associated with improved sex life. However, this subtheme should not be translated simply as a better sex life as this was not reported by the participants. Indeed, there are many aspects of sexual satisfaction that the

participants did not associate with their regular meditation practice.

A majority of RMPs also made comments related to the second subtheme of ‘improved compassion towards and acceptance of the partner’. They portrayed this shift as being more compassionate and understanding while also being able to prioritize their partner’s emotional needs when. Increased self-compassion, as an individual level subtheme, was closely linked to this relational subtheme.

Shaver (2007) made the first link between attachment theory and self-compassion as internalizing both sides of the attachment relationship as caring for and loving oneself while caring for and loving the other. Research shows that the attachment and caregiving systems are interdependent. That is, more secure attachment increases the individual’s compassionate caregiving capacity (Gillath, Shaver, & Mikulincer, 2005). Similarly, Stevens, Emerson, and Millings (2017) suggest that attachment security may promote compassion towards human suffering while compassion is also regarded as an outcome of mindfulness.

This subtheme ‘improved compassion and understanding’ tallies with Pruitt and McCollum’s (2010) theme of ‘compassion and loving kindness’. They defined compassion similarly as a bridge between being kind towards oneself and others.

This subtheme is important because compassion is an important topic in Buddhist philosophy. As the core of Buddhism, mindfulness acts like a framework for meditation practitioners; it provides an outlook for themselves and others, which has a crucial impact on meditators. All participants in this study had been readers, students, and practitioners of mindfulness for many years. However, it is also important to acknowledge here that the Buddhist philosophy of compassion entails being compassionate for all human suffering, which makes the

perspective much broader than what is discussed in this study.

The subtheme ‘re-defining the boundaries’ was reflected in RMPs’ comments differentiating themselves from their partner while also respecting their own boundaries. They described this as a new way of relating with each other. They reported being less tolerant of certain circumstances than before, prior to starting meditation practice, and acknowledged that this shift may have been initially challenging for their partners.

This subtheme can be also linked with Bowen’s (1978) concept of ‘differentiation of the self’, defined as “a developmental process in which individuals are able to establish boundaries in intimate relationships that help them to balance their separateness and connectedness by maintaining an autonomous self, while remaining connected to a relationship system” (Timm & Keiley, 2011, p. 207). This concept is not as frequently researched as adult attachment and relationship satisfaction. However, there is some evidence that greater differentiation of the self is associated with higher marital satisfaction and lower marital stress (Timm & Keiley, 2011).

Theoretically, both constructs are centered on emotion regulation capacities. Hainlen, Jankowski, Paine, and Sandage (2015) associated higher attachment anxiety and increased attachment avoidance with decreased differentiation of the self. Khaddouma, Gordon, and Bolden (2015) studied the relationship between trait mindfulness, differentiation of self, and relationship satisfaction in dating partners. They showed that differentiation of the self mediated the association between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. They concluded that “the mindful attunement to one’s partner may promote greater relationship satisfaction by fostering the ability to maintain a clearly defined sense of self even in the wake of stressful situations and the ability

to successfully navigate relational demands without becoming overwhelmed by or overly fused with one's partner".

This subtheme is also in line with Pruitt and McCollum's (2010) theme of 'intimacy and independence'. They defined it similarly as a new way of relating, whereby each partner felt more open and intimate towards the other partner while also feeling independent so that they do not feel the constant need for another.

RMPs mentioned several difficulties for their partner, especially initially, when the meditating partner became more aware of the dynamics of their relationship and started to challenge them. This is an important aspect of meditation: that one becomes more aware of the dysfunctional aspects of the self or a relationship. Couples may then need to overcome these issues together.

5.7 Theme 7: General Positive Effects of Regular Meditation Practice, Observations of NMPs

All the NMPs noticed the positive effects of their partner's practice on their partner and/or on themselves. Most also noticed a positive effect on their romantic relationship. Their partner's mood was more positive with less use of reactive behaviors during stressful situations. They described their RMP as more emotionally balanced, compassionate, and caring while their romantic relationship had become more harmonious and less tense. They also felt better understood by their partner following regular meditation practice. Some NMPs even reported feeling calmer themselves while being able to ask more easily for emotional or instrumental support, and more open with their partner.

5.7.1 Subtheme 701: Observation of the Partner's Peaceful Mood; Subtheme 702: Observation of Less Negative Reactivity

The two subthemes that surfaced from the data were 'observation of the partner's peaceful mood and 'observation of less negative reactivity'. Given the structure of this study, these themes

should be considered as partner checking for agreement regarding the lived (RMP) and observed (NMP) behavioral shifts. These NMP themes are therefore connected to the intrapersonal and relationship themes from the RMP interviews.

The first subtheme reflects each NMP's perspective on the subtheme 'shift in the emotion regulation strategies', which was reported by all RMPs. Enhanced emotion regulation, which RMPs described as an ability achieved following regular meditation practice, was observed by NMPs as a calm and emotionally balanced mood. Regularly meditating partners similarly described a calmer mood in themselves beyond many other aspects of enhanced emotion regulation capacity. NMPs also seemed to benefit from this new trait in their partners, and noted an indirect positive effect on their relationship due to this improved emotional balance.

The second NMP subtheme was 'observation of less negative reactivity'. This reflected the RMP relationship subtheme of 'less negative reactivity'. Some NMPs believed this new trait had positive effects on the relationship, especially by decreasing stressful conversations and conflicts. NMPs also indicated that this trait enabled their relationship to be less tense than previously. Several RMPs referred to this theme as 'less negative reactivity' while also mentioned that they behaved less automatically in stress-triggering situations. This subtheme is also associated directly with meta-awareness and the RMPs' enhanced emotion regulation capacities.

There is only a very limited literature on the experiences of romantic partners of meditators. Gillespie, Davey, and Flemke (2015) studied romantic relationships and mindfulness with MBSR graduates and their intimate partners. As in the present study, the intimate partners described positive effects of MBSR, including emerging emotional balance and less negative reactivity in their partners. These are almost identical to the themes of this study. However, the NMPs in my study described the positive effects, not as emerging, but as favorable traits that benefitted both themselves and relationship, including easier conflict resolution. In contrast, Gillespie, Davey,

and Flemke (2015) reported that the behavioral changes due to MBSR were only emerging as most partners did not report any change in the relationship. In the present study, in which the RMP was a more experienced and regular meditator, most NMPs reported a behavioral shift in the RMP that benefitted themselves, their relationship, or both.

5.8 Implications

This study explored the relational effects of regular mindfulness meditation practice on romantic relationships when one partner is a regular meditator. The findings show that the NMP can notice the effects of the RMP's practice. Thus, it may not be necessary for both partners to practice mindfulness meditation for each to benefit from the relational effects of meditation practice. This suggests that mindfulness-based courses focusing on romantic relationship for individuals and/or couples could be a useful tool in CFT. This is important because, as mentioned previously, partners may have contradictory motivations regarding meditation despite seeing the benefits of meditation practice for their partners. Mindfulness-Based Relationship Enhancement (Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2004), for example, is designed for couples with low to medium-level distress in their relationships. However, mindfulness-based relationship course structures that enable individuals to attend may also be useful since each partner's motivational levels may be different.

Another implication is to embrace the benefits of regular practice, especially within an attachment security framework. An individual's attachment strategies are mostly automatic processes that remain implicit unless the light of awareness is shed light on them. Regular meditation practice may greatly assist individuals to become aware of these implicit processes. Moreover, the mindful emotion regulation fostered by meditation practice may help individuals to regulate their attachment-related anxieties while avoiding maladaptive emotion regulation strategies like suppression or rumination. A couple therapy modality with an attachment

framework, such as emotionally focused couple therapy (Johnson, 1996), could strongly benefit from the meditation practice of one or both partners. Although some researchers (Beckerman & Sarracco, 2011) have already suggested combining these two frameworks, it could also be worthwhile to encourage clients to start regular mindfulness practice to assist the process of couple therapy. This is also important because mindfulness offers a very rich context for human suffering while providing a solid foundation for meditation practice. Many aspects of mindfulness are in line with the premises of secure attachment, like acceptance and non-judgmental regard. The couple and family therapy field should therefore expand its horizons by taking an integrative approach towards adult secure attachment and mindfulness.

For my personal practice, I decided to psycho-educate my clients about the individual and relational benefits of mindfulness meditation practice and encourage them to participate in a demonstration mindfulness meditation session or an 8-week course like MBSR with an experienced mindfulness meditation teacher. I am also planning to design and test the outcomes of an 8-week course of mindfulness meditation practice for individuals and couples, with a focus on the romantic relationship and individual awareness of one's own attachment style and emotion regulation strategies.

5.9 Limitations

Because of the qualitative nature of this study, its findings cannot be generalized. The sample is non-representative. Because it is rare to find very long-term meditators in Western culture, my sample criterion for the RMP of two years of mindfulness meditation practice was specific but not atypical.

Another limitation is that the interviews were conducted at one time point rather than before and after starting regular meditation practice. To offset this, another sample criterion was that the existing romantic relationship should have lasted longer than the RMP's regular

meditation practice. This enabled both partners to at least retrospectively assess any differences in their relationship before and after the RMP began meditation.

One limitation was that the interviewer and coder were the same researcher with no other coder for this project. The biases of the researcher may thus have affected data interpretation. To minimize this, there was both expert and member checking of the themes.

The couples that participated in the study had different stress levels in their romantic relationship and different attachment styles. Because this study explored the relational reflections of the meditation practice through the lens of attachment theory, the level of relationship satisfaction and the participants' attachment styles could be measured by questionnaires.

Another limitation is that the sample provided insufficient gender diversity despite the efforts of this researcher. Only one male regular meditation practitioner volunteered. Fortunately, two same-sex couples were included so there was some sexual orientation diversity. However, the inclusion of male same-sex couples would have increased the sexual diversity of the sample.

The sample was also limited in its socio-economic diversity as the majority of participants were middle to upper-class SES with at least a bachelor's degree. There was some diversity in ethnicity and religion although some participants refused to define either. Overall, the sample was mostly well-educated Turkish men and women, which was unsurprising because yoga and meditation are mostly practiced by high SES individuals in Turkey. Community health could greatly benefit if mindfulness meditation spread to Turkish citizens with lower SES and immigrants, especially for individuals who cannot afford psychotherapy.

Finally, some participants in this study had received individual counseling or couple therapy. They had also followed other teachings, such as yoga and non-violent communication. These other teachings and therapies could all have influenced the participants' perceptions about themselves and their romantic relationship.

5.10 Future Research

Future research on the association between mindfulness and romantic relationships could include deeper analysis of the meditation-naive partners of meditators, especially focusing on differences in their down or up regulating strategies and their emotion regulation strategies. A longitudinal follow up of the partners when one party continues regular meditation is also necessary to explore the milestones of this relational shift.

Comparison of the effects of mindfulness meditation on securely attached couples versus more distressed couples would usefully contribute to the adult attachment and mindfulness literature. Research into couple and family therapy would also benefit from studies into how mindfulness mediates the effects on romantic relationships of specific stressors, such as the birth of a child, the loss of a child, or the revelation of an affair. It would also be interesting to explore how mindfulness practice affects a relationship during a divorce.

The unique emotion regulation feature of mindfulness and the attachment relationship could be researched in greater depth, for example to determine which specific enhanced mindful emotion regulation strategies have stronger effects on relationship security. Future research can also investigate which attachment strategies (avoidant, anxious, or fearful) benefit the most from mindfulness practice by one or both partners in reducing the use of up or down-regulating strategies.

Several dynamics were revealed by this study regarding perceived relational shifts for both partners. Compassion and differentiation of the self were two other trajectories identified for a possible theory of change in romantic relationships. These traits encouraged by meditation practice and the relationship with attachment security are both fruitful areas for further research into romantic relationships and mindfulness.

Future research should also turn to observational methods for exploring the effects of mindfulness practice on romantic relationships and attachment security. For example, researchers could observe the use of down or up regulating strategies and different emotion regulation strategies during a conflict task by RMPs and NMPs in comparison with a control group of meditation-naïve couples. Such research would be beneficial because of the increased credibility of the findings.

One question that I kept asking to myself while conducting this project was 'How many hours of meditation practice is enough to observe its effects on the romantic relationship for both partners?' Another question concerned the different mindfulness meditation styles and their unique effects on romantic relationships. Most participants in this study were using various meditation styles, such as focused attention, open awareness, and loving and kindness meditation. The effects of different types of mindfulness meditation on romantic relationships is thus a question to be answered by future research.

5.11 Conclusion

This qualitative study delivered a detailed portrayal of the regular mindfulness meditation practitioner's emotion regulation capacities and their current romantic relationship experiences. The thematic analysis revealed themes on three levels: intrapersonal level themes, relationship level themes, and the themes of the non-regularly meditating partners. The following three main intrapersonal themes (numbers) and four subthemes (letters) emerged from the data 1) meta-awareness; 1a) impermanence of emotions; 2) shift in emotion regulation capacities; 2a) decreased intensity of emotions; 2b) staying with negative emotions; 3) shift in the relationship with oneself; 3a) self-compassion.

Reflecting these intrapersonal themes, three relationship level themes and seven subthemes were identified: 4) experiential shift in stressful situations; 4a) less negative reactivity; 4b) fewer

conflicts; 5) transformation of the emotional bond; 5a) self-disclosure of emotions; 5b) decreased anxiety about the relationship; 6) transformation of the romantic relationship; 6a) being present during sex; 6b) compassion for and acceptance of the partner; 6c) re-defining the boundaries. Meta-awareness, enhanced emotion regulation strategies, and cultivation of compassion findings were the traits developed in the RMP. These reflected on the relationship as reduced stressful situations, transformation of the emotional bond, and the transformation of the relationship. The majority of participants felt more personal satisfaction in the relationship with fewer stressful events, better resolution of stressful events, and better-defined boundaries between the partners. They were less anxious about the relational bond and more open about their emotional states. This was associated with the meta-awareness and enhanced regulation of the emotions related to the relationship, distancing from these emotions, and enhanced capacity for staying with their emotions without using maladaptive emotion regulation strategies like suppression or distraction. The NMPs also confirmed the positive effects of the practice on their partners and their romantic relationship. One theme and two subthemes emerged from the NMP data: 7) general positive effects of regular practice; 7a) observing the peaceful mood of the partner; 7b) observing less negative reactivity of the partner.

This study explored the effects on romantic relationships when one partner was regularly meditating. RMPs described how their personal transformation had also transformed their relationship and even their intimate partner's behaviors. However, this should not be interpreted as inevitably changing a highly distressed relationship into a happy one because of the broad framework of a romantic relationship with very different aspects. Instead, it suggests that relationship satisfaction can be increased by less reactivity, enhanced two-way compassion, and re-defined boundaries.

APPENDICES A

Demographic Form (Translated from Turkish)

1- Gender: …….

2- Age: …….

3- Occupation: ……

4- How do you define your socio-economical status?

○ High class ○Upper middle class ○Middle class ○Low class

5- What is your last graduated school:

○ Primary ○ Middle school ○ High school ○ College ○ Graduate school

6- How do you define your ethnicity? ……

7- How do you define your religious belief?.....

8- How do you define your sexual orientation?.....

9- Your marital status:……..

10- Do you have any children?

○ Yes ○ No

11- How many? ……..

12- For how long is your current relationship ongoing? ……..

13- Do you live in the same house with your partner?

○ Yes ○ No

14- Do you do regular mindfulness meditation?

○ Yes ○ No

15- For how long do you practice meditation regularly? ……..

16- How many hours weakly are you practicing meditation?.....

17- What kind of meditation do you practice? (You can mark more than one.)

○ Focused attention ○ Open awareness ○Yoga with awareness

○ Loving-kindness meditation ○ Transandantal (with a mantra)

○ Sufi meditaiton ○ Other ……

APPENDICES B

Informed Consent (translated form Turkish form)

Name of the Project: Romantic relationship experiences and emotion regulation strategies of regular mindfulness meditation practitioners: a qualitative study

Contact info of the Project Manager:

Itır Erkan

Özyeğin Üniversitesi

Nişantepe Mah. Orman Sok.

No: 13 34794 Alemdağ Çekmeköy

E-mail: itir.erkan@ozu.edu.tr

Mobile: +90 532 680 21 02

The purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is to investigate the romantic relationship experiences of the regular mindfulness meditation practitioners and their partners. The effects of at least two years of regular meditation practice on the romantic relationship satisfaction and the partner experience will be explored. The relational dynamics of mindfulness meditation practice and the functional or not functional effects to the relationship will be discussed. The findings of the study will shed light on the use of mindfulness meditation on the field of couple and family therapy in Turkey.

Process: First of all the informed consent should be signed for each volunteer. A pseudonym will be given to you for the whole process. All your identity information will be kept anonymous. After that the informed consent will be send to you via e-mail for you to fill. During the process the interviews will be recorded.

After the interview certain analysis will be conducted and your experience will be summarized under themes and subthemes. They will be sent to you and asked if they are in line with your lived experience. Therefore your email and mobile phone will be asked.

After the interview if you need a counseling session, you can contact Özyeğin University Couple and Family Center (ÖZÜÇAM) via (549) 810 86 25 or Bilgi University Psychological Counseling Center via pdm@bilgi.edu.tr or (212) 311 76 74.

Confidentiality: In this research all of the names, personal information, e-mails, and phone numbers, interview documents, notes and recordings will be encrypted with the code names of the participants and will be held in password protected folders and computers. All of the forms will be destroyed after the research process.

Volunteering: The participation to this study is voluntarily. Not to sign this form and not to participate in this research is always accepted. Even you accepted to participate but than you changed your mind, you can quit any time. This kind of situation will not harm the study. If you have further questions you can contact the researcher via the information above.

If you have any further questions for the ethical sides or for any other details of the study please contact Özyeğin University Ethical Board through (216) 564 9512-phone number.

I read the detail of the study called: "Romantic relationship experiences and emotion regulation strategies of regular mindfulness meditation practitioners: a qualitative study. " and my question were answered. I voluntarily accept to participate in the study. I give permission for my personal information to be collected and analyzed as only for the related research named above.

_____ _____

Name, surname Date

E-mail Phone

APPENDICES C

Interview Questions

Questions for the regularly meditating partner:

1. How did you start doing mindfulness meditation?

2. What is your motivation to continue to meditate regularly?

3. How did your regular meditating practice affected you?

4. How did you experience your emotions prior your regular practice?

5. How do you live your emotions now?

6. How is your current romantic relationship started?

7. How was your experience in your romantic relationship before you started doing regular meditation practice?

8. How is your general experience in your romantic relationship now?

9. Has your regular meditation practice affected your partner, if yes how?

10. How did you express your emotions with your partner prior your regular mindfulness meditation practice?

11. How do you express your emotions now?

12. How does your partner express his or her emotions?

13. How did your partner express his or her emotions before you started doing regular meditation?

14. How was your sexual life prior your meditation practice?

15. How is your sexual life now?

16. How did you cope with a stressful situation about your romantic relationship before you started doing regular meditation?

17. How do you cope with a stressful situation about your romantic relationship now?

18. How did you get support from your partner before you started doing regular meditation?

19. How do you get support from your partner now?

20. How does your partner get support from you?

21. Lastly, would you like to add something?

Questions for the meditation naïve or non-regularly meditating partner

1. How would you describe the affects of the regular meditation practice of your partner to your partner?

2. How would you describe the affects of the regular meditation practice of your partner to yourself?

3. How would you describe the affects of the regular meditation practice of your partner to your romantic relationship?

4. Lastly, would you like to add something?

REFERENCES

Adair, K. C., Boulton, A. J., & Algoe, S. B. (2017). The effect of mindfulness on relationship satisfaction via perceived responsiveness: Findings from a dyadic study of heterosexual romantic partners. *Mindfulness, 9*(2), 597–609. doi:10.1007/s12671-017-0801-3

Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation.* Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Atkinson, B. J. (2013). Mindfulness training and the cultivation of secure, satisfying couple relationships. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice, 2*(2), 73–94. doi:10.1037/cfp0000002

Baer, R. A., Smith, G. T., Lykins, E., Button, D., Krietemeyer, J., Sauer, S., . . . Williams, J. M. (2008). Construct validity of the five facet mindfulness questionnaire in meditating and nonmeditating samples. *Assessment, 15*, 329–342. doi: 10.1177/1073191107313003

Barnes, S., Brown, K. W., Krusemark, E., Campbell, W. K., & Rogge, R. D. (2007). The role of mindfulness in romantic relationship satisfaction and responses to relationship stress. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 33*, 482-500. doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2007.00033.x

Bartholomew, K. (1990). Avoidance of intimacy: An attachment perspective. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 7*(2), 147–178. doi:10.1177/0265407590072001

Beckerman, N. L., & Sarracco, M. (2011). Enhancing emotionally focused couple therapy through the practice of mindfulness: A case analysis. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy, 22*, 1-15. doi: 10.1080/08975353.2011.551082

Bergomi, C., Tschacher, W., & Kupper, Z. (2012). The assessment of mindfulness with self-report measures: Existing scales and open issues. *Mindfulness*, *4*(3), 191–202. doi:10.1007/s12671-012-0110-9

Bishop S. R., Lau M., Shapiro S., Carlson L., Anderson N. D., Carmody J., . . . Devins, G. (2004). Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition. *Clinical Psychology: Science & Practice*, *11*(3), 230-241. doi: 10.1093/clipsy.bph077

Bohlmeijer, E., Ten Klooster, P. M., Fledderus, M., Veehof, M., & Baer, R. (2011). Psychometric properties of the five facet mindfulness questionnaire in depressed adults and development of a short form. *Assessment, 18*(3), 308–320. doi: 10.1177/1073191111408231

Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment & loss: Vol. 1 Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss: Loss*. Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1982). Attachment and loss: Retrospect and prospect. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 52*(4), 664-678. doi: 10.1111/j.1939-0025.1982.tb01456.x

Bowlby, J (1988). *A secure base: Clinical applications of attachment theory.* London: Routledge.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V & Clarke, V. (2012) Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P.M. Camic, D.L. Long, A.T. Panter, D. Rindskopf & K.J. Sher (Eds.). *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological and biological* (pp. 57-71). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *84*(4), 822-848. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.84.4.822

Brefczynski-Lewis, J. A., Lutz, A., Schaefer, H. S., Levinson, D. B., & Davidson, R. J. (2007). Neural correlates of attentional expertise in long-term meditation practitioners. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA, 104*(27), 11483–11488. doi: 10.1073/pnas.0606552104

Brubacher, L. (2017). Emotionally focused individual therapy: An attachment-based experiential/systemic perspective. *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies, 16*(1), 50–67. doi:10.1080/14779757.2017.1297250

Cahn, B. R., & Polich, J. (2006). Meditation states and traits: Eeg, erp, and neuroimaging studies. *Psychological Bulletin, 132,* 180–211. doi: 10.1037/00332909.132.2.180

Carson, J. W., Carson, K. M., Gil, K. M., & Baucom, D. H. (2004). Mindfulness-based relationship enhancement. *Behavior Therapy, 35*, 471-494. doi: 005-7894/04/0471-0494

Cassidy, J. (1994). Emotion regulation: Influences of attachment relationships. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, *59*(2–3), 228. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-5834.1994.tb01287.x

Chödrön, P. (2003). *Comfortable with uncertainty*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Collins, N. L., & Feeney, B. C. (2000). A safe haven: An attachment theory perspective on support seeking and caregiving in intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78*(6), 1053–1073. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.78.6.1053

Collins, N. L., & Read, S. J. (1990). Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58*(4), 644–663. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.58.4.644

Edelstein R. S., & Gillath O. (2008). Avoiding interference: Adult attachment and emotional processing biases. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 34*(2), 171-181. doi: 10.1177/0146167207310024

Edwards, C. E. (2014). *Finding trust in relational vulnerability: Interpersonal and intrapersonal influences on the intimacy process.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest database. (Accession No.1552969396)

Engen, H. G., Bernhardt, B. C., Skottnik, L., Ricard, M., & Singer, T. (2018). Structural changes in socio-affective networks: Multi-modal MRI findings in long-term meditation practitioners. *Neuropsychologia*, *116*, 26–33. doi: 10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2017.08.024

Farb, N. A. S., Anderson, A. K., Irving, J. A., Segal, Z. V. (2014). Mindfulness interventions and emotion regulation. In Gross, J. J. (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion regulation* (2nd ed. pp 548-567). New York, N Y: Guilford Press.

Fraley, R. C., & Shaver, P. R. (1997). Adult attachment and the suppression of unwanted thoughts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*(5), 1080–1091.

doi:10.1037/0022-3514.73.5.1080

Fraley, R. C., Waller, N. G., & Brennan, K. A. (2000). An item response theory analysis of self-report measures of adult attachment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78*(2), 350–365. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.78.2.350

Fresco, D. M., Moore, M. T., van Dulmen, M. H., Segal, Z. V., Ma, S. H., Teasdale, J. D., & Williams, J. M. G. (2007). Initial psychometric properties of the experiences questionnaire: Validation of a self-report measure of decentering. *Behavior Therapy*, *38*(3), 234–246. doi:10.1016/j.beth.2006.08.003

Gambrel, L. E., & Keeling, M. L. (2010). Relational aspects of mindfulness: Implications for the practice of marriage and family therapy. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, *32*, 412-426. doi: 10.1007/s10591-010-9129-z

Gambrel, L. E., & Piercy, F. P. (2014a). Mindfulness-based relationship education for couples expecting their first child—Part 1: A randomized mixed-methods program evaluation. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 41*(1), 5–24. doi:10.1111/jmft.12066

Gambrel, L. E., & Piercy, F. P. (2014b). Mindfulness-based relationship education for couples expecting their first child—Part 2: Phenomenological findings. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 41*(1), 25–41. doi:10.1111/jmft.12065

Gehart, D. R., & McCollum, E. E. (2007). Engaging suffering: Towards a mindful re-visioning of family therapy practice. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 33,* 214-226. doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2007.00017.x

Gehart, D. R. (2012). *Mindfulness and acceptance in couple and family therapy*. New York: Springer.

Germer, C. K. (2005). Mindfulness: What is it? What does it matter? In C. K. Germer, R. D. Siegel, & P. R. Fulton (Eds.), *Mindfulness and psychotherapy* (pp. 3-27). New York: Guilford Press.

Gillespie, B., Davey, M. P., & Flemke, K. (2015). Intimate partners' perspectives on the relational effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction training: A qualitative research study. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 37*(4), 396–407. doi:10.1007/s10591-015-9350-x

Gillath, O., Shaver, P., & Mikulincer, M. (2005). An attachment-theoretical approach to compassion and altruism. In P. Gilbert (Ed.), *Compassion: Conceptualisations, research and use in psychotherapy* (pp. 121–147). London: Routledge.

Goldin, P. R., & Gross, J. J. (2010). Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) on emotion regulation in social anxiety disorder. *Emotion, 10,* 83–91. doi:10.1037/a0018441

Goodall, K., Trejnowska, A., & Darling, S. (2012). The relationship between dispositional mindfulness, attachment security and emotion regulation. *Personality & Individual Differences*, *52*(5), 622–626. doi:2110/10.1016/j.paid.2011.12.008

Gross, J. (1998). The emerging field of emotion regulation. *Review of General Psychology, 2*(3), 271–299. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.2.3.271.

Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: Implications for affect, relationships, and well- being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *85*(2), 348– 362. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.85.2.348

Hainlen, R. L., Jankowski, P. J., Paine, D. R., & Sandage, S. J. (2015). Adult attachment and well-being: Dimensions of differentiation of self as mediators. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 38*(2), 172–183. doi:10.1007/s10591-015-9359-1

Hayes, S. C., & Wilson, K. G. (2003). Mindfulness: Method and process. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 10,* 161-165. doi: 10.1093/clipsy.bpg018

Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *52*(3), 511–524. doi:2110/10.1037/0022-3514.52.3.511

Hesse, E. (1999). The adult attachment interview: Historical and current perspectives. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (pp. 395-433). New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.

Johnson, S. (1996). *The practice of emotionally focused couple therapy: Creating connection.* New York: Taylor and Francis.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1982). An outpatient program in behavioral medicine for chronic pain patients based on the practice of mindfulness meditation: theoretical considerations and preliminary results. *General Hospital Psychiatry*, *4*(1), 33-47. doi: 10.1016/0163-8343(82)90026-3

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. New York: Bantam Dell.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York: Hyperion.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science & Practice*, *10*(2), 144-156. doi: 10.1093/clipsy.bpg016

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses*. New York: Hyperion.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2011). Some reflections on the origins of MBSR, skillful means, and the trouble with maps. *Contemporary Buddhism*, *12*(1), 281-306. doi:10.1080/14639947.2011.564844

Kappen, G., Karremans, J. C., Burk, W. J., & Buyukcan-Tetik, A. (2018). On the association between mindfulness and romantic relationship satisfaction: The role of partner acceptance. *Mindfulness, 9*(5), 1543-1556. doi:10.1007/s12671-018-0902-7

Karremans, J. C., Schellekens, M. P., & Kappen, G. (2017). Bridging the sciences of mindfulness and romantic relationships: a theoretical model and research agenda. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 21*(1), 29–49. doi: 10.1177/1088868315615450

Khaddouma, A., Gordon, K. C., & Bolden, J. (2014). Zen and the art of sex: Examining associations among mindfulness, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction in dating relationships. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 30*(2), 268–285. doi:10.1080/14681994.2014.992408

Khaddouma, A., Gordon, K. C., & Bolden, J. (2015). Zen and the art of dating: Mindfulness, differentiation of self, and satisfaction in dating relationships. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice, 4*(1), 1–13. doi:10.1037/cfp0000035

Khaddouma, A., Gordon, K. C., & Strand, E. B. (2016). Mindful mates: A pilot study of the relational effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on participants and their partners. *Family Process, 56*(3), 636–651. doi:10.1111/famp.12226

Krafft, J., Haeger, J., & Levin, M. E. (2017). The interaction of mindful awareness and acceptance in couples satisfaction. *Personality & Individual Differences*, *113,* 20-23. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2017.02.064

Lazar, S. W., Kerr, C. E., Wasserman, R. H., Gray, J. R., Greve, D. N., Treadway, M. T., ... & Rauch, S. L. (2005). Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness. *Neuroreport*, *16*(17), 1893–1897. doi: 10.1097/01.wnr.0000186598.66243.19

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lippelt, D. P., Hommel, B., & Colzato, L. S. (2014). Focused attention, open monitoring and loving kindness meditation: Effects on attention, conflict monitoring, and creativity - A review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *5*, 1083. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01083

Lord, S. A. (2017). Mindfulness and spirituality in couple therapy: The use of meditative dialogue to help couples develop compassion and empathy for themselves and each other. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, *38*(1), 98–114. doi: 10.1002/anzf.1201

Main, M. (1990). Cross-cultural studies of attachment organization: Recent studies, changing methodologies, and the concept of conditional strategies. *Human Development, 33*(1), 48–61. doi:10.1159/000276502

Main, M., Kaplan, N., & Cassidy, J. (1985). Security in infancy, childhood, and adulthood: A move to the level of representation. Monographs of the Stability and change. *Society for Research in Child Development, 50,* 66–104. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3333827

Main, M., & Solomon, J. (1990). Procedures for identifying infants as disorganized/disoriented during the Ainsworth Strange Situation. *Attachment in the preschool years: Theory, research, and intervention*, *1*, 121-160.

Maniaci, M. R. (2015). *For better, for worse: discrepancies between implicit and explicit evaluations in newlywed marriage.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Database (Accession No. 1667442777)

Mauss, I. B., & Tamir, M. (2014). Emotion goals: How their content, structure, and operation shape emotion regulation. In J. J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion regulation* (pp. 361–375). Guilford Press.

McGill, J., Adler-Baeder, F., & Rodriguez, P. (2016). Mindfully in love: a meta-analysis of the association between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension Volume, 4*(1), 255–271.

Mikulincer, M., Florian, V., & Hirschberger, G. (2003). The existential function of close relationships: Introducing death into the science of love. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 7*(1), 20–40. doi:10.1207/s15327957pspr0701_2

Mikulincer M, Orbach I. (1995). Attachment styles and repressive defensiveness: The accessibility and architecture of affective memories. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68*, 917-925. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.68.5.917

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2004). Security-based self-representations in adulthood: Contents and processes. In W. S. Rholes & J. A. Simpson (Eds.), *Adult attachment: Theory, research, and clinical implications* (pp. 159–195). New York: Guilford Press.

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2005). Attachment theory and emotions in close relationships: Exploring the attachment-related dynamics of emotional reactions to relational events. *Personal Relationships, 12*(2), 149–168. doi:10.1111/j.1350-4126.2005.00108.x

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). Boosting attachment security to promote mental health,

prosocial values, and inter-group tolerance. *Psychological Inquiry*, *18*(3), 139–156. doi: 10.1080/10478400701512646.

Mikulincer M., & Shaver. P.R. (2016). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change*. New York: Guilford Press.

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2019). Attachment orientations and emotion regulation. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *25*, 6–10. doi: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2018.02.006

Neff, K. D. (2009). Self-compassion. In M. R. Leary & R. H. Hoyle (Eds.). *Handbook of individual differences in social behavior*. (pp.561-573) New York: Guilford.

Neff, K. D., & Beretvas, S. N. (2013). The role of self-compassion in romantic relationships. *Self and Identity*, *12*(1), 78–98. doi:10.1080/15298868.2011.639548 .

Paetzold, R. L., Rholes, W. S., & Kohn, J. L. (2015). Disorganized attachment in adulthood: Theory, measurement, and implications for romantic relationships. *Review of General Psychology, 19*(2), 146–156. doi:10.1037/gpr0000042

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pepping, C. A., O'Donovan, A., & Davis, P. J. (2013). The differential relationship between mindfulness and attachment in experienced and inexperienced meditators. *Mindfulness, 5*(4), 392–399. doi:10.1007/s12671-012-0193-3

Pruitt, I. T., & McCollum, E. E. (2010). Voices of experienced meditators: The impact of meditation practice on intimate relationships. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 32*, 135-154. doi: 10.1007/s10591-009-9112-8

Rice, L. N., & Greenberg, L. S. (1984). *Patterns of change: Intensive analysis of psychotherapy process*. New York: Guilford Press.

Rohleder, P., & Lyons, A. C. (Eds.). (2015). *Qualitative research in clinical and health psychology.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Rowe, A. C., Shepstone, L., Carnelley, K. B., Cavanagh, K., & Millings, A. (2016). Attachment security and self-compassion priming increase the likelihood that first-time engagers in mindfulness mediation will continue with mindfulness training. *Mindfulness, 7*(3), 642–650. doi: 10.1007/s12671-016-0499-7

Ryan, R. M., Brown, K. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2007). How integrative is attachment theory? Unpacking the meaning and significance of felt security. *Psychological Inquiry, 18*(3), 177–182. doi: 10.1080/10478400701512778

Safran, J. D., & Segal, Z. V. (1990). *Interpersonal process in cognitive therapy.* New York: Basic Books.

Salzberg, S. (2011). *Real happiness: The power of meditation.* New York: Workman.

Shaver, P. R., & Mikulincer, M. (2002). Attachment-related psychodynamics. *Attachment & Human Development, 4,* 133–161. doi: 10.1080/14616730210154171

Shaver, P. R., Lavy, S., Saron, C. D., & Mikulincer, M. (2007). Social foundations of the capacity for mindfulness: an attachment perspective. *Psychological Inquiry, 18*(4), 264–271. doi: 10.1080/10478400701598389

Shaver, P.R., & Mikulincer, M. (2014). Attachment and emotion regulation. In J.J. Gross. (Eds.), *Handbook of emotion regulation* (pp. 237–250). New York, NY: Guilford

Shaver, P. R., Mikulincer, M., Sahdra, B. K., & Gross, J. T. (2017). Attachment security as a foundation for kindness toward self and others. In K. W. Brown & M. R. Leary (Eds.), *Oxford library of psychology. The Oxford handbook of hypo-egoic phenomena* (pp. 223–

242). Oxford University Press.

Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are.* New York: Guilford.

Siegel, D.J. (2003). An interpersonal neurobiology of psychotherapy: The developing mind and the resolution of trauma. In M.F. Solomon & D.J. Siegel (Eds.), *Healing trauma: Attachment, mind, body and brain* (pp. 1–56). New York: Norton.

Siegel, D. J. (2007). *The mindful brain: Reflection and attunement in the cultivation of well-being*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Siegel, J.P. (2014). The mindful couple. *Clinical Social Work Journal, 42*, 282–287. doi: 10.1007/s10615-014-0489-y

Simpson, J. A. (1990). Influence of attachment styles on romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 59(5), 971–980. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.59.5.971

Simpson, J. A. & Rholes, W. S. (2010). Attachment and relationships: Milestones and future directions. *Journal of Social & Personal Relationships*, *27*(2), 173–180. doi: 10.1177/0265407509360909

Simpson, J. A., Winterheld, H. A., Rholes, W. S., & Oriña, M. M. (2007). Working models of attachment and reactions to different forms of caregiving from romantic partners. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, *93*(3), 466–477. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.93.3.466

Sprecher, S., & Fehr, B. (2005). Compassionate love for close others and humanity. *Journal o f Social and Personal Relationships, 22,* 629-651. doi: 10.1177/0265407505056439

Sroufe, L. A., & Waters, E. (1977). Attachment as an organizational construct. *Child Development*, *48*, 1184–1199. doi: 10.2307/1128475

Stephenson, K. R. (2016). Mindfulness-based therapies for sexual dysfunction: A review of potential theory-based mechanisms of change. *Mindfulness, 8*(3), 527–543. doi:10.1007/s12671-016-0652-3

Stern, D.N. (1985). *The interpersonal world of the infant.* New York: Basic Books.

Stevenson, J. C., Emerson, L. M., & Millings, A. (2017). The relationship between adult attachment orientation and mindfulness: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Mindfulness*, *8*(6), 1438–1455. doi: /10.1007/s12671-017-0733-y

Stevenson, J. C., Millings, A., & Emerson, L. M. (2018). Psychological well-being and coping: The predictive value of adult attachment, dispositional mindfulness, and emotion regulation. *Mindfulness*, *10*(2), 256-271. doi:10.1007/s12671-018-0970-8

Teasdale, J. D., Moore, R. G., Hayhurst, H., Pope, M., Williams, S., & Segal, Z. V. (2002). Metacognitive awareness and prevention of relapse in depression: Empirical evidence. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *70*(2), 275–287. doi:10.1037/0022-006x.70.2.275

Teper, R., & Inzlicht, M. (2013). Meditation, mindfulness and executive control: the importance of emotional acceptance and brain-based performance monitoring. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 8*(1), 85–92. doi:10.1093/scan/nss045

Thera, N. (1962). *The heart of Buddhist meditation*. San Francisco: Weiser

Timm, T. M., & Keiley, M. K. (2011). The effects of differentiation of self, adult attachment, and sexual communication on sexual and marital satisfaction: A path analysis. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 37*(3), 206–223. doi:10.1080/0092623x.2011.564513

Van Dam, N. T., van Vugt, M. K., Vago, D. R., Schmalzl, L., Saron, C. D., Olendzki, A., ... Meyer, D. E. (2018). Mind the hype: A critical evaluation and prescriptive agenda for research on mindfulness and meditation. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *13*(1), 36-61. doi: 10.1177/1745691617709589

Van IJzendoorn, M. H., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J. (2010). Invariance of adult attachment across gender, age, culture, and socioeconomic status?. *Journal of social and personal relationships*, *27*(2), 200- 208. doi:2110/10.1177/0265407509360908

Wachs, K., & Cordova, J. V. (2007). Mindful relating: Exploring mindfulness and emotion repertoires in intimate relationships. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 33*, 464-481. doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2007.00032.x

Wei, M., Vogel, D. L., Ku, T. Y., & Zakalik, R. A. (2005). Adult attachment, affect regulation, negative mood, and interpersonal problems: The mediating roles of emotional reactivity and emotional cutoff. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(1), 14–24. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.52.1.14