EXPLAINING MINDFULNESS IN POLITICAL ADVOCACY

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. . . a way of being in wise and purposeful relationship with one's experience.

—Jon Kabat-Zinn, foreword, *Mindful Nation UK*

But does it work?

—National Health Service service commissioner, 2015

In 2015 a report called *Mindful Nation UK* (Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group [MAPPG] 2015) was launched in Westminster. Its publication marked the culmination of an APPG inquiry established to investigate the policy potential of mindfulness, an awareness training practice originating in Buddhism, across multiple policy areas. And it had been written by a group of unpaid nonpolitical advocates over an eight-month period. The report cited research that identifies an ongoing mental health crisis in Britain, outlining the character and scale of challenges in health, education, the workplace, and the criminal justice system, as well as the existing evidence for mindfulness-based interventions. It did this by setting out the economic case for preventive mental health support, calling for targeted interventions in each area and funding for further research. As a complement to this, each section of the report contained two to four pages of case studies from people who had benefited from mindfulness. These were written in the first person and were personal stories of the lived impact of mindfulness practice. In short, the efficient collation of econometric and statistical research findings and qualitative accounts in the report presented a troubling picture of a costly mental health crisis, beginning in the health sector and extending through the education system, the criminal justice system, and the workplace. The report recognized and costed problems in society, it identified policy objectives, and it made a case for mindfulness as a scientifically appropriate and economically responsible solution. In effect, mindfulness was presented as both instrumental (it could be used) and goal oriented (it would work).

While the report went on to influence political policy (see the discussion later in this chapter) and, to date, has been downloaded over thirty thousand times, it also received criticism. For example, it was critiqued by two reviewers for promoting mindfulness as "a method that 'works'" (Moloney 2016, 283) in the service of "specific operational objectives" (Hyland 2016, 134). In his review of the report, Terry Hyland argues that the "transformational function" of mindfulness has been "co-opted in order to achieve specific *operational* objectives, and such pragmatic purposes have obscured the links with the foundational moral principles" (2016, 134–135) as mindfulness has "swept virus-like through academia, public life and popular culture" (133). Similarly, Paul Moloney thinks that mindfulness is "at the forefront of an official utilitarian 'mental health' movement, sweeping through the health and social sciences" (2016, 270). He describes the report as blending "a declared humanitarian commitment with a strong fiscal case for psychological treatment—(in this case, 'mindfulness')—as a means of reducing healthcare bills through the prevention of psychological distress, and by getting the disturbed and disabled back to work and off the state sickness benefits roster" (271). And he argues that "mindfulness could never be a treatment or method that 'works' in a relatively straightforward way, like swallowing a medicinal pill" (283).

Analysis of the report divorced from the social processes through which it was created and to which it contributes might render mindfulness as an instrumentalized tool of governance. In this chapter, I focus on how the *Mindful Nation UK* report was drafted in order to provide an ethnographic account of explanatory practices in an era of evidence-based policymaking. An abstract denunciation (or celebration) of "instrumentalization" and "evidence" makes little sense in anthropological terms because the mere fact of instrumentalization tells us very little about the causes and effects of practices of governance in any given context (cf. du Gay 2005). Like many others, I am cautious of the effects of instrumentalization and the utilitarian logics of audit and accountancy measures (see, for example, Hoggett 2005; Miller 2005), and yet, dwelling on the reduction of ethical practices to an instrumentalist agenda misses the opportunity to explore the ways in which such agendas are developed and the creative effects that they generate. What can an ethnographic account of political advocacy reveal about explanatory practices? What kinds of case are compelling? What makes an explanation persuasive? And how is this achieved?

The report was written by volunteer advocates who were motivated by their personal ethical commitment to mindfulness practice and who did not have any previous experience with political advocacy. Mindfulness practitioners were motivated to become political advocates by their conviction that mindfulness is a

personally transformative practice and is foundational for living well. At the same time, in order to make mindfulness intelligible as a policy object, it had to be framed in utilitarian and economic terms. With an analytic focus on the social practices of advocacy, I examine how volunteer advocates resolved the (potentially) uncomfortable relationship between the ethical value that mindfulness held for them and their use of governmental technologies, political discourses, and economic logics. The relationship between the ethopoetic processes associated with self-cultivation and larger economic and political logics raises significant ethnographic questions about the negotiation and coordination of different kinds of knowledge, values, and interests. How do political advocates negotiate conflicting values? How do they integrate their motivating values with their knowledge about action? And what do they think of as the right way to coordinate in order to reach their goal? In what follows, I unpack the practices of knowledge management by which explanations of the policy potential of mindfulness were made persuasive. And I show that in the process of drafting the report, volunteer advocates learned to navigate political technologies and discourses and to negotiate a balance between ethical and economic values.

In a series of papers, Michael Lambek makes a persuasive case for maintaining a clear analytical distinction between the meaning of "value" in ethical and economic practice and cautions against conflating the two (see also Tambiah 1990, 150).[1] Ethical and economic values are incommensurable because they are constituted in distinctly different ways and there are places where they just do not meet; they are "isomorphous and each leaves a remainder" (Lambek 2008b, 139). For Lambek (2008b), ethical value is characterized by the exercise of judgment in ongoing personal practice and is contingent on context and multiple considerations. In contrast, liberal economic value is characterized by its "utility" (Lambek 2008a) and informs concepts of abstract reasoning, economic rationalizing, and bureaucratic justification (Lambek 2000, 310). Ethical values are absolute and incommensurable, expressed as practices of judgment, while economic values are commensurable and relative.[2]

Lambek's distinction helpfully puts a finger on an ethnographic puzzle at the heart of the *Mindful Nation UK* report. Utility theories of value do not account for the experience, value, and effect of learning to relate to oneself mindfully that motivated volunteer advocates to write the report. Volunteers described mindfulness as "a way of being," and their passion for mindfulness came much closer to Lambek's theory of moral judgment and ethical value, because it gave them "the practical means to engage ethically with the present and to anticipate the future by means of practices established and dispositions cultivated in the past" (Lambek 2008a, 125). At the same time, however, political advocacy itself is *necessarily* instrumentalizing; it is an effort to effect change in the world, however

that might be conceived. Furthermore, the presentation of mindfulness in the report and the evidence gathered for its efficacy were clearly informed by a utility theory of value. At its simplest, it is unlikely that mindfulness would be being discussed in Parliament as a "way of being" if it were not for the development of an evidence base for its efficacy. In order to ask, "Does it work?" means and ends must be separated, and ends must be framed as measurable objects, rather than as qualities of acts (virtue) or of actors (character) (Lambek 2008b, 136).

In what follows, I develop an ethnography of explanation by examining the explanatory requirements attached to making a case for mindfulness in a policy context. I ask, by what means is such a case produced, and whom does it serve? How is authority constructed in political advocacy, and through what technologies is it made persuasive? And how do people relate political practices to understandings of ethical life? This chapter is inspired, in part, by a Foucauldian concern with the relationship between forms of political rationality and specific technologies of government, encapsulated in Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality. But whereas governmentality is seen by some as purely an instrument of coercion (e.g., Shore and Wright 2000), I argue that engagement with technologies of government opens up new spaces of reflection and political negotiation (cf. Born 2002). As such, this chapter illustrates the simple point that explanatory practices may be constituted by multiple, and sometimes competing, types of value. I focus on the interrelationship between personal ethics, normative imperatives, and new technologies of government in order to explore the processes of knowledge management that are central to bureaucratic practice and political advocacy. Over the eight months that it took to get the document right, volunteer advocates learned to navigate political technologies in order to be "heard"—that is, to shape mindfulness as a credible policy object. This recursivity, explaining mindfulness and transforming mindfulness in the process, suggests that policy development and advocacy are nonlinear processes, and that they are informed as much by ethical and normative as by epistemological or economic agendas.

Learning Advocacy and Drafting the Report

The volunteer advocates who wrote the *Mindful Nation UK* report were brought together by their enthusiasm for mindfulness. Collectively, they made up a group of highly professional people, including a senior journalist, senior academics, the chief operating officer for an educational trust, the clinical lead for a National

Health Service trust, a director of the Royal Society of Arts, a director from the corporate sector, a chief executive from the probation service, clinical psychologists, and others. Each of them had experience with mindfulness in their respective professional worlds and all of them had committed personal meditation practices, in some cases extending for decades, but none of them had been involved in political advocacy before. Political advocacy and participation in the MAPPG were thrilling. Volunteers were excited that the MAPPG and the drafting of the report were powered by a groundswell of grassroots support by passionate independent practitioners.

Immediately after the eighteen-month MAPPG inquiry process, the volunteers drafted a brief twelve-page interim report, which was launched in Parliament a month later to muted applause. The interim report summarized the findings of the inquiry process and referred to the considerable popularity of mindfulness in the United Kingdom, including widespread media coverage, high demand for mindfulness courses, and the popularity of books and CDs that draw on mindfulness-based interventions. In all, the brief document provided information on the outcomes of the hearings but contained few references to research on mindfulness. And while it referenced concerns about the economic cost of a mental health crisis, it placed emphasis on the possibilities of "transformation" and "wisdom" that the volunteers believed arose through mindfulness practice. As they wrote, "We find that mindfulness is a transformative practice, leading to a deeper understanding of how to respond to situations wisely. We believe that government should widen access to mindfulness training in key public services, where it has the potential to be an effective low-cost intervention with a wide range of benefits" (MAPPG 2015, 1).

The parliamentarians were not happy, and they summoned representatives of the volunteers to Parliament for a meeting. The volunteers reported back to the group that they had (figuratively) had their wrists slapped: the interim report just did not work as an advocacy document. The parliamentarians wanted to see evidence of the scales and costs of the problems to be addressed, as well as the evidence for mindfulness-based interventions in each case, and for all of this information to be embedded in existing political narratives. In addition to the policy challenges presented by mental health, mindfulness also needed to be framed in terms of alternative metrics such as well-being, resilience, and flourishing. That is, problems had to be identified, evidenced, and costed, and mindfulness had to be couched in already-existing political and economic narratives. As Susan, a senior journalist, told me, "They were applying a very New Labour policy framework to it. Everything that we do in terms of social spending has to be absolutely bottomed out in terms of its impact, value for money: 'this is how much you spend, this is how much you save.'"

The parliamentarians' feedback on the interim report reflects a dominant strand of contemporary governmental culture. In an era of evidence-based policymaking, governmental agendas increasingly rest on evidence for efficacy and accountability. In the later decades of the twentieth century, political decision making became increasingly dependent on scientific knowledge and experts, informed by the assumption that the empirical tools of randomized controlled trials, advanced statistical analysis, and social science could improve public policy. Explanatory cases for policy development increasingly rested on scientific evidence for "what works" (Davies, Nutley, and Smith 2000). This "scientization of politics" (Maasen and Lieven 2006, 400) is reflected in the increasing dominance of evidence-based medicine and the demand that clinical practice and increasingly all health policy and practice (and indeed other areas of social policy) be based on systematically reviewed and critically appraised evidence of effectiveness (see Lambert 2005).[3]

The volunteer advocates felt deeply frustrated by the parliamentarians' response. They had intended the interim report to act as a placeholder while they began the big job of drafting the final report. But the comments from the parliamentarians raised important questions about what ought to go into the report and what it was for. What kind of explanation of mindfulness would be persuasive? And could mindfulness be presented as an evidenced technique without detracting from the value that it held for volunteers? Volunteer advocates felt that, while they clearly *could* make an evidenced and economic case for mindfulness-based interventions, such utilitarian terms were ill suited for explaining the ethical value of mindfulness. They felt strongly that econometric justification needed to be balanced by a representation of mindfulness as an ethical practice with the potential to transform society. The challenge of the writing process for the volunteers was to produce an account that struck a balance between the ethical value of reflective self-awareness and the economic value of pragmatic and measurable outcomes.

On the day of the first drafting meeting, I walked to the sandwich shop with Danny, a National Health Service senior executive, and I asked him what he thought success would look like: What would it mean to live in a "mindful nation"? Danny had been practicing meditation for thirteen years. He first came across mindfulness while he was doing a cognitive behavioral therapy training course and started practicing mindfulness on his commute to work. Danny told me that, for him, a mindful nation would be "a society that is more awake, compassionate, more interested in processes than results." Returning to the meeting with our sandwiches, though, he told me that if the report was going to have any political impact, it would need to propose targeted recommendations with specific outcomes that were economically and statistically justified. Recommending

the drafting process after lunch, he said to the group, "As a health professional, I'm a secularized philosopher in a way, and we're asking the question, what is a good life? How do we lead a good life?" Reflecting on the challenge ahead, he noted, "In this thrust to get mindfulness into policy, we need to do it pragmatically but without losing its transformative potential. That's why this is such a difficult one to pin down."

Personal Ethics versus Political Evidence

For volunteer advocates, the value of mindfulness lay in both the experience and effect of developing a relationship with one's own mind: a relationship that they thought resulted from meditation practice. Tom was keen to emphasize this in our discussions over the writing period. Tom worked in education and had been practicing meditation for twenty years. In the pub one evening he told me that, for him, the real value of mindfulness lay in cultivating metacognitive awareness.

"It feels like what it's seeking to create is metacognitive space, isn't it, and that capacity for reflection. In that Viktor Frankl bit . . . you know, about stimulus and response and the gap, and the gap is our power to choose, and in that power to choose is our growth and our freedom. It feels like that capacity for metacognition is the name of the game. It's the name of the game."[4]

In Tom's view, people might learn to relate to themselves with mindful awareness, and this was of value because it led to the freedom to discern a wise response to experience. Others shared this view. They thought that having an ongoing mindful relationship with the mind was valuable, not as a goal of practice but for its own sake. As Danny told me when we met up for tea in the British Library, "I think mindfulness connects us to being human, and being part of the species *sapiens sapiens*. It's sad that we're all going to get old and ill and die, and it requires a huge amount of compassion. And we all have to somehow support each other and be in a community that supports us with that existential reality." For Danny and others, learning to relate to oneself and others with mindful awareness was an important motivator in their voluntary work. For Marjorie, for example, this pointed to a possible societal sea change if mindfulness were widely practiced.

> The thing that's really lighting me up at the moment is the potential for this work to stimulate systemic change and the sense that the human mind is at the basis of everything we do. And if we can, as a society, really get skillful about how we think about and use and cultivate our minds, well, that's going to have an impact across all sectors. So, it's something about just really being explicit on a societal level that this is

important and that it's not just about mindfulness as a tool, but mindfulness is one tool that can support skillful use of the human mind.

Marjorie was a cognitive psychologist who had been practicing mindfulness for twenty-five years. She was motivated to volunteer her time to drafting the report by personal conviction and a sense of shared ethical feeling with other advocates. Similarly, Adam Reed has highlighted the relationship between private moral enthusiasm and an ethics of professionalism in his ethnography of a Scottish animal protection charity (see Reed 2017a, 2017b). Reed (2017a) demonstrates that participation in the charity is based on a convergence of private and organizational values, and the success of the charity is thought to rest on the moral enthusiasm of its staff. Mindfulness advocates were motivated by their personal meditation practice and their professional experience. This drove enormous commitment to the advocacy process, which was at times in tension with the work of advocacy itself.

For many of the volunteers, instrumental explanations of the effects of mindfulness did not capture why it was important to them. For example, the idea that living well might be understood in instrumental terms did not sit well with Teresa, a mental health professional. As she told me, "If we were just farm animals, it would be fine. A lot of NICE [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence] guidance for later life is like that. Look after the 'old person animal.' Exercise, nutrition, warmth. But the things that make people live independently, have quality of life, and look after themselves are feeling valued, feeling they've got something to give, to get up for . . . all those things that are about us as feeling human beings with a sense of self, identity, or purpose.'"

After a meditation practice at the beginning of a drafting meeting, she turned to me and asked, "Really, how are you going to measure this?" Furthermore, volunteers thought that the tension they felt between ethical and economic values was reflected in parliamentarians' engagement with mindfulness as well. As Marjorie told me in a formal interview during the drafting process,

> There's something really interesting about that whole Parliament thing. It's almost as if there were two parallel things happening for those politicians. The reason I think that some of them really got behind this was because of their own personal mindfulness practice. That awakened something in them. You'd need to inquire with them, but I suspect it was something about reconnecting to personal values, personal meaning, a sense of sanity about how we can live our lives. So there's that element, but alongside that there's this other element which they have to buy into about policy development and looking at mindfulness in a

much more instrumental way, about the sorts of things that policymakers have to talk about like cost effectiveness and productivity and presenteeism and efficiency and use of attentional resources. So, they're both true, but I think there's potentially a hazard with majoring on the instrumental aspect of it. Because actually they're not what's going to sustain the reasons for practicing this.

This relationship between ethical commitment and evidence was reflected in the development of the *Mindful Nation UK* report, and volunteer advocates navigated what they saw as the ill fit between the "intangible," ethical nature of mindfulness and the standard categories used to identify policy areas and the measures used to assess outcomes.

Political Narratives

In a privately written anonymous document circulated to the group, the head of a national charity provided volunteers with advice about how to think about their work. In developing the report, volunteers were encouraged to think carefully about *why* mindfulness might be a policy issue. For example, were there specific policy "asks": two or three specific areas in which they hoped to make an impact? They were asked to consider how these might fit in a devolved system environment, in which executive control is increasingly local or regional. The document suggested, "Rather than generating interest that isn't already there, find conversations that are already going on and be part of them. Be part of existing conversations around mental health, wellbeing economics or procedural fairness in criminal justice, for example." Articulating mindfulness in relation to broader political narratives became a central focus of the eight-month writing period. As anthropologist Maia Green argues of her work as a development policy analyst and adviser, in order to explain why policy objectives should receive funding, development categories have to be reordered and worked out so that they can become "thinkable, malleable and ultimately real" (2011, 41). Quite consciously, mindfulness was incorporated into political narratives focused in different ways on the mind, which were supported by alternative metrics. Volunteers worked to explain mindfulness in terms of emerging political narratives about mental health, character, attention, happiness, well-being, and resilience. Each of these buzzwords referenced wider social interests at the time and offered a way of embedding mindfulness in conversations that were already taking place. Drafting the report involved researching these conversations, marshaling scientific evidence on mindfulness, and establishing a relationship between the two.

Such narrative framings were not a fabrication of the advocates—these were already widespread in academic and political literature. For example, "well-being" has emerged as a key economic and development focus (cf. Clark 2002; Crisp and Hooker 2000; Dasgupta 2001; Griffin 1986; Sen 1999). It was incorporated into the United Nations Development Index and informed the development of the metrics of quality- and disability-adjusted life years by the World Health Organization (Cummins 2005). Well-being has comfortably become a standard narrative and metric in political models of prosperity and development. As a political narrative, it enables the marriage of wide-ranging ideas about health, education, opportunity, empowerment, and capability, with broader metrics such as affluence, gender, or the environment. Linked to this are broader issues of "quality of life" (Nussbaum and Sen 1993; Offer 1996), leading some to describe well-being and quality of life as a "global morality dictum" (Strathern 2005). Similarly, "resilience" became a part of mainstream development language in Britain after it was placed "at the heart" of the UK government's *Humanitarian Emergency Response Review* in 2011 (Ashdown 2011, 4). The term *resilience* was developed in the physical sciences to describe the qualities and capacities that enable a community to recover from a catastrophic event (Barrios 2016), focusing on the mechanisms that enable a system to return to equilibrium after a stress or the ability to absorb change (Gordon 1978; Holling 1973, 14). The concept of resilience was soon extended from political interest in infrastructure to a focus on human capacity, becoming a core part of Department for International Development work and education policy. Political focus on resilience is informed by concerns about mental health and psychological vulnerability. Here, *resilience* indicates psychological characteristics that enable individuals to "bounce back" from challenging circumstances and to weather the everyday stresses of life (Ryff et al. 1998).

The value of mindfulness could easily be explained in the language of well-being or resilience. Psychological research suggests that mindfulness practice plays a role in psychological well-being (e.g., Brown and Ryan 2003; Josefsson et al. 2011). Attention and impulse control have been linked to social well-being indicators as wide ranging as criminal record, addiction, ability to maintain committed relationships, and body mass index (cf. Moffitt et al. 2011). Mindfulness is believed to help those who practice it cope with life (from stress, anxiety, and depression to impulse control, emotional regulation, and intellectual flexibility) through the cultivation of psychological resilience (see, for example, Bajaj and Pande 2016; Shapiro, Brown, and Biegel 2007).

As a political narrative for mindfulness, well-being had many advantages. It had formed the basis of previous policy work that had led to important changes in the provision of and training in mental health services in the United Kingdom and had been treated as an object of empirical knowledge informed by value

judgments about the good life (Alexandrova 2017). But as a narrative, well-being was also felt to come with its own challenges. The multifaceted nature of well-being makes it a useful tool in qualitative research but made it hard for the volunteer advocates to develop a clear, workable presentation of its value, its measurement, and its outcomes in relation to mindfulness as a narrative bed for advocacy. For example, in shadow cabinet discussions about mindfulness in the run-up to the 2015 election, it was anticipated that a framework of well-being might be critiqued as being too "fluffy" by opponents on both the right and the left, and that it did not present an economically credible focus for investment. On May 7, a general election saw the Conservatives gain an outright majority, unshackling the conservative government from their unpopular coalition with the Liberal Democrats and confounding the predictions of opinion polls and political analysts alike. In their manifestos, each of the political parties had made a strong commitment to increased provision for mental health, and the Labour Party went further in promising that mental health would be given the same priority as physical health. In the Labour Party manifesto, the party hedged their narrative bets by pledging to introduce mindfulness as a support for young people's well-being *and* resilience (Labour Party 2015, 47).

Volunteers could draw on this existing language to explain the value of mindfulness for parliamentarians, and they were confident that these claims were factually accurate. But they thought that these kinds of explanations, while true and important, did not provide a full representation of mindfulness. Reflecting on the different political narratives through which mindfulness could be explained, Tom commented that, while mindfulness could not be reduced to resilience or well-being, the fact that different narratives could be used to frame it reflected its foundational nature: "That's part of the versatility of narrative and the best articulation is a nuanced understanding that includes this array of character, grit, resilience, that kind of language, and recognizes that we're dealing with complex concepts, because we're talking about a human potential that is multidimensional."

For Susan, narratives such as well-being and resilience did not capture the value of her personal practice.

> It's interesting, isn't it? Because I'm not sure I desperately connect with any of those words if I think about mindfulness and my own practice. Maybe *well-being*, but it's quite a vague term. *Happiness* is an interesting one. Am I any happier through mindfulness? I'm not sure I'd use the word *happy*. Happiness doesn't particularly resonate for what mindfulness does for me. *Resilience* in some ways connects, but something around self-care and resilience rather than just that ability to bounce

> back. Perhaps for me "resilience" in the past has been slightly brutal . . .
> "come on now, get back on the horse." I think mindfulness in a way can
> enhance any of these different things. So, mindfulness might help hap-
> piness or resilience but I'm not sure it *is* resilience, or increased
> happiness.

Nonetheless, she thought that engaging skillfully with political narratives
could point to a larger concern with "living well": "It isn't closing down. In some
moments, resilience is what's needed, in other moments compassionate open-
ness is what's needed. We need all these different qualities to actually navigate
our lives and it's about flexibility and responsiveness and wider perspective tak-
ing, seeing what's most need moment by moment. Yeah. And it's a nice way of
framing it. . . . That's maybe moving it towards a bit of a narrative: what is it to
live well."

Throughout the drafting process, the need to explain mindfulness in terms
of pragmatic outcomes and personal transformation remained present for vol-
unteer advocates. Peter and I took a walk along the canal in East London in the
run-up to the general election of 2015. Peter had a long-term meditation prac-
tice and had been a key figure in the development of a popular meditation app.
The towpath was busy with weekenders enjoying the spring weather, and we
stopped for a cup of tea on a narrow boat that had been refitted as a café. At this
point in the drafting process, volunteers were struggling to find a language that
would explain the value of mindfulness in political circles, to present mindful-
ness in such a way that what members thought of as its profoundly transforma-
tive potential could be understood by others. As he told me, "What's starting to
happen is we're finding words for why it is that much more important, but we're
only just starting to do that. And so, you start by using the language that you
have got like *well-being* or *resilience*. . . . And that's pretty visionary and big and
cross sector, but it's still kind of one set of language, one kind of frame."

Useful Knowledge

The ethical value that mindfulness held for volunteers motivated commitment to
advocacy and helped them maintain belief in the broader political project of pro-
moting mindfulness, but it occupied a subordinate position in the discursive hi-
erarchy of the report itself. What made evidence for mindfulness "useful" in the
report was its ability to be communicated to and consumed by others (Strathern
2006, 75), and this was shaped by an idea of its "users": the parliamentarians. The
success of the document rested on its ability to assess mindfulness, provide

accountability for political decisions that might be made as a result of it, and demonstrate value for money. As Susan told me in an interview after the report had been launched, "What the politicians wanted was credibility. Something you could take to a minister and they would say 'this is really interesting.'" The report needed to show that mindfulness was clearly evidenced and costed for specific and targeted objectives.

For volunteer advocates, then, the presentation of mindfulness through econometric data and the evidence of randomized controlled trials did not feel disingenuous, but it did feel strategic. For example, Peter understood the use of instrumental data as a way of communicating something of the value of mindfulness to people who had never practiced it. He told me, "Trying to describe mindfulness is a bit like trying to describe the taste of an orange. How do you do that? Ok, so it's hard to describe the taste of an orange, but you can point out the benefits of vitamin C. It protects you against colds, improves your skin, that sort of thing. That's sort of what we're doing: describing why it's socially important and the mechanisms it influences. But I think we can do better." Peter understood the measurable effects of practicing mindfulness, such as reduced cognitive reactivity or emotional regulation, as secondary but important benefits of practice. But he focused on these measurable secondary benefits when presenting mindfulness as a policy object. Similarly, Teresa and others thought of mindful awareness as foundational for human flourishing, and they did not think that the value of this could be completely accounted for by the evidence and targeted recommendations that they were compiling in the report. But equally, they did not think of these metrics or the evidence that supported them as misleading or untrue. As Teresa said to me, "That's the language you speak if you want to be part of the conversation."

Over the course of drafting the report, volunteer advocates learned appropriate ways to represent mindfulness that were simultaneously moral and technical (cf. Harper 2000). They acted as knowledge brokers, bringing together information from think tanks, universities, research divisions, and mental health institutes in order to provide ideas and solutions with which policymakers could work. Drafting the report involved months of effort in reading research reports and collating their findings, discussing drafts, and developing the text (cf. Harper 1998). The sheer amount of time and effort that went into getting the document "right" is worth emphasizing. I think of drafting the report as an ongoing social process, which was notable not only for the way in which volunteer advocates learned how to navigate the policy landscape but also for the ways it shaped mindfulness as a policy object. That is, through the writing process, the "parameters of the thinkable" (Green 2011, 42) were shaped. Explanatory practices were not just representational; they contributed to an iterative process that made

it possible for mindfulness advocacy to develop, contributing to and shaping policy discussion in turn. In the service of explanation, evidence was marshaled and managed in order to establish "what is the case" (ontological), to demonstrate "how we know this is the case" (epistemological), and to develop a persuasive argument for "what we think should be done" (normative). In the process, mindfulness *became* a policy object.

The final report made specific and supported recommendations for how mindfulness could be introduced across UK services and institutions. In each policy area, the recommendations spoke to identified policy objectives and were couched in emerging political narratives. Divided into four sections, the report presented a dizzying amount of research. It provided pages of references detailing the nature and extent of problems identified in each area of the inquiry, as well as econometric data on the forecasted cost of these problems to the state. What had begun as a broad inquiry into mindfulness and mental health in the United Kingdom had now become an eighty-page comprehensive summary of much of the academic research on mindfulness at the time. The collation of this research had taken months to achieve and had brought together the orchestrated efforts of a highly professional group of people. Mindfulness was presented as an evidenced civil society recommendation with clear policy potential as a preventive health-care intervention. It was framed as a possible solution to costed social problems, based on academic research that suggests that it "works": statistical, social scientific, and psychological research was marshaled to support the claim that mindfulness is an appropriate and positive intervention.

In addition to this, the report was prefaced with a two-page foreword by Jon Kabat-Zinn, the originator of mindfulness-based stress reduction, and each of the key sections contained two to four pages of case studies from people who had benefited from mindfulness. The volunteers thought that both the foreword and the case studies were essential for the success of the document. Kabat-Zinn wrote that mindfulness "has the potential to add value and new degrees of freedom to living life fully and wisely" (MAPPG 2015, 9). Volunteers saw this representation of mindfulness as a "way of being" that was cultivated "wisely and effectively through practice" as a vital complement to the evidenced recommendations that made up the bulk of the report. In addition to the efficacy of mindfulness as a targeted intervention, it was also, and importantly, represented as "a way of being in wise and purposeful relationship with one's experience, both inwardly and outwardly" (9). The case studies from people with health issues, a schoolgirl, a teacher, workers, a policeman, an ex-offender, and a prisoner drew portraits of people who had learned to "re-connect to life" and find time to "simply be," in some cases in very challenging circumstances (57, 58). Tom told me that, for him, these case studies really explained the value of mindfulness: sharing personal

stories of the lived impact of mindfulness practice powerfully hit home. As he said, "My hunch is that nobody really is inspired for a lifetime of mindfulness practice by randomized controlled trials and 'resilience,' that it's as much a poetic enterprise as a scientific enterprise."

In the animal protection charity that Reed (2017b) studied, personal ethical positions were articulated in political lobbying through the combination of scientific and moral techniques. Although photographic images and video footage of creatures caught in snares did not count as "proper evidence" in political lobbying, campaigners presented both quantified evidence and representations of suffering animals in order to spark empathy in politicians. Similarly, Deborah thought that the case studies in the report were important because they were *more* persuasive than the scientific evidence. As she said to me, "What persuades who? Personal testimony. Because we're human beings, our hearts are engaged first and then our heads and we always think we're persuaded by evidence but actually we seek the evidence once the case has caught us. But once we're persuaded, we need the evidence in order to go off and persuade others. But that gives us the confidence person to person to make it connect."

One effect of the creation of this document had been to shape a representation of mindfulness as an effective and evidenced contribution to policy discussion not only about mental health but also about well-being and resilience. Mindfulness was presented as a way of "supporting wellbeing and resilience across the population as a prevention strategy to keep people well" (MAPPG 2015, 19). This presentation of mindfulness as a preventive health measure was complemented by multiple research findings on the positive effects of mindfulness on cognitive and emotional processes, and a correlation was drawn between these processes and living a well-adjusted and happy life.

The Ethics and Economics of Mindful Nation

I return to Lambek's distinction between ethical and economic value. As mindfulness is incorporated into political discussion, does it take on external values, rather than goods that were previously internal to it? Does a practice that was previously integrated into a total way of life come to be valued for the ends that it effects? One possible response might be that mindfulness is instrumentalized in the process of advocacy and comes to be valued for its goal-oriented efficacy. An alternative response might be that the presentation of mindfulness in utilitarian terms is disingenuous and its *real* value is as an ethical practice. I hope to have shown that neither interpretation is sufficient to account for the motivation

for and ongoing process of political advocacy. My interest in this chapter has been to ethnographically examine the ways in which ethical and economic values (in Lambek's terms) intersect, and the efforts taken in different moments to maintain or reduce the distance between them. That is, rather than assuming that advocacy reduces the meaning of ethical value to a relative economic or utility value, I have asked, what is the ongoing relationship between ethical and economic value in the social process of advocacy? The oil and water of ethical and economic values may be characteristic of contemporary political practice in the United Kingdom more broadly, and the incommensurability between the two may itself be productive. In the context of political advocacy, capacity and utility values are mutually reinforcing: if it were not for the evidence that it "works," mindfulness would not be being discussed as a policy intervention; if the only value mindfulness had were extrinsic to it, advocates would not have sufficient moral conviction to campaign for it.

In accounting for the efforts that volunteer advocates made to draft the *Mindful Nation UK* report, I have sought to move away from a linear representation of political decision making. Rather, political advocacy is revealed to be an ongoing and iterative social process. As Peter told me recently, "Political policies are like sausages: you wouldn't want to see how they get made." Participation in mindfulness advocacy for nonstate enthusiasts was motivated by personal moral conviction, and by marshaling multiple sources of evidence in the report, volunteers sought to contribute to cultural change. Volunteer advocates' efforts to explain the value of mindfulness in political conversations were intended as a political intervention. Advocates did not just describe things in the world but sought to explain to parliamentarians why they mattered and what should be done about them, and this explanation was achieved through the *management* of different kinds of evidence, drawing relationships between them and embedding them in broader political narratives. Volunteers learned to explain the value of mindfulness as a policy object through the collation of quantitative research, econometric data, and the reproduction of what they understood to be prominent and salient discourses of the state. This led to what Thomas Kirsch has referred to as a "mimetic incorporation of bureaucratization" (2008, 237), as volunteer advocates responded to the perceived nature of policy development and political conversation. I argue that, motivated by personal ethics and located in broad normative agendas, engagement with governmental techniques is informed by, coexists with, and leads to multiple forms of rationality and ethics (cf. Born 2002). The report may be thought of as a "living document" (Green 2011, 33), a way of maintaining a place in an evolving conversation about policy, of navigating ongoing disputes and future possibilities. As such, it is alive with the social processes that produced it, and it continues to have a "performative

quality" even though the discursive form that it takes masks this "politics of interaction" (see Green 2011; Riles 2006).

By the end of my fieldwork in 2016, the inquiry process and the report had had relatively little impact on the policy landscape.[5] Nonetheless, the volunteers felt that their work had been a success: mindfulness had been put on the table and had become a staple in conversations about mental health in the United Kingdom. The massive public interest in mindfulness generated around the MAPPG and the *Mindful Nation UK* report was informed by and reflected in its uptake in the British press and in Parliament. Volunteers saw advocating for mindfulness as part of a wider project of societal transformation, which was to be achieved by working with, rather than against, dominant political forms. As Peter told me after the launch, "This is our starter for 10 and then we begin the messy business of ongoing relationship building and policy development over a number of years." It is hard to know what the long-term effects of the *Mindful Nation UK* report will be in political terms, but at the time of the launch, Britain seemed to be on its way to becoming a mindful nation. Ironically (given the labor that went into collating the evidence), this had less to do with the development of specific policy "asks" and more to do with a normalization of debate about mental health and mindfulness that had occurred as a result of the process. At the end of the day, the promotion of the instrumentalized goals and targeted recommendations of the report had, in fact, led to a broad discussion about mental health and mindful awareness as constituent aspects of living well, an outcome that was in alignment with the ethical aspirations that had inspired the process of advocacy in the first place.

NOTES

1. Tambiah warns of similar effects of rationalization when he writes, "Science invades the economy, the economy invades politics, and now politics is alleged to inform us on morality, choice and the values to live by. And there's the rub" (1990, 150).

2. Lambek argues that ethical values are posited in respect of absolute standards (the value of a life), while economic values fluctuate (economic value is negotiable). Furthermore, absolute values cannot be substituted for one another.

3. Critics of evidence-based medicine have argued that a drive toward quantification and statistical analysis risks the loss of sensitivity to context and responsiveness to circumstance or individual patients (see Ecks 2008), with "best evidence" increasingly defined by the data and analysis of randomized controlled trials (Williams and Garner 2002). Contrastively, those in favor of evidence-based medicine respond that preserving clinical autonomy perpetuates bias and personal preference in treatment protocols, thereby putting patients' health at risk. As Lambert (2005: 2640) points out, arguments both for and against evidence-based medicine often claim the moral high ground in representing the greater good.

4. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, is commonly cited as writing, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." Despite the frequent attribution, the quote is not found in Frankl's writings. Frankl wrote a

psychological memoir, *Man's Search for Meaning* ([1959] 2004), in which he reflects on his experiences in Auschwitz, the purpose of life, and courage in the face of difficulty. The quote was attributed to Frankl by Stephen R. Covey in his best-selling self-help book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), and it may be that the attribution entered common usage from there. See O'Toole 2018.

5. Within three years of the launch of the report, a series of actions had been taken that were indirectly linked to it. Two recommendations from the health chapter had been acted on: mindfulness-based cognitive therapy had become a mandated therapy through the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies program, and Health Education England was funding mindfulness-based cognitive therapy training. The Department for Education began funding a research trial on mindfulness and mental health interventions in schools. All of the report's recommendations in criminal justice were acted on. The National Offender Management Service (now Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service) convened a steering group and conducted research on mindfulness among staff.

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