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Flow into Social Work Education A two-paper examination on integrating flow and mindfulness strategies into social work education to prevent compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and burnout during MSW programs.

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Abstract

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Flow into Social Work Education

A two-paper examination on integrating flow and mindfulness strategies into social work education to prevent compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and burnout during MSW programs.

Julia Colangelo, MSW, LCSW

A Dissertation in Social Work

Presented by the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Social Work

2020

Marcia Martin, PhD

Dissertation Chair

Lina Hartocollis, PhD

Dissertation Committee

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Acknowledgement and Dedication

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To my clients: During the last 10+ years I’ve witness the most inspirational and transformational journeys of thousands of clients. I am deeply grateful to have been able to partner with each of you. And for my future clients, I will be honored to have the opportunity to work with you.

To my daughter’s generation and beyond: When in doubt, be kind. When unsure, offer patience. And when you need something, don’t be afraid to ask. I wouldn’t have been able to complete this dissertation without patience, kindness, and asking for support. I promise it’s worth it.

Lastly, to the therapists I've worked with and had the privilege to know: Thank you for inspiring me to be the researcher, clinician, writer, parent, partner, child, and friend I am today. I appreciate your patience and kindness over the years.

Abstract:

In 2019, The World Health Organization identified burnout as an occupational hazard and indeed this occupational phenomenon is especially amplified for many of those in the helping professions. The purpose of this two-paper dissertation is not only to understand the stressors and emotional exhaustion experienced by graduate social work students that often lead to burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma during their time in MSW programs, but also to develop a strategy to mitigate the occurrence of these circumstances during and following their educational experiences. Paper one explores perspectives on and causes of student burnout through an extensive literature review, an analysis of the structure of graduate social work education programs, and interviews with administrators at an MSW program in New York City. Paper two presents a practice manual that offers 14 flow and mindfulness strategies that can be adapted into different settings and formats in both online or residential MSW programs. Flow and mindfulness strategies are identified as tools to develop MSW students' reflective awareness and innovative critical thinking skills in order to enhance their responses to the plethora of social injustices and traumas faced by many of the clients and organizations with which they work. This dissertation emphasizes the transformative nature of flow and mindfulness strategies while exploring critiques of their practice applications and ultimately highlighting the opportunity for applying these strategies in support of MSW students while enrolled in and following graduation from MSW programs in order to experience longevity in their careers.

Table of Contents

Dedication and Acknowledgments.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Dissertation Introduction.....	5
Paper One: <u>Vicarious Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout in Social Work Education.</u>	
Introduction.....	10
Foundational Frameworks: <u>Social Work, Vicarious Trauma, and Burnout.</u>	16
Case Vignettes	24
Foundational Frameworks: <u>MSW Educational Frameworks to Promote Student Wellness.</u> ...27	
Foundational Frameworks: <u>Mindfulness and the Origins of Contemplative Practices.</u>	29
Foundational Frameworks: <u>Reflective Awareness and Relational Cultural Theory in MSW Education</u>	31
Foundational Frameworks: <u>Flow Consciousness to Prevent and Recover From Burnout.</u> ...33	
Foundational Frameworks: <u>Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR).</u>	34
Foundational Frameworks: <u>Stress, Vicarious Trauma, Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, and Emotional Exhaustion of MSW students</u>	35
Neuroscience, Connection and Burnout Prevention	38
<u>Mindfulness in Higher Education of Helping Professionals Today.</u>	43
<u>Conclusions.</u>	51
<u>References</u>	53

Paper Two: Implementing Mindfulness & Flow into MSW Programs: A Practice Manual
introducing 14-Mindfulness and Flow Strategies to Develop Reflective Awareness and Prevent
MSW Student Burnout, Exhaustion, Compassion Fatigue, and Vicarious Trauma.

Introduction.....	64
Rationale for Mindfulness and Flow Strategies in MSW Programs.....	66
MSW Student Experiences Leading to Burnout.....	67
<i>Transforming Social Work Education.....</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Neuroscience & the Transformative Nature of Mindfulness and Flow.....</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Applying Mindfulness and Flow to MSW Programs.....</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>The Intersection of Social Work, Mindfulness, Flow, and Positive Psychology.....</i>	<i>73</i>
How to Use this Manual	75

Mindfulness and Flow Strategies for MSW Students

- Strategy One: Breath Awareness.77
- Strategy Two: BODY SCAN.....89
- Strategy Three: Guided Meditation for Social Workers.....92
- Strategy Four: Loving Kindness for Social Workers.....97
- Strategy Five: Core Values for Social Workers.....101
- Strategy Six: Flow, Concentration, and Social Justice for MSW Students...106
- Strategy Seven: Into Flow for MSW Innovation.....108
- Strategy Eight: Mindful Movement for MSW Student Stress Reduction.....110

- Strategy Nine: Attention, Focus, and Flow for MSW Students.....112
- Strategy Ten: Walking Meditation for Flow & Stress Reduction.....116
- Strategy Eleven: Active Communication and Listening.....120
- Strategy Twelve: Flow Framework.....121
- Strategy Thirteen: Foundations of Gratitude for MSW Students.....124
- Strategy 14: Community Flow for MSW Students.....128

Suggestions for Implementation of Mindfulness and Flow Strategies into Five Unique Approaches.....131

Introductions to five approaches with scripts and outlines139

Conclusion.....148

References150

Dissertation Introduction

I've been in the social work field for nearly a decade and in my various roles I've been a line worker at various large non-profits, a clinician in public and private schools, and have taught at graduate schools of social work. Throughout my personal and professional experiences, I have struggled with, and recovered from, burnout. A supervisor once told me that burnout is the expected occupational hazard of the helping professions. I didn't know why this had to be the case, but I swiftly went on to experience layers of emotional exhaustion and to suffer from vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue resulting in burnout and chronic burnout. Before I knew it, my ability to connect with the work I loved, had faded. I leaned into my support systems, and sought my own ongoing therapy, supervision, and peer consultation support. I eventually, albeit slowly, recovered and was able to see more clearly and intentionally by using my own formal and informal mindfulness and meditation practices and tapping into my creative genius through accessing and enhancing my own flow states.

As I began to instruct social work students, however, I was struck by how many of my students reported burnout in September and January on the first day of each semester. To me, it was confusing that students who were coming off of a summer break or winter vacation were exhausted, excessively stressed, and anxious about the next 14 weeks of class and field internship. As early as the first week of class, I have had students approach me expressing stress related to their internship and their educational and life responsibilities. When given the option, it is common knowledge in higher education that students often prefer to spread out their classes, especially during the summer or winter intensives, because they feel that doing everything all at once is "just too much." This feeling of emotional exhaustion is ever more evident in MSW

programs where the content and exposure to trauma is integrated into the social work profession's foundation of education, values, and ethics.

As a semester begins, I have noticed a pattern where students rapidly decline in their performance, attendance, focus, and engagement. I believe they are experiencing compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, emotional exhaustion and, in some cases, burnout. At first, I wondered if it was my teaching style, even though my feedback was consistently positive. After graduation, however, students reflected on the difficulty of "giving their all" to all aspects of their life while balancing their field internship and educational requirements. I offered myself as a resource and colleague in the field for my students to meet and consult with as they entered the job market. That's when I began to see the pattern that time and time again, my students were burning out while fulfilling their social work education requirements. My students come from all walks of life. Some are in their early twenties, or single parents, or partnered with children and stepchildren. They work in agencies, babysit on weekends, and study to complete the expectations of a demanding graduate program. No matter their demographics, many students are encountering the universal experience of burnout. But how could they be experiencing this before even graduating and officially becoming licensed social workers? After consecutive semesters hearing the same stories, the same challenges, and complaints, I really wanted to understand this phenomenon better.

I started to explore this issue in a more in depth way with students, colleagues, and administrators and eventually focused on it in my application to the University of Pennsylvania DSW program. I spoke about what had helped me in my professional recovery from burnout and listened to what helped my colleagues with similar experiences of emotional exhaustion resulting directly from social work education, field requirements, and professional expectations. I learned

that while burnout is, indeed, an occupational phenomenon (World Health Organization, 2019), it is an amplified and distinct experience for those in the helping professions. Through these discussions and as a result of my personal experience, the topic of this dissertation was conceived. The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the stressors experienced by graduate social work students through an extensive literature review, an analysis of the structure of graduate social work education programs, and by interviews conducted with administrators at an MSW program in New York City exploring their perspectives on the causes of student burnout. Lastly, I will propose elements of mindfulness practices and flow activities that can be implemented into a practice manual for MSW programs to integrate into their organization. This content will support student wellness, mitigate MSW student burnout during their programs and following graduation, and encourage flow and creative genius for MSW students so they can experience alignment of their values and actions to be innovative change agents.

Paper One: Vicarious Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout in Social Work Education

Introduction to Paper 1:

Social worker student burn-out is a real problem. While it has not been quantified, the author is aware that anecdotally some students withdraw from MSW programs because of experiences of fatigue and overwhelm. Lingard (2007) identified employment as a potential role conflict for students who work while taking college courses. This conflict can lead to students experiencing competing demands while they continually try to balance professional and educational priorities (Benner, Curl, 2018). In an exploratory study where employment was explored as a factor for jeopardizing student success and increasing the risk to experience emotional exhaustion and eventually burnout, Benner et al. suggest that burnout can be a function of role conflict specifically for social work students. Understanding the student experience of balancing different roles can help inform the way MSW programs are formatted. MSW students' experiences of burnout are not sustainable for the social work profession. It's time to reassess students' needs in the same way clients' needs and strengths are assessed. We need to equip our students with tools that they can utilize to deepen their own self-awareness, improve their clinical and creative confidence, consider their own thoughts and feelings, and develop attunement towards their clients to improve quality of care. Mindfulness practices must be considered for inclusion in that tool kit.

Contemplative practice is an umbrella term that includes mindfulness practices whether formal, such as silent meditation, or informal, such as mindful walking or eating. Flow states occur when we integrate mindfulness practices and are intentional about minimizing distractions

so we can become fully immersed and attentive to the task or activity at hand. This full immersion and experience of being in the zone heightens our awareness, productivity, and confidence to function in alignment with our values, actions, and strengths (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). Mindfulness practices, when regularly integrated in a way that results in flow states, emphasize the reality that the brain changes when we persist with any form of repetition (Siegal, 2007). In the U.S., social work pedagogy bases itself on a combination of educational and internship requirements to receive an MSW. Historically, this format has enabled social workers to enter into their social work careers post-graduation equipped with the foundational knowledge and practice tools that allow them to ethically engage with diverse populations immediately post-graduation. CSWE has designated field education as the signature pedagogy of social work education, highlighting its critical role in helping students to integrate theoretical and conceptual understandings into practice settings (CSWE, 2015). While field education certainly introduces professional development and the use of practical clinical skills and critical thinking, self-care strategies are not typically emphasized within social work graduate programs. There is yet to be developed in higher education institutions a required self-care class or workshop centered on providing social work students with space to process, explore responses, and sit with difficult emotional or physical experiences. Some MSW programs are beginning to prioritize MSW student wellness. Columbia University requires MSW students to attend two Community Care Days each academic year, one each in the fall and spring semesters. Students are even required to miss a day of their internship assignment in order to engage in self-care related activities addressing the seven dimensions of wellness: social, environmental, financial, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical (Columbia University, 2019). While this standard is encouraged, it is not yet implemented nationally or worldwide to encourage the integration of

flow, genius, mindfulness practices and burnout prevention techniques for students to address their personal and professional lives.

Many MSWs are launched into the field, without the knowledge and skills needed to prevent the sustained potential for the burn-out, vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue that accompanies client-centered work. For this reason, it is critical to examine a framework that might enable students to graduate prepared with clinical skills and ethical awareness as well as the tools to maintain their careers and counter burn-out. While numerous MSW programs teach about mindfulness from an academic or clinical standpoint, there isn't often space for students to internalize wellness practices for themselves. Such a space would encourage self-reflection and the development of insights into students' physical and emotional experiences. This space is what Laura Birnbaum referred to as an "accompanying space" that is not measured, not graded, though it is accessible and encouraged (Birnbaum, 2007).

The CSWE conducts an annual survey that collects data about the demographics of bachelors, masters and doctoral level social work students. Using an online platform, survey invitations are sent to accredited social work programs requesting general data on student enrollment. In the most recent available survey, CSWE noted that there was an institutional spam filter which resulted in fewer completed surveys overall. Nonetheless, the information is relevant in order to understand social work program composition. Looking at the statistics for MSW programs, we see that 235 of 255 MSW programs participated in the survey for a 92.2% response rate. About 65% (41,186 students) of MSW students are enrolled full-time in MSW programs while 35.2% of students were enrolled part-time (CSWE, 2017). This data collection did not specify or identify additional variables impacting student enrollment apart from gender and part-time or full-time enrollment. However, anecdotally from the author's interaction with

MSW students as a field supervisor, lecturer, and former MSW student, many factors impact MSW students' lives, and physical, emotional, and mental stressors can be exacerbated if the MSW experience is compounding additional stress to the student's life and schedule. While the statistics show over 1/3 of MSW students are enrolled part-time, there are factors such as employment, personal obligations, and family planning that impact student stress. In addition, physical, emotional, and spiritual health are impacted by MSW field and academic requirements and vice-versa.

There are critiques of mindfulness, including some considering that mindfulness has become the new capitalist spirituality (Purser, 2019). Critiques of the current mindfulness revolution claim that mindfulness advocates like Jon Kabat-Zinn are providing support for the status quo by encouraging us to be aware of the present moment, nonjudgmentally (Purser, 2019). In the same breath some might consider that integrating mindfulness skills into MSW programs may be just a band aid rather than an attempt to uncover the root causes of collective disturbance facing social service agencies, workers, and higher education institutions. However, this dissertation recognizes that the tide is coming, and change is on the horizon. By integrating mindfulness skills that encourage self-compassion and nonjudgment while honoring the roots of mindfulness as identified by Thich Nhat Hanh as a form of resistance, we can encourage mental and emotional resilience without necessarily depoliticizing and privatizing stress (Purser, 2019).

Mental health services are underutilized on college campuses due to reported skepticism and a lack of perceived urgency in need (Eisenberg, 2011). In a recent study, students participated in online focus groups and discussed wellness issues related to college students ranging from topics of healthy food options to stress and student health. Students reported that wellness programs needed to accommodate students' schedules when organizing health and

wellness events (Christianson, 2018). One way to accommodate students' schedules is to mindfully schedule a wellness course that is pass/fail and formatted to support students rather than offer optional and sporadic mindfulness events. Naropa University in Boulder Colorado roots its entire mission in a teaching and learning approach that integrates Eastern Wisdom and traditional Western Scholarship and proclaims itself the “birthplace of the modern mindfulness movement” (Naropa University, 2019). While most MSW programs are unlikely to adopt an entire shift in their philosophy, it seems feasible that they might integrate student self-care and mindfulness practices within their curriculum. One op-ed from Columbia University made a call to action to integrate a pass/fail class related to student wellness required for all incoming freshmen. This student-led proclamation is one reminder of the need students experience themselves to have a means to cope even without the rigor of social work field and internship requirements.

Vicarious traumatization occurs when there is a culmination of pervasive, damaging effects on the clinician following chronic exposure to bearing witness to clients' traumatic material. A clinician's sense of self is negatively impacted and a traumatized clinician may experience rage, terror, grief and loss reminiscent of post-traumatic stress disorder which disrupts the clinician's worldview. (Michalopoulos et al., 2011). Throughout the first paper, case composites will demonstrate some of the conditions that lead MSW students to experience elements of vicarious trauma resulting in burnout and moral injury. When a schema or worldview is altered by exposure to trauma, MSW students are unable to perform at their optimal functioning level (Dombo, 2013).

In this exploration the author will explore the studies completed thus far in an extensive literature review of mindfulness practices and discuss the effects of mindfulness practices on

social work students. In addition, this literature review will document the extent of stress and emotional exhaustion experienced by social work students and describe the need to address the extent of social work student burnout in order to encourage long careers in the field. This paper will examine the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings and intersection of mindfulness, flow, trauma, and pedagogy through an extensive literature review. This paper will also suggest the specific intersect with social work education and the experiences of social work students.

Additionally, informal interviews will be conducted with administrators and instructors within MSW programs to further explore the resources and challenges that exist for MSW students.

There have been various quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies as discussed in the literature review which examined social work student burn out and the introduction of mindfulness practices. However, the courses, curriculums, and manner by which mindfulness practices were introduced to students varied and were often introduced as part of a graded class. For this reason, the practice manual component of this dissertation aims to offer students an experience of an “accompanying space” (Birnbaum, 2008), where students can seek internal and external contemplation to practice self-care and feel supported by their institutions and each other and feel equipped internally to tolerate distress throughout, and following, their MSW student experiences.

Additionally, and apart from preventing vicarious trauma and burnout, this research encourages the notion that social work students must be supported to reach their full potential and have greater impact on their clients and communities. This enhanced experience, where one is fully immersed in their task and thinking critically, is often referred to as genius state, flow consciousness or optimal performance (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). In flow states, one experiences a decrease in stress and increased self-awareness resulting in an ease and sense of effortlessness as

it applies to completing a task or activity (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). Clearing our consciousness of distractions allows for the integration of mindfulness practices to create an optimal experience, which for MSW students provides an entry into doing difficult client or community work with high-needs populations with a sense of ease and confidence in the process. In the practice manual, material will be provided to teach mindfulness practices to improve self-awareness skills, and skills to think creatively and be innovative in order to truly embody the role of social change agents. When MSW students, faculty and administrators can learn how to enter their flow consciousness, they have the opportunity to perform tasks that are highly challenging and innovative, and to become change agents within legislatures and organizations (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Bloom (2019) compares an organization to a living system. Schools of social work are subject to burnout and vicarious trauma by holding the experiences of MSW students. Organizations as living systems thrive when the system is healthy and functioning with flow, allowing room for creativity and conclusions. In addition to, and apart from preventing MSW burnout, introducing mindfulness practices allows graduate schools of social work to encourage students to function at their optimal performance in serving others.

Social Work, Compassion Fatigue, Vicarious Trauma, and Burnout

According to a study completed by SAMHSA, social workers are the largest group of mental health service providers (NASW, 2019). Social work values and principles are defined and reviewed throughout each master's program as part of The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE's) accreditation process. The CSWE handbook, Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), specifies the core elements of social work education programs. While each Masters in Social Work (MSW) Program varies in their specific requirements,

CSWE stipulates certain content areas and competencies that must be addressed and requires a minimum of 900 hours of field education in conjunction with completing educational credits, units, and coursework in the standard in-person or online classroom (CSWE, 2015). While CSWE regulates social work education, the National Association of Social Work (NASW) defines the values and ethics in the social work profession.

The NASW code of ethics states that the first value of the social work profession is *service* which bears the following principle:

Ethical Principle: Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems. Social workers elevate service to others above self-interest. Social workers draw on their knowledge, values, and skills to help people in need and to address social problems. Social workers are encouraged to volunteer some portion of their professional skills with no expectation of significant financial return (pro bono service) (NASW, 2019).

Beginning with their MSW application and essay prompts, aspiring social work students are cognizant of the expected sacrifice and dedication necessary to uphold social work values and ethical principles. But when social workers offer their resources, time, energy, and compassion to relieving others' challenges, what are the emotional, physical, and spiritual challenges they face? Vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burn out have been heavily researched within the social work field as common hazards of the profession. While each of these experiences differ by definition, they collectively reflect the impact helping professionals, specifically social workers, experience in reaction to serving vulnerable populations day in and day out. When social workers enter stages of burnout, which has been defined as a syndrome, and occupational phenomenon (World Health Organization, 2019), and do not devote significant

time and attention caring for themselves, patient care can be compromised, resulting in potentially harmful consequences (Shapiro et al., 2007).

NASW supports efforts to improve social worker self-care (NASW, 2011), and there are initiatives within the social work field on how to integrate educational material related to self-care strategies and burn out prevention into social work courses from a competency-based approach (Newell, 2014). However, there is yet to be developed an accessible practice manual that addresses social worker wellness that can be implemented within MSW programs in a feasible format. Such a practice manual would teach students tangible skills to increase their self-awareness, thus enabling them to be more cognizant of the potential psychological, physical, and social tolls that can be triggered by experiences in micro, mezzo, and macro social work practice. Secondly, the practice manual would aim to encourage more fulfilling and prolonged social work careers in which social workers persistently deliver high quality and ethical services to their clients through developing skills of self-preservation.

Compassion fatigue is the "cost of caring" or erosion that occurs when helping professionals are not able to refuel within their helper role, both physically and emotionally (Figley, 2002). In this regard, Figley identifies four risk factors for compassion fatigue:

- persistent exposure to the intensity of trauma through work with multiple victims and survivors of trauma that can overwhelm the caregiver and result in the loss of professional perspective;
- immersion into empathy in the absence of professional boundaries that can result in internalizing the pain of another actually experiencing their trauma;
- memories of a caregiver's own unresolved personal history of trauma that may be triggered by a client's similar experience;

- exposure to trauma in children and their accompanying pain that is especially devastating for caregivers and results in a heightened sense of despair.

Vicarious trauma describes the process of change that has a cumulative transformative effect on helping professionals after prolonged exposure to clinical work with clients who themselves report trauma when working with clients reporting trauma (Bloom, 2003, Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995). Burn out refers to the physical and emotional exhaustion experienced by professionals and, in our discussion, helping professionals when they feel powerless and overwhelmed in their employment and have low job satisfaction (Maslack, 1997).

Compassion fatigue can occur when MSW students are unable to provide sufficient self-care while balancing classes, personal and professional responsibilities and field education client-facing work. While self-care is encouraged within MSW programs in classes and in relation to clinical approaches, it is not mandated. While classes and field education are requirements, it's not surprising that when given the option, MSWs may feel as though there remains little time and energy for them to direct inward and recover and rejuvenate from their various MSW-related stressors. When clinicians do not dedicate specific time, resources, and self-preservation skills to care for their own physical and emotional wellness, it's likely that burnout may occur.

Burnout typically occurs gradually and in different stages identified as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and cynicism, and personal efficacy and accomplishment (Maslach, 1981). The stages of burnout identified by Veninga and Spradley (1981) can be adapted to the social work experience. The first stage is the honeymoon stage where one might be deeply committed to and positive about their job, but are aware that some days are more challenging or stressful than others. Under those circumstances, work inefficiency, fatigue, or

escapist activities can set in. Then, there are the stages that include chronic symptoms of burnout where there seems to be little reprieve from feelings of dissatisfaction and fatigue and a sense of being overwhelmed. Lastly, there are symptoms of crisis and enmeshment where the experience of burnout becomes embedded in one's life to a level that requires intervention (Maslack, 1997). A newer term to refer to this fully-encompassing and severe version of burnout is moral injury, identified as the experience of complete depersonalization and absenteeism from their own values and ethical code of conduct (Litz et al., 2009). Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D. (2003), Senior Fellow of The Child Trauma Academy (www.ChildTrauma.org) in Houston and an Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Feinberg School of Medicine of Northwestern University in Chicago, in categorizing the individual indicators of secondary traumatic stress as emotional, physical, individual, and workplace, provides this list to describe burnout:

- emotional distress characterized by anger, sadness, prolonged grief, anxiety, and depression;
- physical distress characterized by headaches, stomach aches, lethargy, and constipation;
- individual distress characterized by self-isolation, cynicism, mood swings, and irritability with family and friends;
- workplace distress characterized by avoidance of certain clients, missed appointments, tardiness, and lack of motivation.

While burnout and secondary/vicarious stress is often experienced on an individual level, there is an organizational dimension necessary to consider. The organizational layer of burnout directly relates to the worker, the organization and the work they are doing. These three dimensions are each considered on a continuum. Maslach and Leiter (2008) define the first

connected dimension is as exhaustion <-> energy which focuses on the individual's feeling of running on empty. The second connected dimension is cynicism <-> involvement which represents the interpersonal component of burnout where the individual distances from their work responsibilities. Lastly, is the connected dimension inefficacy <-> efficacy that is most evident when MSWs are working directly with individuals who identify as members of oppressed or vulnerable populations, and there is a sense of ineffectiveness in their tasks and accomplishments (Maslach, Leiter, 2008).

Maslach and Leiter (2008) emphasized that the worker was not at fault for experiencing burnout but that the organization and work environment often promote burnout. Indeed, some organizational sources of burnout identified are work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, unfairness, breakdown of a sense of community, and value conflict. When exposed to these sources, MSWs may be more susceptible to experience burnout. The Sanctuary Model, spearheaded by Dr. Sandra Bloom, suggests that organizations must deliberately redesign workplaces to create morally safe climates. Bloom (2017) emphasizes that environments can make people physically, psychologically, socially, and morally sick. Those that are exposed to ongoing stress and trauma in their work are susceptible to suffering. The sanctuary model offers seven commitments that organizations ranging from nonprofits to centers for education can take including commitments to nonviolence, emotional intelligence, social learning, open communication, democracy, social responsibility, growth and change. While the implementation of the Sanctuary Model varies, it is designed to bring the awareness of the need for an intentional organizational design. Bloom posits that safety can extend from the work with clients to the providers themselves benefiting from less organizational stress deriving from exposure to

vicarious trauma. Similarly, MSW programs could be urged to follow suggestions from this model to encourage the evolution and growth of MSW students within the educational system.

Beth Hudnall Stamm (2010), Director of ProQOL.org and Professor at the Institute of Rural Health at Idaho State University, places explicit emphasis on what she terms professional quality of life which includes positive (Compassion Satisfaction) and negative (Compassion Fatigue) aspects. She identifies burnout and secondary traumatic stress as potential byproducts of compassion fatigue. She associates burnout with inefficacy and discouragement as well as a sense of being overwhelmed, all feelings that may be exacerbated by an excessively heavy workload and an invalidating work climate. For Stamm, secondary traumatic stress is associated with work-related trauma. In the social work profession, work-related stress and trauma are risks of the occupation, however mindfulness and flow strategies equip MSW students to manage this stress without abandoning the profession entirely.

Social work students seek to develop clinical skills through their MSW programs and field internships. However, in order to prevent burnout and emotional and physical fatigue from daily service to others, it is imperative that MSW programs emphasize skills that can support student wellness. Unfortunately, most MSW programs currently lack a format for explicitly teaching social work students how to preserve their own energy and enthusiasm while maintaining a client-centered approach and providing high quality care as interns and future licensed social workers and change agents. How can MSW programs begin to better encourage student wellness in a thoughtful and student-centered approach designed to facilitate the development of self-awareness? One solution would be to integrate into the curriculum components of formal and informal contemplative practice related to mindfulness and self-compassion.

While much has been written, documented, and reflected anecdotally about social service conditions that overwhelm MSW students and licensed clinicians, there is insufficient research documenting the extent by which students are impacted and how it impacts the longevity of their career in the social services. In his book *Lost Connections*, Johann Hari declares the seven major disconnections: disconnection from meaningful work, disconnection from other people, disconnection from meaningful values, disconnection from childhood trauma, disconnection from status and respect, disconnection from the natural world, disconnection from a hopeful or secure future. Each of these arenas can be directly related to the experience of moral injury experienced by social workers when MSW students feel disconnected from their work, other people, values, status and respect, natural world, and their own lived childhood experiences (Hari, 2018). If MSW students do not develop skills to tolerate distress, the social work profession is at risk of leaving vulnerable populations deeply underserved, and failing MSW students who once aspired to be change agents.

MSW students may experience vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, or burnout as they are learning clinical skills, accruing educational knowledge, and meeting the field requirements in addition to negotiating their other personal and professional experiences. Compassion fatigue, burnout and vicarious trauma cause the brain to experience a stress response which interferes with MSW students' clinical effectiveness and field learning (Dunkel, et. al, 2000). This stress response impacts social workers' ability to complete their daily tasks, deliver high quality interventions and decreases client outcomes. The most recent review of research indicates that between 65% and 86% of social workers experience verbal and physical aggression throughout their careers (Lyter, 2016, Criss, 2010). If one is victimized physically or verbally, there are essential steps to follow to provide support to MSW students to train them to manage their

exposure to these risk factors. Dr. Sharon Lyter proclaims, “The endurance of the profession’s hallmark of social justice is celebrated, but the lack of comprehensive attention by the profession to worker safety is unfortunate” (Lyter, 2016, P 218). Dr. Lyter’s research depicts how residual impact of exposure to risk to untrained or newly trained social workers negatively impacts their overall wellness. In the social work field, safety is not measured solely by the absence of physical or verbal assaults, but by the presence of emotional wellbeing that social workers experience and present with. Additionally, for those students who do not experience verbal or physical assault but do experience moral injury or burnout from repeated exposure to trauma, patient care can be compromised, resulting in potentially harmful consequences (Shapiro et. al, 2007).

Case vignette: Manifestation of stress: To demonstrate how vicarious trauma, stress, emotional exhaustion, and compassion fatigue manifest and are coped with by MSW students, a case vignette that is a compilation of students’ experiences will conceptualize the experiences MSW students can experience.

Selena graduated with a Bachelors in Psychology from a top school and then worked for two years running an afterschool program in NYC, before applying to an MSW program. Her goal was to have a more profound impact on children and teens in NYC. Selena’s first year field placement was in an inpatient psychiatric hospital where she was supporting the lead social workers with assessment and ultimately working directly with clients providing individual therapy and co-leading group therapy.*

Selena met Linda, age sixteen, during the intake with her supervisor. Linda had been experiencing ongoing abuse and neglect in the home for as long as she could remember and was accompanied to the intake appointment at the hospital by a police officer and a law guardian*

who worked with the abuse and neglect cases that were pending with the criminal and family courts of Brooklyn. Linda was admitted to the inpatient psychiatric facility following her arrest for heroin use while skipping school that week. School used to be her safe place. However, that changed when she began to be bullied for her clothing and haircut once she started in high school. She found she didn't really relate to others in her class and started looking for another place to fit in. She joined social media platforms and found that connecting with peers online allowed her to feel heard. Some of the people she connected with online were in her geographic area, which is how she found her new social and chosen family, as she referred to it.

She was skipping school after meeting some older friends on social media. After attending a few parties she found that she preferred being with her friends and experimenting with drugs more than going to school where she felt stuck, like she couldn't relate. She felt less depressed when using drugs and felt like she was accepted by this new community of friends, after having endured excessive punishment of hitting and even burning from her parents throughout childhood and adolescence.

Linda explained that she wasn't addicted to heroin, however, she did like the feeling. She was embarrassed about being arrested and scared about what could happen, but also not sure she was ready to stop using the drug that seemed to make everything feel better. She found that even after a few days in the psychiatric hospital she was needing the heroin rush she had just started to experience. She was getting depressed, and in a group session Selena was co-leading, Linda took one of the pencils for the activities, scratched her arm impulsively with it, and started bleeding within a matter of seconds. Selena screamed out of shock never having seen this, and then had to quickly yell for help to support Linda.

The other group members were not as alarmed, but Selena was shaking. This was her third month working at this field placement, and she had felt like she was developing a rapport with clients and also distinguishing herself as an effective and eager intern. Immediately after this incident she couldn't really speak, and noticed she was somewhat frozen and unable to respond. The group ended, and the co-leader grabbed a supervisor on the floor to talk to them both. Everyone was focused on supporting Linda, and there didn't appear to be space for Selena to explore her reaction. It was also around 4:30pm and the evening staff was showing up. Selena's supervisor came over to check-in briefly and apologize for being busy with helping Linda and unable to talk with Selena. She assured her that they would process the situation in two days when Selena was back in field. Selena nodded, and headed to the subway. While waiting for the subway, she could not get the image of this self-harm episode out of her head. Just last week when she met Linda, she felt such heaviness hearing her story and she worried about Linda's future and wellbeing. Now that she had witnessed this self-harm in real time, she truly was frightened. She thought about what to do, and remembered that she had heard about the importance of self-care in class. It was three days until she had her case class, and it was two weeks before a holiday break. She was at a loss for what to do. She was still shaking and also berating herself for shaking when she wasn't the one who had experienced the trauma that Linda had lived. After all, she just saw something happen, but she wasn't the one actually hurting. She wasn't sure whether it was appropriate to call her field advisor or email a professor because she knew everyone was busy. She wanted to bring this up in class but didn't want to seem "weak" or like she wasn't tough enough to be in the trenches as a direct line social worker. She ended up going home, feeling too sick and stressed to eat, and simply fell asleep watching tv.

MSW Educational Frameworks to Promote Student Wellness

MSW programs seek to promote experiences of safety, mutuality, empathy, and relational and interactional learning in the classroom process (Goldstein, et. al 2009). By integrating these core elements, students benefit from the humanity, disclosures, shared perspectives and vulnerabilities being named by classmates and instructors in order to process the potential vicarious trauma, emotional exhaustion and eventual burnout many MSWs endure during their MSW educational program or postgraduation. Whether it's a student's ability to relate to symptoms, experiences, self, or others, the MSW experience emphasizes exploring the relatedness and connection of ourselves to our service.

Social work educators have somewhat limited strategies for ensuring student emotional safety in the social work classroom (Mishna, 2007). Mishna (2007) suggests the integration of mindfulness strategies as an effective tool for educators to encourage a sense of safety and relation within the class. When social work educators integrate a reflective nature by noticing and integrating their own responses and experiences to aid students in their learning, students can begin to experience ease and comfort in the class setting. Additionally, to encourage student safety and openness when discussing themes of oppression and diversity, a reflective teaching style encourages student engagement (Mishna, 2007). This reflective awareness has been described as flow or mindfulness and helps social work educators be present with their range of emotions and reactions within their teaching in order to aid and support students' development and diminish students' experiences of shame (Mishna, 2007).

In discussion with a former director of Advising and current Assistant Dean at a School of Social Work in the North East, it was identified that social work jobs and the challenges seen by interns and newly graduated MSWs are not what they used to be. More importantly than the

change in work and internship demands, one Assistant Dean shared that of the University's 577 graduating MSW students this past year, more students than ever applied to, were accepted, and entered the MSW program with pre-existing diagnoses of anxiety and mood disorders than any year prior. She noted that this has been a steady increase each year, which might mean that mental health diagnoses are less stigmatized. However, due to her direct interface with students, she has hypothesized that, in fact, MSW applicants are more stressed, pressured, anxious, and overwhelmed than previous applicants. Additionally, she referenced the need for more accommodations to support students with these diagnoses who seek support through the office of disabilities. She reported that consistently over her fifteen years involved in the program, approximately ten MSW students dropped out each semester. While a comprehensive advising model is designed to hold all administrators, instructors and field supervisors accountable, there is an increasing need for MSW instructors and advisors to read between the lines of students' behavior. For example, without students feeling as though faculty are prying, as a preventative measure instructors are encouraged to inquire about recurrent absences or lateness, and discouraged from discrediting how real issues of food insecurity and financial problems may be impacting student performance and engagement in field internship and with instructional material. Per this informal interview, it can be inferred that MSW student wellness is being critically examined and promoted by directors of MSW programs.

Additionally, the current political climate is an ongoing contributing factor whereby students are tasked to explore their own intersectional identities as part of their MSW educational training. When students do not feel emotionally equipped to witness how their real-life experiences of racism, sexism and xenophobia, are talked about and shared in the classroom, they can experience similar signs of emotional exhaustion, desperation, and moral injury that

contribute to burnout. As MSW programs expand and offer online programs, there are more opportunities for interpersonal conflict in the classroom between instructors and students. In fact, the interviewed Assistant Dean shared that some faculty are not yet ready for students to push back on their syllabus, and so there is a heightened awareness that students don't necessarily feel afraid to voice their opinions, and instructors aren't necessarily equipped to manage what they perceive to be a power struggle. Students reportedly "want to get their money's worth" out of their MSW program, which encourages them to demand anti-oppressive language, text books and articles. While some instructors are prepared and invite these conversations, others are shocked by students' reactions and unequipped to have constructive conversations.

Mindfulness and the Origins of Contemplative Practices

While traditional Buddhism is credited with the origins of mindfulness and contemplative practices, current understandings of mindfulness can be traced to the life and teachings of Vietnamese Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh, also known as Thay. Thay was born in central Vietnam in 1926 and entered the Tu Hieu Temple in 1942 as a novice monk. When the Vietnam War began, Thich Nhat Hanh founded a Buddhism movement which encouraged Buddhism practitioners to balance living the contemplative life while meditating in a monastery and helping those suffering from the war (Hanh, 1975). Thay dedicated his life to teaching mindfulness to benefit individuals and society through social action and described mindfulness as "being conscious of each breath, each movement, every thought and feeling, everything that has any relation to ourselves" (Hanh, 1975, p.8).

Hanh went further to clarify that mindfulness can be defined as "keeping one's consciousness alive to the present moment" (Hanh, 1975, p 11). In relation to the concept of restoration, Hanh describes mindfulness as "the miracle by which we master and restore

ourselves” (Hanh, 1975 P 14). More recently, mindfulness practices have been integrated into trauma recovery in the form of yoga and movement (Emerson, 2011). While MSW students are not necessarily experiencing trauma in the exact form their clients are, restorative yoga practices have the potential to support MSW students in coping with their emotional exhaustion. In the practice manual we will explore how using similar language of inquiry that we use in therapy can be adapted to support MSW students to understand, explore, notice and observe their experience and experiences of burn-out (Emerson, 2011).

Scholars have defined mindfulness as a concept of attention and awareness (Brown et al., 2007). Jon Kabat-Zinn, M.D. is often credited with bringing mindfulness practices to Western medicine. Kabat-Zinn further defines mindfulness as the practice of being aware of the present moment, ideally and nonjudgmentally (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Kabat-Zinn goes on to define the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness as non-judging, patience, beginner’s mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go (Kabat-Zinn, 2007), which speak to the manner by which all individuals are invited to explore mindfulness with curiosity and compassion.

Brown et al., explore the development of mindfulness theory and how it relates to other psychology theories of Reflexive Self-consciousness, and theories of Integrative Awareness (Brown et al., 2007). Throughout this paper, mindfulness will be referred to as a concept rather than a theory. As a concept, we will integrate Hanh’s, Kabat-Zinn’s and Brown et.al.’s definitions of mindfulness as a state of being in the present moment, nonjudgmentally, where one is aware of the breath, thoughts and feelings and everything that has any relation to ourselves. Furthermore, mindfulness practices will be distinctly understood as exercises that are formal or informal, silent or not, where one is deeply connected to the present moment with a profound

awareness, acceptance, and attention to that moment, without self-judgment for what the present experience is, or is not. We will discuss these terms throughout the paper with greater clarity.

Reflective Awareness and Relational Cultural Theory in MSW Education

It is possible to integrate elements of Relational Cultural Theory in order to promote student wellness and prevent experiences of burnout. Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) highlights the need for humans to grow through and toward connection (Jordan, 2018). RCT emphasizes that therapists must develop mutuality and believes that chronic disconnection is a primary source of suffering for themselves and in their work with clients and communities. Additionally, RCT suggests that healing occurs when psychotherapy decreases feelings or experiences of isolation (Jordan, 2018). The clinician's empathetic attunement is critical in both RCT and in the attunement of an MSW educator seeking to support students. RCT emphasizes increasing empathy inside and outside of the therapeutic process for client empowerment through the integration of empathic attunement in present time. When considering elements of the social work classroom, it can be helpful to conceptualize the power deconstructing interactions and integrating self-disclosures might be useful in empowering students in their clinical practice and emotional processes (Goldstein, et. al, 2009).

Defined boundaries are often an emphasis of the learning process for MSW students out of fear for excessive and unsolicited self-disclosures (Goldstein et. al, 2009). Indeed, it is critical that MSWs learn the appropriate use of self-disclosure. However, by using disciplined disclosure from the perspective of the relational lens it can encourage MSW student learning, reflection, and insights (Ringel et. al, 2007). RCT also suggests that the idea of boundaries be reevaluated in order to aid human connection and encourage resilience and interdependence. When a relational framework is applied to the classroom, students' learning can be enhanced when there are

difficult elements in the classroom interactions, so that there can be a process to explore ruptures or enactments within the classroom community (Goldstein, et. al 2009). Additionally, when considering MSW student wellness and burnout prevention, when disclosures are shared about discomfort, emotional and or physical reactions to experiences in clinical work, connection is deepened in the work and classroom setting.

One critique of RCT is that there is a certain level of altruism required in order for therapists to deliver the services in alignment with the model (Jordan, 2018). In research related to mindfulness and flow consciousness, a similar critique is that to be mindful and sitting with one's breath is too passive of an activity to initiate social change, and in fact, the passivity and lack of responsiveness or reactivity in some interpretations aligns mindfulness with capitalism (Purser, 2019).

RCT and mindfulness complement one another directly in reference to their emphasis on the research found in the field of neuroscience with an emphasis on the brain's capacity to alter, change, adapt, and renew based on a person's integration of self-empathy, reflection, mindful practices, and mutuality. RCT specifically names the brain's capacity to transform based on neuroscience research that human beings are "hardwired to connect" (Banks, 2011, 2016, Jordan, 2018). RCT complements the neuroscience that aligns with mindfulness practices. If one is to practice mindfulness, the brain's neuropathways change in a profound manner (Siegel, 2007). RCT supports foundational science which promotes that humans are seeking responsiveness and engagement from birth and that neurons die when connection is not made (Chugani, et al., 2001, Jordan, 2011). As opposed to considering relationships in the hierarchy of needs as something we should eventually obtain and seek, connection and relationships are truly the bedrock for survival (Banks, 2016, Lieberman, 2013, Jordan, 2018). When RCT's theoretical model is

applied to the MSW student experience, one might infer that accessing mindfulness and flow improves one's capacity to connect with themselves, the work they do in the social work profession, and the relationships they have with clients, colleagues, and classmates. RCT emphasizes that therapists must develop mutuality since chronic disconnection can be healed by way of psychotherapy as the therapeutic process can decrease feelings or experiences of isolation (Jordan, 2018). RCT also suggests that theories and directives concerning boundaries be reevaluated, which is of particular impact when we conceptualize how and when we embrace human connection, humanity and true transformation. Similar to RCT, mindfulness and flow consciousness consider certain levels of altruism, which was an initial critique of RCT (Jordan, 2018). Similarly, one critique of mindfulness is that that sitting with the breath is a passive activity that is idealist in nature (Purser, 2019).

Flow Consciousness to Prevent and Recover from Burnout

Accessing deeper levels of consciousness in flow, prevents the susceptibility to burnout because in flow, one is fully immersed in a productive state, and therefore not procrastinating, measuring feedback towards goals, and stretching his or her capacity (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). Additionally, through connection, group flow experiences can occur whereby MSW students are connecting to their work in an energized manner so that when students experience compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma, they can move towards shared goals of resilience and recovery as a collective, class or cohort (Csikszentmihaly, 1990).

Group flow experiences occur when members of a group are moving in the same direction towards a shared goal, often under an experience of oppression, challenge, and stretching their inherent capacities (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). In this regard, MSW class settings provide the structure to encourage a group flow state, and if there is a sharing of egos, then

students who are experiencing vicarious trauma and burnout will have the connection with peers to support their challenge and help them recover, particularly if the professor is integrating themes of reflective teaching (Mishna, 2007). When aspects of mindfulness, flow, and genius states intersect with relatedness, connection and education, students can shift from experiencing vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue into experiences of ease, confidence, and curiosity. This results in MSW students being authentically impactful in their work, because they are accessing their own optimal level of performance, experiencing alignment, and activating their flow states (Csikszentmihaly, 1990).

When one accesses flow states, creativity can be illuminated because a person is accessing a specific part of their brain that allows them to be more focused, fully present and immersed more productive (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). Additionally, when they recover from a flow state of full immersion in their activity, they have the capacity to reset their nervous system prior to returning to a new flow state of heightened awareness. Where mindfulness teaches the ability to be present with one's experiences, flow expands on the ability to think expansively and curiously about innovation and one's work.

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction is an 8-week long, fully manualized group program that was developed in the 1980s by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn to address various physical and mental health concerns for adults (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, Walach, 2010). Kabat-Zinn developed the MBSR program for adults in order to improve participants' awareness of the present moment and their relationship to their own pain and suffering through the integration of traditionally Zen principles and practices of body scans, meditation, and connection to ones' breath and surroundings (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). MBSR is not a therapy program, however, it integrates

mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) through a supportive group approach where adults participate in activities during three-hour class sessions and then practice these skills independently during the week in between each session (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, Walach, 2010). Kabat-Zinn describes the point of MBSR is to "challenge and encourage people to become their own authorities, to take more responsibility for their own lives, their own bodies, their own health (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p 192)."

Various studies have reported the benefits of meditation and mindfulness since its development into a formal intervention in the Western world (Wylie, 2015). Gray matter, which allows for cognitive flexibility in our brain, changes as we age. However, those practicing meditation were discovered to experience less decrease in gray matter and slower erosion of cognitive flexibility than those who did not practice meditation (Last, Tufts, Auger, 2017). Mindfulness Meditation (MM) is one component of the MBSR program. One assumption of MM is that engaging with the breath in the present moment allows the body to reconnect or establish new neurological pathways in a way that can alter one's relationship to their thoughts, feelings and behaviors (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). MM has been identified as a protective and less stigmatized treatment approach for mental health symptoms by many due to its presence in the mainstream (Wylie, 2015). It's not necessarily feasible for social work students to attend a formal MBSR program in addition to their schedules and responsibilities within and outside of their MSW programs. However, the foundational elements offered in MBSR offer opportunities for MSW students to develop self-care practices to prevent burnout.

Stress, Vicarious Trauma, Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, and Emotional Exhaustion of MSW Students

Burnout in the social work field is composed of three elements: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishments (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). While burnout is often researched in the social work field, there is less data regarding social work student burnout specifically and interventions to support students who are susceptible to burn out. There is no doubt that social work students experience burnout, vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue throughout their MSW programs considering the realities of balancing field internships, academic responsibilities, and personal demands on their time.

Burnout results through a progression of experiences, events, and emotional experiences that accumulate and result in burnout. Currently burnout is categorized as an occupational hazard (World Health Organization, 2019). There is, however, a difference between burnout and symptoms of stress and emotional exhaustion that present prior to burnout in its truest essence. Colloquially, this progression can be referred to as build-up. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) measures burnout in three key dimensions: overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment (Maslach, 1993). While these dimensions of burnout can be present for individuals in any profession, when considering social work students, the explicit nature of the social work profession, and its work with especially vulnerable populations, it makes them particularly susceptible to burnout. In direct service work, social workers are exposed to trauma and stressors both in their professional requirements and in their interactions with clients (Hussein, 2018). This exposure to elevated levels of stress and potential lack of support on administrative tasks, can contribute to the experience of burnout and impact the quality of care to vulnerable populations (Hussein, 2018, Skirrow et al., 2007).

Revisiting the experience of Selena will serve to define the spiraling effects of burnout.

Selena overslept the next day and was anxious about being late to school. She was additionally worried about what had happened to Linda, but also didn't want to overstep boundaries and call her field supervisor who she would see the next day. She was embarrassed to call her parents who would likely be frightened for her for choosing this profession, and she felt like she must be the only person who had become so stressed and immobilized by a situation like this.

Selena was alone in much of her experience as an MSW intern, someone experiencing vicarious trauma, and unable to utilize coping strategies that would help her grow rather than numb her emotional reactions by watching TV. She was uncertain of where her support might come from, experienced deep self-doubt and self-criticism, and felt unequipped to discuss this topic that surely would bring up experiences of shame.

Bloom defines a system as a group of interconnected elements that work together to achieve a common purpose or function (Bloom, 2019). When we consider social work education as a system, we see outright the interrelatedness of field internships, academic expectations, and classroom experiences that contribute to the complexity of higher education. Systems are continually changing in complex ways which require members of these systems to adapt in response to those changes (Bloom, 2019). Some MSW programs attempt to promote student spiritual, physical, and emotional wellness through class scheduling, field internship support, advising departments, and offices for professional advancement and diversity. These departments and resources are in place specifically within MSW programs to provide students with a sense of ongoing support. While undoubtedly some students participate in these offerings, the reality for most MSW students is that they are participating in a system that does not align with the reality

of their multifaceted responsibilities and their intersectional identities including, but not limited to, student, intern, provider, partner, classmate, or parent.

Selena began to recognize her pattern of fatigue, exhaustion and experience of feeling retraumatized. In one of her practice classes when they were discussing mindfulness practices, each student was encouraged to engage in a brief finger breathing exercise to ground themselves in the classroom. The instructor encouraged students to practice these skills daily in order to be more aware of their thoughts, feelings, and bodily reactions, when experiencing distressing themes from their work. Selena had heard about mindfulness, but the instructor went on to describe how repetitive practices such as informal and formal mindfulness exercises, including breathwork and meditation, have the capacity to create new neuropathways in the brain. The instructor described this phenomenon as neuroplasticity. Selena was desperate for anything to help her manage her stress and improve her daily functioning, not to mention she wasn't positioned to invest time and money into therapy or an outside class. Selena was open to trying these practices and spent the next few minutes learning from the instructor how to integrate finger breathing into her preparation before going to her field placement, and in between clients.

Neuroscience, Connection and Burnout Prevention

Jordan (2018) describes empathy as the anchor that is necessary for our essential human connectivity. “Mirror neurons make emotions contagious, letting the feelings we witness flow through us, helping us get in sync and follow what’s going on” (Goleman, 2006, p 42). Similar to how mindfulness practices and connecting with our breath through intentional mindfulness, self-compassion and empathy practices have the capacity to change our brain chemistry (Siegal, 2007, Van der Kolk, 2014, Begley, 2008, Cozolino, 2014, Doige, 2007, Schore, 1994). This knowledge that one can rewire the neuropathways to deepen the connection to self, others, and

the world, suggests that one's worldview or schemas can also transform. In this conceptualization educators, supervisors, colleagues, and administrators experience the need to develop further relatedness and mutual empathy in order to encourage MSW students in their professional and educational development.

In his book, *The Body Keeps the Score, Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Bessel van der Kolk (2014) claims that individuals can recover from trauma through Limbic System Therapy which reactivates the part of the brain that is aware of what's going on inside them. Limbic System Therapy suggests using breath, chanting, and movement such as that prescribed in yoga, which are all considered mindfulness practices, to enter a state of relaxation and self-awareness that can restore the emotional brain after experiencing trauma. van der Kolk connects the mind and body similarly to understanding how the diathesis stress model interrelates the impact of stress, in this case, traumatic stress, on the body and the mind (van der Kolk, 2014). RCT and Relational Psychoanalysis promotes that recovery from trauma can occur within the relational models of therapy and rewiring the patterns that were constructed following the traumatic experiences.

Humans experience condemned isolation when they feel locked out of opportunities and life altogether (Miller, 1989). Anecdotally, MSW students have acknowledged experiencing isolation, vulnerability and shame throughout their educational trajectories when they have lacked community, continuity, or coping skills. This isolation then escalates into MSW student burnout when students begin to doubt themselves, their connection to their work, and their purpose. Vicarious traumatization occurs when there is a culmination of pervasive, damaging effects on the clinician that occurs from chronic exposure to clients' traumatic material. A clinician's sense of self is negatively impacted and can result in post-traumatic stress disorder

where feelings of rage, terror, grief and loss disrupt and negatively influence the clinician's worldview. (Michalopoulos et al., 2011).

When RCT elements are applied to higher education, MSW students might feel supported to relate differently towards one another and to those within their clinical practice, and function with more ease and thoughtfulness. When students are learning mindlessly, they can be easily influenced in one direction or another and lose a sense of themselves in connection with the world. Specifically, by integrating elements of RCT into MSW education through mindfulness practices, one can integrate elements of their humanity with less apprehension and anticipatory fear around boundaries in students' ongoing clinical work.

Neuroscience and neuroplasticity are foundational elements behind RCT and mindfulness practices. If preliminarily mindfulness practices and secondarily flow consciousness and creative genius strategies are accessed, MSW students will have the capacity to better process the traumatic experiences and address the compassion fatigue they experience regularly. When clinicians and MSW students begin to experience alignment by bridging their actions and values (with boundaries, in relationships) it becomes feasible for clients to transform how they relate to themselves and others. When MSW students can trust their choices and themselves, they can feel less isolated when experiencing vicarious trauma because they have this foundation of creativity, references to understanding their own neuropathways, and confidence in their emerging skill set as therapists.

As part of the MSW student experience, students are taught to examine their boundaries, connection, transference and counter-transference experiences in the classroom and their introductory clinical work. However, this means that in some ways the process recordings where students depict their interactions can lead to experiences of shame in the students and scrutiny

form the supervisor. Additionally, there is a feeling of powerlessness as a student who is without power in the relationship. This sometimes translates into an emphasis on how easily students can be influenced and impacted by any element of their clinical or classroom learning experiences. When bridging elements of mindfulness with elements of RCT, MSW educators have the opportunity to understand their thought and reaction patterns as well as how to more mindfully make choices personally and professionally to create alignment with students' values and the social work code of ethics.

When focusing on social change, elements of RCT can be applied as a structural and evidence-backed theory that supports the need for social change, societal connection, and interdependency as something that ought to be developed, valued, and appreciated as opposed to criticized (for example when people are told they are codependent or needy). Through teaching MSW students mindfulness, ease through flow states, and interconnectedness, MSW students can deepen their dependence on their classmates, communities, and on their own strengths including confidence, values, skillset, and more.

MSW students will experience heightened vicarious trauma and emotional exhaustion when they are shamed for their dependency on others or lack of confidence in clinical practice. In fact, for this and other reasons, it is critical to integrate elements of relational theories into MSW student education in a more overt manner. MSW student education has the opportunity to provide a holding environment for students and emerging clinicians who are in jeopardy of experiencing compassion fatigue, burnout and vicarious trauma with the incorporation of reflective teaching and relational models. In much of the social work profession, MSW students and clinicians are often treated as though they have superhuman capacities of hard-wired boundaries that are somewhat robotic, which is incongruent with the actual nature of social

practice. If RCT was applied to MSW education, students would be challenged to make more space for their humanity and immediate reactions instead of autocorrecting behaviors or reactions in their process recordings based on others.

Disconnection, brokenness, and suffering are pervasive in the lived experience of MSW students and the vulnerable populations they are treating. While much of this disconnection and emotional exhaustion is caused by ongoing oppressive systems, there is friction within the MSW educational framework that negatively impacts students' ability to enjoy prolonged careers. When MSW educators integrate reflective teaching, teaching mindfulness strategies, and how to access flow states for creative problem solving and genius states, MSW students have the opportunity to develop innovative patterns and skills to relate to themselves, their work, and their clients with deeper empathy and mutuality.

When looking into ways to support students, it has been identified that even space and logistical constraints pose a challenge. For example, when there are over 1000 MSW students enrolled at a time, rooms are reserved well in advance for classes and clubs. At some universities, clubs or caucuses are offered to provide community, camaraderie, and alliances. In one anecdote, the writer learned that the only time a room was available for a students of color caucus was weeknights at 8-10pm. When logistical concerns pose such an issue, students who hold part-time jobs, have family responsibilities of childcare or eldercare, commute to campus or hold additional responsibilities are limited in their access to these forms of optional community-building membership.

What she sees is too many people prepare to enter their MSW program and in some ways discredit the coping skills and wellness activities they had used thus far. The assistant dean noted she actually discourages "dropping" any activities in order to prioritize their education because

when that's done, students feel a loss in areas of community that can, in fact, help them in their educational and social work trajectory. When asked about the most successful students who stay on track and find opportunities to lead during and after the MSW program, she shared that they were the ones who maintained their yoga teaching job, or joined an intramural sports team, or offered their unique skillset to a caucus or campus activity.

Mindfulness in Higher Education of Helping Professionals Today

While an eight-week or semester long course teaching mindfulness and self-awareness skills similar to MBSR would likely benefit many students, it may not be realistic to expect a CSWE accredited MSW program to integrate a required mindfulness class in addition to the required field education and classroom credits required to obtain an MSW degree (Thomas, 2017). Thomas conducted a mixed-methods study to investigate the impact of brief mindfulness practices on Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) students' ability to regulate their emotions and manage stress while still meeting clinical practice and educational goals. The study researched participants from an experimental group consisted of 67 BSW juniors enrolled in four sections of the practice class. The control group consisted of 32 BSW students, also enrolled in the same practice class, so the experimental group was twice the size of the control, group. 90% of the students were female in both the experimental and the control groups.

Thomas found no significant differences at post-test on quantitative measures but in reviewing qualitative measures, students expressed benefits of the mindfulness exercises, including being able to manage their anxiety, stay present with their clients, and connect within the classroom (Thomas, 2017). Ultimately, Thomas found that even 100 minutes of mindfulness practices devoted over the course of a semester, yielded benefits, including an ability of students

to manage their anxiety and stay present with their clients and in the classroom as reported by the students in the interview component of the research study.

Thomas used grounded theory techniques to open code and create themes in order to analyze the participants' experiences and reflections. Two readers were used to confer and combine codes to align with identified themes. The four themes identified were calming anxiety by using breathing and body awareness meditations, an ability to stay present and focused on clients, reducing premature judgment, and feeling safe in the classroom. Additionally, noteworthy comments reflected feeling surprised by the intervention and an ability to view oneself with kindness (Thomas, 2017). This evidence supports the need to integrate contemplative practices such as mindfulness in a structured format within social work education. This was one of a few studies that examined brief contemplative practices within social work practice but suggests that integrating these skills into a formal curriculum has the potential to support social work students.

Piatkoska conducted a quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional research study of 35 female MSW students that explored the possibility that mindfulness technique might prevent burnout among social work students (Piatkoska, 2014). Piatkoska utilized the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (2006) and Maslach's Burnout Inventory (1981) to survey her participants. The study found that students benefited from learning mindfulness practices as a way of coping with the stress of their MSW programs. Using the five facets questionnaire, Piatkoska found that mindfulness can serve as a protective factor for students in preventing burnout during their social work studies. A common limitation in an exploratory study like this one is that the generalizability is limited because of the small sample size and convenience sample and a non-randomized selection procedure (Piatkoska, 2014).

There has been significant research related to understanding the challenges social work students face outside of the United States. Researchers in Hong Kong examined survey data collected from 165 undergraduate social work students to examine emotional exhaustion which leads to burnout (Ngai, Cheung, 2009). Though these were not MSW students, the sample shares similarities of those who enroll in MSW programs in that these students share idealism, altruism and a dedication towards serving others in their career orientation. Also 48.2% had field work experiences, which are a cornerstone of MSW programs for sample comparison (Ngai, Cheung, 2009). Ngai and Cheung evaluated that idealism, or sometimes the unrealistic belief that the world should be based on principles, values and goals over actual realities, increases social work students' experience of emotional exhaustion or burnout. This study admonished social work educators to be fervently aware of their students' challenges in their social work education and training. This study emphasized that introducing both positive and negative aspects of the social work field experiences during class discussions and readings throughout students' educational experience and prior to their entering the social work field, may help reduce students' vulnerabilities to emotional exhaustion. This study also supported the hypothesis that students who have a positive perception of their own abilities as social workers have a sense of capacity in their work (Ngai, Cheung, 2009).

Some limitations of this study were that the sample included its focus on one specific region and outcomes might differ from other regions, and the fact that the variables of idealism, altruism and career orientation did not focus on factors such as curriculum design, support and peer networks, and the impact of individual health or mental health factors that might contribute to social work emotional exhaustion during educational programs (Ngai, Cheung, 2009). One way to increase social work student orientation to the social work profession and to their own

capacity is by teaching mindfulness practices and wellness skills to develop self-care practices. As Ngai and Cheung (2009) identified, it is imperative to hold conversations in which social work students are encouraged to explore the realities of the social work role and develop coping skills to manage the stress of the profession. According to Ngai and Cheung, these conversations must occur prior to the students' launch from their social work programs into the field, where students might experience unprecedented levels of distress that conflict with their previous idealist views about the social work profession and the "calling" to serve others (Specht, & Courtney, 1994).

A mixed methods study of 53 undergraduate social work students in Singapore examined how students responded to a two-week module that used daily mindfulness practices. This study examined how mindfulness practices impacted students' ability to be active listeners and hone core interpersonal skills (Goh, 2012). The qualitative responses from this study reflected that students directly connected their ability to increase self-awareness through mindfulness practices with their ability to be aware of their behaviors and responses to clients in their direct practice. The ability for students to hone this sense of awareness highlights the need to integrate mindfulness practices into the core curriculum in social work educational programs, particularly at the masters level when all students are required to complete field internships during their studies.

In a randomized control trial, researchers examined the responses of medical, nursing and pre-medical students to a shortened MBSR course that integrated Mindfulness Meditation (MM) (Jain et al., 2007). Compared with treatment as usual (TAU), the participants who received brief training in mindfulness meditation or somatic relaxation reported reduced distress and improved mood. In this study, participants received six hours of in-class instruction, were expected to

practice mindfulness exercises independently, and attended a six-hour retreat (Jain et al., 2007). This model displays the potential for effectiveness in a shortened and amended model of MBSR, one that has a 6-week duration rather than the traditional 8. It also examined how practicing mindfulness meditation can significantly decrease rumination of thoughts. This finding suggests that social work students have the potential to decrease their own rumination during distressing field internships or challenging coursework. Another study explored the impact of 10 minutes per class of mindfulness practice on 132 social work graduate students over the course of 28 class sessions for a total of 7 hours over the course of an academic year (Gockel et al., 2013). In this mixed methods study, students reported improvements in their ability to overcome challenges and ultimately succeed in their MSW programs. While mindfulness and well-being scores did not change immediately at post-test, there was a significant improvement in mindfulness scores after three months (Gockel et al., 2013).

Researchers in social work education are calling for educators to support students in developing mindful awareness to improve their well-being and reduce their emotional exhaustion in field placement and future employment (Ying, 2008). In her studies of MSW students, Ying also explored the positive effect mindfulness had on decreasing levels of depression and anxiety, with mindful awareness as a positive correlation with students' mental health (Ying, 2009b). In Israel, a study was conducted that called for an “accompanying place” for social work students where they could express their thoughts, feelings, and dilemmas in a nonjudgmental format (Birnbaum, 2008). In this regard, Birnbaum led an eight-week open group of 12 Bachelor of Arts students completing their social work degree at the bachelor’s level who could choose to attend as often as they wished. In this qualitative study, Birnbaum provided a space for students to engage with, and build awareness around, their emotional experiences in their social work

studies. In the United States a masters degree is title protection in the clinical practice of social work and a bachelors degree in social work is sufficient training and education for non-clinical case management positions.

In some areas, including Israel which are outside of the U.S jurisdiction, a bachelors degree in social work is the highest level of educational training within the social work field. Israel requires only a bachelors degree which led Birnbaum to explore the impact of mindfulness practices on students' educational experiences in a flexible format. In their interviews, students reflected that they were initially curious to learn mindfulness techniques to develop self-containment strategies without the rigor or expectations of a structured and graded classroom setting (Birnbaum, 2008). Participants in Birnbaum's study shared their desire to learn not only emotion regulation skills but also how the mindfulness group positioned them to develop techniques as students who were experiencing stress in the field education and academic requirements. While some social work programs encourage their social work students to attend traditional therapy to develop coping skills and further insight into their own processes, this is often neither an option nor feasible for students due to financial and scheduling limitations. This "accompanying place" supported members in experiencing increased awareness, exploring their relationships with themselves and others, and sitting with ambivalence related to their studies and field internships (Birnbaum, 2008). Birnbaum called for educators to infuse mindfulness practices into their training of social workers to meet students' needs. Iacono (2017) called for the integration of self-compassion within social work curriculums so that students simultaneously developed these self -acceptance skills in addition to honing their empathic capabilities towards clients. In Iacono's call to action, he declared that when social work

institutions provide more comprehensive self-care training, students are better positioned to avoid burnout while enhancing their clinical practice as students and graduates (Iacono, 2017).

While there have been studies conducted with MSW students, undergraduate social work students and medical students, there is yet to be a structured mindfulness practice manual that focuses on guiding instructors on how to teach students self-care and mindfulness practice that can be integrated within social work education standards. One published curriculum that offers some components is the Quality of Life: Development of Mindfulness (QLDM) which was developed by Napoli and Bonifas (2014) as a 16-week elective social work course and piloted in an MSW program in the southwestern United States. The QLDM aims to support MSW students to gain the ability to practice mindfulness with the goal of improving their overall wellbeing. Students meet for sixteen weeks, three hours each week. The three components of QLDM include mindfulness journals, critical thinking reading logs, and fast fact research presentations. While the QLDM provides an experiential component through which students are encouraged to develop a lifestyle where they experience stress reduction, the course is an elective that competes with students' opportunities to explore other specialized social work topics and does not reach all students who might benefit from developing mindfulness skills (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). The QLDM developers conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the 16-week curriculum delivered in an elective format in an MSW program. Here, the goal was to support students in improving their Quality of Life during their master's program and to bolster their effectiveness. This study found that exposure to the researchers' Quality of Life Curriculum did not lead to a decrease in MSW students' stress levels, but students did report improved quality of life in three of the identified life domains: the health and functioning subscale, the social and economic subscale and the psychological and spiritual subscale (Napoli, Bonifas, 2014). Some limitations were that

the study lacked a comparison group and, therefore, prevented understanding causality using the pre-test/post-test design. Additionally, students may have had a natural tendency to enroll in this course due to its elective format and may have had specific interest in improving areas of their lives (Napoli, Bonifas, 2014). Lastly, the post-test data was collected at the end of the semester when students had completed coursework and, therefore, may have experienced lower levels of stress than they might have during the time of final exams. Additionally, students can be influenced to respond a certain way when engaging in a research study in a graded class. Once again, Selena's experience can inform our understanding of the impact of mindfulness practices.

Selena found that after integrating elements of the mindfulness practices into her routine, there was a sense of connection to herself, her experiences, and to her peers. She found that, while it wasn't necessarily easy to remember to ground herself through these practices every day, that she did feel as though she was better equipped to manage the stressors of her field work, exposure to trauma, and rigor of coursework simultaneously because she could ultimately connect back to her breath. Additionally, there was a transformation as Selena learned she enjoyed connecting with her peers around these exercises in a human manner. Instead of lectures connecting to slide shows and case consultation, she was relieved to have a portion of class time dedicated to student wellbeing. Additionally, she found that she wasn't the only MSW student becoming exhausted and dealing with clients' trauma on a daily basis. This helped her experience clarity that she was, indeed, in the right profession and decreased her doubts about entering the MSW program. Lastly, she found that while her vicarious trauma was something she would have to continue processing in her own therapy, the mindfulness practices provided a strong foundation to her and helped her gain the clarity and develop a strategy by being with her breath on how to go about securing that support.

Conclusions:

When the author explored which areas the Assistant Dean previously interviewed would immediately change about MSW programs, she stated that she would make the MSW program tuition free. The pressure for students to avoid failure at all costs is immense because students are literally entering programs with \$100,000+ of loans, and each year financial aid offers diminish. She also said that having more inclusive physical space would help to promote community. In addition, she noted that hiring new faculty to transform the way conversations around racism, xenophobia and sexism are being held would decrease the emotional strain students experience in class and field. Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, she suggested ways to create spaces for students to have more fun and create levity, where students can celebrate their intersectional identities, and stress could, perhaps, decrease as a result. It's impossible to deny the need for revisions in the MSW program design and as part of this suggested practice manual, the author suggests opportunities for levity that also encourage creativity, innovation, and self-growth through self-compassion.

There are many critiques of mindfulness, including some considering that mindfulness has become the new capitalist spirituality (Purser, 2019). Critiques of the current mindfulness revolution claim that mindfulness advocates like Jon Kabat-Zinn are providing support for the status quo by encouraging us to be aware of the present moment, nonjudgmentally (Purser, 2019). In the same breath some might consider that integrating mindfulness skills into MSW programs may be just a band aid rather than an attempt to uncover the root causes of collective disturbance facing social service agencies, workers, and higher education institutions. However, this dissertation recognizes that the tide is coming, and change is on the horizon. By integrating

mindfulness skills that encourage self-compassion and nonjudgment while honoring the roots of mindfulness as identified by Thich Nhat Hanh as a form of resistance, we can encourage mental and emotional resilience without necessarily depoliticizing and privatizing stress (Purser, 2019).

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Paper Two: Implementing Mindfulness & Flow into MSW Programs: A Practice Manual

Introducing 14 Mindfulness and Flow Strategies to develop reflective awareness and prevent MSW student burnout, exhaustion, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma

Introduction:

During Devon's internship at a school, a child shares that her parent has hit her almost every day because she "does bad things like take two snacks or not clean up quickly enough." She even shows Devon the marks. He reassures the child that she did the right thing by saying something to him, but knows that as a mandated reporter, he must immediately call his state's specific line to report the abuse. He recognizes how scared the child is as she cries and clings to him, once child protective services arrive. Although he realizes he did the required thing by reporting the abuse, on his way home he is haunted by the desperate cries of the child and worried about her ultimate safety and well-being.

For her field internship, Lily meets with clients as part of a research program. Daily she hears story after story of trauma, oppression, stress, and adversity of clients growing up with nothing and attempting to rise above oppressive systems. Her notes are turned into codes for research and measurement purposes. She finds herself getting lost in these powerful stories and struggles to create notes that honor these full lived experiences, and worries she minimizes them or over emphasizes certain areas. Increasingly, she has been staying up late, troubled about whether or not these participants felt heard and whether they will get the support they need.

Lisa is interning at an alternative program designed to help teens improve their school attendance. She has found herself offering a more empathetic approach to discussing truancy, that includes a focus on the ways students are existing within oppressive systems and suggesting that their behavior and arrests are, in many ways, an effect of racism. In class there have been discussions about being a social worker and a member of an oppressed group, and Lisa starts to think more about how her identity as a black woman has shaped her work. A part of her wants to discuss these reflections more, but she fears she may not be heard and is concerned about what she might discover about herself and others.

Sandra is an intern at a community health clinic. During a typical day, she sees six clients in a row, all of whom have lengthy histories of mental illness. A new client has a history that reminds her of her own brother's struggle with depression. During the intake she finds more similarities and realizes she is disconnecting from the client because she is reminded of the extent of her brother's suffering. After completing the documentation and reassuring the client of the next steps, Sandra heads home feeling completely disassociated as she moves through her evening. What if more clients' stories hit too close to home and take too great a personal toll?

Leni, a first year MSW student, finds that much of the beginning theoretical background discussed in class pathologizes LGBTQIA+ populations. Leni identifies as a member of the transgender community since they were a tween. They now for the first time feel overwhelmed and even enraged by the material being presented and professors' and classmates' failure to question the theories and theorists. Leni worked so hard to get into the MSW program in order to help others like them, yet feels hesitant to speak up, and doesn't want to be responsible to

educate their instructors and student colleagues on LGBTQIA+ issues or feel like the token transgender student.

Keana, a MSW intern at a hospital, met a family whose baby was admitted because of difficulty feeding. During Keana's evaluation, the mother disclosed there were incidents of domestic violence occurring throughout her pregnancy, and she was scared about what would happen now that there was a baby in the home. Mom quickly became emotionally dysregulated and shared that because she is panicked, she struggles with breastfeeding and is worried about disappointing her husband or showing more attention to the baby and, therefore, upsetting him. She discloses this fear is overwhelming but quickly terminates the interview and soon the family is discharged. Keana goes home where she can't get the image of this fearful mother out of her mind.

Rationale for Mindfulness and Flow Strategies in MSW Programs

This practice manual is in response to the issue of social work student burnout, and provides specific strategies designed to enhance student wellness. The goal of this manual is to support the integration of mindfulness and flow practices in MSW programs in order to increase student compassion, awareness, and attention to their own well-being and, as a consequence, to provide enhanced client-centered care, and manage multiple stressors related to their work, studies and personal responsibilities. Additionally, there is an anti-oppressive lens used throughout this research approach that encourages students and educators to feel supported within their MSW programs by understanding the various elements impacting their lived experiences considering their intersectional identities.

Research in mindfulness has shown that mindfulness-based approaches contribute to the ability to change environments and how people gather information (Umar, Chunwe, 2019). Individuals have the potential to develop new levels of openness, sensitivities and orientations by placing intentional attention on the present moment (Langer, 1989). Well-being and psychological flexibility show a high level of correlation (Marshall, 2016, Forbes, 2019). MSW students are positioned to further hone their psychological flexibility in order to embody social work values where there is continuous emphasis on the dignity of the individuals, which requires us to continually challenge any underlying assumptions clients may bring to the relationships or their needs.” By introducing mindfulness and flow strategies within MSW programs, students can enhance their sense of belonging, productivity, and focus while experiencing the MSW program in an aligned manner so they can have their desired transformational impact.

From a social construction lens, people join together when they develop skills and they become more capable of transformation. By equipping MSW students with skills that can be utilized independently to cope with experiences of vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout as well as help them move towards creativity and innovation leads to the necessary evolution of social work practice to match its progressive ideals. By viewing the person through an environment lens, there is an emphasis on understanding the social practice and relations as well as the evidence of neuroscience, which both filter into daily life and decision-making. (Pickersgill, Cunningham-Burley and Martin, 2011).

MSW Student Experiences Leading to Burnout

Compassion fatigue is the "cost of caring" or erosion that occurs when helping professionals are not able to refuel within their helper role, both physically and emotionally (Figley, 2002). Vicarious trauma describes the process of change that has a cumulative transformative effect on helping professionals after prolonged exposure to clinical work with clients, who themselves report trauma when working with clients reporting trauma (Bloom, 2003, Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995). Burnout refers to the physical and emotional exhaustion experienced by professionals and, in our discussion, helping professionals when they feel powerless and overwhelmed in their employment and have low job satisfaction (Maslack, 1997). Social work students seek to develop clinical skills through their MSW programs and field internships. However, in order to prevent burnout and emotional and physical fatigue from daily service to others, it is imperative that MSW programs emphasize skills that can support student wellness. Unfortunately, most MSW programs currently lack a format for explicitly teaching social work students how to preserve their own energy and enthusiasm while maintaining a client-centered approach and providing high quality care as interns and future licensed social workers and change agents. MSW programs can introduce components of mindfulness, self-compassion, and flow strategies into their curriculum in order to support MSW student wellness.

Transforming Social Work Education: While mindfulness is the ability to be aware of the present moment without judgment, Flow is the practice of unlocking optimal human experience. While Flow is not identified as a foundational component of social work values, Flow is incorporated by way of understanding that when social workers are encouraged to truly integrate progressive innovative change, transformation, and creative problem-solving, transformational social change can occur. Flow theory derives from Positive Psychology and was first coined in

the 1970s by Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi. Flow leads individuals to be more effective and creative in their jobs because they are more productive and focused. Flow can be defined as being in the zone, completely immersed, exercising reflective awareness, and in one's creative genius space. While mindfulness practices increase self-awareness and self-compassion, flow leads to implementation, action, and immersion, therefore supporting MSWs to experience a sense of competence in the social work profession. This practice manual defines ways in which MSWs can not only be more effective, but also be positioned to better address experiences of burnout or vicarious trauma because they will have the skills and creativity to reflect on their own experiences nonjudgmentally.

In social work education, process and content are dependent on one another so that MSW lessons transcend the surface level of material and integrate points on implementation (Fox, 2014). Regardless of this transformational ideal for social work education, anecdotally through experience as an instructor and field supervisor, social work interns are still in many ways told directly or indirectly to “stay in their lane,” listen first, learn, and implement within rigidly established structures. When social work students consider how to enhance and challenge the norm in order to create transformative change, a paradox becomes apparent whereby students are tasked to both honor the foundational path and think innovatively. However, social work students are not actually taught steps or practices of *how* to think creatively or find a flow state of innovation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). By not developing social workers' skillset to create innovative change, transformation in the social work profession moves at a glacial pace. As Fox (2014) describes, “we see the world as we are trained to see it, and resist contrary explanations... which is what makes innovation and discovery difficult (p 151).” If MSW students are

encouraged to break free of their automatic thinking beginning in the classroom, paradigms shift, burnout can be prevented or recovered from, and true innovation can occur.

The purpose of this manual is to emphasize and prioritize self-awareness, innovation, and implementation of mindfulness and flow strategies as overarching and critical themes for the MSW program to enhance the MSW students' professionalism and ethical duties. The goals within this practice manual integrate the theoretical framework of developing a critical consciousness as it relates to the learning (Friere, 1970). In order for students to learn, change, and challenge their understandings, there must be an atmosphere of acceptance and trust (Friere, 1970). This invitation to combine learning, practice, and conceptualization leads the instructor to teach tangible exercises that students can utilize, including creative genius skills to enhance their ability to uncover solutions that are different from what they may have previously thought. There must be progression for learning to be actually dynamic, and in this practice manual, each strategy builds upon the concepts and strategies introduced in the prior class to constantly stretch the students' brainpower to a newer more creative layer (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Whitkin writes, "For social workers it is important to consider how different processes of change will invite either support or opposition in any change effort (Witkin, 2017, p17). Integrating mindfulness and flow practices into MSW curriculums may be viewed as radical and transformative because it is challenging the contradiction that MSW students are innately able to maneuver the complexities within the social work profession. Social Construction can be viewed as a process for "how people actively generate, maintain, and transform reality" (Harris, 2008 p 231, Witkin, 2017). There is an acceptance of relating our experiences and ourselves as filtered through a lens of neuroscience rather than relationships (Pickersgill, et al., 2011). Mindfulness and flow are validated through the research conducted through neuroscience which has generated

momentum and acceptance of these practices across medical and social disciplines. One of the founders of social construction, Ken Gergen, critiques neuroscientific explanations, claiming that “all attempts to link brain states to psychological processes depend on cultural constructed conceptions” (p. 798). It’s critical to examine the benefits of mindfulness and flow practices for MSW students as well as the obstacles and limitations within these theoretical frameworks. Understanding how the person relates differently in different scenarios, and the reality that personality resides in the social situation, in this case the MSW program as opposed to the actual person, directly connects to the understanding of mindfulness as not changing what is, but rather transforming how we relate to our experiences in the present moment. Indeed, this distinction promotes the reality that much of mindfulness practices relate to the actual joining together for social change. For example, while mindfulness practices are individual, they can be practiced in community as is modeled in MBSR. And much of the research on mindfulness shows that the joining of members’ experiences can lead to a deeper sense of transformation.

Neuroscience & the Transformative Nature of Mindfulness and Flow: The brain’s neuropathways are evolving, adapting, and restructuring with each new lived experience (Siegel, 2007). During orientation and in the first weeks of classes and semesters of their MSW programs, students are learning how to relate to each other within their new community and make sense of their choice to pursue their MSW. Anecdotally, through discussions with field instructors, administrators, faculty and MSW students, the author suggests that the first year in an MSW program is a transformational period when friendships develop, professional collaborations are fostered, and careers launch. In MSW programs, students interact with likeminded MSW candidates in a structured format pursuing education and training in their chosen social work profession. During this critical juncture, many social work students may

confront a disconnect between their idealistic views that brought them to the social work profession and the many of the realities of the social work profession itself. Students might view the contradiction between what they believed to be social work's stance on progressive social change and its seemingly conservative intellectualism (Whitkin, 2017) which can prompt deeper questioning of values, ethics, and the social work profession. Additionally, incoming MSW students may become overwhelmed and doubtful about their capacity and strengths. Imposter syndrome can be linked to the experience of distress and fear of being discovered as a fraud with uncertainty around someone's performance particularly during times of transition (Clance, Imes, 1978). This experience is common at this professional juncture where students are often unpaid interns and brand-new clinicians who are not empowered to make their choices within their field or educational system.

Applying Mindfulness and Flow to MSW Programs: While many graduate programs in psychology and social work offer mindfulness content through electives (Napoli, Bonifas, 2014), their primary focus is on teaching the evidence base for mindfulness and clinical practice as opposed to supporting social work students themselves in developing clinical self-awareness and coping skills to support their roles as future clinicians. When mindfulness and flow are taught as a graded elective, the course must inevitably uphold the rigorous educational standards of the institution. This creates a dynamic whereby students have to meet educational goals and are dependent on receiving a passing grade, and might not comfortably engage in the exercises focusing on their own wellbeing.

While MBSR is one format that teaches mindfulness practices to students without providing a grade, it is unlikely that many social work programs are positioned to hire MBSR instructors from a feasibility and financial standpoint. Additionally, it might only serve students

to receive instruction from professionals who are particularly aware of the common hazards and stress related specifically to the social work profession. In this regard, this practice manual and the aforementioned strategies offer an approach to integrating mindfulness and flow practical skills without requiring academic institutions to hire outside trainers. This practice manual is developed to instruct social work educators and administrators to educate social work students on burnout prevention through the use of mindfulness and flow techniques. The guidelines in this practice manual will additionally emphasize community participation so students develop self-awareness and self-preservation skills in order to prevent experiences of burnout and exhaustion.

Mindfulness can be applied to social work education in ways that allow educators to focus on responses within the classroom and community settings (Mishna, 2007). MSW programs provide significant diversity and oppression content which research suggests can lead to a range of student emotional experiences, including shame, distress, defensiveness, anger, and feelings of loss or grief (Akamatsu, 2000; Garcia & Van Soest, 1997; Sullivan & Johns, 2002; Tatum, 1992; Van Soest et al., 2001, Mishna, 2007). Additionally, some students censor themselves for fear of judgment or misspeaking. The role of mindfulness and flow practices as part of the social work curriculum encourages MSW programs to engage in both reflection in practice and reflection on practice (Mishna et al., 2007).

The intersection of Social Work, Mindfulness, Flow, and Positive Psychology: While there are differences between positive psychology and social work, there are notable areas of emphasis that connect the two disciplines. Both disciplines emphasize the individual's strengths and have a commitment to a person's well-being (Dekel. et al. 2015). By bridging the emphasis on strengths with transforming social change it is likely that flow can even further encourage social work students to consider the promotion of well-being through the social justice and person-in-

environmental lenses held in the social work field. When, however, MSW programs continue to perpetuate the expectations that social workers are radical in theory but more conservative in action, MSW programs disserve their students, which results in new grads launching into careers unable to be the change agents they had aspired to be. This domino effect causes burnout, moral injury, and distrust of purpose and belonging within the social work profession.

Flow theory identifies how group flow experiences occur when there are shared goals, movement in the direction of this shared goal, and joining together of skills to promote this movement and receive feedback (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Group flow experiences can occur and be of particular importance when there exists stress, systemic oppression, and challenges, which is another reason for integrating these skills into MSW programs where students are adapting to and understanding their roles within communities and their own intersectional identities.

Implicit Mindfulness Therapy (IMT) has been identified as an individual's lay belief regarding the fixedness versus malleability of mindfulness (Kong, et al., 2018). This theory explores whether people have implicit theories of mindfulness that differ from other attributes, and do these interpretations predict work behaviors (Kong, et al., 2018). It's important to consider IMT in order to help us frame whether MSW students, who still could be categorized as lay people, interpret the benefits of mindfulness practices. When adapting the usefulness of IMT from a general workplace into a social work environment, one can highlight the importance of being present, aware, and attentive within organizations. Kong et al. (2018) suggest in their research that IMT be adapted in order to understand how the range of behaviors and attitudes develop and manifest, and how to modify these reactions for desired outcomes in educational, public administration, and other contexts. This adaptation of understanding the relationship

between mindfulness attitudes helps us frame the considerations for the variety of attitudes and beliefs students might hold upon learning and engaging with mindfulness practices throughout the practice manual.

How to Use This Manual

This manual is designed to offer fourteen different mindfulness and flow strategies in order to support MSW students. The manual can be used in various formats that are outlined in greater detail at the end of this manual. However, since every MSW program is different, the author recognizes that the exercises themselves are as important as the format by which they are offered.

If you're new to mindfulness and flow practices, you are encouraged to read the full manual prior to introducing these strategies in order to develop an understanding of the language, anticipated challenges, and theory supporting the adaptation of each strategy into the social work program. Additionally, as you read this manual, you can develop a familiarity with the exercises and language to improve your own capacity to guide these strategies. Having a basic knowledge of the reasoning behind these strategies when used individually as well as a whole will enhance your ability to engage MSW students in these practices.

If you're already well versed in flow and mindfulness practices, you are encouraged to review potential obstacles and best practices for implementing these practices within MSW programs specifically as these practices may introduce varying obstacles in the classroom setting within higher education. MSW classrooms may require the introduction of different elements when adapting mindfulness and flow strategies as opposed to providing these same strategies in other environments.

In the case that you are looking to adapt these practices into an orientation, student care or wellness day, regular classroom structure, or beyond, you are encouraged to review the full manual and take note of a recommended outline for the strategies at the end of this manual. Additionally, you are encouraged to include multimedia resources in order to engage different adult learning styles when introducing these strategies over a longer period of time.

These fourteen strategies are recommended to be implemented flexibly in order to adapt them to your specific setting. In the essence of flow and mindfulness, this manual provides outlines and research-based suggestions, however, each individual, community, and classroom will relate to and incorporate these skills slightly differently. It is imperative that the instructor or guide leading these exercises remain open, begin to practice these skills in some capacity themselves, and consider exploring these themes independently on their own.

Following the outlines and scripts for the fourteen strategies, there are five suggested approaches by which these strategies can be integrated within an MSW program. These suggested approaches are outlined in detail at the end of the manual but include;

- 1) A half day orientation that emphasizes mindfulness and flow for social work students.
- 2) A mandatory pass/fail four-session course spanning the first year of an MSW program.
- 3) An integration of 5-10 minutes of mindfulness exercises implemented into recurring classes.
- 4) An integration of mindfulness skills into the supervisory relationship as part of the field education requirement.
- 5) A Supervision in Field Education (SIFI) course for field educators.

This manual contributes to the body of literature, suggested strategies, and best practices for those engaging in mindfulness practices. This manual specifically offers unique strategies that can support MSW students and each exercise provides a rationale for why the strategy is identified specifically for MSW students. As discussed in the introduction, MSW students are susceptible to burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma due to balancing multiple personal and professional demands in addition to their dedication to their classroom and field educational requirements.

Implementation of Mindfulness and Flow Strategies and Anticipated Obstacles

Prior to introducing any new activity, exercise, strategy or intervention into an MSW classroom, instructors can prepare by anticipating possible obstacles and challenges. The following section provides an outline of potential challenges when introducing these exercises as well as recommendations for how to integrate them.

Honoring the roots of mindfulness and not culturally appropriating the practices: Mindfulness practices derive from various religions and secular traditions ranging from Buddhism and Hinduism to yoga, and most recently, to non-religious meditation. While present in the mainstream, mindfulness practices have been around for thousands of years as an independent practice or part of different traditions (Hanh, 1975). Mindfulness was born in the East through religious and spiritual institutions and practices, yet currently in the West it's common that these practices are traced to secular institutions. It is critical to recognize and respect the roots of mindfulness in Eastern religion. When introducing Mindfulness practices into the MSW setting, it is important critical to align with social work values and discuss, not only how these practices might support self-awareness and prevent burnout, but also the roots of mindfulness so as to prevent cultural appropriation of these sacred practices.

Recommendations for discussion: Acknowledging the history of mindfulness is imperative in order to identify how mindfulness can integrate these practices without taking, or culturally appropriating, the practices from specific communities, cultures, and traditions. Dr. Kendra Surmitis, an associate professor and licensed therapist in Virginia, has researched the appropriation of mindfulness. Appropriation is defined as taking or using something that is illegal or unfair without authority or right (Surmitis et al., 2018). Cultural Appropriation is often considered commodifying that which is sacred to some for the use of a more privileged population (Timilsina, 2011, Surmitis et al., 2018). There are best practices outlined for integrating mindfulness and meditation practices into counseling and education without culturally appropriating the practices. First, Surmitis (2018) identifies a recognition of spiritual bypass as one way to acknowledge any avoidance of one's own practices and beliefs that may be preventing them from utilizing mindfulness practices for their own growth. Spiritual bypass can occur when students assume that spirituality is the catch-all for any psychological wounds or unresolved issues. Instructors will want to engage in class dialogue about any assumptions that spirituality can resolve pain and emotional discomfort for all people under any condition. When students, instructors, and clinicians acknowledge the potential for spiritual bypass to occur unreasonable expectations for mindfulness to resolve any problems are diminished. The second principle outlined is understanding the desired effect of meditation (Surmitis, et al., 2018) which bear in mind the adaptations of mindfulness practices in clinical or educational settings. Third, Surmitis (2018) emphasizes that meditative practices be matched between counselors and clients. This can be adapted into understanding the match of teacher to student which encourages matching of approaches to the students' or clients' cultural practices for improved outcomes. Lastly, the practice of engaging in reflexivity allows students, instructors, and administrators to

develop a strong understanding of the practice as it relates to their own belief and value systems (Surmitis et al., 2018). Similar to how a therapist might engage in an explorative conversation with clients when engaging in mindfulness practices, instructors would explore the assumptions, prejudices, and levels of introspection in the experience of mindfulness practices internally and in discussion with MSW students.

- Surmitis (2018) also emphasizes the need for introspection in order to expose any complexities or ideological agendas clinicians may hold in engaging in mindfulness practices in order to not culturally appropriate these practices. Mirroring the impact repetition of mindfulness on the brain in developing repetitive practices and engraining new passages in neuropathways (Siegal, 2007) by maintaining a reflexive approach to meditative practices, there is potential to reconceptualize these practices in one's evolution as a clinician upholding the highest ethical and human standards. When engaging in these practices outlined below, Surmitis suggests asking ourselves the following questions (Surmitis, et al., 2018, p 13): How have I come to know this meditative practice? Who were my mentors, instructors, and educators, and in what ways are their values or contexts affecting my understanding?
- Who am I in relation to this meditative practice? In what ways do my privilege, culture, faith orientation, and values influence my use of this meditative practice?
- What do I believe about this meditative practice? What do I know about this meditative practice, and what opportunities exist for additional understanding?
- Why is this meditative practice of value to me? In what personal, financial, and professional ways will I benefit from this meditative practice?

Additionally, when introducing mindfulness practices, one must not completely withdraw from or avoid engaging in these practices due to infinite reflective processing (Surmitis, et al., 2018). Indeed, by develop self-awareness of excessive introspection, instructors, MSW students, and clinicians have the opportunity to avoid staying in the process of these practices to instead begin engaging in these practices. In social work practice, there are often funding, administrative, or oppressive obstacles preventing progress or implementation. By identifying, anticipating, and preparing for obstacles when introducing mindfulness and flow practices into MSW programs, there is an increased likelihood that these integrations will indeed occur.

Time constraints and Logistics: Logistics, such as timing issues have previously been reported as one obstacle when introducing mindfulness practices to healthcare professionals (Duggan, K. et al., 2017). Indeed, conditions are required when introducing these practices when there are limitations on time, challenges with space, or a need for resources such as paper, writing utensils, art materials, music, or snacks to engage in a mindfulness practice. These conditions can pose limitations. Instructors have very limited time to review assignments, introduce new material, and answer any questions. However, these logistics and time constraints can be planned for and anticipated, and with structured strategies time is used more efficiently.

Recommendations: While there is evidence that shows that ongoing repetitive mindfulness practices yield significant improvements in self-awareness and maintain gray matter in the brain (Lazar et al., 2005), more brief mindfulness practices allow these practices to be integrated into organizations and systems without formal trainings impeding on the required class content while still yielding successful interventions (Duggan, K. et al., 2017). Considering that even brief

exercises can lead to improvements in self reflection and focus, instructors can adapt these short exercises to structure the class without consuming a large portion of the class time.

Lack of mindfulness training for the facilitator: Some instructors or administrators may view these recommendations with ambivalence and avoidance due to their own lack of training in the material. A core foundation of Mindfulness practices is the notion of “Beginner’s Mind” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). While a facilitator training would be ideal for those leading mindfulness sessions, this practice manual provides the historical context, practice recommendations, and scripts for clinicians to gain understanding, conceptualization, and appreciation and respect for mindfulness and flow practices and their origins. Indeed, in one Mindfulness Moment Intervention training, facilitators were only provided with a 10-minute video training, a summary handout, and an hour-long small group (Duggan, K. et al., 2017). While these recommendations led to cohesion in the implementation during a research study, the author understands that many MSW programs are not equipped or organized to provide this training. For this reason, suggestions are included throughout this manual for application.

Recommendations: For those MSW programs able to offer trainings, seek out experts on mindfulness and encourage various refreshers to adapt these practices. These can be through Professional Development, Online Webinars, or in-person trainings. For those institutions unable to provide specific trainings, mindfulness facilitators are encouraged to review this manual for best practice recommendations, scripts, and guidelines for engaging your students in these practices.

Student reactions, confusion, frustration, mixed reactions: No one intervention or strategy will be received by all consumers in the same manner. Individualized practices within mindfulness

and flow yield a variety of reactions. Processing the variety of reactions in mindfulness practices is one of the cornerstones in MBSR. In MBSR, the facilitator provides the outline for the exercises, then the exercise is conducted and then participants are invited to share their reflections or experiences. During this period there may be a variety of expressions including some of frustration, confusion, fatigue, and euphoria. New environments and opportunities can bring up new challenges. When students are disengaged from the practice, instructors should remember that this is the students' practice and as is the core of mindfulness; there is not a wrong way to practice if one is connecting to the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Recommendations: There is an expectation that mindfulness practices may yield these reactions, so it is suggested that facilitators anticipate conversations MSW students may have related to the practice. While the facilitator is not expected to have a response or solution, the facilitator is expected to be an active listener. It is recommended that when there are mixed reactions, confusion, frustration, or ambivalence, the facilitator should engage in active listening and validation. In the true essence of mindfulness, one carries an approach of nonjudgmental acceptance, and through being self-aware as a facilitator, a container can be created for students to reflect their reactions. Then the facilitator can end the mindfulness practice and move into class content or other tasks with a sense of presence. Additionally, it is encouraged that the facilitator notes to the class that there will be a range of reactions and to expect this. The facilitator might also want to discourage any comparison about ones' reactions to the practice experience, while still inviting any and all reflections. By creating this container for students' reactions, MSW students have the potential to develop their own understandings of mindfulness practices. Additionally, it is critical to encourage anyone who might not wish to participate in the practices, to remain in the space but engage in their own practice or quiet reflection for the

duration of the exercise so as to prevent any member from feeling excluded or judged for their own choice. This practice additionally helps model the role of therapist to client in giving a client-centered and strengths-based choice instead of forcing an undesired intervention

Accessibility within language, and different abilities: It is possible that some students may have different abilities or languages. Some students might not be able to engage in the practice based on accessibility, language, model of delivery, or physical and emotional differences.

Additionally, when there is a difference in language between student and facilitator, it is possible that confusion or frustration may develop. For example, when a student's first language is American Sign Language, verbal guided meditations would not be inclusive. However, it could be made inclusive by providing a script of the practice beforehand to the student.

Recommendations: Consider the importance of clarifying the language and learning differences present in the orientation or classroom, and provide accommodations, translators, print outs of content, captions, and digital versions depending on students' learning styles. Seek guidance and consultation to ensure accessibility and inclusion with your school's or organization's offices of diversity, accessibility, and inclusion.

Other considerations: Implementing any new intervention into a curriculum, classroom, orientation, supervisory or clinical relationship can yield a variety of responses. While other obstacles may arise, the benefits far outweigh the potential of negative outcomes when considering whether or how to introduce these strategies. Anticipation never will allow a facilitator to prepare for the entire array of possible responses students and colleagues may consider. Nonetheless, the author believes that introducing the following mindfulness and flow strategies creates the potential for increasing self-awareness, improving clinical attunement,

preventing burnout symptoms, and managing stress throughout ones social work career, and are worth the risk of encountering the range of student responses or reactions.

Mindfulness and Flow Strategies for MSW Students

Attitudinal Foundations of Mindfulness: Throughout these mindfulness and flow strategies, participants are invited to adapt the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness as have been described more fully within *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn:

- **Non-judging:** This is the practice of being unbiased towards whatever experience occurs during the strategy. By encouraging students to practice from a tolerant place and reassuring them that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to engage in these strategies, students’ stress levels will likely dissipate.
- **Patience:** Tolerance with the practice is critical in order for students to understand there is no finish line or gold star for completing these strategies.
- **Beginner’s Mind:** Always look at the practice with a curiosity as though you haven’t yet encountered it or seen it before. This principle is helpful for students who have been practicing similar strategies for a long period of time in their religion or culture.
- **Trust:** Believe in the potential of the practice to be transformative, and also nonjudgmentally honoring any doubts.
- **Non-striving:** Do not seek any specific goal from the exercise but rather connect to it without a goal in sight.

- Acceptance: Accept things just as they are, including those that upset us during the practice. This is not passivity but rather an invitation to accept circumstance and emotional reactions during the exercises.
- Letting Go: Release any tension, thoughts, feelings, or judgments that aren't serving well.

These attitudinal foundations can help frame the openness of the following 14 strategies.

The following are actual scripts that build off of one another. Following the 14 scripts and exercises are five recommendations for where, how, and in what format these strategies might be introduced. Each of the 14 strategies and scripts were written by the author and are copyrighted but are open to be adapted into your setting.

Strategy One: Breath Awareness:

Rationale for Breath Awareness for MSW Students: In these exercises, you will find different ways of accessing your breath. Everyone breathes differently, and often to breathe, and to be with the breath is sufficient to allow us to find our flow and connect to our values. Social workers are expected to manage many responsibilities, tasks, and requirements, so integrating breath awareness as strategies allows us to reset, refocus, and honor our experiences, emotions, and reactions with dignity.

Finger breathing: Begin by placing one hand in the air. Then with your pointer finger of your other hand, begin tracing the hand. Each time you trace a finger moving upwards, inhale, and when you lower the finger, exhale. Do this for each finger, and recognize your pace and your reactions to breathing in this way. Then when you've finished, trace the hand again. You can feel free to switch hands and integrate this breathing when you're feeling stressed at a staff meeting,

overwhelmed during a session, or need to ground yourself due to a counter-transference experience.

Belly Breathing/Deep Breathing/ Diaphragmatic Breathing: Sit comfortably with your hand on your belly and the other on your chest. If you'd like you can lay down flat; you're welcome to do so. As you do this exercise, you're going to focus on only having your hand on your stomach move. Many of us experience our chest rising and falling as we breathe. The goal of diaphragmatic breathing is that our diaphragm is able to reset, and relax different parts of our body in order to cope with stress. This is particularly useful for social worker students who may experience vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, emotional exhaustion or burnout.

Begin by taking a breath in through your nose, and noticing the air travel down your throat, all the way into your stomach. Then once your stomach is full, you are going to exhale the breath by letting the air travel from your stomach, into your throat, and exiting from the mouth.

We are going to do this exercise 10 times in order to engage our body and mind in relaxation. By allowing the air to flow through our bodies, we can release any tension as the breath travels through different areas. Breathe by inhaling through your nose, and then exhaling through your mouth. Notice the movement of your chest and stomach up and down as you breathe. Recognize any thoughts, feelings, judgments, or reactions that come up when you're breathing in this way.

Strategy Two: BODY SCAN

Rationale for Body Scan in Social Work Practice: In Buddhism, objects of the mind are defined as dharmas, and Thich Nhat Hanh grouped together these dharmas into five categories: 1) bodily and physical forms, 2) feelings, 3) perceptions, 4) mental functioning, and 5) consciousness. In contemplative practices such as body scans, one becomes connected to their dharmas or objects “until you see that each of them has intimate connection with the world outside yourself (Hanh, Pp 47). By connecting the interdependence of objects and our relation to them, we begin to experience life in a different manner. For this reason, a body scan is an important means by which a social work student can integrate awareness into their own experiences throughout their MSW program. Body scans are one foundational access point to the mind and body connection. When attention is drawn to the body, one connects with their deeper experiences. Bringing this reflective awareness into the social work practice enhances the ability to be attuned to our own reactions and client reactions in the social work field education experience. If students do not wish to close their eyes, or are hesitant to apply themselves in this manner, encourage them to connect to their body and breath. In its truest essence, there is no incorrect way to engage in this practice, as mindfulness is a practice and not an exam. A Body scan is one of many formal mindfulness practices that allows us to connect to the present moment and the experiences both internally and externally of our body. We are about to begin a body scan that will last approximately 7-10 minutes. A body scan allows us to ground our thoughts, feelings, and sensations in our own body and connect to our body. It is a deceptively simple mindfulness practice, that can be integrated throughout the day to increase our present moment awareness.

Script: Make yourself comfortable either seated in a chair or on the ground, or laying on your back. Your hands can be relaxed by your side, and either close your eyes softly, or keep your eyes open with a gentle gaze. Be sure to sit or lay in whatever way feels comfortable for your body. If sitting or lying doesn't feel comfortable, you are welcome to stand or position yourself in whatever way is comfortable for you in this moment.

Take several intentional breaths. Begin by breathing in whatever way is comfortable for you. Some find that breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth is most comfortable. If possible, this manner of breathing allows you to notice your belly expanding on the inhale and relaxing on the exhale when you let go.

Begin to recognize your surroundings and bring attention to any noises or distractions. This may be a door closing in the distance, a wrinkling paper, or someone near you moving. Be aware of these sounds, don't judge yourself for having them, and when possible bring your attention back to your breath.

First bring your attention to your feet, and begin noticing any and all sensations in your feet. You might choose to wiggle your toes and notice how it feels to activate the toes without judgment. If it's useful you can take a deep breath and send a sensation down to your feet as though through a pipe within your body. The breath is moving down and then a breath is moving back from your toes or feet.

After focusing on your feet and toes, bring your attention up to your ankles, and calves. Again, breathe deeply however it feels comfortable to you, and breathe in and out of these areas of your body.

Next notice your knees and thighs and slowly bring your attention to these areas of your body. Recognize any judgments that enter as you focus on different parts of your body acknowledging that these different areas in your body are activating different sensations. Don't try to wish away any experiences as you complete the body scan, but rather notice these thoughts, judgments, feelings, or sensations as visitors to your mind. Try not to force or push anything away, but let them linger, and then let them move on.

Next, consider moving your focus to your internal organs including your stomach and notice any experiences of digestion or the movement of the belly rising and falling with each breath. Next, moving up the body focus your attention on the chest and shoulders, again always breathing however is most comfortable for you, and adjusting along the way. The emphasis here is on acceptance and sitting with your body in the present moment.

Next, we move our attention and breath to notice our sensations in our arms, hands, and fingers, releasing any tension or stress.

Lastly, we focus on the neck, shoulders, and head, noticing any tightness you may be holding. Again, don't judge yourself for carrying this tension, but rather create more openness with each breath you inhale and then exhale while focusing your attention on this part of your body.

In closing, bring your attention to focus on the body as a whole, and bring your awareness from the top of your head down to the bottom of your feet and as you breathe, experience this connectedness of your body and your breath. Take in all the energy of the practice as you continue to breathe. Gently praise yourself for connecting to, and being present with, your body and your breath during this body scan.

When you're ready, take one more breath in. On the exhale bring your hands together rubbing them together to create some energy Qi (pronounced Chi) and then put them over your eyes. Let your eyes adjust back to the room and space while covered and then slowly remove your fingers to return to the room. Take one final breath now with your eyes open, recognizing with reflective awareness that you are in the classroom, ready to engage in the class material.

Before we move on, are there any reflections or reactions anyone would like to share?

Strategy Three: Guided Meditation for Social Workers

Rationale for Guided Meditation for Social Workers: Mindfulness practices are utilized for both being present and expansive growth. Research shows that even a single session of guided meditation can improve psychological function (Melville, et al., 2012). MSW students are exposed to stressors, and guided meditations have been shown to reduce perceived stress, blood pressure, heart rate, and respiration rate (Rizzolo, et al., 2009, Arambula, et al., 2001).

Script: Bring yourself into this space, and focus on your breath. Make sure you're breathing in whatever way feels most comfortable to you in this moment. For some of you that might mean inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. For others it might mean inhaling, holding your breath for a few moments, then exhaling through your nose or mouth however it feels comfortable to you.

I want to invite you into this space and ask you to ground yourself in the present moment. Consider this your time and your space for you to be with yourself. Perhaps you may uncover a new aspect of yourself so that you can uphold the social work values of service, social justice,

dignity and worth of the individual, importance and centrality of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

You've chosen the social work profession for a reason, and let's begin by thinking about the links in your life that brought you here. For some of you, a family member, friend, or perhaps you yourself went through a challenge or felt the calling to step into action and service to support individuals, systems, and communities. Perhaps you were committed to being an anti-oppressive social justice advocate and found that social work was part of your journey for that reason.

Whatever the initial reasons, I invite you to now think about the new reasons that resonate with you as you are preparing to launch into the social work profession after graduation in a few short months. Consider the aspects of your own intersectional identity that may have shifted over the years.

Consider the different elements of education you have had while in the field, in your classes, in your lived experiences, challenges, conversations with instructors, peers and clients. All of these have further informed and shaped your own experience.

I invite you to now focus for a moment on each of the core elements of the social work code of ethics. As I say each ethic, breathe in, hold your breath and then exhale, releasing tension and energizing yourself with each breath. With each phrase notice any thoughts, feelings, or reactions coming up for you. Try not to focus on judging yourself for having any reactions or judgments in the moment.

SERVICE (PAUSE)

SOCIAL JUSTICE (PAUSE)

DIGNITY AND WORTH OF THE INDIVIDUAL (PAUSE)

IMPORTANCE AND CENTRALITY OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS (PAUSE)

INTEGRITY, (PAUSE)

COMPETENCE (PAUSE)

Lastly, we will transition to introducing the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness so you can center yourself in them as you might in your social work practice or research.

Now we will transition to bringing mindfulness and reflective awareness to your experiences as social workers:

Sit with any thoughts, feelings, or reactions when considering your experiences holding your clients' communities' organizations' experiences and challenges. Sit with the awareness that you have been able to achieve so much.

As social workers: You combat hate, oppression, racism.

You advocate for diversity, inclusion, and equity.

You courageously work to transform broken systems to support oppressed and vulnerable individuals, communities, and systems.

Breathe in acceptance of the courage and strength you embody.

Breathe in pride that you embody dignity and justice in your work.

Breathe in your role transforming unjust systems.

Sit with this for a few moments and notice any feelings, reactions, and judgments that may come to in this experience.

Breathe deeply, breathe profoundly as we begin to end this exercise. Begin to reintegrate into the space, begin to reflect back to your role in the room, community, and class. If your eyes were closed, begin to rub your hands together to create Qi or energy. Celebrate that you gave yourself these moments to bring deeper awareness to all you contribute in your role. Cover your eyes with your hands, and slowly move your hands away to adjust back into the space.

Readjust back to the space as we begin now to transition to our next exercise/activity/class.

Strategy Four: Loving Kindness for Social Workers

Rationale for Loving Kindness Meditation for MSW Students: Meditation is a serene encounter with reality (Hanh, Pp 60). Being awake to meditation is equivalent to being awake in one's direct service work in social work. Adapting the alertness and sense of awareness that is integrated into mindfulness practices helps emphasize the importance of the mindfulness and meditation as a means by which one can connect to their clients in a more deeply empathic manner because they have learned to adapt this practice to themselves. Meditation "reveals and heals" (Hanh, Pp61) and allows one to fix on one object if, and when, fixating on multiple objects yield too painful. Social workers are encouraged to access their creativity and innovate while recognizing their experience in their classroom and field education. In order to create innovation for problems within social services, organizations, and communities social workers are seeking to acknowledge their challenges and involve loving-kindness or *metta* into their states. Loving Kindness meditation focuses on sending unconditional love without any expectations of receiving in return. This meditation and emphasis on service aligns with social work values (CSWE, 2018).

Script: Begin by finding a comfortable position with your breath and body. Recognize any thoughts, feelings or sensations occurring, and notice them nonjudgmentally.

Find your breath and recognize how to connect to your breath if you ever find yourself wandering during this practice. When in doubt, you can repeat these phrases when you are in a meeting, driving, sitting, resting, or experiencing stress.

First bring your focus on yourself, and with deep self-compassion you will direct loving-kindness to yourself:

May I be free from inner and outer suffering.

May I be free of mental distress.

May I be healthy and strong.

May I be able to live in this world happily, peacefully, joyfully and with ease.

May I contribute to the greater good with loving-kindness.

May I have innovative impact on the people and communities I serve.

May I be able to thrive, whatever that looks like for me.

May I trust that I am enough, no matter what.

Next, bring your attention to someone you care for deeply. Again, silently repeat these phrases to yourself, directing the loving-kindness towards that person:

May they be free from inner and outer suffering.

May they be free of mental distress.

May they be healthy and strong.

May they be able to live in this world happily, peacefully, joyfully and with ease.

May they contribute to the greater good with loving-kindness.

May they have innovative impact on the people and communities they serve.

May they be able to thrive, whatever that looks like for them.

May they trust that they are enough, no matter what.

Next, bring your attention to someone to whom you feel neutral, perhaps someone you interact with but you neither dislike nor are deeply attached to the person. Silently repeat the following phrases to direct loving-kindness to them.

May they be free from inner and outer suffering.

May they be free of mental distress.

May they be healthy and strong.

May they be able to live in this world happily, peacefully, joyfully and with ease.

May they contribute to the greater good with loving-kindness.

May they have innovative impact on the people and communities they serve.

May they be able to thrive, whatever that looks like for them.

May they trust that they are enough, no matter what.

Next, bring your attention to someone with whom you have a lot of conflict or have had past or present discord. Silently repeat the following phrases, recognizing any range of sensations as you direct loving-kindness to this person.

May they be free from inner and outer suffering.

May they be free of mental distress.

May they be healthy and strong.

May they be able to live in this world happily, peacefully, joyfully and with ease.

May they contribute to the greater good with loving-kindness.

May they have innovative impact on the people and communities they serve.

May they be able to thrive, whatever that looks like for them.

May they trust that they are enough, no matter what.

Lastly, we will return to direct loving-kindness to ourselves as we end this practice.

Again, silently repeating these phrases back to yourself:

May I be free from inner and outer suffering.

May I be free of mental distress.

May I be healthy and strong.

May I be able to live in this world happily, peacefully, joyfully and with ease.

May I contribute to the greater good with loving-kindness.

May I have innovative impact on the people and communities I serve.

May I be able to thrive, whatever that looks like for me.

May I trust that I am enough, no matter what.

As we end this mindfulness practice, notice any and all reactions to the phrases and people to whom you directed loving-kindness. Take a breath, center yourself, and come back to the room. Recognize you can channel loving-kindness back to yourself at any point, any time, or any day.

Strategy Five: Core Values for Social Workers

Rationale of Core Values for MSW Students: Social Work education boasts boundaries as cornerstone, within work, communication, disclosures. Indeed, there might be more that can “go wrong” than is praised for social workers, MSW students particularly. Thich Nhat Hanh (2008) proposes that there be no forced distinction between work time and free time. Moreover, that when work and free time can align, we become freer and be able to live with more enjoyment. Indeed, these themes are paramount to how flow can be integrated into social work. Flow Theory

would use the description of Autotelic Personality to describe one who is driven with purpose and curiosity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In order to develop characteristics that are aligned within work, one might engage in flow activities to increase enjoyment and decrease panic, dread, anxiety, stress, or apathy, all of which are the opposite of flow. Flow has the potential to positively contribute to a person's quality of life. Indeed, research has shown that those who are in flow report feeling connected, able to concentrate, motivated, active, strong, and creative (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Flow states occur when we are engaged in an activity that requires a certain level of challenge and difficulty as well as a level of skill. In order to access the flow channel when time either speeds up or slows down, and we are immersed in creativity and creation, there are certain exercises that can contribute to experiencing these levels of optimal experience more often. For social workers specifically, when flow is accessed, MSWs have the potential to create innovative change within social systems and communities. Additionally, when there is this activation of genius in socially-conscious MSWs, oppressive systems, and progressive change can shift from being an altruistic goal to being an implemented value within the social work frame. Indeed, because one cannot sustain optimal experience and high levels of challenge all the time, being intentional and mindful about the exercises leading to productivity, creativity, innovation, and concentration will aid MSWs amidst their learning experiences.

For MSW students, a flow practice can intentionally increase reflective awareness and draw upon a student's strengths. The following exercise is encouraged for MSW students in order to begin tapping into their own strengths in order to aid in their development with others. Strengths can be defined as "strategies, beliefs, and personal assets used with relative ease to promote the positive quality one is trying to build" (Padeksy, C., Mooney, K. 2012, Pp 283).

Flow states occur and become more effortless when a person experiences alignment of their values and actions, and for social workers, when they experience their reactions in a self-reflective manner. When MSW students examine their own strengths, they are able to examine their own qualities and values.

For this exercise, Students will be given the following prompt and supplies:

Script: Take a moment to look at these values:

List of Personal Core Values

Accomplishment	Determination	Honor	Perfection
Abundance	Discipline	Improvement	Perseverance
Accountability	Discovery	Independence	Persistence
Accuracy	Diversity	Individuality	Personal Growth
Achievement	Education	Initiative	Personal health
Adventure	Efficiency	Inner peace	Pleasure
Approval	Environment	Innovation	Power
Autonomy	Equality	Integrity	Practicality
Balance	Excellence	Intelligence	Preservation
Beauty	Exploration	Intensity	Privacy
Challenge	Fairness	Intimacy	Problem solving
Change	Faith	Intuition	Professionalism
Clarity	Faithfulness	Joy	Progress
Cleanliness/ orderliness	Family	Justice	Prosperity
Collaboration	Flair	Knowledge	Punctuality
Commitment	Flexibility	Leadership	Purpose
Communication	Forgiveness	Learning	Straightforwardness
Community	Freedom	Love	Strength
Compassion	Friendship	Loyalty	Success
Competence	Frugality	Meaning	Systemization
Competition	Fulfillment	Merit	Teamwork
Concern for others	Fun	Moderation	Timeliness
Confidence	Generosity	Modesty	Tolerance
Connection	Genuineness	Money	Tradition
Conservation	Good will	Nature	Tranquility
Content over form	Goodness	Nurturing	Trust
Cooperation	Gratitude	Obedience	Truth
Coordination	Hard work	Open-mindedness	Unity
Creativity	Harmony	Openness	Variety
Credibility	Healing	Optimism	Vitality
Decisiveness	Holistic Living	Patriotism	Wealth
Democracy	Honesty	Peace, Non-violence	Wisdom

Highlight in one color the top 10 --- Breathe

Then highlight the top 5 in a darker color --- Breathe

Then circle over that, the Top Value --- Breathe and notice what comes up for you.

If your values are not listed, please add your values and words.

Now, write down your top ten, five, or several values:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Now spend a few minutes reflecting on the following:

1. In what ways are your values showing up within your MSW classroom and field education experiences?
2. How are your values absent?

3. In what ways might you integrate these values more?

4. In what ways are you aware of alignments within your values and what you're currently doing in your MSW program?

Give yourself credit for leading with these values.

****When or if you find misalignments, don't berate yourself, but invite yourself to explore how to better align your personal and professional life with your core values.****

Strategy Six: Flow, Concentration, and Social Justice for MSW Students:

Rationale for MSW Students: Both mindfulness and social work practice require levels of concentration. Indeed, mindfulness can only be cultivated when the mind has the capacity to be calm, stable, and focused (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Kabat-Zinn (1994) describes concentration as the capacity of the mind to sustain an unwavering attention to one object for observation. In social work, concentration is applied in direct practice, attunement to the client's verbal and non-verbal communication, and the psychological, spiritual, biological, social, and environmental factors contributing to their experiences. In mindfulness, concentration is developed by focusing on the breath at first. Often in field education, concentration is applied to sitting with our clients in their lived experiences. Concentration requires elements of steadfast purpose and consistency. Similarly, in social work practice, without concentration, social change, innovation, and micro-mezzo-macro levels of transformation may not occur. Indeed, from a pedagogical perspective, Paulo Freire encouraged critical consciousness as a means to reflect upon the world and act to

transform it. When we examine the critical consciousness in social work practice, it's critical to incorporate mindfulness in order to reflect upon one's own reactions. An exercise that can encourage concentration, creative considerations, and innovation begins with recognizing the current challenges one observes, experiences, and is interested in combatting. This reflective exercise encourages stretching one's capacities and invites vulnerability to be able to consider obstacles outside of oneself.

Script: Take a moment to center yourself with a breath, and make sure you are comfortable. We will spend the next ten minutes in a reflective writing exercise to enhance your concentration and develop actionable steps. Please note that this is for your reflection only, however, if you feel moved to share any experiences please know you'll have the opportunity at the end of this exercise.

1. My top 10 challenges are:
2. I view society's top 10 challenges as:
3. When I try to innovate and create social change:
4. The top 10 strategies I have tried in the past to create innovative and solve problems are:
5. **Now circle the ones that have been effective even in a minor way.

Next reflect:

6. I have felt defeated or have experienced burnout trying to solve these problems, personally or professionally:
7. I go further with the help of (Insert names, companies, organizations, people):
8. If all the challenges listed above were to be solved, I would feel:
9. The challenges I want to overcome MOST are:
10. If I could make this innovative change I would feel, think, and experience:

Now recognize any thoughts or feelings. Once everyone has come back to the room, would anyone like to share their experiences or reactions.

Strategy Seven: Into Flow for MSW Innovation:

Rational for MSW students: Based on one's upbringing, each person develops patterns and certain understandings of how to relate within, and in conjunction with, the world. Limiting beliefs, automatic thoughts, and core beliefs all refer to the premise that a person believes certain truths about the world and the patterns within the world, that may or may not be accurate. MSW students, like all humans, carry these thoughts that impact their functioning and relation in the world. Reflective awareness creates the necessary space to process these thoughts, feelings, and reactions.

Flow requires this awareness not only of one's strengths, but also what may be preventing one from existing at their most optimal, creative, and innovative capacity. Thich Nhat Hanh (1975) describes that "when your mind is liberated your heart floods with compassion: compassion for yourself, for having undergone countless sufferings, because you were not able to relieve yourself of false views, hatred, ignorance, and anger." (Pp 58). MSW students must examine their own lived experiences. They may not have the capacity to process their lived experiences in therapy or outside of their classroom and field education due to personal and other professional responsibilities.

Script: This strategy explores our own narrative through identifying and expanding upon our own limiting beliefs. By identifying these limiting beliefs MSW students will have the potential to combat assumptions about themselves and, therefore, hone their skills to serve their clients.

What are the statements that repeat within you over and over again? Some might refer to these as core beliefs, limiting beliefs, automatic thoughts, or cognitive distortions. While some might be positive, many people experience these as negative and self-critical. In order to serve others and think more expansively one benefits from honing reflective awareness.

Here are some examples of what these thoughts and reactions might sound like:

If you're late you're doing something wrong.

You're only an intern.

People will know you're not confident.

Perhaps yours vary from the above, and in that case, you're invited to name whatever those beliefs are for you right now.

Next, focus on recognizing whatever false and inaccurate beliefs you've been carrying in yourself which have limited your capacity to be creative.

Finally, look at each of them, and begin to change the words can't, don't, not, only with words like "I am enough, no matter what."

Take some time to do this, and recognize the feelings, thoughts, and sensations that come up for you. Recognize that flow, this optimal experience where you are functioning in alignment with your values, can be accessed through understanding many of your limiting beliefs and what they might be informing you about your patterns.

Strategy Eight: Mindful Movement for MSW Student Stress Reduction

Rationale for MSW Students: Chair-based Yoga postures that integrate deep breathing have been shown to decrease stress responses in the workplace (Melville, et al., 2012). Melville (2012) found that participation in 15 minutes of chair based yoga has the potential to improve psychological and physiological causes of stress. MSW students are exposed to stress in their work and communities, which suggests that a chair-based yoga practice has the potential to improve their stress management.

Script: Sit in a chair. Once seated, find a comfortable place to center your body and connect to your breath.

Place your hands however they feel comfortable for you. You might choose to rest them on your lap or you might wish to place them on a desk or table in front of you. First, we are going to begin with moving your eyes and stretching different parts of our body. Please recognize that there is nothing aerobic about these postures, but rather mindful movement is meant to bridge connections within our bodies and breath. If at any point you'd like to stop the movements for any reason, please do so and find another comfortable way to sit and ground yourself.

First, while keeping your head facing forward, begin to move your eyes from right to left, stretching your capacity of vision from left to right, and back again. Notice what you experience as you're feeling the way your body and breath is connecting to the slight movement.

Next, move your neck in whatever way feels comfortable for you. This can be up and down, or side to side. If you'd like, move your head in a rotating direction activating your neck and shoulders.

Next we will activate our arms and hands. First make a tight fist with your hands, and then release. Move your hands up in front of you, and again then release.

Next focus on pushing your toes onto the floor, creating some tension, then releasing. Do this a few times, and only continue if it feels comfortable. Slowly move through the motions and when you're ready, take several profound breaths and deepen your connection to your body. Recognize what happens as you connect with your body and breath, as you stand and recognize any clarity, frustrations, or discomforts you're experiencing.

Strategy Nine: Attention, Focus, and Flow for MSW Students

Rationale for MSW students: In order to comply with HIPAA, social workers engage in confidential documentation, much of which is embedded within secure electronic health records (EHRs) or other types of files. Documentation is often identified as needing to represent a “golden thread” by which another provider, supervisor, or auditor can review the client’s or organization’s files and understand the process that has unfolded within the therapeutic relationship. Anything and everything an MSW student or social worker write within their documentation has the potential to impact the course of a client’s life as part of their permanent medical and mental health record. MSW students understand this pressure and understand the weight of their writing and descriptions. For these reasons, it is critical to engage MSW students in honing their focus and attention in order to document ethically, and in a manner that is neither oppressive or problem-focused, nor lacking specificity.

This strategy and the below script can encourage MSW students to engage their attention and focus so they can be intentional in their documentation:

Script: In this exercise, you might recognize that some feelings, thoughts or sensations might be uncomfortable or introduce elements of stress. If this is the case, please consider focusing on your breath and the message of the material.

Bring awareness to your body, your breath, and your fingertips. Breathe however feels comfortable for you and start to consider that you're in the process of documenting an important session, event, intervention, or update regarding your client or social work practice. You're noticing how you feel as you think about what was said, practiced, and communicated. Next, bring awareness to any sensations, thoughts, or feelings. This might be regret, pride, guilt, self-doubt, or another emotion. Now move from thinking about the interaction to thinking about describing it. Consider the words and phrases you would use to describe this interaction and session to a supervisor, a colleague, or an auditor. How might you describe the session differently to each person? (pause) How might you describe the session similarly to each person? How might you reflect your own experience as the therapist in the session?

Next, bring awareness to what might happen if someone outside of your office viewed your note, perhaps the client themselves, or someone in their life. What sort of reactions might the client or others have when reading the phrases and words you've used to describe the session and the focus of the work. Would there be any discrepancies in language, phrases or work? Would there be any terms to explain or that could contradict the client's experience? Notice any sensations as you reflect on what others might see or experience. Notice any feelings of anxiety, panic, discomfort or stress you're experiencing. Also honor feelings of pride and alignment as you recognize you're working with clients.

Regardless of whatever you experienced, recognize that you're learning as an MSW student how to bring attention to what you are writing and describing in your documentation. By honing these skills of mindfulness and flow so you experience more alignment and ease, you are likely to experience less stress and pressure throughout your social work career.

Now we will move into envisioning the future documentation.

As an MSW student you're learning new skills and aware of your documentation and engagement with others. I want you to take out your phone or computer or any piece of technology and hold it in your hands. Run your fingers across the screen, the keyboard, or surface. Recognize the energy between your fingertips, hands, and palms on the surface. Bring awareness into what power you have by typing and writing and documenting anything on this device. If you're using a pen and paper to document, recognize the power you have when you bring pen to paper to transfer and gather information.

Next, take a deep breath and begin typing or writing into the device. Take note of whatever you're experiencing, thinking and feeling as you type one letter, or write by hand one letter. Recognize the sensations, thoughts, and feelings between your fingers and the creation of a letter. Next type or write several other words and again, take note of the sensations in your fingers. Notice how it feels and any thoughts or sensations that come up when you think about the power of creating information and energy.

Next type or write a bit faster, noticing any reactions or sensations you have as you notice what you're writing, documenting, and sharing. Envision now that you're bringing this sense of awareness and attention to writing to your clinical documentation. Be aware of how you're feeling, what you're experiencing, and how you anticipate your message, reflections,

descriptions, and process will be delivered. Notice any differences or similarities between this attentive writing practice where your reflections are flowing, and how your documentation occurs when you're writing.

Make sure to keep breathing, and identify to yourself as you write and reflect, any other experiences or sensations in your description. Now, slowly return to writing slowly, almost in slow motion. Notice your ease and slowing of pace, perhaps breath, or heart rate. Next, slowly return to write only a part of a letter or one letter typed, and then pause knowing you're finished exactly when and where and how you should.

Breathe however feels comfortable for you. Then we will focus our discussion on how we can bring this focused and attentive writing and documentation into and throughout our MSW internships and education.

Strategy Ten: WALKING MEDITATION FOR FLOW & STRESS REDUCTION

Rationale for MSW students: This strategy will emphasize how our bodies and minds can become grounded in the present moment, and help build awareness also of our own stress responses. This strategy and script can be adapted and extended to have a duration of 10 minutes or 60 minutes depending on the setting and format.

Script: Begin by centering yourself with your breath, in whatever way feels comfortable to you. In this exercise, you will be moving your body and noticing any thoughts, feelings, or sensations coming up for you. If at any point you'd like or need to take a break, feel welcome to do so.

When you're ready, please stand and come into the center of the room. We will be walking throughout this 7-minute exercise.

First, begin by standing, breathing, and grounding your feet into the floor. Next, begin by lifting, very slowly one foot and placing it on the ground, very, very slowly. Make sure to only place one point of your foot at a time. You can start by placing the ball of your foot on the ground, then slowly dropping in the heel of your foot. Notice any feelings when connecting your foot to the ground. If you're seated, you are invited to use your hand to slowly drop it onto the desk, dropping one point by point of your hand at a time.

Next, move your second foot and do the same, slowly and intentionally place each point of your foot on the ground, bit by bit, and experience the engagement of your foot. We will do this for the next minute, at your own, slow pace, picking each foot up, and not picking the other one up until the other one is fully planted on the ground. Do this slowly, intentionally, recognizing any reactions, sensations, or thoughts that may arise as you're doing this.

(Pause)

Next, I want you to begin connecting your steps by moving a bit more quickly. Remember if you're doing this with your hands on a desk, move your hand up and down a bit more quickly but still try to pay attention to every experience of the movement.

Now I want you to intentionally try to walk at the pace you may usually walk. Notice how this pace differs, where and how your body is connecting and responding similarly or differently, and recognize any thoughts, feelings, or reactions at this moment.

Now, I want you to imagine that you're on your way to your dream interview. It's a wonderful day out, you're excited for this opportunity and you hop on public transit towards your interview. Suddenly you look at the clock and you realize you're running about 30 minutes late. You may be late for your interview for your dream social work job. Recognize if your pace

has changed, where you feel the changes, and what thoughts or feelings are happening in your body. Suddenly you're walking quickly to try to get to this interview on time. If you're doing this with your hands, your hands are moving quickly side by side along your desk, tapping the desk swiftly. Notice the thoughts and reactions you're having. Suddenly you get to the office where the interview is, you look at your watch and realize you are actually 30 minutes early.

(sigh)

Pause. Notice what happens to your pace. Recognize what happens to your breath and to your response. Notice what happened to your pace without any prompting. Perhaps you slowed down, or perhaps you are maintaining the pace. Recognize if any judgments came up when you were running late versus when you are suddenly running early.

(Pause)

Now I want you to intentionally return to your typical pace and prepare to slow that pace down even more. Bring yourself into that visualization again, and notice how you feel as you know you have enough time, are in the moment, have time to catch your breath and prepare. Spend a few moments at this pace, and then consider slowing your pace even more.

(Pause 10 seconds...)

Next, begin to move your feet at the same pace as the one we began this exercise, by picking up one foot at a time, and placing each part of the foot on the ground at a time. You're not picking up the second foot until the other is completely settled on the ground.

Recognize your pace, any sensations unfolding in your brain, body, or five senses. Notice any reactions you're having as you're moving between these different paces, and where you feel if any tension, stress, ease, or presence in your body.

Now begin to slow your pace until you're able to pause movement altogether. Focus your breath on wherever your feet are located, and again return your full attention to your breath. Breathe in and out, inhaling, and exhaling. Where you're comfortable take one or two more intentional breaths. Please feel free to share any reactions, experiences, or thoughts about this experience.

Strategy Eleven: Active Communication and Listening

Rationale for MSW students: In this strategy, you will engage in active communication and active listening. In clinical practice, there is an emphasis on how clients and therapists communicate. While other classes and projects recommend role play, the emphasis on this strategy is to cultivate active communication skills in order to improve reflective awareness, concentration, and listening skills. When a person is able to integrate these skills, they are able to be an active and engaged listener and communicator. Social workers need to integrate active communication skills in order to empower clients and engage with them in meaningful ways.

Script: This active communication exercise will take approximately 10 minutes. Each student will be in a pair, and if there is an odd number, there will be a group of three. Each student will take a moment to describe a difficult communication they had and speak for 2 moments. The other student/s cannot interrupt, describe or respond. After the first student speaks, the second student will spend one-minute describing what was felt from the reporter's body language, phrasing, and description. Additionally, the student will describe what their own reactions,

impulses and desires were to respond to the student. This is different from stating what the other person said because we are actively aware that we are also having our own responses. This exercise can help bring awareness to how and where we experience listening in our bodies as listeners, and also how we experience sharing an experience when the other person is not reacting or interrupting.

Next, you will change roles, and repeat this experience. Then, we will come together as a class and share any experience that anyone is interested in or comfortable sharing. This exercise enhances our ability to express our own thoughts and feelings. It also can enhance our feelings with others. In many ways, there are opportunities for us to be present, but we often become too distracted by what we want to say or how we want to respond. By developing these active communication styles as both reporters and listeners, we expand our capacity to listen attentively and also practice being more focused in the presence of another person sharing something that is important to them. Building this focus skill can enhance our own ability to find flow as a listener or reporter, both of which are skills to be integrated into the social work field.

Strategy 12: The Flow Framework

Rationale for MSW Students: This framework is developed to recognize your most creative spaces and times, when you feel you are experiencing flow and functioning at your highest level as an MSW. This strategy is an exercise for welcoming new and unknown experiences by recognizing how they relate to your previous positive experiences.

Script:

F- Flow

Focus on what you've previously experienced in a specific area, for example social work, that has created a positive experience for you. Focus on those experiences and write down each positive experience on one list.

L- Link

From each positive experience, trace back each link that led to your experience of flow.

O- Observe

Observe any and all patterns that have led you to experience these flow experiences in your social work practice and education.

W- Welcome

Welcome the opportunities to experience more of these flow experiences. Write down a list of all of the possibilities where you see yourself able to welcome these in relation to your current work or skillset. Welcome the potential and possibility for transformational change.

Here is an example specific to social work:

Focus: Entire list: Dynamic session with a client, breakthrough while writing process recording, clarity from an awareness of counter-transference experience, new clarity on how a system functions, supported a client in tolerating a distressing situation, helped client obtain a green card.

Choose two:

Dynamic session with a client

Clarity on an experience of counter-transference:

Write the story backwards trying to pull on experiences, feelings, or emotions. THEN number them to recognize steps leading to experience of positive flow.

Link:

FLOW 10 Dynamic Session with a client:

- 9 I had a lunch break.
8. I prepared for the session by reviewing last week's notes.
7. The client confirmed the appointment.
6. I felt at ease because I wasn't running behind.
5. My morning sessions were all on time.
4. I made the earlier train.
3. I listened to an interesting podcast on the way to work.
2. I didn't press snooze.
1. I made a fancy morning coffee and had overnight oats ready for me.

FLOW 7. Clarity on an experience of counter-transference:

6. I had been struggling with what I said in the session.
5. I was uncomfortable seeing a client who seemed different from me.
4. I engaged in a mindful breathing exercise with my field supervisor when I was nervous.
3. I was nervous about doing the wrong thing and wrote about that fear in my process recording.

2. I made the choice to do my best.

1. I went for a morning run to get rid of some of my nerves.

Observe: Now sit for a few moments and observe the links you've just outlined that led to your flow experience.

In observing, recognize any patterns. In the examples above, some patterns include: taking breaks, running "early," being kind to oneself, being reflective, and acknowledging nonjudgmentally all experiences. Carrying these observed themes and patterns forward will lead to more frequent and more expansive experiences of flow.

Welcome the potential for other flow experiences, and write down a list of anticipated opportunities to enjoy flow, and be specific when and however possible:

1. Having a positive conversation with a friend/colleague.
2. More frequent positive sessions with clients.
3. More productivity in the early mornings.
4. Pleasant experiences lead to more pleasant experiences.
5. I don't have to let one negative experience derail a day.
6. Thoughts and feelings can be like visitors, I don't need to prioritize the negativity.

This exercise can help clarify patterns in a unique way for students to recognize what work styles, environments, and focus strategies set them up for success more so than others.

Strategy Thirteen: Foundations of Gratitude for MSW Students

Rationale for MSW students: Gratitude is defined as a trait and a state in psychology (Emmons, 2004, McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). People who experience and express gratitude

experience improved psychological well-being. Positive psychological well-being is critical for social workers who are exposed to, and can experience, vicarious trauma, emotional exhaustion, moral injury, burnout, and compassion fatigue. By engaging in gratitude practices in the social work classroom, students have the potential to improve their baseline of psychological well-being and further develop reflective awareness to tolerate distress they may experience in their field and classroom education.

Script: In this exercise, each student will reflect upon their experiences thus far in the social work field. I'll guide the class with various prompts that can help you organize your thoughts. This exercise will last 5-7 minutes.

First, using your computer, phone, or writing on paper, please begin by writing everything that has happened in your social work experience thus far. This could be before entering the MSW program, upon writing your application, or perhaps case work or work you did yourself with a therapist.

Notice any feelings or sensations coming up as you reflect on this past experience.

(Pause)

When you've completed this section, please look up from your computer or paper.

Since most of you have looked up, now I want you to reflect on any of the challenges you've encountered in another paragraph or list. Notice any thoughts, feelings, or reactions you're experiencing during this exercise.

Lastly, I want you to write down everything you anticipate and expect may happen in your social work career. This may be a longer or shorter list depending on your goals, and remember there is not wrong way to do this. This may be opening a private practice, running an agency, transforming oppressive systems. Write anything. There is no goal or anticipated accomplishment or even challenge too vast.

(pause)

Now look at your paper and reflect upon what you've written thus far.

Gratitude helps improve our psychological well-being. Anticipatory gratitude, or the act of looking ahead to what we may be grateful to experience helps us visualize the goals within our career.

Looking at these three lists, I want you to now think about where you might want to include the words "I am grateful for..." For some of you it might be ahead of the past experiences and anticipated goals. For others you might consider expressing gratitude for the past challenges you've experienced or the ones you anticipate experiencing. There is no wrong way to do this exercise.

As we begin to wrap up our gratitude exercise, begin to center yourself and return to your breath, honoring all of your experiences and emotions with dignity. Take three deep breaths in whatever way is comfortable for you, and then please return to the room. Before we go ahead, would anyone like to share any reflections or thoughts on that experience?

Strategy 14: Community Flow for MSW Students

Rationale for MSW Students: Community and group flow occurs when there is a shared goal, shared movement towards a goal and a sharing of values and actions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1994). When there is a shared common theme with individuals with a shared interest, transformative change can unfold. While during a 14-week class, transformation may or may not unfold, it would be expected that a group flow could exist. These experiences can be initiated by a professor in an intentional manner for students who want to engage in a shared and unified experience together:

Script: In today's flow practice, we will create shared goals and objectives for the class as MSW students.

Can I have four volunteers to write on the board with me? (Or type into the keyboard that is projected onto the board)

Okay, two of you will be writing down any of the goals in social work that the class shares, and the other two will be writing down steps we can take to get us closer to any and all of the goals shared.

We then will discuss any energy we feel in the room. Sometimes this may seem overwhelming, and other times this can lead us to experience more momentum and energy as well as motivation to achieve these goals.

(Instructor- Do these exercises for 5-10 minutes max)

Now, looking at all of these examples, let's notice some common themes. Does anyone want to share what they experienced during this exercise? (Pause)

Now, let's consider any shared values we have reflected on to identify these goals and objectives.

Let's dialogue over the dynamic that occurred as we all shared different hopes, dreams, goals. Can anyone share their experience? Their energy? Or perhaps, in some cases, stress level?

Now, as some common notes, what we just experienced was a community and group flow experience. It was focused on sharing common goals, pulling together more ties that unite our class than pull us apart, and identifying the overlaps in our goals and shared values.

As you move through your social work career, continue to remember that there are more commonalities that unite us than differences that pull us apart in this profession. Let's continue to find ways to communicate support across this profession with one another.

Examples for ease of use for instructor (expect 20+ examples depending on class size)

Goals:

Transform the way women of color (WOC) are treated.

Open affordable private practice for specific population.

Create trainings for children and their parents in foster care to improve communication.

Create an anti-racist structure in education models in MSW education that are student led.

Objectives:

Begin learning more about what has or hasn't worked in the past with creating affordable treatment options.

Consider the multiple layers of oppression facing WOC and how they can be transformed.

Look for mentors on LinkedIn working with these populations.

Find a peer supervision group to collaborate with.

Seek funding to establish a caucus or club at the university during the MSW program.

Ask for fellow students to sign a petition.

Suggestions for Implementation of Mindfulness & Flow Strategies into Five Unique

Approaches and Settings:

This practice manual includes strategies to guide the implementation of mindfulness practices to improve MSW student wellness and encourage creativity that can be adapted. Each strategy is suggested based upon research and can be adapted and utilized by the reader depending on their program's needs.

Due to the variety of MSW educational structures that all follow the CSWE guidelines for accreditation in field education, the following 5 approaches for implementing mindfulness and flow are suggested:

- A half day orientation that emphasizes mindfulness and flow for social work students.
- A four-session mandatory pass/fail course spanning the first year of an MSW program.
- An integration of 5-10 minutes of mindfulness exercises implemented into recurring classes.

- An integration of mindfulness skills into the supervisory relationship as part of the field education requirement.
- A Supervision in Field Education (SIFI) course for field educators

The first approach is a one-day orientation workshop focused on mindfulness where students will learn about formal and informal practices. This approach can be conducted as part of an MSW program's initial orientation, prior to students beginning their formal classes and internship responsibilities. Offering an introduction to mindfulness during the orientation period can potentially bridge the gap between students and the actual wellness resources on campus and introduce themes of self-care and wellness directly from administration and faculty to the students. It can also emphasize the importance of providing a holding space for students within their MSW programs to engage in dialogues with each other, faculty, and administrators where they feel supported as future clinicians and as individuals who are balancing many roles and responsibilities even before officially starting classes and field internships. Orientations offer opportunities to bridge incoming students with their new identity as students in higher education. During a short span of time, typically days for a graduate program, students are immersed in a new academic and scholarly culture, interact with new individuals, and develop connections with other social workers.

The fourteen principle strategies described in the earlier section of the practice manual can be implemented as the organizer or facilitator sees fit. In addition, an organizer might consider implementing some of the following into a one-day training:

- i. Introduce mindfulness as it relates directly to social work values and mission.
- ii. Guided meditations specific for social workers and MSW students.

iii. Small breakout groups for meeting one another where students participate in informal mindfulness practices:

1. Reflective and active listening about current material: learning to listen in a new way.
2. Sitting with discomfort:- noticing what bodily sensations, thoughts, and feelings arise while hearing challenging scenarios from role plays.
3. Self-compassion exercises.
4. Mindful writing regarding MSW program goals.
5. Tapping exercises emphasizing loving-kindness.
6. Expressive arts activities to develop cohesion and teambuilding. These daytime activities will help students learn to deal with vicarious trauma in a new way. Examples include:
 - a. Community building by creating a group mural of tiles to be integrated into a building,
 - b. Individualized art expressions related to their social work professional goals.
 - c. Designing a “class logo.”
 - d. Two sticky note walls:one of fears and one of goals.
7. Music and mindfulness during a mindful eating exercise.
8. Mindful small group discussion.
9. Mindful eating exercises during community meal/lunch
10. Mindful movement and walking.

11. Closing activity: mindful writing and reflection.

12. Final loving-kindness meditation.

This full-day orientation can also be adapted to a half day or third of a day.

The second approach is incorporating the above strategies into a pass/fail four-session course that spans the first year of the MSW program. The objective of this course is for students to have an ongoing connection to the theme of wellness. An instructor is guided through this practice manual as to how to facilitate dialogues and engage students in mindfulness-based exercises so they can be in touch with their emotional experiences in relation to their position in the MSW program and in the field. Many social work programs require students to participate in seminars and workshops focused on such things as child abuse reporting, safety training, and practice ethics. In a like manner it seems conceivable to mandate a class in self-preservation that reinforces tools to support self-care. It's possible that learning mindfulness practices to prevent social worker burnout and develop self-awareness only further supports one's ability to think critically and empathetically support our clients.

In addition to the above 14 strategies, an organizer might consider implementing the following into a one-day training:

- ^ Class One: mindfulness and the clinician: An introduction to mindfulness and its benefits for social work students.
- ^ Class Two: Informal mindfulness exercises that can be utilized to activate and build awareness around the five senses.
- ^ Class Three: Mindful communication: embodying active listening to improve your self-compassion and awareness as an MSW intern.
 - Engaged and active communication for the clinician.

- Exercises for students to listen, report back, share. thoughts/reactions of being heard and hearing their partner.
- Class Four: Formal mindfulness practices: meditation, guided imagery, and using meditation for termination and transitions as students and with our clients.

The third approach is to designate five to ten mindful minutes in the classroom structure. This goal is for students to ground themselves when discussing classroom content and further develop reflective self-awareness as a component of their learning. Since the majority of MSW classes last a duration of fourteen weeks, the 14 strategies outlined in this manual can be seamlessly adapted to meet this recommended approach. The above strategies aim to be both practical, relevant, and concise. Following this practice manual instructors with or without, formal mindfulness training can consider what the potential impact of setting aside time each class might have on students' contributions and focus during the class. Studies have shown that our brains and neural pathways can adapt and adjust with ongoing meditation, that could result in improved attention and focus. Therefore, this exercise could have the potential to improve MSW student focus in the class content and engagement with the material. When instructors integrate scripts and thoughtfulness to their class structure, they additionally have the potential to empower students, meeting their needs and attain the educational expectations per their course outlines and objectives.

In addition to the above mindfulness and flow practices, instructors might consider these additional 14 strategies that can be explored in separate literature:

^ Exercise One: Mindful finger breathing.

- ^ Exercise Two: Mindful music and reflection.
- ^ Exercise Three: Mindful antra creating.
- ^ Exercise Four: Mindful eating.
- ^ Exercise Five: Mindful communication and listening.
- ^ Exercise Six: Mindful letter writing.
- ^ Exercise Seven: Mindful handprint.
- ^ Exercise Eight: Mindful technology Use.
- ^ Exercise Nine: Mindful guided imagery.
- ^ Exercise Ten: Mindful movement (walking meditation).
- ^ Exercise Eleven: Mindful coloring.
- ^ Exercise Twelve: Mindful stretching.
- ^ Exercise Thirteen: Mindful silence.
- ^ Exercise Fourteen: Mindful gratitude.

The fourth approach for integrating mindfulness skills will be designed for licensed clinicians, and field or task supervisors, so that they can integrate mindfulness practices in their supervision with MSW students. By integrating mindfulness skills into individual supervision, students and supervisors are encouraging more self-awareness and presence in dialogues related to direct client care, outcomes, and best practices. Mindfulness practices encourage students to be in the present moment during these conversations where they are often likely to experience vulnerability and exposure with their supervisors discussing process recordings and practice approaches. With the use of mindfulness, it is likely that we will be more attune to our students' needs and the clients' needs they are reflecting as well. Additionally, if mindfulness skills are

reinforced through the field instruction, independent of the traditional classroom setting in one-on-one supervision, client care has the potential to be enhanced.

In addition to the 14 detailed strategies above, the below might be additional exercises to introduce to students:

^ Exercise One: Mindful communication and listening: beginning with listening and communication in the supervisory relationship.

^ Exercise Two: Mindful letter writing: Encouraging self-reflection in the clinical work and academic experience of MSW students.

^ Exercise Three: Mindful technology use: encouraging the dialogue of how mindfulness in relation to technology can improve the quality of care.

^ Exercise Four: Mindful silence: Understanding the sensations, thoughts, and feelings associated with silence in clinical settings, and discussing the implications for the student's clinical work.

^ Exercise Five: Mindful gratitude: Ending the year by discussing clinical transitions and endings.

The fifth approach for integrating mindfulness and flow skills will be designed for SIFI participants who are supervising MSW students. By introducing these practices, the supervisors will be more adept at responding to their own reactions or assumptions and then model this for their students. Additionally, new supervisors might not yet have the ability to anticipate and respond to the challenges presented by their MSW interns and for that reason, this guide can be used by a SIFI instructor to teach new supervisors ways to integrate mindfulness and flow skills into their supervisory process. Typically, SIFI classes meet anywhere from 4-14 times, and the SIFI instructor can adapt the 14 strategies within the designated number of classes.

In addition to the 14 detailed strategies above, this sequence might be useful in helping SIFI students to supervise their MSW interns with greater awareness and empathy.

^ Introducing mindfulness and flow and the rationale for why these matters for social work practice and field education.

^ Introducing breathing exercises to establish a foundation for SIFI teachers and participants to engage in collaboratively.

^ Engaging in mindful communication for difficult interactions and in order to discuss clinical and administrative challenges that will arise in the field.

INTRODUCTIONS TO FIVE APPROACHES- SCRIPTS AND OUTLINES

Below can be found examples of introductory scripts to implement these strategies into different formats. While five approaches are suggested, please feel encouraged to adapt these above applications outside of the suggested settings.

APPROACH ONE: Orientation:

Script 1: Introduction: Today we are gathering to welcome you, and to establish our community. You'll see over the next few days of orientation we embody the values of social justice, equity, anti-oppressive lenses and student empowerment. During this portion of the orientation, we will participate in several exercises. For some of you, these may be new exercise and for others these may be exercises you have integrated in the past. We are engaging in these exercises to meet the following goals and objectives as they relate to beginning your MSW program:

- 1) Mindfulness practices allow for us to be in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). During this orientation, we ask each of you to be present, and using some of these skills can help us be here together.
- 2) As social workers and current and future change-makers, you will be working with the most vulnerable populations, giving them voice and using your privilege to empower them. Being able to use these skills to manage carrying others' experiences will give you the opportunity to be present and self-preserve. While you'll learn more about this during the MSW program, you can also begin learning some skills now.
- 3) Mindfulness skills do not need to be practiced in isolation. Rather, we can collaboratively use these skills in our new community to establish trust and relationships together as you all begin this new journey.
- 4) We care about equipping you with the theoretical frameworks and clinical training for your success. However, we also want you to have the tools to maneuver through the programs' internships and academic stressors. This is a rigorous program, and by beginning to teach you these skills will set the stage for you to feel capable and equipped to manage these multiple roles as changemakers who are students and interns.

APPROACH TWO: Pass/Fail Four-Session Class:

Script 1: In this four session class, we will be learning and practicing mindfulness together in order to embody social justice, equity, anti-oppressive lenses and student empowerment. During these four courses, we will have an ongoing connection to the theme of wellness. I will help facilitate dialogues, and together we will engage in mindfulness-based exercises. One goal is that

learning to connect with one's emotional experiences in the present moments during the MSW program amidst educational field requirements will prevent social worker burnout and develop self-awareness to further support critical thinking and empathetic capacity towards the clients, communities, and organizations social workers serve.

In each class we will participate in different exercises based on your own comfort level. Similar to the curiosity you're bringing into your MSW program and field internship, you are invited to bring a beginner's mind into this seminar and the practices you will learn. For some of you, these may be new exercises and for others these may be exercises you have integrated in the past. We are engaging in these exercises to meet the following goals and objectives as they relate to beginning your MSW program:

- 1) Mindfulness practices allow for us to be in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). During this orientation, we ask for each of you to be present and using some of these skills can help us be here together.
- 2) As social workers and current and future change-makers, you will be working with the most vulnerable populations and giving them voice and using your privilege to empower them. Being able to use these skills to manage carrying others' experiences have the opportunity to be present and self-preserve. While you'll learn more about this during the MSW program, you can also begin learning some skills now.
- 3) Mindfulness skills do not need to be practiced in isolation. Rather, we can collaboratively use these skills in our new community to establish trust and relationships together as you all begin this new journey.

- 4) Most of all, we care about equipping you with the theoretical frameworks and clinical training but also the tools to maneuver through the programs' internships and academic stressors. This is a rigorous program and beginning by teaching you skills sets the stage for you to feel capable and equipped to manage these multiple roles as changemakers who are students and interns.

APPROACH THREE: Five Mindful Minutes:

In addition to addressing the course goals, objectives and discussion, we will be integrating a mindfulness practice at the beginning of each class. As a group we will be learning about and practicing mindfulness together in order to embody social justice, equity, anti-oppressive lenses and student empowerment. This reflects our university's emphasis on student wellness in a practical way.

I will help facilitate dialogues, and together we will engage in mindfulness-based exercises. One goal is that learning to connect with one's emotional experiences in the present moments during the MSW program amidst educational and field requirements will prevent social worker burnout and develop self-awareness. This will further support critical thinking and empathetic capacity towards the clients, communities, and organizations social workers serve.

Research in neuroplasticity shows that the brain's neuropathways can change when one engages in formal or informal mindfulness practices on a recurring basis (Siegal, 2007). Studies have shown that our brains and neural pathways can adapt and adjust with ongoing meditation. This can help improve our attention and focus, which could have the potential to improve your

focus in the class content and engagement with the material. For these reasons, I will begin each class by leading a brief mindfulness practice.

In each class we will participate in different exercises based on your own comfort level. Similar to the curiosity you're bringing into your MSW program and field internship, you are invited to bring a beginner's mind into this seminar and the practices you will learn. For some of you, these may be new exercises and for others these may be exercises you have integrated in the past. We are engaging in these exercises to meet the following goals and objectives as they relate to beginning your MSW program:

- 1) Mindfulness practices allow for us to be in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). During this orientation, we ask for each of you to be present and using some of these skills can help us be here together.
- 2) As social workers and current and future change-makers, you will be working with the most vulnerable populations and giving them voice and using your privilege to empower them. Being able to use these skills to manage carrying others' experiences have the opportunity to be present and self-preserve. While you'll learn more about this during the MSW program, you can also begin learning some skills now.
- 3) Mindfulness skills do not need to be practiced in isolation. Rather, we can collaboratively use these skills in our new community to establish trust and relationships together as you all begin this new journey.
- 4) Most of all, we care about equipping you with the theoretical frameworks and clinical training but also the tools to maneuver through the programs'

internships and academic stressors. This is a rigorous program and beginning by teaching you skills sets the stage for you to feel capable and equipped to manage these multiple roles as changemakers who are students and interns.

APPROACH FOUR: Supervision

Mindfulness skills can encourage more self-awareness and presence in dialogues between students and supervisors related to direct client care, outcomes, and best practices. Mindfulness practices encourage students to be in the present moment in these conversations where they are often likely to experience vulnerability and exposure with their supervisors discussing process recordings and practice approaches. Using mindfulness skills will make it more likely that we will be more attune to our students' needs and the clients' needs they are reflecting as well. Additionally, if mindfulness skills are reinforced through the field instruction, independent of the traditional classroom setting in one-on-one supervision, client care has the potential to be enhanced.

In each supervision we will participate in different mindfulness exercises based on your own comfort level. Similar to the curiosity you're bringing into your MSW program and field internship, you are invited to bring a beginner's mind into this seminar and the practices you will learn. For some of you, these may be new exercises and for others these may be exercises you have integrated in the past. We are engaging in these exercises to meet the following goals and objectives as they relate to beginning your MSW program:

- 1) Mindfulness practices allow for us to be in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). During this orientation, we ask for each of you to be present and using some of these skills can help us be here together.
- 2) As social workers and current and future change-makers, you will be working with the most vulnerable populations and giving them voice and using your privilege to empower them. Being able to use these skills to manage carrying others' experiences have the opportunity to be present and self-preserve. While you'll learn more about this during the MSW program, you can also begin learning some skills now.
- 3) Mindfulness skills do not need to be practiced in isolation. Rather, we can collaboratively use these skills in our new community to establish trust and relationships together as you all begin this new journey.
- 4) Most of all, we care about equipping you with the theoretical frameworks and clinical training but also the tools to maneuver through the programs' internships and academic stressors. This is a rigorous program and beginning by teaching you skills sets the stage for you to feel capable and equipped to manage these multiple roles as changemakers who are students and interns.

APPROACH FIVE: SIFI Class

When MSW programs offer supervisors an opportunity to develop their own reflective awareness skills, they are better positioned to work with MSW students directly. Field supervisors observe first-hand the array of MSW student experiences and challenges. Equipping

SIFIs with mindfulness and flow strategies can transform the field education experience both for student and supervisor.

In the SIFI courses online or residually, SIFI participants are encouraged to engage in learning flow and mindfulness strategies in each class.

Script: In addition to addressing the course goals, objectives, and discussion, we will be integrating a mindfulness practice at the beginning of each class. We will be learning and practicing mindfulness together in order to embody social justice, equity, anti-oppressive lenses and student empowerment. This reflects our university's emphasis on supervisory wellness as SIFIs are on the front line of working with supervisors in support of MSW students.

I will help facilitate dialogues, and together we will engage in mindfulness-based exercises. One goal is to learn to connect with our students' MSW experiences and the potential for their burnout or overwhelm.

In each SIFI class we will participate in different exercises based on your own comfort level. Similar to the curiosity you're bringing into your MSW program and field internship, you are invited to bring a beginner's mind into this seminar and the practices you will learn. For some of you, these may be new exercises and for others these may be exercises you have integrated in the past. We are engaging in these exercises to meet the following goals and objectives as they relate to supporting the MSW students you supervise.

- 1) Mindfulness practices allow for us to be in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

- 2) As social workers and SIFI supervisors, you are supporting MSW students in order for them to be effective and attuned in their work. Being able to use these skills to manage carrying others' experiences will give you the opportunity to be present and self-preserve in your own work and in supervision.
- 3) Mindfulness skills do not need to be practiced in isolation. Rather, we can collaboratively use these skills in our new community to establish trust and relationships together as you all begin this new journey.
- 4) Most of all, supervisors are encouraged to learn these skills in order to model these self-reflective practices to and with students.

Conclusion:

The vast majority of MSW students struggle to balance personal and work responsibilities with the academic and field instruction requirements of demanding graduate programs in social work. At both their jobs and internships, they often are working with clients facing multiple traumas associated with such things as abuse, mental health, addiction issues, and domestic violence, along with poverty and, in some instances, oppression associated with racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia. These MSWs are often working in under resourced agencies and organizations that, in spite of good intentions, provide limited support to their staff and interns. In addition, many students are themselves dealing with various levels of stress and trauma in their own lives compounded for many by the reality of tremendous debt upon graduation, the pressure to secure a job, and the burden to provide ethical services to clients.

There is little question that MSW students are extremely vulnerable to experiencing emotional exhaustion, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue during their student careers as

well as their professional lives following graduation. The need for practical and evidence-based strategies for MSW students to manage stress and ultimately innovate and enhance creativity to embody the social work values is evident. This Practice Manual for MSW students includes recommendations to address, and ultimately ameliorate, MSW burnout, encourage stress management, and increase reflective awareness. There is an enormous need for applicable, practical and versatile interventions. In order for MSWs to experience longevity and fulfillment in the social work profession, they must be equipped with skills to manage the many responses and responsibilities they carry.

MSWs devote their careers to supporting individuals, families, and communities and unquestionably require significant coping strategies. The value and impact of equipping MSWs with skills to manage the stress associated with their experiences has the potential to be transformative. By utilizing the practice manual as a suggested pathway for administrators, instructors, supervisors, and field educators, MSWs have the potential to address the personal and professional pressures created by the demands of their work. The strategies and adaptations presented in this manual introduce transformative and empowering themes of mindfulness, flow, creativity, expansion, and self-compassion so that MSWs can manage stress without compromising their values or leaving the social work profession altogether.

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