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Mindfulness, Flow and Self-Care for Double Bass Musicians

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B.M., Music Performance, The Peabody Conservatory of Music, 2015

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

In this qualitative multi-case study, three college-age music majors from the local state university were interviewed, observed, and asked to complete reflections in order to answer the following questions: How do mindfulness activities affect collegiate double bass music students' perceptions of their own playing and practicing? My secondary questions were 1) how do mindfulness activities affect *flow* experiences among collegiate double bass music students, and 2) how do mindfulness activities affect students' perception of self-care? The interviews were transcribed, coded using "concept coding" (Miler, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020), and then grouped into categories, themes, and sub-themes. The themes were time, judgement, perceptions of playing, perceptions of practicing, flow, and self-care. The participants, John, Emily, and Gabriel, each reported more positivity in the perception of playing and perception of the act of practicing. They also reported fewer situations of being pulled out of flow states. Finally, John and Gabriel decided to continue pursuing mindfulness meditation as it helped them with their mental well-being. The findings from this study could change how music educators construct their curriculum, and how musicians approach their instrument.

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INTRODUCTION

Change involves carrying out an activity against the habits of life - F.M. Alexander.

The light came through the windows of the studio. A beautiful day by all accounts. It seemed to spite me, as I felt the storm roiling and thundering within myself. In a typical day at the Alexander Technique Training Course, we bear witness to our unhealthy habits, decide to not engage in said habit, and then choose an alternative. The habits are often what may be called "body habits," but one cannot separate the body from the mind. So, we can say they are holistic habits. This day, the habit is a pernicious and silent obstructer.

My neck is tight, and my hip hurts. Pain? Ok, I need to be a good Alexander Technique student and engage in the process. I'm going to free my neck. Did I do it? No. I need to free my neck. No! Free the neck! Gah! Ok, maybe I need to let go of the undue tension in my legs first. Release the legs. Did I do it? Again, no. You should be able to release the legs! You have been in the Training Course for two years already. Get it together, man. Release. The. Legs.

I recognize that this is a spiral. I choose to break the cycle. "I'm sorry, Leslie [my teacher]. I'm getting really frustrated. Why can't I do this? I should be able to do this!"

"I'm sorry, Sam. What part is frustrating?"

"My neck hurts, and I can't release my freaking legs."

"Ok. Let's find an activity where you can undo the tension in your legs."

"I just don't understand why I can't do this. I should be able to do this!"

"Remember what we've talked about with the 'should' word. It is removed from the present. We can only work with where we are now. Anything else is end-gaining. Speaking of: what is your means to gain your end here?"

"Um. I'm going to think 'Neck Free to allow the head to release forward and up, back to lengthen and widen, elbows out and down,' to come back from the ankles, to release the knees."

"That is a lot! You might be overthinking. Can you simplify it?"

"Umm. How about, 'Neck Free to all the back to lengthen and widen,' to come back from the ankles, to release the knees?" I try it, and my neck stiffens, and my hip starts hurting. Gah!

"Hold your horses, mister. Don't forgot to 'mind the gap' before you follow through on the activity. That way you hold the possibility of an alternative. Then, try 'Neck Free" to come back from the ankles to release the knees."

I allow myself some space to consider how I'd like to engage in this activity. Think my instructions, and the Neck stiffens, but less. My hip pain dulls to a low hum. This may be where I am today, and that's ok.

The above vignette is an example of my mindset in the early years of my graduate study. My awareness of a problem did not start there but had its origins in my undergraduate days at a music conservatory where I was studying double bass performance.

There were many "villains" in my time at this conservatory; from the friend in college who adopted a rule for success (Five hours of practice a day would lead to winning an audition) and found their classmates' lack of practice disgusting, to the teacher who urged students to play with a bigger sound by trying "harder" rather than solving the problem. What I notice now, years later,

was that I was not thinking — at least not clearly. I reacted to my teacher's and my peers' critiques and suggestions with mindless effort, fierce judgement, and, inevitably, pain and frustration. Put simply, I did not have the tools to handle an environment that fed my most destructive thoughts. While I don't recall the exact moment, I began to recognize this unhealthy practice and, in my own way, tried to find a different pathway.

Personal Orientation to Mindfulness, Flow and Self-Care

Mindfulness was not on my radar as a young student of the double bass until my later years in college. Frankly, the epicenter of my musical education was trying to create a musical product through sheer force of will. My response to a problem was not to give myself space to explore how to do it differently but to rush into the same practice only with more angst and force. Later, after I had graduated and moved to a different city, it occurred to me that all my peers were cultivating many habits, most of them detrimental to their progress and well-being. This awareness did not mean I could change my own many detrimental habits. As a matter of fact, I found myself developing many similar destructive patterns. A recurring internal dialogue in my case consisted of thoughts such as "I will never amount to anything," "I'm not good enough," and other thoughts like this, albeit with more expletives. The understood and unstated mantra was "no pain, no gain," or "If you do not punish yourself for every mistake, how are you going to grow?" These patterns and beliefs led to my own reluctance to practice, perform, and explore, and, now, I believe they inhibited my growth as a musician and as an educator. This recognition of the problem, and the recognition of the conservatory's role in cultivating the problem, led me to explore an extracurricular means of healing.

Despite or perhaps because of my own obvious angst and frustration in my lessons, my private double bass teacher was the first person to introduce me to Csikszentmihalyi's concept of *flow*, as a way to open my neural pathways for growing as a musician. This piqued my interest, and I started to explore *flow* and its widespread appeal.

I had experienced *flow* before, but I did not know what to name that experience. *Flow*, which is characterized by "an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), was something that I had experienced multiple times throughout my many years of playing sports and performing music but I had not yet identified this phenomenon.

Many athletes would describe *flow* as being "in the zone." These experiences seemed to be directly related to how much I enjoyed each activity, particularly in sports. However, despite personal experiences of *flow* and a theoretical understanding, I found the concept of *flow* was still too abstract to put into practice. The conservatory happened to have a certified Alexander Technique (AT) Teacher that would come to campus once a week to teach group classes and private lessons, and I signed up. Like Charlie Brown with the football, I thought this time would be different. However, I was not yet ready to challenge my early notions of how a classical musician finds success and safety in the field. For me playing well was only a means to an end: wining an audition and being safe in an orchestral job. It took years to let go of this way of thinking.

Originated by F.M. Alexander (1869-1955), this technique is a form of holistic education with attention to how one reacts to stimuli. Alexander would quote John Dewey, one of Alexander's students, who succinctly asserted that the AT teaches one to "think in activity" (Alexander, 1932). This could be re-said as "being mindful in activity." After I began exploring this work

with more interest, a good friend described how mindfulness meditation practice helped him find emotional and mental peace. He offered me a book called “Mindfulness in Plain English” by Henepola Gunaratana (1991), a fully ordained monk and meditation teacher who had written many books on the topic of mindfulness. However, after some preliminary exploration into the Alexander Technique and an introduction to mindfulness, I remained confused and lost in the practicing and performing of my instrument.

I was so lost that at the end of my undergraduate program I felt unprepared to teach or to move on in my playing so I chose to further my study at a state university in my hometown for a “do over” in the study of teaching and learning. I enrolled in a master's program in music education and found a certified AT teacher which recommended that I join the Teacher Training Course that she offered.

It was in this teacher training course where I came across like-minded trainees who shared my interest in mindfulness meditation and other holistic practices. As I struggled to acclimate to this new experience, my peers and teacher encouraged safety and joy in discovery. I felt as though I was learning the tools to choose the way that I wanted to think either mindless pain and frustration or mindful openness and understanding.

My Alexander Technique teacher recognized that by choosing openness and understanding, I was learning self-care. Caring teachers, peers, and family have often suggested that I “take care of myself,” or that I “shouldn’t be so hard on myself,” or something thereabouts. I never bought into these suggestions until I found that I could not take care of others because I did not have the resources. This applied directly to the bass, as I took more frequent days off from practicing, teaching, and learning (“mental health days”) as the demands on my time increased.

Thanks to help from psychologists, family, and my Alexander Technique teacher, I've found some resources for self-care that were constructive and supportive. Mindfulness was one such resource.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how mindfulness affects a musician's perception of their own performance and practicing. Like many spiritual and holistic disciplines, mindfulness can be difficult to define in a straightforward and clear way (Krägeloh, 2016). The word "mindfulness" itself derives from a variety of different languages; mindfulness comes from the word "Sati" in Pali, "smrti" in Sanskrit, and "tren-ba" in Tibetan (Day, Jensen, Ehde, and Thorn, 2014). Sometimes the "original" word for mindfulness has changed over time, such as "Sati" which originally meant "memory" (Krägeloh, 2016). Conversely, the basic translation for "smrti" in Sanskrit was "awareness" (Cornett-Murtada, 2012). That being said, there had been some consensus as to what characteristics made up basic mindfulness practice.

There were two characteristics of mindfulness that many agree to be focal points of mindfulness practice: 1) personalized attention to the present moment, and 2) a cultivated perspective towards the moment, which is characterized by "curiosity, openness, and acceptance" (Bishop, et al., 2004; Day, et al., 2014). Day et al. add a precursor to the aforementioned characteristics, which was the intention of purpose in meditation. Cornett-Murtada (2012) also adds a few characteristics of mindfulness: "non-judging...patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, [and] letting go" (p. 21). Therefore, a mindfulness activity might have the following traits: one would set an intent for the meditation, hone their awareness towards the "now," and approach the meditation with acceptance and a lack of judgement. Qualities of acceptance in this case include

openness, curiosity, patience, a lack of judgement, trust, a beginner's mind, letting go, compassion, and non-striving.

I am interested to see if *flow* states were an indirect result of mindfulness practice, and how a musician's consideration of self-care changes. For the purposes of this study, Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) theoretical model of *flow* is defined as "an almost effortless yet highly focused state of consciousness" (p. 9). *Flow* is characterized by: 1) clear goals throughout the experience; 2) immediate feedback (i.e., a musician objectively hearing what sounds they are producing); 3) a "balance between challenges and skill"; 4) "action and awareness are merged"; 5) one is not distracted; 6) no fear of failure; 7) one is not self-conscious; 8) "sense of time is distorted"; and 9) "the activity becomes an end in itself" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, pg. 9-11).

In this study, self-care was defined as a "deliberate action taken to care for one's mental, emotional, and/or physical health" (Kuebel, 2019). It was "deliberate" in that one must take charge of their self-care, and the consideration of the entire integrated self (i.e., mental, emotional, and physical) was a crucial consideration.

This study examined mindfulness, *flow*, and self-care as it pertains to the research questions stated below.

Research Question

Because I am interested in finding a healthier way of viewing one's own musical growth, my primary research question for this study was how do mindfulness activities affect collegiate double bass music students' perceptions of their own playing and practicing? My secondary questions were 1) how do mindfulness activities affect *flow* experiences among collegiate double

bass music students, and 2) how do mindfulness activities affect students' perception of self-care?

Rationale

There is a misconception surrounding musical growth that has been widely adopted by music educators, and that is the notion that practicing more and practicing harder is the best way to grow. While at a music conservatory for my undergraduate degree, I was pushed by both my teachers and peers to practice as often and for as long as humanly possible. "Keep your nose to the grindstone" was the mantra. I, to this day, feel shame and guilt about how long I practice. While the notion of practicing for a long time is not necessarily a false notion, it is grossly in-complete.

In the AT, Alexander coined a term that perfectly applies to this notion; he called it "end-gaining." Simply put, "end-gaining" is when one completely disregards the process and tries to reach the end regardless. The "end-gaining" in this notion of quantity in practicing is that, in the musician's effort to practice 5-7 hours a day, they disregard the quality of practicing. While some musicians do in fact practice mindfully for 5-7 hours a day, it had been my experience that I would act mindlessly the moment I get tired.

Other research which has been hastily adopted was Ericsson's, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer's (1993) 10,000 hours observation, which served as a springboard for Malcolm Gladwell's book "Outliers: The Story of Success" (Gladwell, 2008). Gladwell connected the 10,000 hours observation to iconic figures and groups such as The Beatles and Bill Gates. Gladwell observed that, after both The Beatles and Bill Gates had reached 10,000 hours' worth of practicing in their field, they created products which catapulted them to greatness. As a result of this misconception, I

experienced burnout, injury, cultivation of harmful mental and physical habits, and losing my joy for music.

Mindfulness activities were designed to consider the process more than the product and to practice a lack of judgement, which was a crucial skill for all musicians. One becomes more aware of *how* best to practice, rather than *how long* to practice, by developing their awareness towards the problem at hand and towards how to use their body to get the sound they want. Mindfulness also encourages being present with whatever it is one is doing, by not removing yourself from the present by fretting about the past or the future.

One of the qualities of being an excellent musician is awareness. Studio teachers teach awareness in many aspects of music education, such as intonation, rhythm, and tone quality. While building awareness in these musical qualities, other destructive habits can be cultivated. This notion had made it difficult for friends of mine to find joy and motivation in their own practicing. The opposite notion of self-compassion needs to be practiced among musicians so that we have more high quality and positive musicians out in the field.

Summary

There is a need for mindfulness in music education as the notion of being a self-supplied drill sergeant is still cultivated and is harmful for aspiring musicians. Mindfulness activities can cultivate healthy habits of self-care and have a positive effect on *flow* experiences among musicians. Mindfulness, *flow,* and self-care can reinforce a healthier approach to development in aspiring musicians. In this next chapter, I explored some of the literature on both mindfulness and *flow*.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Musical growth is a goal among most music educators. The nose to the grindstone approach is not effective for all musicians, and there is a growing recognition of healthier ways of learning. This includes integrating a more mindful way of practicing and performing, cultivating experiences of joy and *flow,* and ultimately leading to a consideration of ones' self-care. A good deal of research has followed suit, as the efficacy of mindfulness-based education ought to be tested.

The following review of literature observed different facets of mindfulness activities, and *flow*, and how they pertained to artistic growth. My primary research question was as follows: How do mindfulness activities affect collegiate double bass music students' perceptions of their own playing and practicing? My secondary questions were 1) how do mindfulness activities affect *flow* experiences among collegiate double bass music students, and 2) how do mindfulness activities affect students' perception of self-care? Based on these questions, I reviewed the following three categories of literature: 1) Mindfulness, 2) f*low*, and 3) self-care

Mindfulness

While the aforementioned operational definition had been established and clarified, it was important to remember that mindfulness practice is a broad field. Consider the practice of being conscientious of student's progress and having a clear vision in mind of the direction for the class (Byo, 2004). Was this not mindfulness? It involved introspection, and intent of awareness (i.e., the vision for the students). It would be explicitly considered mindfulness if Byo stated that the teacher should not attach a judgement to whether the students were meeting the teacher's vision.

While Byo did not intentionally subscribe to the discipline of traditional mindfulness, it was not a stretch to see how Byo's assertions in the essay were related to mindfulness.

Some found that mindfulness practice was a field that ought to be pursued not only in student education but also in teacher education. Stauffer asserted the following: "Our task is to provide rich and mindful experiences in every music setting. Our task is to model the disposition of a philosopher—one who asks questions, is curious, and is engaged in the life of the mind" (Stauffer, 2005, p.136). Stauffer asserted that while this was obvious, the lack of a diverse and mindful education in philosophy for prospective teachers is hindering the progress towards this task. One such aspect of philosophy that was not often addressed was holism in music. Cornett-Murtada defined holism as "the concept that the universe, particularly each living system, is correctly viewed in terms of interacting wholes rather than as a collection of parts" (Cornett-Murtada, 2012, p. 15). An aspect of holistic music education that was often neglected was the spiritual aspect of music. A reason for this neglect was that 1) it is difficult to talk about spiritualism, and 2) students needed to experience spiritualism, and how does one achieve that?

First, communicating spiritualism in music was an area of interest. Bogdan (2010) asserted that, despite the inability to prove that spirituality exists in music, there were two factors that aided in addressing the inexplicable in music: the "Shiver factor" and the "Shimmer factor," examples of each being, respectively, the shiver down the spine or goosebumps when listening to a powerful piece of music and being in a flow state. Finding activities that stimulated these factors could be one way in which to bring awareness to flow and the sensations of music and also to give the students the experience of the spiritual aspect of music. Another way was to explore the spiritual aspect of music is via group improvisation (McCarthy, Williamson, and Sarath, 2009).

McCarthy, Williamson, and Sarath asserted that spiritualism can be found if guided by four principles in group improvisation: "attention, intention, relationship and community" (p. 15). The first two principles were aligned with the three characteristics of mindfulness (i.e., an intent for the meditation, awareness towards the "now," and an approach to meditation with acceptance and a lack of judgement), while the last two principles were related to being in a group environment, demonstrating that mindfulness practice was for groups as well as for individuals.

Another aspect of mindfulness that deserved attention was kindness and self-compassion. Self-compassion was not a skill often developed among musicians. Conversely, self-destructive behaviors, such as self-deprecation, being overly critical, and a lack of constructive criticism were often cultivated among musicians (Johnson, 2016). Johnson asserted that self-compassion ought to be practiced, and much of the practice involved bringing a self-compassionate intent to various exercises. This was valuable not only for students but also for educators.

As an example, Falter (2016) described a scenario where teaching a song to kindergartners could become a mindfulness activity:

> Twenty-four kindergarteners sit on the floor with their legs stretched out in front of them. They all have their eyes closed as their music teacher guides them saying aloud "Imagine a flea is sitting on your toe. It doesn't weigh much, but you can feel a little pressure. In a moment, it's going to jump and then you won't feel that pressure anymore. Here it goes! It jumps up onto your tummy. Feel the little pressure on your tummy. Oh, it's preparing to jump again. There it goes! Now it's on your nose." This continues until the flea has jumped up onto the head and back down to the tummy, knee, and toe. "Okay, are you ready? Flick off that flea!" Some kindergarteners open their eyes, others keep them closed. They all

> reach out and flick the imaginary flea off their toe. One shouts, "Take that you flea! (Feierabend, 2000, p. 26)" from the song, "On my Toe there is a Flea" (Falter, 2016, p.20).

Falter asserted that not only does this activity bring attention to the body, it stimulated the imagination and further fleshed out the song. Consider how aspects of the activity, such as imagining the fly as it flies from the tummy to the nose, brought the students attention to the present moment and developed spatial reasoning.

The second example of a mindfulness activity from chapter 1 of this thesis was a breathing exercise from Cornett-Murtada:

> Breathe naturally from the diaphragm, observing but not controlling the breath. See if you can watch the breath become slightly deeper, slower, and quieter. Count each exhale from 1-5, and then start over again. Imagine the breath cycle beginning on the *exhale* instead of the inhale. Observe the moment the exhale becomes an inhale, and the inhale becomes an exhale. Identify the moments of stillness ("the gap") at the end of each inhale and/or exhale (Cornett-Murtada, 2012, p. 23).

A large part of this breathing exercise was acknowledgement of how the breathing mechanisms work. However, consider how Cornett-Murtada drew attention to "the gap" at the end of the inhale and exhale. It was common for mindfulness practice to embrace stillness, and the silence at the end of the breath was one such time to embrace. An activity often associated with Mindfulness Meditation (MM) was bringing one's attention to an object or to a function of the body, in this case, the breath. These were but two examples in an ocean of mindfulness activities, but they served as clear examples of a mindfulness activity.

According to Buchanan (2017), there were three basic styles of meditations: open-eyed meditations, guided meditations, and mantras. Open-eyed meditations were often videos that helped the meditator "focus on the images" presented in the videos. Guided meditations were recordings "designed to help the listener focus on sounds and clear the mind." (p. 73) Mantras were simple statements that were repeated and absorbed (Buchanan, 2017). If one gave themselves the space to close their eyes, breathe, and practice some mantra meditation, for example, they may have calmed the anxiety storm enough to give themselves a chance at *flow*. Mindfulness practice was by no means limited to these three styles of meditation, but they were an engaging introduction to mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness practice had also been applied to a number of quantitative, qualitative, and other experimental studies. The studies explored the effect of mindfulness practice on the "Novelty" and "Enjoyment" of a musical example (Anderson, 2013); "social connectedness" and "nature connectedness" (Aspy & Proeve, 2017); students outlook on life and their relationships with others (Crowley & Munk, 2017); breathing, body awareness, tone of voice, communication of the text, critical thinking, teacher/student relationships, and focus while practicing and in lessons among vocalists (Czajkowski & Greasley, 2015); attentiveness, aesthetic response, and *flow* in music listening (Diaz, 2013); and how students in an orchestra perceived making and preparing music (Langer, Russell, & Eisenkraft, 2009). Bell, McIntyre, and Hadley (2016) found a correlation between listening to classical music and improved spatial reasoning and mindfulness, with mindfulness treated as a dependent variable and listening to classical music as the independent variable. Not surprisingly, mindfulness practice had a positive impact in each of these studies.

Mindfulness and how it relates to music and music education is a growing field of research, both in quantitative and qualitative research.

Flow

Flow, as defined by Csikszentmihalyi, was another relevant area of research in music education. As flow was a goal when doing any activity, it was something to keep in mind while teaching mindfulness activities. Flow was also a wider field of study in music and music education, as it had been addressed in musical development and practicing (Bloom, & Skutnick-Henley, 2005), performance anxiety (Kirchner, Bloom, & Skutnick-Henley, 2008), studio instruction (Riggs, 2006), and combined flow experiences (Hart, & Di Blasi, 2015).

Consider first what constitutes a flow experience. Observed and defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, flow is "an almost effortless yet highly focused state of consciousness" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). People who have experienced flow described qualities that made up their experience of flow: clear goals, immediate feedback, balance between challenge and skills, "action and awareness merge," no fear of failure, distractions were excluded, "self-consciousness disappears," the sense of time distorts, and one finds themselves in the moment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

How did flow affect development and practicing? Riggs asserted that flow originated from Abraham Maslow's idea that an "individual provided with the appropriate environmental conditions and opportunities could reach self-actualization of his or her individual potential" (2006, p. 177). Riggs continued by saying that the pleasurable experience of flow can be a "motivating force, enticing individuals to pursue flow states in future endeavors while reinforcing a focus on the creative process over a final product" (p. 178). Bloom and Skutnick-Henley (2005) found

that participants, averaging around 59 years old, who did not experience flow often struggled with goal setting and were less willing to embrace discovery and exploration. Goal-oriented practice had been correlated to musical achievement, particularly among more advanced musicians (Bonneville-Roussy & Bouffard, 2015). Conversely, unfocused practice time in abundance can be harmful to one's musical growth and performance due to the "empty" nature of the practice time and the lack of a "goal-oriented direction" (Bonneville-Roussy & Bouffard, 2015, p. 700).

There are many means of discovering flow: one could "suspend self-judgement and self-criticism whenever possible," play music that "touches your soul," and/or "embrace the *process* of playing" rather than the product (Bloom, & Skutnick-Henley, 2005). Bloom and Skutnick-Henley acknowledged that "flow experiences tended to occur more often in small ensemble than while playing alone." (p. 27) Hart and Di Blasi's (2015) study found that group flow experiences were comparable to individual flow experiences. By interviewing how the musicians, ranging from 20 to 22 years old, related to other musicians, these group flow experiences were also correlated with increased empathy towards other musicians in the ensemble.

Another consideration was the relationship of flow experiences to performance anxiety. Bloom and Skutnick-Henley (2008) acknowledged that self-criticism was related to being threatened. It was no surprise that this feeling of being threatened led to performance anxiety. In a study done by Kirchner et. al. (2008), flow "proneness" was found to be both positively and negatively correlated with performance anxiety. Kirchner, Bloom, and Skutnick-Henley (2008) suggested that facilitating an environment where flow was easily attained and cultivated could lead to lessening the terror of performance anxiety.

Finally, the theoretical framework of flow can be the philosophical core to studio instruction. Riggs, in an article discussing a philosophical framework for studio instruction, identified five "concentric circles" in studio instruction: identity, experience, insight, inspiration, and flow. This framework was designed to "enhance a student's artistic and personal development while also strengthening a healthy mentoring relationship between teacher and student" (Riggs, 2006, pg. 176). Riggs argued that this could be the best means of studio instruction, with flow guiding the other four concentric circles.

So, why, and how was flow connected with mindfulness? Flow is a state in which things are at their most easy and engaging. One might think of mindfulness as a means to flow, because mindfulness practice can raise awareness to areas where the individual might be blocked, or awareness to the ensemble fit amongst a group. It was also a valuable measurement of student perception of the inherent enjoyment in a classroom, as Wrigley and Emmerson observe (2013).

Mindfulness and Flow

How do the theoretical concepts of mindfulness and flow relate? While this was a peripheral curiosity in this study, it had been central to many studies and articles. Some researchers have asserted that there exists a positive correlation between mindfulness and flow. Reid (2011) asserted that mindfulness and flow were similar in their perspective of engagement. With regard to the concept in Occupational Therapy called Occupational Engagement, Reid reported that "there is a link between the critical aspects of mindfulness and flow that capture awareness and presence during occupational engagement. Both flow and mindfulness embodied a presence to or attunement during modes of occupational engagement" (Reid, 2011). Bloom and Skutnick-Henley (2005) asserted that, while there was a correlation between mindfulness and flow, it was

largely dependent on the "content of that mindfulness" (pg. 26). Some musicians were found to be more flow prone when in connection with others and were more self-aware as a result. Bloom and Skutnick-Henley concluded that "the mindfulness underlining flow among musicians might be enhanced by steps that simply expand one's awareness when playing" (pg. 26).

In one study, Moore asserted that flow, cognitive flexibility, and mindfulness were linked, although "it remains unclear if one of these skills was an antecedent of the other or if they arise simultaneously" (2013, pg. 326). Moore asserted that "detached judgement" could lead to more creativity in "cognitive flexibility," which suggested that "mindfulness can predict flow disposition" (2013, pg. 326). In another study wherein four groups were formed based on their Mindfulness/Mindlessness Scale (MMS) found correlations between mindfulness and flow (Kee, & Wang, 2008). Kee states that "the high mindfulness cluster" performed better at with "challenge-skill balance, clear goals, concentration, sense of control, and loss of self-consciousness" than the "low mindfulness" cluster. This "high mindfulness" group also had better scores in the following categories: "attentional control, emotional control, goal setting and self-talk" (2008, pg. 405-406).

One study found that mindfulness and flow cannot be linked. Sheldon, Prentice, and Halusic (2015) conducted a study that examined if mindfulness and flow could exist simultaneously. They state that mindfulness and flow cannot exist simultaneously because "flow involves *losing* self-awareness within an activity, and mindfulness involves *maintaining* self-awareness throughout or even despite an activity" (Sheldon, Prentice, & Halusic, 2015). They continued:

> Intuitively, mindfulness and flow seem to go together. Both involve using the mind in an efficient, high-quality way, and both are seen as signals of good mental hygiene and health.

> Thus, many researchers have assumed that boosting people's ability to be mindful should also boost their ability to experience flow. We found evidence for the opposite conclusion: that boosting a person's ability to remain mindful during an activity might actually undermine their ability to get absorbed in that activity (pg. 281).

Additionally, Sheldon et. al. used the analogy that "one cannot both stand on the banks of a stream and be washed down that stream at the same time" (pg. 281). There was enough of a question of the correlation between mindfulness and flow to bear further research.

Self-Care

Self-care is part of a constant journey for most, if not all, professionals. Kuebel (2019) defined self-care as "deliberate action taken to care for one's mental, emotional, and/or physical health." In her article about developing a self-care plan for music teachers, Kuebel asserted that a self-care plan is "not anyone else's plan," meaning that one has a choice in what was considered appropriate care for one's self, and that a self-care plan "should be scheduled and honored in the same way that anything else in your life would be." In essence, one must commit to taking care of one's self.

Mindfulness can be a method or mode of self-care. Brown and Ryan (2003) found that higher levels of mindfulness intervention resulted in "lower levels of both mood disturbance and stress before and after the… Intervention." In addition, mindfulness work led to "heightened self-knowledge," which was a crucial element of emotional regulation. Brown and Ryan affirmed that while mindfulness leads to a greater sense of well-being, well-being was not a primary goal. Rather, it was a side effect of growing awareness. Wells and Klocko (2018) suggested that, since mindfulness benefits self-care and a sense of well-being, it should be incorporated into prepara-

tion programs at colleges and universities. They asserted that mindfulness practice would prepare people with "coping strategies" for the inevitable "setbacks of [any] job."

In addressing Kuebel's (2019) second point of honoring one's self-care plan, research had shown that mindfulness can indirectly affect the "perceived importance of self-care and well-being" (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010). Further, Richards et. al. suggested that in order "to receive the full benefits of well-being from perceiving self-care as important, one must achieve a state of mindfulness." The relationship between mindfulness and self-care was reciprocal, in that one who practices mindfulness was more prone to benefit from self-care, and vice versa.

An adjusted definition of self-care as it pertains to mindfulness was given by Baer: It was the focus on caring for the self and the intention to be fully present in the moment that offers an integrative approach stemming from mindfulness practice (Baer, 2003).

Summary

Mindfulness is a growing field in music education, and studies have shown that it is a valid field of study with regard to artistic growth. The studies determined that mindfulness practices have a positive impact on many problems in education, music education and performance. Research had found that mindfulness practices and flow were linked but were not the same experience. This research could have implications for pedagogies, studio instruction, and performing. With luck, the growing fields of mindfulness and flow will lead to a more holistic and joyous education for the growing musicians of the world.

While there was a growing body of research cataloguing the benefits of mindfulness in a variety of fields, there was not a wide body of research that addresses how mindfulness can af-

fect musicians' relationships to learning and performing on their instruments. The goal of this study was to observe and connect how three double bassists related to learning and performing their instruments after completing four mindfulness activities.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Mindfulness, as a foundational technique in education and learning, could lead to a healthier and more productive way of growing as musicians and students. Because of the quantity of research into best practice in mindfulness in the music classroom, this thesis centered on the following research question: How do mindfulness activities affect collegiate double bass music students' perceptions of their own playing and practicing? My secondary questions were 1) how do mindfulness activities affect *flow* experiences among collegiate double bass music students, and 2) how do mindfulness activities affect students' perception of self-care? This study therefore was situated in a studio classroom where students who practice and play together and alone, prepared for high-level performance experiences in a college music program.

Participants

This study was a multi-case study where college-level double bass players were interviewed and observed. This multi-case study design was chosen to allow for a more fleshed-out study resulting from a broader collection of data (Yin, 2009). There were three participants of the study who took part in interviews, guided exercises, and written reflections. All students in the class were members of the music department of a state university and studied with the same applied teacher, who continues to be a professional double bass player. The three selected participants ranged in age, experience, and musical ability. Descriptions for each of the three selected participants are as follows:

John	John was a 20-year-old bassist who just finished their second year of a Music Bachelors program.
Emily	Emily was a 19-year-old bassist who just finished their second year of a Music Performance Bachelors program.
Gabriel	Gabriel was a 23-year-old bassist who just finished their first year of a Music Performance Bachelors program.

All participants including the students, teacher, the school, and the community were assigned given pseudonyms by the researcher to protect their anonymity. The methodology was reviewed and approved by an IRB board.

Method

Mindfulness activities were administered in a series of four guided meditations over the course of two weeks. The activities were split into two parts: a guided meditation while sitting and a guided meditation while playing the bass. The sequence of these activities were varied but usually included a mindfulness-based activity, playing and practicing experiences, and a reflection exercise. These meditations were recorded and then uploaded to YouTube as unlisted files, which enabled only the participants to access them. For an example of a guided meditation script that was used in this study, see Appendix A.

The mindfulness activities included guided meditations that ranged from 13 to 18 minutes in length. The meditations were influenced by meditations from the application "10% Happier" (Harris, 2016), but were written and guided by the researcher. These guided meditations were largely based in Vipasyana meditation (insight meditation) with some aspects of Samatha (Hurk, et. al., 2010) meditation (concentration meditation). Four guided meditations were given to the participants over the course of two weeks. For an example of how these were incorporated, see Appendix A.

There were four guided meditations that were given to the participants over the course of two weeks. The participants completed a minimum of approximately 65 minutes of guided meditations before the end of the study.

Data Collection

The researcher analyzed the data using "concept coding" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). Data was collected from researcher observations, interviews, participant reflections, and a questionnaire. The researcher observations were taken prior to the stay-at-home orders that resulted from the spread of COVID-19. Observations were taken in the studio classroom, with the participants, the researcher, and the professor of double bass at the university in attendance. The researcher did not participate in the studio class.

The interview process involved only the selected participants. Interview questions addressed mindfulness, flow, and self-care as they relate to the participants' musical development and experiences. The interview questions were based on the research questions of this study, as well as the operational definitions of mindfulness, flow, and self-care. The one-on-one interviews occurred after the second mindfulness activity, and again after the fourth mindfulness activity.

The questions were open-ended, with some yes or no questions intended to clarify aspects of the process. The questions changed based on the participant, the participants' reflections, and the flow of conversation. For an example of a set of interview questions, see Appendix B.

The participants were asked to complete a reflection with four prompts as a guide when they received the mindfulness activities. The questions changed from one activity to another, with some questions that remained unchanged. For an example of one of the sets of prompts, see Appendix C.

A questionnaire was given to the participants prior to the start of the mindfulness activities. The questionnaire was designed to establish the participants experience on their instrument, understanding of key terms, and general interest in the study. For an example of the questionnaire, see Appendix D.

Themes and Coding

This thesis centered on the following research question: How do mindfulness activities affect collegiate double bass music students' perceptions of their own playing and practicing? My secondary questions were 1) how do mindfulness activities affect *flow* experiences among collegiate double bass music students, and 2) how do mindfulness activities affect students' perception of self-care?

For the purposes of this study, the operational definition of mindfulness contained two components: 1) personalized attention to the present moment, and 2) a cultivated perspective towards the moment, which was characterized by judgement, "curiosity, openness, and acceptance" (Bishop, Lau, et al., 2004; Day, et al., 2014). In this study, Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) theoretical model of flow was defined as "an almost effortless yet highly focused state of con-

sciousness." Self-care was defined as a "deliberate action taken to care for one's mental, emotional, and/or physical health" (Kuebel, 2019).

With the aforementioned research questions, the review of literature, and the "concept coding" (Miles, et al., 2020) data were grouped into three categories: Mindfulness, flow, and self-care. The research questions and operational definitions of the categories suggested the following themes: Time, Judgement, Perception of Bass Playing, Perception of Bass Practicing, Flow, and Self-Care. For more information, please consult Table 1.

Table 1. An example of the categorization matrix and coding of the data.

Category	**Theme**	**Sub-Theme**	**Related Research Participant's Quotes**
Mindfulness	Time	Past	"I was listening to [music]… earlier" "That will lead me to think about all the other times I've done that." "I'll tend to… be mad at my past self for not preparing my present self well."
		Present & Not Present	"I only had to restart my thoughts once or twice… and was able to stay… aware of myself and actions through the activity." "Stop and relax, and take a moment to know what you're doing." "Sometimes I'm just going through the motions."
		Future	"I'll never get in to a grad school that I want… with the way that I play now." "If I screw it up there, maybe I'll never get in to grad school." "I guess I'm more worried about the future."
	Judgement	Negative	"I suck." "This just sounds horrible." "I was out of tune…Therefore, I am terrible."

Category	Theme	Sub-Theme	Related Research Participant's Quotes
		Neutral	"I'm not using more pressure than really is needed." "This note is flat." "This fingering isn't the most efficient fingering I could be using."
		Positive	"You got it!" "Wow, I did such a good job fixing this section."
		Acceptance & Non-Acceptance	"This is my anger." "Wherever I'm at is ok." "It should sound better than this."
	Perception of Bass Playing	Perspective	"I have felt better about it, because I'm recognizing smaller increments of progress." "It's… good to remember that professional musicians play out of tune." "The point is to keep playing and work on actual playing as opposed to perceiving myself as good."
		Awareness	"you can put your bow on the bass and then you can say my bow hold is wrong." "I'm playing music, and that's the only thing in existence in my consciousness."
		Ease	"It felt pretty natural to keep reading, to keep my arms moving, to keep my fingers moving." "It felt like it came a lot more naturally." "My playing overall is… more relaxed."
	Perception of Bass Practicing	Deliberate/ Constructive	"This is what needs the most work. This is how I work on that well." "I have a plan for practicing all of these excerpts." "You can respond to it by taking a note of it and then next time around you play that note, you can make it more in tune."

Category	Theme	Sub-Theme	Related Research Participant's Quotes
		Destructive	"When I'm tired, and go lay in bed and watch tv instead of practicing… I beat myself up." "I'm not actually doing anything. I'm just playing the song crapilly over and over again." "It's those gigantic leaps of logic that are… detrimental."
		Sustainability	"It honestly doesn't really seem worthwhile to practice when you're upset or tired." "I give up! I'm going to go do something else." "I'm going to get better at my instrument, and, in an hour, I'll be done… then I'll try to get better… again."
Flow	Flow	In Flow State	"I'm not really thinking about how I feel… I'm playing music, and that's the only thing in existence… time doesn't exist." "I have days where… I'm not really thinking about anything, and I'll just start playing." "I lose track of time, and I don't really care about anything else besides what I'm doing."
		Out of Flow State	"It comes in and like 'oh it's so bad" and it can definitely take me out." "This piece might not… be what I need to be working on… because my state of mind… I'm not able to get into that flow state."
Self-Care	Self-Care	Physical Needs	"If I'm in a… room, with a full belly… and I got enough sleep… I tend to not feel much judgement, even if I am messing up." "I try to do a little bit of cardio each day, fifteen minutes jumping rope, or trying to run."

Category	Theme	Sub-Theme	Related Research Participant's Quotes
		Mental & Emotional Needs	"I started doing some counseling sessions" "I… get tired easily, especially around people." "I think that [mindfulness meditation] tends to calm those thoughts and quite them… It's like preventative medicine." "I just go to try and find somewhere to be alone… I felt better."

Limitations of the Study

The most obvious limitation was whether the participants listened to the guided meditations on their own. Based on the viewership on the videos, the participants watched each video at least once, with some participants having watched videos more than once. Other variables included: the participants may not have had an interest in mindfulness, or the students may have had preconceived notions about mindfulness. The hope was to gain some clarity on the participants' perceptions of mindfulness in the opening interview to get a sense of their commitment to the activities.

Summary

In this multi-case study, the effects of mindfulness on flow and double bass students' perceptions of practice, performance, and self-care were observed through the students' own accounts of their experience. The interview and reflection questions were inspired by existing literature on the subjects of flow, mindfulness, and self-care.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS

The following introductions are intended to clarify what understanding, personal difficulties, and intrigue the participants offered regarding the research questions: How do mindfulness activities affect collegiate double bass music students' perceptions of their own playing and practicing? My secondary questions were 1) how do mindfulness activities affect *flow* experiences among collegiate double bass music students, and 2) how do mindfulness activities affect students' perception of self-care? In this chapter I will introduce the participants of this study: John, Emily, and Gabriel. I will explore some of the challenges that the participants experience as a music student. I will briefly clarify the participants relationship to the bass professor at the local state university. Many quotations from the participants are included in order to get a sense of how the participants talk and think.

John

Hunched over his computer, his video gaming headphones obscuring only one ear, John moves his mahogany brown hair out of his eyes and scratches his nose. He looks down thoughtfully and explains his thoughts while shaking his head side to side. Sitting on his couch that almost looks like it is made from red velvet, one can still get a sense that John is lean and of medium height. As he talks, his hands come up to accentuate the points he makes. John seems comfortable at home.

John is 20 years old and just completed his Sophomore year at the local state university. He has played double bass for seven to eight years prior to this study and has been involved with playing music for nine or more years. Despite a vested interest in performing both the upright

and electric bass in classical music and jazz settings, his primary passion is in the field of Music Theory.

John's interviews were characterized by a concern for the frequent tension between truth and "healthy skepticism." When discussing the concept of "right effort" John said that "there's a right way to be putting in your energy into things with healthy skepticism and addressing the problems that you have," which was to say approaching things with reason and critical thinking. John showed many instances of introspection throughout his interviews and reflections. He was an individual who was aware of his intelligence. In his words, John has always been "really smart, but… wasn't particularly concerned with actually doing schoolwork" (Interview, May 28th, 2020). As time has passed, John has grown from a "pretty bad student in middle school" to one who can "appreciate paying attention to a [music] theory lecture." However, he seemed to be on task with an ever-present tendency to get distracted and bored, which lead him to "[freak] out about paying attention." This freaking out helped John with his focus, but he admitted he still gets bored in class and while practicing. Boredom plays a significant role in John's perception of class, but also, crucially, in John's perception of practicing his double bass.

> "Boredom is a thing I'm always worried about when I'm practicing. More than like playing badly, I think it's boredom. Even if I'm really angry with the way I'm playing, there will be days that I don't stop. But if I'm bored, that is always a problem for me. That's something, I've been trying to work on: trying to figure out how to not allow myself to think that I'm bored" (Interview, May 28th, 2020).

John let me know that he felt that, generally, boredom was a consequence of "time and lack of materials to play." He considered himself a "big procrastinator" (Interview, May 28th, 2020).

Over the course of his education, spanning from middle school to the present day, he had intermittently cogitated on his nature and his relationship to work. John found school "easy," or rather it was "not hard." So, John considered, if it was easy, "Why even not do it?" This sort of logic permeated his bass practice. For example, John often found ways to break up his practicing into "Whey even not do it" time frames (15 minutes). As he put it, "because fifteen minutes is such a ridiculous small time for practicing… you almost feel ridiculous for not practicing for fifteen minutes." It was an act of self-care to plan in this way, as it was "normal" for a music student to be "stressed very often."

John had a unique reaction to stress. Some mornings, John would wake up and feel disassociated from his body. It is a phenomenon known as depersonalization. John described it best:

> You wake up, and you're kind of looking through a glass wall. It's almost like an out-of-body experience, because you're experiencing your day but everything you're doing feels absent of your thoughts. It feels like you're just going to class, you're just walking but you're not actually the one telling yourself to walk. So, it's really strange, because it feels like you're controlling a video game character, but the video game character is your own self (Interview, May 28th, 2020).

This experience was one that John described as "terrifying," and it has led him to cancel private lessons and to lose practice sessions. He shared with me that this feeling sometimes concerned him, and he had reached out to talk with a counselor.

A noteworthy moment came in John's second interview where he touched on why mindfulness is important. It is also worth noting how John prioritized throughout this moment.

> It's just those gigantic leaps of logic that are just so, so detrimental. Like, exactly what you said: "I was out of tune on this C sharp. So, I can't play in first position. Therefore, I am terrible." When in reality, every other note around it was in tune, but your brain actively seeks out the worst parts of your performance. I feel like people are, by definition, far more illogical about themselves than they are about other people. Like, if I said to you "I was out of tune"after I played something, and you say to me "you didn't seem out of tune. There might've been a couple of notes here or there." For me, those notes are what I'm thinking about. For you, all the other notes are what you're thinking about. So, I feel like the brain is actively seeking out ways to try and disrupt you (Interview, June 4th, 2020).

John's comments showed an individual who prioritizes reason, critical thinking, and skepticism. The findings showed that John has found these priorities align with mindfulness and the act of meditation.

Emily

Sitting on a bed, a crooked poster of Paris on the wall behind her, Emily smiles generously at the computer screen. A naturally soft-spoken individual, she holds up a recording device to amplify her voice. Laughter, jokes, and hyperbole are dished out with every story she tells. During a story, Emily's hands will fly around her as if conducting an orchestra, occasionally retreating to scratch her nose, adjust her glasses, and tuck her light brown hair behind her ear. She is a natural storyteller.

Emily is 19 years old and just completed her sophomore year at the local state university. Like John, Emily has played the bass for seven to eight years and has played a musical instru-

ment for nine or more years. She plays not only the upright bass but also the viola da gamba and has experience playing classical music, early music, and jazz.

Emily's interviews were filled with humor and laughter, with Emily almost performing a play consisting of comedic characters: herself and her teachers. After the local state university was shut down due to COVID-19, Emily explained an interaction with her teacher.

> It was like, right after the school got shut down and everything. I was like "oh, I'm just going to practice… I'll just practice an hour today. I didn't practice yesterday. I practiced two hours today. Oh, I'm just like sporadically doing stuff," and just kind of doing stuff. And then [the bass professor was] like "excuse me. You have all day to practice now. What is this? [laughs]" (Interview, June 5th, 2020)

Another example was when Emily explained how mindfulness affected her perception of her practicing and herself.

> Instead of just feeling [your emotions], you're like "oh, I'm going to look back and analyze why this is happening,'"and that puts you more in the Neutral party mode. So, then it's like "oh, why are crying about your note being flat? That's stupid." [laughs] I guess that's not really good judgement. [laughs] It's more like "oh, you don't have to cry about this. It's not the end of the world" (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

Emily described many things using hyperbole, often for comedic effect, like when she said that her heart felt like it was "pounding like 500 beats" per second (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

Emily considered herself, like John, a procrastinating perfectionist. Sometimes Emily would "have the perfect answer," but "won't write it down" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). Other days, she would not want to "deal with the perfectionism" and would avoid the work, which let

everything “build up.” On the other side of the spectrum, Emily would have intense periods of focus where she would start something and finish it. Emily explained it best.

> The other night I was reading this music history book, and I was like “oh man. I remember [my viola da gamba professor] teaching me this.” And then I was like “oh I remember learning about this time period in Western Civ.” And then I was making all these connections for like three hours straight. I was like [gestures to illustrate thoughts going everywhere], and then I was like “it’s four AM. Go to bed!” That’s pretty common for me (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

Sometimes Emily’s lengthy periods of focus affected her ability to get a good night's sleep, as was demonstrated above.

Emily’s comments showed an individual who described most things with humor, and a recognition of absurdity. As shown in the findings, this recognition proved useful in recognizing destructive and unhelpful thought patterns.

Gabriel

Lounging back on a couch, hands behind his head, Gabriel flashes as smile at his iPad's camera. The beginnings of a goatee outline his smile. His black hair is short, but it sticks up on top with the same carefree nature as he himself embodies. He looks up towards the ceiling, as if the answer to the question resides there, before looking into the camera to share what thoughts he found.

Gabriel is 23 years old and just completed his first year at the local state university. Gabriel has played the bass for three to six years but has played a musical instrument for nine or more years. Gabriel is well versed in jazz, salsa, and classical music. He also played the electric

bass, and the cello. He is a member of the National Guard and began his collegiate experience by setting himself up as best he could to be an officer when he graduated. He participated in ROTC and majored in engineering, until choosing to pursue music.

Music still held its allure, and Gabriel considered how he could include music in his collegiate life.

> Oh, why don't I just try out for the music program? See what happens. Worst case scenario is I don't make it and I'm doing the exact same thing I am now. Best case scenario I can just enjoy playing music while I'm a part of this program, and I'll come out the other end an officer (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

Time passed and Gabriel found that his interest was not in engineering, or ROTC, but in music. So, he decided: W"ell, you know what? I'm just going to stop doing ROTC and play music because this is what I like doing. I enjoy this more" (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

Gabriel had a hunger for information, often asking about resources to further his understanding of many topics. In the interviews he asked for resources on mindfulness, how mindfulness related to music, how to practice mindfulness, and the philosophy of aesthetics. Gabriel asked many questions of how the researcher understood mindfulness and flow, sometimes interviewing the researcher when the researcher should have been interviewing him.

A sense of humor and self-effacing jokes were present throughout Gabriel's interviews. One such example occurred when talking about how he often related his skill in music to his worth as a human being: "I think I used to tie my self-worth to my ability on my instrument, and that's not a really good thing. Especially when you don't sound that great [laughs]" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). In the interviews, Gabriel would attempt to be concise in his responses, often

apologizing for "rambling" or talking too much. Another example of Gabriel's self-effacing humor came when he described how his past actions and thoughts related to his present and future.

> I'll tend to kind of be mad at my past self for not preparing my present self well enough. I guess the shit kind of just flows downhill. I feel like the middleman, like "my past self screwed me over, so now my future self is going to suffer, so I have to pick up the slack." And, you know, like "that guy is an asshole [laughs]" (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

During the two weeks that this study took place, Gabriel's life went through some changes. First, he had an audition in the National Guard called an Army Musician Proficiency Assessment (AMPA). Gabriel was "really stressed" about the audition. Second, he moved to Virginia for the summer where he lived in the barracks. Upon arriving, he had to quarantine for eleven days due because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This change of scenery affected everything from where he slept to where and how he practiced.

> My practicing has changed for better and for worse in different ways over the past couple of weeks. Like, I'm in a completely different environment right now. My practice space is completely different. My available time to practice is completely different (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

Third, due to the lack of sleep and the exercise ("Half-mile intervals.") that he had to do, he was consistently tired.

Gabriel's comments showed an individual who was profoundly curious, introspective, and interested in the topics of mindfulness and flow. He also experienced a great deal of change over the course of study, which affected his ability to be comfortable. In the findings, Gabriel's curiosity and introspection allowed him to relate to similar qualities in mindfulness meditation.

Summary

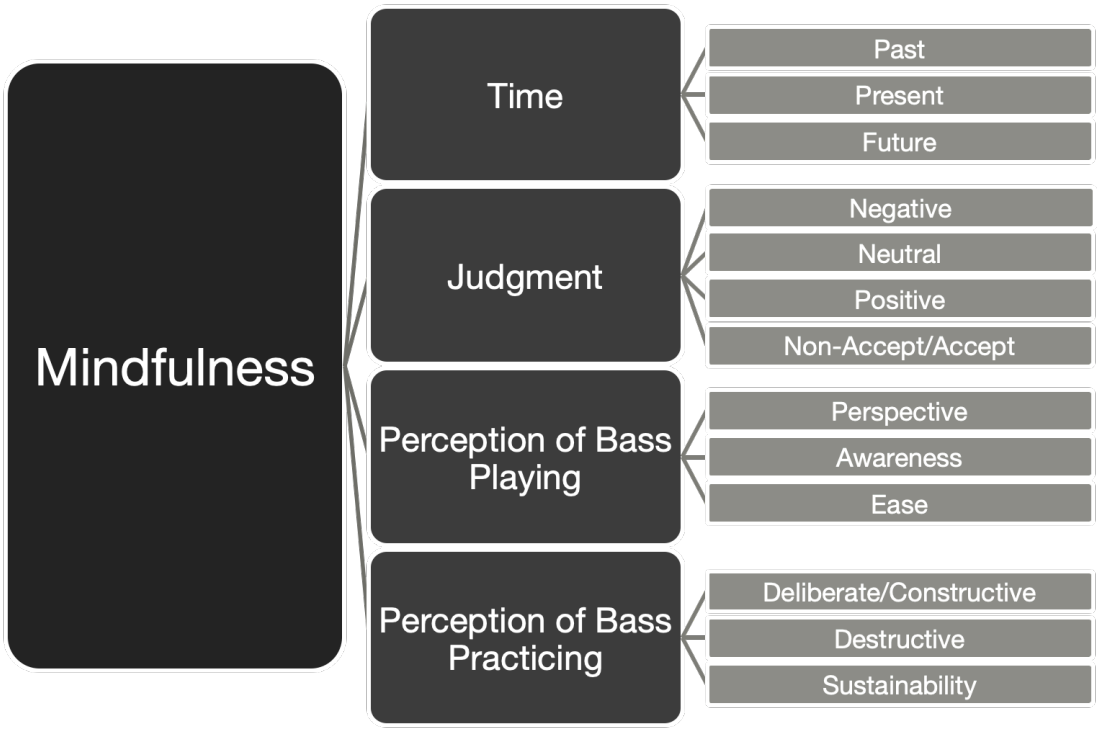
Three participants in this study consisted of John, Emily, and Gabriel. Each participant's background and perceptions of challenges ranging from stress, practicing, performing, and their responses to these perceptions, clarified how and why they responded to the mindfulness activities in the way they did. The quotations from each participant also provided a lens into the participants' self-talk, judgement, and personality. By establishing the context in which the participants experienced the mindfulness activities, the understanding of mindfulness, flow, and self-care became clearer. This helped answer the following questions: how do mindfulness activities affect college music student's perceptions of their practicing and performing? Secondarily, how do these activities affect student's flow experiences and understanding of self-care?

CHAPTER FIVE:

MINDFULNESS

The purpose of this study was to answer the following questions: how do mindfulness activities affect college music student's perceptions of their practicing and performing? Secondarily, how do these activities affect student's flow experiences and understanding of self-care? The participants were asked to take part in four guided mindfulness activities. Following the activities, the participants were asked to reflect on the activities and interviewed. The data was separated into three categories (Mindfulness, Flow, and Self-Care) and six themes (Time, Judgement, Perceptions of Playing, Perceptions of Practicing, Flow, and Self-Care) to best answer these questions. Mindfulness and the related themes and sub-themes are shown in the For the purposes of this study, mindfulness was defined as an exp figure below:

Figure 1. Mindfulness, themes and sub-themes.



Mindfulness: Time

erience wherein one brings their attention to the present moment, and a cultivated perspective towards the moment, which is characterized by judgement, "curiosity, openness, and acceptance" (Bishop, Lau, et al., 2004; Day, et al., 2014). The data that emerged from interviews, observations, and participant reflections can distill the definition of mindfulness into two parts: time, and judgement.

Time: Past

My past is everything I failed to be (Fernando Pessoa).

This study was primarily interested in how students engage in the *present* moment and how residing in that space affected their perception of the act of playing and practicing the bass. However, it was helpful to not only to be able to note when one was in the present, but also when one was in the *past* or the *future*.

The intent of the first mindfulness activity with the participants was to allow them to simply be aware of the breath and to observe when/if their mind might take their attention away from the breath. When reflecting on the first mindfulness activity (May 26, 2020), Emily discovered that her mind took her out of the present moment with thoughts that were rooted in the *past*. Despite normally thinking "in full sentences" (Interview, May 29th, 2020), the name "Edgar" came up in her meditation. This was a *past* thought because she was taken out of the present moment by thinking about Edgar Meyer's Bach recordings that she had been listening to recently. Gabriel also found that his mind left the *present* for the *past* a "couple of times" but that he was able to return to the *present* moment (Reflection, May 26th, 2020).

Emily introduced the concept of "dwelling" on other things than the task at hand (Reflection, May 26th, 2020), which could suggest being stuck in the past. When introducing this point, Emily asserted that "not dwelling on other things" was a positive result from changing her thinking to something simpler (inhaling and exhaling to "momentum"). Emily later stated that there were times where "one little mistake can feel like a huge failure" (Reflection, June 5th, 2020). This was an example of how dwelling in one *past* mistake can be detrimental for one's ability to grow and progress. Gabriel explained an analogous situation in a separate way. Gabriel outlined a process wherein "there will be memories… that I'll get wrapped up in and then I'll start to get wrapped up in a stream of thought" (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

Emily chronicled a situation where, instead of dwelling in one thing, her mind would take her from one memory to another memory, ad infinitum. Regard the following quote from an interview with Emily:

> The other night I was reading this music history book, and I was like "oh man. I remember [my viola da gamba instructor] teaching me this." And then I was like "oh, I remember learning about this time period in Western [Civilization]" And then I was making all these connections for like three hours straight… I think I spend way too much time thinking about things and I'm like "I already learned the whole history book! I've only had it for one day!" [laughs] And then I'm like "oh, I guess I've been learning it since I was like ten." And then I'm like "never mind, think of something else." That's kind of like… it spirals. So, then I went to [the first mindfulness] activity I'm like "oh, mine isn't spiraling like 500 billion facts that I've remembered from every single lecture that I've ever had" (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

Consider the use of words such as “spiral” and “connection.” The nature of a spiral was that it seemed out of control, and in this case, Emily recognized that she was not in control when she was remembering “500 billion facts from every single lecture” she has had.

As noted by Emily, there were moments where one would be thinking *past* thoughts in a deliberate way, and this can lead to growth and perspective. This was often in the act of analysis or reflection. She recounted how reflecting on her *past* experiences with a piece of music helped her remain neutral rather than engage with a negative thought pattern.

> I started playing it, with keeping the intonation in mind, but I was like “hmm, this note was really out of tune. But I know this piece, I’ve heard a good recording of it a lot, and I don’t remember me playing it this out of tune before”… Then I was like “Oh, I’ve had this problem before” (Reflection, June 5th, 2020).

Emily stated that a note was not only out of tune, it was “really out of tune.” This could be an opportunity to dwell in the past, but she reminded herself that she had played this with good intonation before and can use that to continue to grow. Gabriel interpreted this as a moment where one had to “break out of a mindful state to some degree” in order to “problem solve.” John reflected on *past* information to help with a *present* situation. John wondered “ok, well, if I’m feeling bad about this part, what were all the techniques I know that I can do to make that thought disappear by making this part stronger?” (Interview, May 28th, 2020) Keep in mind the following quote from Eckhart Tolle as it relates to John and Gabriel’s statement: “Your mind is an instrument, a tool. It is there to be used for a specific task, and when the task is completed, you lay it down” (Tolle, 2004, p.21-24). Gabriel chose to “break out” of the *present* moment in order to use his mind for a “specific task.” John called upon his awareness of the *present* moment to di-

rect his mind to problem solve. When one can use the mind deliberately as a "tool," as Tolle (2004) asserted, then one can avoid the feeling of "making a huge mistake."

Time: Past and Future

Both John and Gabriel noted that often thinking about the *past* would lead to thinking about the *future* in a negative and destructive way. John explained how something like a "bad day" of practicing could trigger a response in him that traveled out of the present moment:

> I think it goes this way: it starts in the *present*, then it goes *backwards*, and then it leads me to the *future*. What I mean by that is, I'll have a bad day practicing and I'll just stop. I'll stop practicing that day, and I'll just be like "ok, I'm done." That will lead me to think about all the other times I've done that. And then that will lead me to think about "well, if I've done that that many times, how will I ever be the bass player I want to be?" (Interview, June 4th, 2020).

Consider how John spoke about "all the other times" he had stopped his practicing prematurely. This was a past thought. This thought pattern inevitably led him to conclude that, if he continued to stop his practicing prematurely, he wondered "how will I ever be the bass player I want to be?" His difficult day of practicing happened for him in the present moment, but consequentially, it reinforced that he had practiced badly many times before, and in his mind he concluded that he would never be bass player he wants to be if this was to continue.

Gabriel recognized the connection between *past* and *future* in his thought processes as well. He explained how one thought process tied into the other. Note how Gabriel viewed his *past* self, *present* self, and *future* self as separate entities.

> I'll tend to kind of be mad at my past self for not preparing my present self well enough. I guess the shit kind of just flows downhill. I feel like the middleman, like "my *past* self screwed me over, so now my *future* self is going to suffer, so I have to pick up the slack. … that guy is an asshole." [laughs]… I'm more worried about the *future* and upset about the *past*… not preparing myself in the *past* and worrying about how it's going to impact my *future*" (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

In Gabriel's case, the anger at the past-self sounded like regret, which suggested that Gabriel's future-self might "suffer" as a result. When he noted "the shit… flows downhill," this might suggest a mind run amok. He noted that his mind started time traveling, which was characterized by a continuing complication, and continued much longer than was helpful. Gabriel's awareness of his reactions to *past* thoughts and *future* was revealed when he stated that he was "worried about the future and upset about the past." Like John, the *past* was also used as a means of justifying his fear of the *future*: "no preparing [himself] in the *past"* led to fear that it would "impact [his] future."

Time: Future

> *Why didn't I learn to treat everything like it was the last time, my greatest regret is how much I believed in the future (Jonathon Safran Foer).*

In coding the data, a significant connection between anxiety and *future* thoughts emerged. Each participant viewed themselves as an "anxious" person, and often their anxious thoughts were about the *future*.

Future thoughts in this study often came in the package of planning. While meditating, Emily found that she was thinking about "studying for [her] music history class" (Reflection,

May 26th, 2020). John discovered that he was thinking about *future* thoughts ranging from thoughts about dinner (Interview, May 28th, 2020) to "where were [my friend] and I going to hike?" (Interview, June 4th, 2020). Gabriel's planning was the repeated of the phrase "I'm going to do this" (Interview, June 5th, 2020), which was less in the distant *future* and closer to the *present,* but this still was a thought that was not about the *present* moment. Planning had its place in practicing, and adult life, if it was deliberate. Consult the aforementioned passage from Eckhart Tolle: "your mind is… a tool" (Tolle, 2004, p. 21).

The participants detailed moments where they were disengaged in an activity or, rather, were not *present* with the activity at hand. The participants reported basic distractions such as an itchy leg (Gabriel, Interview, June 5th, 2020) or playing while another student was playing (personal observation, February 19th, 2020). Take Emily, who recalled "when the exercise was over, but there was still some talking, I noticed I got distracted and started fingering the introduction to the Bottesini Concerto that I was working on earlier in the day" (Reflection, May 26th, 2020). In this case, the task at hand required being attentive to the guided meditation, and Emily found herself preparing for the next task. Like the planning theme as discussed above, but with the difference being that Emily "noticed" how she started practicing, rather than deliberately choosing to stop the meditation and start practicing. Emily later admitted that it was "common… to think about assignments or other tasks I have to do when I first begin practicing," which was another example of not being *present* with the activity at hand.

Time: Present

> *It's being here now that's important. There's no past and there's no future. Time is a very misleading thing. All there is ever, is the now. We can gain experience from the past, but*

> *we can't relive it; and we can hope for the future, but we don't know if there is one (George Harrison)*.

The *present* is the moment in time that is happening right now (Tolle, 2004). The participants often compared being in this state to being focused. Emily recounted how she was "able to just focus on hearing the note without thinking about it" (Reflection, May 26th, 2020) while practicing an exercise mindfully. John asserted that "if you practice addressing your distractions, it's harder to get distracted when it counts" (Interview, May 28th, 2020). Gabriel outlined how, when working on an exercise, he could "focus on each note and the motion of it, and the sensation of it" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). Later Gabriel noted that, when he was practicing "well," he "[focuses] on the music and not on outside factors and distractions" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Being in the *present* was not an exhaustive focusing. Gabriel chronicled how a mindful state differs from an exhaustive focus:

> I'll be very deliberate and very conscious the entire time, and very focused. But, at the same time, it's not an exhaustive type of focus. Like, if I try to balance a pencil on my finger, I can focus for a set amount of time and then my focus would wear [down] and I would have to stop and take a breath, and then do it again. Whereas, when I'm in that kind of zone and I have that flow, you can focus for a really long time, and it's like you're not working against yourself (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

Gabriel found that it took more effort to focus on the pencil, but the effort in flow was much less. Being in the present had a way of allowing one to "focus," or be with whatever task was at hand. Gabriel also mentioned that it was "like you're not working against yourself," which was akin to

not letting one's mind travel to the *past* or *future*. What he named as "that flow" will be touched on later in the section titled *flow*.

The participants reported situations where they were "not thinking about anything" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). While this initially sounded like mindlessness, and mindlessness is not only the absence of thinking but also the absence of awareness. Emily narrated her brief moment of mindfulness: "I'll have a moment for like five seconds where I'm like 'oh I'm not thinking about anything.' And then I'll be like 'that's weird!'" (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

While acknowledging that she was "not thinking," it was important to recognize that she was aware of this state of mindfulness. Gabriel elucidated that being in the *present* moment was about being a "passive observer of the music instead of being an active participant." Being "passive," in the way that Gabriel was referring to, is what led guided meditators to use words such as "allow," "witness," etc. Contrast this with the following description of a practice session that was not going well from Gabriel.

> [The way I normally practice is] less of a deliberate experience, and it's more of a going through the motions. When I'm doing it well, I'm listening for a good sound and good intonation. But when I'm not doing it well, I'm just going through the motions just to get it done so I can move on to the next thing (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

Rather than have an awareness of a mindful state, he seemed to be "going through the motions" without awareness and attention to problems that may need to be address (i.e. sound and intonation). Gabriel finished this idea by saying "so I can move on to the next thing," which was not attending to the *present* moment and moving his attention to the *future*. Gabriel later recounted how, when choosing to sit down and watch tv feeds into a "vegetative state." This was an effec-

tive way to define mindlessness, whereas mindfulness was awareness of the *present* moment without interference from the mind (Bishop, Lau, et al., 2004; Day, et al., 2014).

There was a connection between how "stopping to take the time to think" (Emily Interview, June 5th, 2020) allowed one to connect to the *present* moment. Gabriel said, "you slow it down and you respond to [a situation] in a more thoughtful way" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). Conversely, when people did not take the time to stop and "think," they were not attending to what was happening in the *present* moment. In the bass studio class, before the class had to be disbanded due to COVID-19, it was not an uncommon occurrence for one bass player to be working on piece while the bass professor was working with another student (Observations, February 12th, 2020). Emily outlined how her bass professor would ask for a passage and she would jump in without taking the time, and then the professor would say something to the effect of "how about count four bars first?" (Interview, 29th, 2020). When observed back in February, each of the participants would start an excerpt from a symphony without stopping to think (Observations, February 12th and 19th, and March 4th, 2020). Gabriel detailed this process not as "stopping" but as being able to slow it down. These were examples of not attending to the *present* moment.

The data points to a connection between being in the *present* moment and a sense of "calm" and "clarity." There was also a connection between the amount of physical tension one had and being able to remain in the *present* moment. Emily narrated her experience of clarity while meditating:

> I was feeling comfortable and I just kind of felt like "oh, my head is clear. I'm not thinking about stuff. I don't feel any tension in my head."… I think in the activity you said,

> "let your jaw relax,"… I was like "oh, yes. Let's do that." I felt my face relax, and I felt everything relax. And I think that was my clarity, like I didn't have anything on me… I had a lot of tension in my lower back. I would say that's really common for me… that's what I mean by clarity… "I've got all that tension off" (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

For Emily, tension took her out of the *present* moment, and when she was "comfortable," she uncovered that "clarity." Similarly, Gabriel noticed that when "it was hard… to get into a comfortable position," it was a "challenge" to be in the *present* moment. John recognized that, when practicing mindfully, he can play his instrument with more ease.

> I think that my playing overall is just more relaxed… By starting my practice routine with one of these activities, I'm able to relax my shoulders, clear my head a little bit, then I sit down, wind up my bow. And then, by that time, twenty minutes in, my arms are ready to kind of just sit at the bass instead of just [mimes tense bass playing] (Interview, June 4th, 2020).

John discovered that the activity helps him relax and consequently "clear" his mind. Again, the participants shared moments of having "clarity" or a "clear… head" when practicing mindfully.

Throughout the two weeks of study, the participants showed skill in not only recognizing when they were not in the moment, but also in returning to the *present* moment. Gabriel detailed how he recognizes "that something is starting to stress [him]" and then chose to "take a step back from it" (Interview May 29th, 2020). John recounted how he would occasionally have to "restart [his] thoughts" (Reflection, May 26th, 2020). This was a recognition that his mind took him out of the *present* moment, and then was able to "stay keen and aware of myself and actions through

the activity." Emily also found success in being able to recognize thought patterns and was able to not indulge in them.

> I'm constantly thinking about stuff all the time, so I was like "I know how my brain works. I know where that's going." I was able to turn it off… Then when I got to "Music History," I know where that's going too. So, I was like "Music History? Nope. Turn it off" (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

The participants had developed skill in stopping themselves from getting distracted before the study began, however, their ability to recognize the thought pattern and return to the *present* moment was much more clear at the end of the four mindfulness activities than what had been observed previously.

The participants said that they felt "calm," "clear," and "aware" in the *present* moment. Inspect the contrast between how the *past* and *future* were characterized by words such as "upset," "worried," and "anxiety" and the way that the participants described the *present*. One's mind could visit the *past* or *future* without it negatively affecting their playing, practicing, or health if it were deliberate and they were able to return to the *present* moment. The participants each showed the ability to return to the *present* moment in some capacity.

Judgement

In the aforementioned operational definition of mindfulness, judgement played a key role. One of the purposes of Mindfulness Meditation (MM) was to bring one's attention to the present moment with a "non-judging" mind (Cornett-Murtada, 2012). Another way to say this was that the absence of judgement was the absence of negative or positive judgement. This brings one's judgement to a more neutral judgement, where one was merely observing without an

added emotional label. Acceptance and non-acceptance played a role in judgement of the present moment, as one's awareness of the present moment was characterized by "openness and acceptance" (Bishop, Lau, et al., 2004; Day, et al., 2014).

Judgement: Negative

To crooked eyes truth may wear a wry face (J.R.R. Tolkien).

The participants in this study had a clear understanding on how *negative judgement* manifests in their lives. Gabriel discussed how he "blame shifts" when he was stressed.

> Something is going wrong and instead saying it's my fault, my responsibility, I'll put that blame on people close to me. Usually people close to me. It's like "well, you're making noise over there, and that's why I can't focus on this, and that's why I'm going to fail this semester." Just crazy things like that that don't really make much sense (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

Gabriel was making *negative judgements* of the people around him instead of considering how best to alleviate his stress.

John asserted that when he reacted to something, rather than stopping and thinking, he might feel "outrage" and "blame the teacher or the course… rather than blame themselves" (Reflection, May 26th, 2020). John seemed to be advocating for the approach put forth by a Bo Diddley tune: "before you accuse me, take a look at yourself" However, shifting blame from an external thing to an internal thing might be simply shifting negative judgement from the external to the internal.

Renowned meditator Joseph Goldstein contends that judgement was silly. Part of the reason this could be was because they were often distorted versions of the truth. John illustrated this phenomenon in our second interview.

> It's just those gigantic leaps of logic that are just so, so detrimental… "I was out of tune on this C sharp. So, I can't play in first position. Therefore, I am terrible." When in reality, every other note around it was in tune, but your brain actively seeks out the worst parts of your performance. I feel like people are, by definition, far more illogical about themselves than they are about other people. Like, if I said to you 'I was out of tune' after I played something, and you say to me "you didn't seem out of tune. There might've been a couple of notes here or there." For me, those notes are what I'm thinking about. For you, all the other notes are what you're thinking about. So, I feel like the brain is actively seeking out ways to try and disrupt you (Interview, June 4th, 2020).

John noted that an external judge of a performance may have a much more positive perception than the performer. The use of the word "terrible" was consistent with the other participants. Gabriel used the phrase "I suck" to name how he felt "stagnated" and disappointed in the amount that he practices. Emily commented "this just sounds horrible" when practicing a piece of music. *Negative* judgements often crumbled under the slightest scrutiny. If you played some notes that were out of tune, as in John's example, are you terrible? Do you suck? Does it truly sound horrible?

Emily detailed her experience with one of the guided meditations:

> After [the instruction] … to play a scale of my choice, I immediately chose a scale, and felt ready to play it. Then I started thinking about if I was supposed to start yet, and then I

> think I started getting annoyed because it felt like a weirdly long time before I felt like I was instructed to play a scale then when it actually happened (like if I was told to play a scale of my choice in a lesson I would just say 'okay' choose one, and play it right after I thought about it) whereas here I think I felt like I was just standing and waiting in anticipation (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020).

This feeling of annoyance was due to not feeling comfortable in the *present* moment. She wanted to get the scale and was not content with simply being in that moment in time.

The participants noted how *negative* judgements could take them out of an ideal headspace for practicing or performing. Emily was also aware that sometimes negative judgements could take one out a flow state and the *present* moment: "I think negative emotions can definitely take me out of a state of flow though. Like if I get frustrated and I just keep feeling frustrated, like I'll just not be able to focus after trying awhile on anything productive" (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). Note the use of the word "focus." As mentioned in the earlier section on time, the participants related focus to being in the present moment. Negative emotions such as "frustration" took Emily out of the moment.

There was a belief that grit, "discipline," and being critical were ingredients for success. However, this did not match John's experience:

> When you practice at home or at school, and you're really tough on yourself, you ingrain the actual idea that you need to reprimanded for these problems… When I was working on my Marcello… I got the first passage… But, some of the other passages, I either didn't have the discipline or didn't have the commitment to doing them right. So I would constantly be putting myself down about that, and… that stemmed to other things. So, in

> another movement… I would be reminded of that and say "well, if you can't do that, then you can't do this." So, it spreads throughout pieces and throughout practice sessions (Interview, May 28th, 2020).

John characterized this vicious cycle as one that "spreads" throughout all musical activities. This adversely affected his practicing and subsequent artistic growth in learning his instrument. The goal of mindfulness meditation was to note when we may make *negative* comments about something and then find a less emotional way to assess the situation. As mentioned earlier, if you played out of tune, the *negative* comment might have been "I suck," or "this sounds horrible." The *neutral* comment might be as simple as "I was out of tune there." From that experience, one could imagine how the *negative* comment negatively affects growth, and a more *neutral* comment was more equipped to positively affect growth.

Sometimes the *negative* judgements were much more subtle than some the examples previously mentioned. Reflect on the use of the word "should." This word was often used in a sentence that exhibits characteristics of non-acceptance. As previously mentioned, "acceptance" is a characteristic of mindfulness. How one used the word "should" indicated whether it was self-acceptance or not. When Emily said "I should play everything perfectly" (Reflection, June 5th, 2020), or when Gabriel said, "you should've gotten this done a while ago" (Interview, May 29th, 2020), that was an example of *negative* judgement. Conversely, an example of the word "should" being used without *negative* judgement was when Emily asked, "should I practice Bach, or should I practice Beethoven?" (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

Judgement: Non-Acceptance and Acceptance

For after all, the best thing one can do when it is raining is let it rain (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow).

Non-acceptance is when one was not accepting the reality of the present moment. This manifested in diverse ways among the participants. One of the more common ways that *non-acceptance* manifested was in feelings of frustration. When John felt "bad" about a practice session, he wanted to accept his problems and work to correct them (Interview, May 28th, 2020). However, he found that he had "never really been able to address it in that way," which consequently led him to feel "overly frustrated" and "discouraged" for not only his practice session but for the rest of the day. Both John and Gabriel recognized that sometimes frustration was an overreaction. John used the word "overly" when he described being frustrated. Gabriel elucidated how he can "get frustrated with other people for things… that I don't need to be frustrated by" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). Emily asserted that setting too bold a goal, in this case working on "the entire [Bach Cello] suite," could result in frustration, because it was unrealistic to expect so much (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Frustration, like *negative* judgement, was often removed from the reality of the situation at hand. It resulted from a lack of *accepting* the present moment.

Each participant communicated moments where they "beat themselves up." I would contend they were beating themselves up because they were frustrated with the work they did, which was a sign of *non-acceptance*. Gabriel expounded how setting a "high expectation" for himself, and when he did not finish the work needed to meet said expectation, he beat himself up (Interview, May 29th, 2020). This was a sign of *non-acceptance* because Gabriel was scolding himself for something that had already happened. A more accepting approach might be to acknowledge that the expectation that he set for himself was not met, note how felt about that, and then con-

structively address this by planning or moving on. John admitted that he was often very "hard on himself," which was to say that he was not forgiving.

The data shows how n*on-acceptance* can manifest in other ways. Emily recounted an experience where she would enter "distraction mode" in order to "get rid" of her anxiety (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). There was inherent non-acceptance in the thought process of getting "rid" of something. Gabriel similarly expressed wanting to "erase" how he felt about something, or "push [those] judgements" out of his mind (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). A phrase often used in mindfulness work is to honor something. Erasing something was not honoring or listening to what was in the *present* moment. A more accepting approach might look like accepting that the emotion was there, honor it, and then choosing whether it was helpful or whether you want it.

Rejecting how one feels in the present moment is an added form of *non-acceptance*. Another is not accepting where one is in their learning journey. Emily elucidated this idea when she pleaded "why don't I play like [Edgar Meyer] all the time?" (Edgar Meyer is a virtuosic bass player, and Emily wished she could play like that.) There was an element of shame in not accepting where one was at the present moment. Earlier in this interview, Emily explained an experience of *non-acceptance:*

> "No! I just want to play it good! I don't actually want to practice it. I just want it to be good right now." And then I'm like "this is bad…" I actually rage quit earlier this week… "This is just sounding bad. It's not getting better. I feel like I'm just playing the same thing over and over. It's just bad" (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

Emily detailed how *non-acceptance* built on top of itself and led to one quitting a practice session. It was important to inspect the emotional component of the phrase "rage quit." The *non-ac-*

ceptance led to not only rage, but also a lot of *negative* judgements. While Emily's observations were obvious examples of *non-acceptance,* sometimes the *non-acceptance* of one's present learning state was more subtle. Take John's description of working on a Mozart Symphony: "If I start at 60 bpm playing an eighth note passage from a Mozart excerpt, and I wind up at 120, the judgement will be 'ok, but that's not fast enough.' Because the excerpt is supposed to go to 210" (Interview, June 4th, 2020). In this case, there was not an obvious example of *non-acceptance* that eventually led John to quit his practice session, but there was the language of *non-acceptance* in the quote. Examine the difference between the following two sentences: "That's not fast enough," and "I got to 120 bpm and I need to get to 210 bpm in the coming practice sessions." The latter was a longer statement, but one that *accepts* John's current place, while acknowledging that he had more work to do. The former was not accepting or honoring the progress made before recognizing there was work to do.

Another example of *non-acceptance* was when the participants were trying to be right, or rather to not be wrong. For the purposes of this study, the nature of right and wrong will not be examined. This study was interested in how the participants responded to the desire to play a passage right, or do the meditation right, etc. As both Emily and John identified themselves as perfectionists, it was no surprise that they were striving not to be wrong.

There was a correlation between *acceptance,* more *deliberate practice*, and more *neutral* judgements. In the aforementioned examples of a "more accepting approach," there was an element of choice. Honor the emotion, then decide what you want to do with it. John outlined a more accepting response to a bad practice day:

> "I didn't get to where I want to today, and I'm going to be in there tomorrow, trying to get better at my instrument. I accept that. That's an isolated incident. It has happened before, and those were isolated incidents in themselves"… So, you can just say "ok, bad day. But that judgement aside. I'm going to come back tomorrow and try again" (Interview, June 4th, 2020).

To use the phrase "I accept that" completely removed any sense of shame or *negative* judgement from the situation. It was interesting to note that John's first interview was about how he did not accept a lot of his circumstances, which sometimes manifested in being "hard" on himself and dealing with "boredom" in the practicing room. His second interview, however, had much more of an accepting nature to it. His assertion that the practice session was an isolated one was also acknowledging that the past was past and choosing to reside in the *present* moment.

Emily addressed how a more accepting approach felt:

> I think it's also… about… letting go of those thoughts about having to be perfect or not being good enough. That also just makes you feel better about yourself, because you're like "oh, I'm doing pretty good, even if this part isn't always perfect," or like "these notes aren't as clear sounding as Edgar's." And I'll actively work to make them clearer sounding, but if doesn't happens every time I'm like "no problem. I bet he doesn't play it clean every single time too [laughs]" (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

Emily said that "you feel better about yourself" when you let go of *non-accepting* thoughts, such as thoughts rooted in perfectionism. The process that Emily described was simple in nature as well. She wanted to make her notes "clearer," so she worked to do so. It was a simple process

that was without the extraneous effort of negativity. Like John, Emily's second interview revealed many more examples of acceptance versus non-acceptance.

Judgement: Neutral

> *The things I carry are my thoughts. That's it. They are the only weight. My thoughts determine whether I am free and light or burdened (Kamal Ravikant).*

In the guided meditations, the participants were asked to use the tool of "Mental Noting." This was an acknowledgment of whatever had come into one's awareness. The noting was done without judgement or emotional attachments. It was naming what *is*. This was an example of *neutral* judgement. John clarified this process as simply "noticing it," and then choosing what to do (Interview, May 28th, 2020). This process took John to what he named a "middle space," which was not operated in the "extremes" of positive or negative judgement (Interview, June 4th, 2020). Emily asserted that *neutral* judgement is *neutral* because it was "not really an emotional criticism… It's just a fact" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Similarly, Gabriel felt that when he was perceiving a moment without negative judgement he did not feel "happy," "sad", or "upset." He felt "calm" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). Calm is a neutral state of being.

The data pointed to interesting phenomenon: *Neutral* judgement was often used in conjunction with a much more constructive and simple approach to practicing both the bass and mindfulness. Examine John's description of how a mindful state was beneficial for him:

> I'm able to practice more per day if I'm able to perceive myself as mindful… I'm able to practice more because I'm not getting actively discouraged by those intrusive thoughts… When you have those nagging thoughts like "that was really bad, you need to work on that thing." That prevents you from objectively saying "this is what needs the most work.

> This is how I work on that well"… I think it just makes you practice more consistent, it makes your practice longer, and I think it makes your practice have a clearer focus (Interview, June 4th, 2020).

For John, the mere lack of "intrusive thoughts" and the consequent getting discouraged was enough to make his practice much more constructive and productive. Emily highlighted the simple and constructive nature of *negative* judgement when she said "oh, this note is flat… make it sharp" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Gabriel further supported this point when he said that it "felt a lot more natural to read something, make a mistake, and back and try it again from a perspective without judgement" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). He felt that it was not only an uncomplicated process, just like Emily highlighted, but that it also feels easy. *Neutral* judgements made the process of practicing in a deliberate manner simple and easy, whereas *negative* judgements made the process complicated and uncomfortable.

Judgement: Positive

Positive judgements did not appear to connect with deliberate practicing like *neutral* judgements. Emily and Gabriel both reported moments where they would have a positive judgement on their playing or practicing, such as "wow, I'm so good at practicing now" (Emily's Interview, June 5th, 2020). However, John said that positive judgements were infrequent for him (Interview, June 4th, 2020). These moments of self-encouragement did not correlate with a changed perception of playing and practicing among the participants. This could be grounds for a future study.

Negative judgement and *non-acceptance* led to feelings of frustration and discouragement, and prematurely ended practice sessions. A more *neutral* approach was much more con-

structive and empowering, and, as John noted, it "just makes you practice more consistent… longer, and…it makes your practice have a clearer focus" (Interview, June 4th, 2020). By cultivating *acceptance* and *neutral* judgement, the participants discovered a more simple, constructive, and enjoyable method of practicing and playing the bass.

Perceptions of Playing

There was an understanding that having a negative perception of one's skill on their instrument was what one signed up for when they chose to be a musician. John asserted that "we all have those thoughts" despite it being "so bad" for you (Interview, June 4th, 2020). If one did not accept their present, then often the reaction was to force the sound, force the intonation, etc. The participants recounted how their perceptions of playing changed when they were in a more mindful state, which was with a greater sense of perspective, awareness, and ease.

Perceptions of Playing: Perspective

This above all: to thine own self be true (William Shakespeare).

A sense of *Perspective* appeared when the participants were cultivating mindfulness. The participants acknowledged the negative internal dialogue about their skill. Emily depicted how, after having a "clear mind," it occurred to her that she "[knew] how to play" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Later she reported how she did not have to hold herself to a standard of perfection with intonation.

> Playing one note out of tune doesn't make you horrible…everyone plays notes out of tune. I think it's also good to remember that professional musicians play out of tune. Even… [at one of Olga Kern's concert] and it's like "oh, well she's just always going to be in tune, [because she plays piano]." But… the piano just kept going…out of tune

> throughout the entire concert. I was like "well, even a world-famous piano player can play out of tune sometimes" (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

Having the perspective that playing out of tune did not make you "horrible" allowed the possibility that you do not have to punish yourself for making a mistake, which could lead to more enjoyable practice sessions. In this theme of perspective, Gabriel acknowledged how the mindfulness activities allow him to recognize "smaller increments of progress" (Interview, June 5th, 2020) in his playing so that he can confirm that he was "improving overall." A sense of *Perspective* afforded the participants the possibility of a healthier relationship to their playing.

Perception of Playing: Awareness

> *If, then, I were asked for the most important advice I could give, that which I considered to be the most useful to the men of our century, I should simply say: in the name of God, stop a moment, cease your work, look around you (Leo Tolstoy).*

When playing their instrument in a mindful manner, the participants had a clear *awareness* of how they were playing the bass. John shared how, after completing the second mindfulness activity, he "[noticed] more" of his "habits" in his bow hold, and then was able to correct them (Reflection, May 28th, 2020). John detailed this further in his interview, saying that it was helpful for him to "not stop [himself] from playing, but to continue on" and turn his awareness to his playing by thinking, "ok, what's wrong with the way I'm holding my bow" or "what's wrong with my left hand," "why's my shoulder feeling like this," in order to correct them if need be (Interview, May 28th, 2020). Emily contended that mindfulness can "play into helping you think about [active listening, and listening for progress]," which was an important aspect of being a

musician (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Gabriel shared that, when he was mindful, he was "listening for a good sound and good intonation" (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

Perception of Playing: Ease

> *May what I do flow from me like a river, no forcing and no holding back, the way it is with children (Rainer Maria Rilke).*

The double bass is a challenging instrument. Emily explained how with the bass you have to "practice shifting every seven-seconds… There were some technical challenges on bass that actually make it [hard]" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Finding e*ase* on this instrument is a challenge and a goal. John noticed that tension "can make practicing less productive and enjoyable" (Reflection, May 26th, 2020). He was "more relaxed" in his bass playing after the first mindfulness activity, which he found "very helpful." Emily observed that the third mindfulness activity helped her "feel more relaxed," and when she returned to practice, she felt that it was generally "better quality playing [than] before… the exercise" (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). John came upon that a routine that began with the mindfulness activity was highly beneficial for him:

> By starting by my practice routine with one of these activities, I'm able to relax my shoulders, clear my head a little bit, then I sit down, wind up my bow. And then, by that time, twenty minutes in, my arms are ready to kind of just sit at the bass instead of just [mimes tense bass playing] … Once I get into the routine of getting relaxed while I play, then it will lead to better playing (Interview, June 4th, 2020).

This routine was useful for John because it set him up for the practicing ahead.

By practicing mindfulness for two weeks, the participants each cultivated a sense of *perspective*, *awareness* of how they play the bass, and *ease* while playing the bass. This led to more enjoyment, resiliency, and more skilled playing of their instrument.

Perceptions of Practicing

As was showed in the earlier sections, being out of the present moment and meeting the bass with negative judgement can be detrimental to not only one's quality of practice but also one's view of the act of practicing. The participants recounted examples of *deliberate practice* and *destructive practice*. For the purposes of this study, deliberate practice was defined as "a highly structured activity, the explicit goal of which is to improve performance" (Ericsson, et. al., 1993). Simplicity was also a characteristic of deliberate practice. Destructive practice is deliberate practice's antithesis, in that it is an unstructured, complicated activity, which would negatively impact one's performance. Another sub-theme that was present in the data was the concept of *sustainability* in practicing. For the purposes of this study, sustainability was defined as the ability to practice regularly.

Perception of Practicing: Destructive Practice

> *Guilt is just as powerful, but its influence is positive, while shame's is destructive. Shame erodes our courage and fuels disengagement (Brené Brown).*

There was a common distinction made in mindfulness meditation between responding and reacting. Responding was a more mindful approach, whereas reacting was rooted in habit and was often mindless. Reacting could fall under the sub-theme of *destructive practice*. Each of the participants characterized reacting with some variance of "without thought" (Reflection, May 29th, 2020). John defined a reaction as "instinctive" with no "forethought," which he asserted

could lead to *negative* judgements in the form of "outrage" or "blame" (Reflection, May 28th, 2020). When the *negative* judgements started to take hold, that was when practice sessions suffered. Gabriel compared reacting to the notion of practicing by "going through the motions and just not practicing that well." He contended that led him to not get "much done in the practice room" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). "Going through the motions" was an example of an absence of thought and awareness, and it led him to an unproductive practice session.

Where reacting was qualified as "without thought," sometimes a too much thought was destructive. Consider John's description of how his mind functioned on occasion.

> It's funny, because my brain energy — my actual mind — is racing critiquing all these small things that normally I wouldn't worry about. But, my actual will to continue practicing is far less than what it was when I started. It just redirects my energy to practice into energy to critique, which isn't helpful (Interview, May 28th, 2020).

There was a lot of activity in John's mind, but the will and energy to continue practicing waned. This was destructive to his ability to get work done, and it also affected his ability to *sustain* his practicing. John wisely stated that this "isn't helpful."

There was a connection between *negative judgement*, and *destructive practicing*. It might be better said that *destructive practicing* was the result, and the *negative judgement* was how one attained the result. John reported moments where, when he used his struggle with a couple of notes to justify that he was "terrible," his practice became an obligation. John said "it feels like you're just practicing because you know you need to practice, or you know you should practice, instead of feeling like 'I am actively trying to get better'" (Interview, June 4th, 2020). Before Emily "rage [quit]" a practice session, she stated, "I don't want to practice," and then forced her-

self to "play the same thing over and over" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). This was harmful to her progress on their instrument. Gabriel found that repeating stuff multiple times without success led to strong *negative* judgements.

> "I'm never going to get it. I should get it. It's not even that hard. It's because I don't practice enough. I screwed myself over by not practicing for the past several weeks, and now I've got this much time left and I've got to get all of this done." And then like a lot of thoughts [come up] like inadequacy in my musicianship and in my personal organization of my time, my dedication to my instrument (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

These *negative* judgements, like "I screwed myself over," led to Gabriel thinking about his "inadequacy in [his] musicianship," and his "dedication" to the bass. These thoughts served to dismantle Gabriel's confidence and joy in practicing. They were *destructive* thoughts.

There was an element of complexity in *destructive* practice. Emily narrated a moment where she thought she was creating "fake problems" for herself.

> I'm like "oh, I'm just creating fake problems for myself by… Oh, I've got to clear my mind and I've got to just play normal so I can find the actual real problems." Problems that actually exist that I'm not just creating by overthinking (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

The connection between "overthinking" and creating problems that did not exist was notable. Acknowledge, also, the recognition that, in order to "find the actual real problems" Emily needed to "clear [her] mind," which was a shorthand for come into the *present* moment without judgement. Later in the interview, Emily detailed how she complicated her practicing by thinking "I have the entire suite to work on" rather than "I have four measures I need to work on" (Inter-

view, June 5th, 2020), This led to frustration, according to Emily, because It was not feasible to work on too much at one time.

Self-care factored into the quality of one's practicing session as well. Gabriel described how, when he was busy, stressed out, hungry, etc., he tended to "not practice very well." This led him to "try to ignore a lot of the stuff [he] has on his plate." While productivity certainly suffered because of his needs not being met, ignoring his responsibilities could be *destructive* in his educational and professional life.

Perception of Practicing: Deliberate or Constructive Practice

> *Basketball is an intricate, high-speed game filled with split-second, spontaneous decisions. But that spontaneity is possible only when everyone first engages in hours of highly repetitive and structured practice--perfecting their shooting, dribbling, and passing and running plays over and over again--and agrees to play a carefully defined role on the court. . . . spontaneity isn't random (Malcolm Gladwell).*

Similar to how *destructive practicing* is the antithesis of *deliberate practicing,* so responding is the antithesis to reacting. Using the example of responding to bad news, which can be the way practicing can feel at times, John said that responding was a "more introspective and [healthily] measured approach" versus the mindless reacting (Reflection, May 28th, 2020). Gabriel applied this measured approach to a common practice example: "I think when I tend to be in a calmer head space, It was like you can respond to it by taking a note of it and then next time around you play that note, you can make it more in tune" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). Emily defined responding as a process where "you acknowledge something and then decide more thoughtfully how to go from there by either deciding to do something about it and what to do or

to do nothing about it and walk away" (Reflection, May 29th, 2020). Emily's description mirrored that of Merriam-Webster's definition of deliberate: "to think about or discuss issues and decisions carefully" (n.d.).

Sometimes responding was not to an external stimulus, but to an internal stimulus. In other words, when one gets ready to play a piece of music, that was a stimulus. In the studio class, Gabriel would demonstrate how to react to this internal stimulus, which would be to immediately start playing a piece of music as soon as possible (Observations, March 4th, 2020). Emily shared this reaction, saying that she "[does not] take the time to establish a solid tempo" before starting the piece. She would "jump right into it" (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). Emily discovered that, by stopping before playing to be more "mindful," she was better able to play music "better in time." The fourth mindfulness activity ended with an intention five-minute mindfulness practice with the bass. Emily catalogued her thought process throughout this practice in her reflection (June 5th, 2020), noting how she responded to questions about intonation. She observed that, by stopping and being more mindful, she had very clear and constructive questions and observations such as "Sometimes I shut down my ear and just try to play in tune with my hand, but I overcompensate by often going to high or low trying to guess where it should be instead of just listening," and "how am I defining intonation?" Additionally, there were clear goals and deliberately structured parts of her mindful five-minutes, such as when she mentioned that she "[needs] to isolate this note/measure and get this note in tune." This was a remarkably simple and deliberate approach.

Gabriel discerned that sometimes, he needed to break from a "mindful state to some degree" to be more *deliberate* in his practicing (Reflection, June 5th, 2020). Consulting the use of

the mind as a "tool" (Tolle, 2004), breaking out of a calm observant state to problem solve would suggest *deliberate* practice. Gabriel contended that breaking from this mindful state was not necessary for the entirety of ones practicing, and that "there [was] a certain amount of practice that goes very smoothly when in a mindful state."

D*eliberate* practice was often phrased by the participants in a profoundly uncomplicated way. As mentioned previously, *neutral* judgement was a simple and constructive approach to practicing. Emily found that by thinking about one thing ("momentum"), she was able to play better and not get lost in "Overthinking/second-guessing everything" (Reflection, May 26th, 2020). By simplifying her thinking, she was able to enjoy her practice session more. Consider how John used *acceptance* and *neutral judgement* to come to a simple solution in the following quotation.

> It's mostly just taking into awareness the fact that this thought is present, and then just saying "ok, well, if I'm feeling bad about this part, what are all the techniques I know that I can do to make that thought disappear by making this part stronger?"… I think it would be a very beneficial thing to have in your practice (Interview, May 28th, 2020).

There was an acknowledgement of his state of feeling, which then led him to question what he can practice. There was an element of *non-acceptance* in that he wanted to "make that thought disappear," but elements of *acceptance* were also present. John concisely showed how simple this can be in the second interview (June 4th, 2020): "this is what needs the most work. This is how I work on that well." Similarly, Emily contended that "neutral criticism" is when one can say, "this note is flat" and then you simply "make it sharp" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). In the interview, Emily then laughed at the simplicity of the idea. Gabriel contended that when he was

practicing "effectively" he was in a meditative state where he attended to "one particular aspect" of what he was practicing (Interview, May 29th, 2020). By attending to only one thing at a time, complication was not a factor. This was a simple and profound approach.

One cannot remove judgement from practicing music. John contended that "everything you practice, you practice because you judged it" (Interview, June 4th, 2020). The judgement that John was using was *neutral* and constructive when practicing. He might judge that what he just practiced was "effective," but it was phrased without emotion. Emily explained how she judged where she needed to work on saying "I just got to work on these ten measures in this one Bach suite," because "that's the only part that… sucks" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Using a *negative* word such as "sucks" was not as *neutral* as it could have been, but Emily's process was simple: she judged it to be in need of work, and structured a simple and *deliberate* approach to the problem.

When asked how it felt to try to practice the bass mindfully, John stated that "It felt like what I would say is happening in my best practice sessions… I am clear headed, mindful and unfazed by self-criticism" (Reflection, June 4th, 2020). Mindfulness and the intent to practice the bass in a mindful way was related to how John felt in his best practice sessions.

Self-care and ease factored into a more constructive practice session. John illustrated how he was "more relaxed" when being mindful, and was consequently able to "respond, instead of react, to small errors or perceived problems, which would normally make [him] tense up" (Reflection, May 26th, 2020). A calmer mindful state enabled John to respond to problems more easily, which made practicing a more *deliberate* process. Emily experienced this as well, adding that she was "enjoying [her practicing] a lot more" (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). Gabriel observed

that, if his environment were good and he got "enough sleep," he could respond to a situation without judgement. He planned for the road ahead with phrases like "maybe I need to work on something else" or "maybe I need to slow this down" or "maybe I need to approach this from a different angle" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Mindfulness and one's needs related to a constructive and *deliberate* practice session.

Perception of Practicing: Sustainability

Get back on the horse (that bucked you) (Idiom).

Each of the participants experienced issues with sustaining their practice sessions. Whether that was not practicing long enough or not returning to the practice room, the participants described the factors that affect sustainability. There was a self-care factor in sustaining a consistent practice schedule. John noted that being "self-critical" often ended his practice sessions, and that he "can absolutely not practice while I'm angry" (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). John also noted that, when he was depersonalized, he "was not able to practice" and he had to cancel one of his bass lessons this past semester (Interview, May 28th, 2020). *Negative judgements* and the consequent emotional reactions caused John to end his practice sessions early or not practice in the first place.

Emily asserted that when she would get "frustrated," she was not be "able to focus" and would not do "anything productive" (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). Sometimes, when the frustrations built up, Emily said she would "rage quit" and say "I quit bass! I'm going to play viola da gamba instead" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). The quitting of a practice session and then choosing to take a break from the bass would affect one's ability to sustain progress over an extended peri-

od of time. Gabriel said that it did not seem "worthwhile to practice when you're upset or tired" (Interview, May 29th, 2020) or when he was "hungry" (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

When in a mindful state, there were promising thought patterns that emerged regarding sustainability. Recognition of progress and intent to learn rather than perform was helpful for both Gabriel and Emily. Gabriel described how the mindfulness activities were helpful with "recognizing smaller increments of progress" and with recognizing that he was "improving overall" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Emily asserted that mindfulness could help with "confidence and self-esteem" because one could better recognize their progress (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

The participants also recognized an ability to practice longer with better focus. Emily noticed that, after she did the mindfulness activity and practiced for an hour and a half, she probably "could have worked longer… with pretty good focus" (Reflection, May 26th, 2020). Later, Emily discerned that she could be more productive and practice longer when she decided to "take the time to think," which was an example of stopping so that one can reside in the *present* moment (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Gabriel observed that he could "sustain" his practice for longer with relative ease when shifting his attention from his body to the music (Reflection, May 29th, 2020). Gabriel also asserted that the focus in these moments was not an "exhaustive type of focus" (Interview, May 29th, 2020) and enabled him to "focus on the music for longer periods of time" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). The following passage from John elucidated how he found he was better able to focus with mindfulness.

> If I perceive myself as kind of a neutral player, or if I am able to take the bad perceptions, and just kind of accept them and move on — accept them as existing and then just move them out of my mind — then my practice sessions are able to actually last longer. I'm

> able to practice more per day if I'm able to perceive myself as mindful… I'm able to practice more because I'm not getting actively discouraged by those intrusive thoughts (Interview, June 4th, 2020).

John discovered he can move on and not get discouraged in his practice sessions when he was able to be in the *present* moment without *negative* judgement. These statements suggested there may be a connection between sustained attention and mindfulness practice.

The participants showed more resiliency in their practice schedule when they practiced *acceptance* and being in the *present* moment. John recounted how he was able to peacefully move on from a difficult day of practice.

> "Ok, [it was a] bad day. But that judgement aside. I'm going to come back tomorrow, and try again… That was far from my best practicing and I'm visibly upset about it. But that day's practice cannot and should not impact tomorrows practice." Or at least it shouldn't't impact it in a negative way (Interview, June 4th, 2020).

John accepted that his practice was "bad," and then set it aside so that he can come back the next day and resume his work. He noted that he still wanted to learn from the "bad" practice sessions so that he could learn from his mistakes, but he intended to not bring the *negative* judgement along with him. This enabled him to resume his practicing without overcoming a negative emotion.

Mindfulness activities have shown to increase enjoyment in practicing among the participants. Gabriel noted that mindfulness made practicing "feel good." He continued, "I think the mindfulness stuff had helped me to be like 'I can practice and play because I enjoy practicing and playing, and if I'm sounding really good or if I'm not sounding really good, that's ok be-

cause I'm enjoying this in the moment." Emily also illustrated what might be characterized as a virtuosic cycle, in that she wanted to keep practicing because she " wasdoing such great work" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). This feeling translated to the mindful five-minutes of bass practice following the fourth mindfulness activity, where she commented that she was "liking this five-minute thing" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). This was "empowering" for Emily, because, "if [she] can do that much in five minutes, guess what [she] can do in an hour."

John, Emily, and Gabriel discovered that mindfulness activities enabled them to practice more *deliberately* and *constructively,* focus for longer in their practice sessions, and return to the practicing the next day without getting discouraged. Importantly, they uncovered enjoyment and empowerment in their practice sessions when they practiced mindfully.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to answer the following questions: how do mindfulness activities affect college music student's perceptions of their practicing and performing? Secondarily, how do these activities affect student's flow experiences and understanding of self-care? After taking part in four guided meditations over the course of two weeks, the participants found that the mindfulness activities positively affected music student's perceptions of practicing, performing.

The first factor of mindfulness was awareness of the present moment. The present moment was explained with words such as "calm," "clear," and "aware." The past and future were characterized by words such as "upset," "worried," and "anxiety." This was a distinct difference. The participants observed that the mind could visit the past or future without it negatively affecting their playing, practicing, or health if it were deliberate and they were able to return to the

present moment. The participants each showed the ability to return to the present moment in some capacity.

The second factor of mindfulness was witnessing the present without judgement. Negative judgement and non-acceptance led to feelings of frustration and discouragement, and prematurely ended practice sessions. By cultivating acceptance and neutral judgement, the participants unearthed a more simple, constructive, and enjoyable method of practicing and playing the bass.

By practicing mindfulness for two weeks, the participants each cultivated a sense of perspective, awareness of how they play the bass, and ease while playing the bass. This led to more enjoyment, resiliency, and more skilled playing of their instrument.

As mindfulness related to practicing the bass, John, Emily, and Gabriel discovered that mindfulness activities enabled them to practice more deliberately and constructively, focus for longer in their practicing, and return to the practicing the next day without getting discouraged. Importantly, they uncovered enjoyment and empowerment in their practice sessions when they practiced mindfully.

CHAPTER SIX:

FLOW AND SELF-CARE

The purpose of this study was to answer the following questions: how do mindfulness activities affect college music student's perceptions of their practicing and performing? Secondarily, how do these activities affect student's flow experiences and understanding of self-care? The participants were asked to take part in four guided mindfulness activities. Following the activities, the participants were asked to reflect on the activities and interviewed. The data showed a positive effect on flow and self-care.

Flow

Flow is characterized by 1) clear goals throughout the experience, 2) immediate feedback (i.e. a musician objectively hearing what sounds they are producing), 3) a "balance between challenges and skill," 4) "action and awareness are merged," 5) one is not distracted, 6) no fear of failure, 7) one is not self-conscious, 8) "sense of time is distorted," and 9) "the activity becomes an end in itself" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 9-11). In this study, the participants illustrated many moments of how they were *in flow* and moments where they were clearly *out of flow*. Data collected through interviews and participant reflections were separated into observations of being in a flow state (*in flow*) and being out of a flow state (*out of flow*). With the school year ending, and all performances being cancelled due to COVID-19, the participants expressed that they did not have any opportunities to see how mindfulness affected their flow in a performance. This study inspected how mindfulness affects flow in practice sessions.

Flow: Out of Flow

Finish every day and be done with it.

You have done what you could.

Some blunders and absurdities, no doubt crept in.

Forget them as soon as you can, tomorrow is a new day;

begin it well and serenely, with too high a spirit

to be cumbered with your old nonsense (Ralph Waldo Emerson).

Planning played a role in entering a flow state. Emily reported a particularly rough week of practice where she was not "planning what to practice and how [she] should practice" (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). This led her to feel like she could not focus, or be in the zone, which then resulted in tension. There were no "clear goals," and she was "distracted" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 9-11). Contrast this feeling with her description of her bass playing while being "in the zone": "I felt more like I got in the zone and it sounded a lot more relaxed, in tune, and a lot prettier sounding" (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). Where there was tension when one was out of flow, there was relaxation now. She was aware of her intonation and sound quality. In a similar fashion, John noticed that he often gets distracted when practicing a piece of music, and mindfulness could be helpful because it "[kept] you more on track" (Interview, May 28th, 2020). It kept you more on track, John explained, because "if you practice addressing your distractions, it's harder to get distracted when it counts."

Negative judgements and emotions could negatively affect one's ability to get into a flow state, according to the participants. Emily said that "negative emotions can definitely take me out of a state of flow." She continued that "feeling frustrated" prevented her from focusing on the task at hand (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). Gabriel recognized that "bodily sensations" take him out of flow (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). This could be due to a *negative* judgement and *non-ac-*

ceptance of said bodily sensations. John asserted that *negative* judgements were "really disruptive" to one's flow (Interview, May 28th, 2020). He continued that these *negative* judgements, that take the form of "intrusive self-doubts," prevented him from having a practice session that was "structured" and simple. In other words, the *negative* judgements prevented John from creating "clear goals" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p.9) for his practice session.

Positive emotions and judgements had a curious effect on flow depending on the participant. Emily said that positive emotions, such as excitement, would put her into a "state of being in the zone faster than if [she] was feeling just neutral about something" (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). John said that if he was happy, it was hard for him to "concentrate" because he wanted to celebrate and reward himself (Reflection, June 2nd, 2020). Curiously, Emily also asserted that one can enter a flow state from a "negative emotion." These emotions caused Emily to become "obsessed" with an activity, although she conceded that it was often not the activity she needs to work on in that moment.

Flow: In Flow

The idea is that flowing water never goes stale, so just keep on flowing (Bruce Lee).

When the participants were in flow, they illustrated the experience in similar ways to the way it is defined by Csikszentmihalyi. Emily portrayed a situation where she would "lose track of time" and she did not "care about anything else" in that moment (Interview, May 29th, 2020). Gabriel shared a similar experience where, when he was in the zone, he would look at the clock and exclaim "oh snap! It's been… forty minutes" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). This flow state was often described within the context of a performance setting, but it also happened in a practice setting for each of the participants. This suggested that one does not have to set a specific

time for practice (scheduling) but enter a flow state in a practice session and realize the time had evaporated.

A common wording to illustrate flow among the participants was that it felt almost absent minded. This meant that one was absent of what Tolle referred to as the "mind" (2004). The mind was useful in specific situations where it was needed. John interpreted this in other words saying "[It's] not absent minded, but I won't have to think about it" (Interview, May 28th, 2020). John noted he "may have been slightly absent minded" in his five-minute mindful practice session, but that flow can "feel [like] not having to try very hard and still achieve the results you wanted" (Reflection, June 4th, 2020). Gabriel supported this idea when he said that that an "inherent part of being in that zone, in that flow, was that I'm not really thinking about how I feel" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). He was absent of the mind, but "very deliberate and very conscious the entire time, and very focused" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). He continued that "it's not an exhaustive type of focus." Consciousness in this case referred to being deliberate and aware, which can exist without the "mind."

Interest in the activity was an important consideration when attaining a flow state. Csikszentmihalyi advised that "when something strikes a spark of interest, follow it" (1997, p.11). Emily expressed that, when she was given a piece of music that she "[wanted] to play," she learned the piece in one night (Interview, June 5th, 2020). John conveyed a similar experience when learning a new piece. He detected that he was "instantly excited" to work on this new piece, after feeling bored with the last piece he was working on (Interview, May 28th, 2020). He continued to say that he practiced much more on this new piece of music in a shorter amount of time, than he had with the old piece of music.

Gabriel also noticed that, in practicing, the mind was needed, so he would remove himself from a state of flow and mindfulness to "problem solve" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). He wisely stated that the skill was in being able to "take yourself out" of flow and being able to put yourself back in. John observed this to be true as well. He said that, when you were playing, you "need to shut the judgement [mind] away… because that's not the focus" (Interview, June 4th, 2020). The focus in this case was the performance in the *present* moment.

The participants each said in the questionnaire given to them before the mindfulness activities began that they had experience a flow state before. Their descriptions of these states confirmed their claim. They found that the mind was not present, and time had no meaning. If one wanted to practice a part, they simply removed themselves from flow and allowed the mind to problem solve. *Negative* judgements and general distractions unintentionally removed the participants from a flow state and being able to have better control over these judgements and distractions via mindfulness meditation made a flow state easier to be found.

Self-Care

For the purposes of this study, self-care is defined as a "deliberate action taken to care for one's mental, emotional, and/or physical health" (Kuebel, 2019). In this study, the participants outlined moments of not only "deliberate action" to take care of one's self, but also moments where they did not take care of themselves. For this study, emotional and mental health was viewed as one theme. The participants practiced self-care prior to this study. In the questionnaire that the participants were given prior to the mindfulness activity, John claimed to have practiced self-care once a month (Questionnaire, May 18th, 2020). Emily practiced self-care the majority of the week, and Gabriel practiced self-care daily (Questionnaire, May 9th, and May 11th, 2020).

Over the course of the interviews, the ways in which the participants took care of themselves and the role of mindfulness in self-care became clearer.

Self-Care: Physical

Get some rest. If you haven't got your health, then you haven't got anything (The Princess Bride).

When asked about what he did with self-care, John came out of the gate with how he took care of his physical needs. At the end of high school and beginning of college, John took care of his physical needs by staying in shape (Interview, May 28th, 2020). As his schedule became more strenuous, he stopped taking as much care of himself. Curiously, John claimed to practice self-care once a month (Questionnaire, May 18th, 2020), despite trying to do a "little bit of car-dio each day." This regular exercise was a good example of "deliberate action taken to care for one's… physical health" (Kuebel, 2019). Emily came to "deliberate action" over the course of a semester. Emily recognized she would "never eat food" during the semester, and that she would react in a strongly negative manner to her surroundings when "starving" (Interview, May 29th, 2020). Eventually, she became skilled at "making sure" she was always able to eat. This was a deliberate choice for self-care. Gabriel chose to "listen to [his] body," and would occasionally choose an option that he thought fit his needs, such as going for a walk, or not eating that piece of cake (Interview, May 29th, 2020). While going for a walk was an activity, choosing to not do something that may give one "heartburn" was also a "deliberate action" with physical well-being in mind.

Self-Care: Mental and Emotional

you look at me and cry

everything hurts

i hold you and whisper

but everything can heal (Rupi Kaur).

Mental and Emotional health were important considerations, especially for music students. Emily recounted how she took care of her mental and emotional needs.

> I think I'm naturally kind of an anxious person a lot of the time. I also get tired easily, especially around people. I think people make fun of me for being a super introvert. I have introverts making fun of me for that. [laughs] So I definitely take a lot of time where I just go to try and find somewhere to be alone (Interview, May 29th, 2020).

Having observed that she needed time alone, Emily took action to take care of her emotional and mental well-being. She later illustrated this process like a meditation, in that she would "sit there and do nothing" in order to not get "overloaded." Emily also realized that she was not "going to cry" over *neutral* judgement, which spoke to greater emotional resiliency (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Gabriel also noticed that, "recently" he was able to "accept… distractions" without linking them to his self-worth (Reflection, June 5th, 2020). This ability to not tie his distractions to his self-worth helped his emotional well-being. Gabriel prioritized his mental health and often depicted situations where he refused to sacrifice his mental well-being for some musical purpose (Interview, May 29th & June 5th, 2020).

When asked if they would incorporate mindfulness into their self-care plan, the participants were unanimous in their inclusion of mindfulness meditation. John said that it had "been pretty helpful" and it was something he would envisage doing "regularly" (Interview, June 4th,

2020). John clarified that, due to practicing mindfulness, he "made small progress towards something that helps with [his] anxiety and helps [him] to kind of understand what's going on with me." Emily had a more reserved reaction but said that she would "clear [her] mind" before engaging in an activity, because it relieved tension and kept her more on task (Interview, June 5th, 2020). Gabriel said that it had been a "really important" aspect of his self-care, because it allowed him to practice "letting go" of "unhealthy trains of thought" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). He continued by saying that the mindfulness activities allow him to "accept the current situation, which really reduces stress." He even referred to mindfulness meditation as "preventative medicine." This process of acceptance and letting go of unhealthy trains of thought were of immense importance to the practice of mindfulness and have aided in Gabriel's self-care.

While the participants came to this study with some skill and experience in self-care, each participant recognized that mindfulness meditation affected their self-care in a positive way. Whether that was being able to stop and choose a healthy path, clear one's mind before a performance/practice session, or letting go of unhealthy thought patterns. The participants recognized mindfulness as a valuable addition to their self-care plan.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to answer the following questions: how do mindfulness activities affect college music student's perceptions of their practicing and performing? Secondarily, how do these activities affect student's flow experiences and understanding of self-care? After taking part in four guided meditations over the course of two weeks, the participants found that the mindfulness activities affect flow and self-care in a positive manner.

The participants each said in the questionnaire given to them before the mindfulness activities began that they had experience a flow state before. Their descriptions of these states did not refute their claim. They found that the mind was not present, and time had no meaning. If one wanted to practice a part, they simply removed themselves from flow and allowed the mind to problem solve. Negative judgements and general distractions unintentionally removed the participants from a flow state and being able to have better control over these judgements and distractions via mindfulness meditation made a flow state easier to be found.

While the participants came to this study with some skill and experience in self-care, each participant discovered that mindfulness meditation affected their self-care in a positive way. Whether that was being able to stop and choose a healthy path, clear one's mind before a performance/practice session or letting go of unhealthy thought patterns. The participants recognized mindfulness a valuable addition to their self-care plan.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

*Her breakthrough comes as breakthroughs often do: by long and prepared accident (Richard Powers, "*The Overstory*," 2018).*

My previous experiences of teaching and observing music students showed me that the "nose to the grindstone" approach was alive and well. Some students had the same reaction that I did to this process, in that there was frustration, anger, hopelessness, and other such emotions. The progress of the student often did not meet the expectations set by both student and teacher. I wondered, both with myself and with these students, if there was a way in which one could practice efficiently and effectively without falling into this storm of negative emotions.

Mindfulness and flow were something I was not aware of or particularly interested in for much of my life. After many experiences with the Alexander Technique (AT), books on mindfulness and a curiosity of the flow experience, I felt that there was potential for a new paradigm of practicing. This new paradigm would be centered on the concept of "right effort" (Goldstein, 2020) rather than the most effort. I discovered that, with myself, cultivating mindfulness and flow in my practice sessions led to more enjoyment and fewer of the aforementioned emotions. I was encouraged to see if this not only applied to me, but also to others.

Summary of Literature Review

The research in mindfulness is vast and only growing. Some studies determined that mindfulness practices have a positive impact on many problems in teacher education (Byo, 2004; Stauffer, 2005), music education (McCarthy, Williamson, and Sarath, 2009; Bogdan, 2010; Cornett-Murtada, 2012; Anderson, 2013; Diaz, 2013; Czajkowski, & Greasley, 2015; Falter, 2016;

Johnson, 2016) and performance (Langer, Russell, & Eisenkraft, 2009; Czajkowski, & Greasley, 2015). Research has found that mindfulness practices and flow are linked but are not the same experience (Bloom & Skutnick-Henley, 2005; Kee, & Wang, 2008; Reid, 2011; Moore, 2013; Sheldon, Prentice, & Halusic, 2015). The research also shows mindfulness can have a positive effect on self-care (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010; Crowley, & Munk, 2017; Wells & Klocko, 2018). Mindfulness can aid in "coping strategies" (Wells & Klocko, 2018) and the mere recognition of the importance of self-care (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010). This research could have implications for string pedagogy, studio instruction, and performing, in that it could change how one teaches music at all.

Summary of Methodology

This study was a multi-case study (Yin, 2009) where college-level double bass players were interviewed and observed. Three participants engaged in interviews, guided exercises, and written reflections. Some data were also collected via researcher observations prior to the local state university shutting down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were coded into three categories: Mindfulness, Flow, and Self-Care. The research questions and operational definitions of the categories suggested the following themes: Time, Judgement, Perception of Bass Playing, Perception of Bass Practicing, Flow, and Self-Care. For more information, please consult Table 1 (p.29-32).

The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions: How do mindfulness activities affect collegiate double bass music students' perceptions of their own playing and practicing? My secondary questions were 1) how do mindfulness activities affect *flow* experiences among collegiate double bass music students, and 2) how do mindfulness activities affect

students' perception of self-care? Over the course of two weeks, it is fair to conclude that mindfulness activities had a positive effect on the participants perceptions of their practicing and performing, and enhanced their flow experiences and their understanding of self-care.

Effect of Mindfulness on Perceptions of Self-Care

When I asked the participants directly "would you consider including mindfulness in your self-care plan," the answers were unanimously positive. Emily found that she could use it as a tool before practicing, whereas both John and Gabriel said that they would continue pursuing mindfulness for their health benefits. The participants felt calm, relaxed, and with a clear mind after completing these activities. Since Emily, John, and Gabriel are self-described anxious people, it is no wonder that an activity such as meditation would help with their anxiety. It is notable that each of the participants described being having fewer thoughts rooted in negative emotions such as anger or frustration after practicing just four mindfulness activities.

Effect of Mindfulness on Flow States

In terms of flow, the participants discovered that the regulation of distractions helped cultivate a flow state. They conceded that, without a performance on their 2020 calendar at the moment, they were unable to see how the mindfulness activities affected flow in performing. However, according to the participants, the flow states in practice sessions were affected when they practiced mindfulness beforehand or when they chose to be mindful in the practice sessions.

Effect of Mindfulness on Perceptions of Practicing

When the participants resided in the present moment with a sense of acceptance and neutral judgement, they were able to cultivate more simplicity and positivity in their practice session. Emily went as far as to say that it was "empowering" to practice mindfully (Interview, June

5th, 2020). There was a surprising connection between neutral judgement and simplicity that was unearthed in the data. For example, when the participants played out of tune two primary approaches emerged. One was a complicated response that germinated from negativity:

> I'm never going to get it. I should get it. It is not even that hard. It is because I do not practice enough. I screwed myself over by not practicing for the past several weeks, and now I've got this much time left and I've got to get all of this done (Interview, June 5th, 2020).

Second was a simple response that came from a *neutral* judgement: "oh, this note is flat… make it sharp" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). I found this to be beautifully simple. Most musicians, especially aspiring professional musicians, want to be in tune, so a process where the incorrect intonation is noted, adjusted, and that is it, holds such a beautiful potentiality for not only musicians as a whole but also for my own practicing.

Importantly, the musicians in this study were happy to be practicing while integrating mindfulness activities, and they were able to sustain their practice sessions for a longer period of time than when not practicing mindfulness. When discussing Aristotle, Will Durant surmises that "excellence is an art won by training and habituation" (1926, p.87). The act of practicing is an act of habituation, therefore sustained practice ought to lead to excellence. While I recognize that this may be an oversimplification, excellence cannot be found without practicing. As John put it "you can't get better at playing your instrument by sitting there and judging your playing…you'll get better at understanding your problems but if you don't play, you're not going to get any better" (Interview, June 4th, 2020).

Effect of Mindfulness on Perceptions of Playing

The participants described having more awareness at their instrument, and more ease and relaxation while at the instrument. While these were interesting improvements in how the participants perceived their skill at their instrument, I was fascinated by how a growing sense of perspective was uncovered after these two weeks. Emily described her recognition that she is still learning. Gabriel found that he was noticing "smaller increments of progress" (Interview, June 5th, 2020). John reported that the "point" of practice is to simply get "better" at your instrument (Interview, June 4th, 2020). A sense of perspective resulted in less discouragement and better sustainability.

Summary

After codifying and connecting the data, mindfulness had a positive effect on each of the participants perceptions of their practicing and performing. They also had more autonomy in uncovering flow experiences in practice sessions and their understanding of self-care improved, especially regarding mental health.

Implications for Music Education

My experience of practicing and improving on my instrument produced the question "why is it so hard to keep practicing without getting upset or burnt out?" My private instructors up to this point never really gave me a clear answer other than something to the effect of "you've got to keep your nose to the grindstone." My high school orchestra director also encouraged this mentality, to a lesser extent. The nose to the grindstone approach simply resulted in accelerated burnout and a greater emotional disturbance. The aim of this study was to challenge the "nose to the grindstone" paradigm and see what the effects would be of a more mindful method of practicing would be.

The results of this study implied that there is merit to a different practicing paradigm. This study could challenge music educators to expand how they teach practicing to their students. Some teachers have their students complete a practice log to track how many hours students complete. This concept prioritizes quantity over quality, which will in turn prioritize mindlessness over mindfulness. John and Emily found that the routine of beginning a practice session with a mindfulness activity lead to a head space that was akin to what it is like when they have a "good practice session" (John's Interview, May 28th, 2020). Teachers could teach a routine in which mindfulness and the cultivation of awareness and a lack of judgement are established, and then students would practice with improved awareness, and more constructive thinking.

Similarly, the data in this study suggested that mindfulness can improve not only one's quality and but also one's quantity of practice. John and Emily found that the routine of beginning a practice session with a mindfulness activity lead to a head space that was akin to what it is like they have a "good practice session" (John's Interview, May 28th, 2020). If one develops the skill of mindfulness meditation, one can better regulate their head space therefore resulting in more "good practice sessions." As noted by Santoro (2000), "success breeds success," so this study suggests that a recognition of progress could result in a more positive attitude towards practicing.

It is possible that practicing in a more mindful manner could improve practicing for all students, particularly the ones who may not have access to a private instructor. With the aforementioned routine of practicing, students will have some structure to guide their practice sessions. This study suggested that these students will uncover more empowerment in practice as

well as more intentional practicing. This could potentially decrease the disparity between those music students who take private lessons, and those who do not.

Each of the participants in this study reported longer periods of focus when they began their practice sessions with a mindfulness activity or chose to be mindful. In a rehearsal setting, an orchestra director could incorporate a warm-up wherein mindfulness is established. This study suggested that this warm-up would improve the students focus and attentiveness in rehearsal. This could be especially important for high schoolers who are increasingly sleep deprived (Richter, 2015) and may need some time to stop and think. The experiences of John, Emily, and Gabriel suggested that a more mindful approach could lead to better overall output, and a better relationship to learning music.

More importantly, two of the participants found that mindfulness meditation helped with their anxiety. As a self-care tool, mindfulness was invaluable in its ability bring the participants to a sense of calm. These activities can also be self-sustained in that one does not need guided meditations to meditate once they have learned how. Mindfulness activities enable music students and music professionals alike to come to a sense of peace and clarity before practicing and performing. As this pertains to pedagogy and K-12 music educators, this study encourages teachers to begin teaching mindfulness to students as soon as they begin learning their instrument.

Implications for Musicians

For musicians, both student and professional, this study showed that mindfulness can change one's perception of practicing from something that one is obligated to do to something that one wants to do. The participants were better able to perceive their progress (John's Interview, June 4th, 2020; Gabriel's Interview, June 5th, 2020) and choose to learn rather than strive

for perfection (Emily's Interview, June 5th, 2020). When recognizing progress, without those *negative* judgements that will interject, the participants unearthed a healthier relationship to their instrument and practicing in general.

Another notable factor to consider is that *neutral* judgement and being in the *present* moment resulted in more constructive and simple practicing among all three of the participants. The body of research in mindfulness, as mentioned in the review of literature, suggests that mindfulness is beneficial for one's health and well-being, but it is important to consider that it made the participant better at practicing. They did not get distracted or discouraged. They discovered that the approach can be laughably simple, as compared to many current approaches which are often colored with negativity.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

There were two limitations of this study. One was the lack of diversity among participants. John, Emily, and Gabriel were somewhere between 19 and 23 years old and played the same instrument. Future research could explore how the mindfulness activities affect perceptions of playing and practicing among beginning musicians and as well as among musicians of different ages. As with the general implications for music education, a future where mindfulness and the act of learning an instrument are two peas in a pod is an exciting possibility. Musicians may have a better relationship with their instrument, whether they decide to become professionals or not.

The second limitation is time. This study took place over the course of two weeks, wherein the participants reported an improved perception of their bass playing, bass practicing, flow, and self-care. The data showed that mindfulness can be a positive agent in one's musical growth.

A longitudinal study wherein a larger group of participants is tracked for months, or even years, would provide a clearer sense of just how much mindfulness affects one's learning and perception of learning to be a musician. If the findings of this hypothetical longitudinal study mirror what John, Emily, and Gabriel found, this could have grand implications for music education and teacher training.

Conclusion

This study resulted from fear. Like the participants, I would consider myself an anxious person who fears a great deal. Practicing and the possibility of a career in music carry multiple suitcases of anxious baggage. My approach to practice was rooted in blood, sweat, and tears. I felt that, as the infomercials say, "there's got to be a better way." The data resulting from merely two weeks of mindfulness activities has given me hope for a better approach to learning the skill necessary to have a career in music. It has also given me hope that other's may not have to experience blood, sweat, and tears to live a life of music.

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APPENDIX A
GUIDED MEDITATION SCRIPT

“Welcome. I want to begin by thanking you for taking this time to join me in this meditation.

Before we get started on our meditation, I’d like to introduce a couple of concepts. The three most important words of mindfulness meditation are ‘Simply Begin Again.’ If you find your mind wandering, maybe you’re thinking of food, a tv show you watched or COVID-19, that’s ok. That’s a very important part of meditation. When you catch it, make a mental note of it, and simply begin again. The next concept is one I briefly touched, and that’s ‘mental noting.’ The idea behind mental noting is that you are acknowledging something that has come into your awareness. It’s a sort of kind acknowledgement, without judgement. Like right now you might be aware of my voice. Talking. Talking. Etc. We’ll note things like your in-breath and out-breath, your emotions and sensations, and your wandering mind. The note might sound like zoning out, in, out, sleepiness, restless. We’d like to avoid a judgemental or emotional attachment to the noting.

We’ll start our meditation by sitting in a chair or cross legged with a pillow under you. We’ll occupy a sort of dignified, watchful posture. Not slouchy, or hyper vigilant, but somewhere in the middle. Close your eyes. Allow your eyes to soften. Jaw to soften. Shoulders. Abs. Legs. Feet.

As you bring your attention to your body, you’ll notice your body sitting. Make a little mental note of that. Sitting. Sitting. Sit, and know that you are sitting.

As your awareness of your body deepens, you may notice your body breathing. Where do you feel the breath? Do you feel the air coming in through your nose? Throat? Do you feel your ribs expanding on an inhale? Belly rising? As you breathe, make a note of it. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.

You may notice your mind wandering or jumping on trains of association. That’s ok. As a matter of fact, that’s a part of the process. If you catch your mind wandering, or thinking/planning/reflecting/judging, make a mental note of that, (thinking, thinking) and Simply Begin Again.

It might be interesting to observe just how your mind is wandering. Are you planning for the future? Are you analyzing something from the past? I like to think of these thoughts as ‘time trav-

eling thoughts,' because we aren't in the present moment, aware of what *is* right now, but traveling to the future or past in our minds. Are you thinking, "am I doing this right"?? Or "what is going on?" If you observe these flavors of mind wandering, make a note, and return to the breath.

And, when you're ready, you can open your eyes and reconnect to the world around you. This process might seem overly simple: catch your mind wandering, make a mental note, and Simply begin again. That's the beauty of meditation: where we often practice stacking thoughts on top of each other, mindfulness meditation gives us some skill in simplifying what we're thinking so that we can attend to one or two thoughts at a time.

Now, pick up your bass. As you get settled, occupy a dignified watchful standing posture. If you are comfortable, close your eyes. If not, leaving your eyes open is perfectly ok. Turn your awareness inwards. You may notice your body standing. Stand, and know you're standing.

As your awareness expands, you may notice your body breathing. In. Out. In. Out. If your mind interjects, make a mental note, and begin again.

Lightly set your bow on any string. What did your mind do? Did you consider what the "right" bow hold is? Did you think a future thought, like imagining a future or planning? Did you think a past thought, like regret or shame or analysis? If so, make a mental note of it, and return to the breath.

Rest your left hand on the side of the bass, like so [demonstrate]. Using only down bows, I'd like you to play the open string of your choice. Can you do this activity and be aware of your body breathing. Like the juggler who is aware of the balls in the air but isn't concentrating on one specific one. Out. In. Out. In. What about the vibrations? Where do you feel your instrument vibrating you? Can you observe this sensation without being distracted by analyzing, or judgement? If not, that's ok. Note the mind's activity, and simply begin again.

And, when you are ready, you can stop playing, open your eyes, turn your awareness outward, and connect with the world around you. We worked on making mental notes of what comes into our awareness and then returning to the calm of paying attention to the breath. How can this process be incorporated into your daily practice? If you find you have a short span of attention, try returning to the breath. What effect does that have on your attention?

Also, in this wacky time, mindfulness meditation could be a way to find some peace. I know it has worked for me.

Thank you, and I'll see you next time."

(Guided Meditation, May 21st, 2020)

APPENDIX B:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview 1:

1. Do you have any observations or comments to start out with?

Mindfulness:

1. What's your impression of the mindfulness activities so far?
2. So, in the 1st activity, we looked at how our mind interrupted: did you have any observations about how and when your mind interjected in the meditation or in your practicing?
3. When/if you observed your mind activity, how did you respond?
4. After doing some of these activities, could you compare how you normally practice to how you practice mindfulness?
5. In mindfulness meditation there's this idea of right effort. What do you think that means?

Flow:

1. How would you describe what being in the zone feels like?
2. Did you feel like you experience flow more often when in a mindful state? If so, could you elaborate? If not, why do you think that is?

Self-Care:

1. How did you feel when you were doing the mindfulness activities?
2. How would you describe your mental state after doing these activities?
3. What sorts of things do you do for self-care right now? If it's helpful, you can think of what you do to take care of your physical, mental, and emotional selves.

APPENDIX C:
EXAMPLE OF REFLECTION PROMPTS

Here are the prompts for the reflection:

1. How would you describe the difference between responding and reacting?
2. What bodily sensations did you become aware of in both parts of the meditation? How did you react to the awareness of these sensations?
3. Did you notice anything change in your bass playing? What about in your bass practicing? If so, can you elaborate?
4. Any other comments or questions you would like to share.

APPENDIX D:
QUESTIONNAIRE

How many years have you played a musical instrument?

A. 1-2 years
B. 3-6 years
C. 7-8 years
D. 9 or more years

How many years have you played the bass?

A. 1-2 years
B. 3-6 years
C. 7-8 years
D. 9 or more years

Have you taken private lessons prior to college?

A. Yes
B. No

Which of the following definitions of mindfulness is most accurate

A. Mindfulness is a way to practice being focussed.
B. Mindfulness is being aware of the present moment without judgement.
C. Mindfulness is clearing your mind
D. Mindfulness is being aware of the parts of one's thinking.

Meditation is defined as taking time out of your day to attend to your breathing and become aware of what is happening within and without you. How often do you meditate?

A. Never
B. Once a month
C. Weekly
D. Twice a week
E. The majority of the Week
F. Daily

Flow experiences can be described as being "in the zone" where playing a musical instrument feels easy and fun. Is this something that you have experienced before?

A. Yes
B. No

C. I don't know

Self-care is the process where one takes care of their physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual needs. How often do you engage in self-care?

A. Never
B. Once a month
C. Weekly
D. Twice a week
E. The majority of the Week
F. Daily

Are you interested in participating in this study?

A. Yes
B. No
C. Maybe. I would like more information

Please contact me if you have any questions at all.