THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

By

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ABSTRACT

Transcendental Meditation (TM) is a popular meditation technique used by an estimated four million people worldwide. The aim of this thesis is to explore the subjective experience and process of individuals who practise TM in order to illuminate the essential meaning of meditating. Prior research on TM, although exhaustive, has neglected the subjective aspects of the technique and this thesis aims to address this paucity, by supplementing the previous research with subjective insight and meaning. Participants were enlisted via the Cape Town TM centre. The sample consisted of ten meditators who practise TM twice daily. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilised. Transcripts were analyzed using IPA, which involved analysing and identifying themes and organising them into master themes, first within and then across transcripts. The results of the thesis present four master themes namely 'Positive change in attitude', 'Altered state of consciousness', 'Meditation as a growth process' and 'Holistic health improvements'. These themes encapsulate the essential meaning contained in the participants' accounts. It was found that TM has been an overall positive and beneficial process for the participants. Participants reported experiencing a distinct state of pure awareness while meditating which led to increased energy and alertness following meditation. In addition, they reported a positive change in attitude towards self and others. Participants described a rich process of growth that deepened over time coupled with a stress release process culminating in higher states of consciousness. Moreover, participants reported holistic improvements in physical, mental and emotional health. These findings were all seen to be interrelated suggesting that TM has a holistic impact on the individual. The results of this thesis were found to corroborate prior research and supplement it with subjective insight into the meditative process, suggesting that TM leads to personal growth, enhanced relationships and improved health. The implication of this study is that TM can be used as a tool to assist individuals in developing their consciousness.

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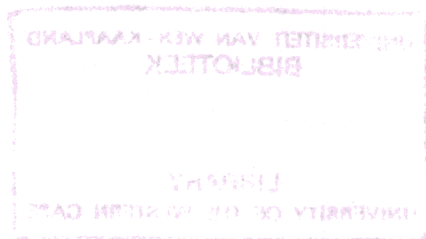
DECLARATION

I declare that "The Subjective Experience of Transcendental Meditation: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis" is my own work, that is has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

David Stein   October 2004

Signed:_____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Transcendental Meditation (TM) is a popular meditation technique that has been taught worldwide since the 1960's. The objective of this thesis is to explore and describe the subjective experience and process of individuals who practise TM, supplementing the prior research with insight into the subjective experience and process of meditating. I believe that this will be relevant to the research on TM, enriching it with subjective insight.

My motivation for this thesis began when I explored the existing research on TM. Numerous benefits and changes have been attributed to its practise, which I found very interesting but somewhat superficial and impersonal. The earlier research seemed to describe the effects of practising TM on the individual but did not give any understanding of how the individual experiences TM or the meaning that it may have for him or her. Having practised TM myself, I had found it to be a rich, subjective experience and I wanted to find out how others experienced TM and explore their process with it. My hope was to gain insight into the subjective aspects of TM, with a particular focus on the process that the meditator undergoes as a result of regular meditation. In short, I wanted to explicate the essential meaning of the meditating process for the individual with a view to supplement the existing research.

1.2   Background to the TM technique

TM was introduced to the world in 1957 by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (Roth, 1994). He is credited with reviving an ancient but lost meditation technique. He began teaching in India and then eventually throughout the world (Roth, 1994). Centres for learning TM are located in all major cities worldwide. It is estimated that there are currently in excess of four million people who have learnt TM around the world and it is one of the most well known forms of meditation to date (Roth, 1994). TM has been described as a simple and effortless mental technique that is practiced for 15-20 minutes twice daily while sitting comfortably with the eyes closed. During the meditation, the individual uses a sound called a mantra. The Sanskrit word 'mantra' is translated to mean 'mind tool' (Wallace, 1993). A mantra is defined as a sound, the effects of which are known (Wallace, 1993). A special sound is chosen by the teacher to suit the individual. The sound does not have any particular meaning (Orme-Johnson, 1987; Robbins & Fisher, 1975). In just a few hours of instruction, any person, regardless of age, education and culture can learn the technique (Frew, 1974; Robbins & Fisher, 1975).

TM does not involve any effort or concentration. During this technique, the individual's awareness settles down and a unique state of deep rest is experienced, which is distinct from the commonly experienced states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep (Roth, 1994). The TM technique is thought to develop the individual's latent creative potential while simultaneously dissolving accumulated stress and fatigue (Wallace, 1993). It has been described as a method to help unfold the full development of consciousness in every individual (Roth, 1994).

1.3   Rationale

The claims made by the TM movement that the practise of TM neutralises stress and develops one's latent potential are impressive. The benefits of TM have been substantiated by many research studies. These studies have mainly focused on providing concrete scientific proof that the TM technique produces identifiable and objective changes in the physiology and that these changes are experienced by every individual who practises the technique (Wallace, 1993). Findings such as changes in breathing, metabolism and heart rate have been widely substantiated by research (Orme-Johnson, 1987, Wallace, 1993).

The reason for this emphasis in the research is that when TM was first introduced to the world, people were sceptical that such a simple technique could bring about such profound results (Wallace, 1993). The TM movement aimed to provide scientific proof that the effects of technique could be objectively researched. This has unfortunately led to a neglect of the study of the subjective aspects of TM. This paucity will be addressed by describing in detail the subjective experience and process of meditators and then comparing these findings with the existing research in the field.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has been selected as the most appropriate methodology to fulfil this aim as it is specifically designed to capture the essential meaning of subjective experiences (Smith, 1999; Willig, 2001). IPA analyses subjective accounts in a systematic and in-depth manner, while other methods, such as

grounded theory, for instance, do not have this aim as the exclusive focus. My interest in Phenomenological research is influenced by the Humanistic/Existential position, which views subjective experience to be of prime intrinsic value and justifies the importance of understanding subjective perception (Rogers, 1961; Smith, 1999).

Phenomenology and IPA in particular, are concerned with how the individual's thoughts, feelings and beliefs mediate their experience to produce meaning (Ellis, 1973; Frankl, 1969; Rogers, 1961; Smith, 1999). The Phenomenological and Humanistic/Existential view is that the individual perceives unique subjective meaning from his or her experience (Ellis, 1973; Frankl, 1959; Rogers, 1961; Smith, 1995). If this is true, then rich subjective accounts provided in this thesis will be of invaluable importance for individuals to gain a rich understanding of the subjective aspects of TM.

The subsequent chapter will describe the theoretical framework guiding this thesis and explore the relevant prior research on TM. This is followed by a description of the IPA method. Thereafter, the findings of this research will be discussed, describing in detail the themes that emerged along with a detailed discussion of the results. The final chapter summarises the key findings and provides recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter explores the previous research that has been conducted on TM. It's aim is to investigate the holistic findings attributed to the practise of TM, namely its impact on cognition, physiology and behaviour. I intend to show that the available research does not give adequate attention and importance to the subjective features of TM. My argument is that these subjective aspects are of pivotal importance if one is to gain a complete and comprehensive understanding of TM. Furthermore, I hope to show that a study of the subjective experience and process of individual's who practise TM will supplement and enrich the previous research findings as well as reveal the importance of conducting further research on these subjective aspects.

Since the central aim of this thesis is to study subjective experience, this chapter will begin with an exploration of the theoretical positions which justify this aim, and which guide this research, namely the Humanistic/Existential perspective. This will be followed by a critical exploration of the earlier studies on TM highlighting the paucity of subjectively based research. I will argue that this paucity contributes to a superficial understanding of TM. A deeper understanding of the subjective aspect will provide added depth to the prior research findings. I make an argument that this research will contribute to the research on TM. It is my intention that this study will advance our understanding of TM and the impact it has on the individual.

2.2   Humanistic/Existential Framework

Humanistic models of personality emphasise the individual's subjective perception (Ellis, 1973; Frankl, 1959, 1969; Rogers, 1951, 1961). Rogers (1961) emphasises the individual's phenomenological field and self-concept, which is the individual's subjective experience and the way that he or she perceives and defines him or her self, respectively (Nelson-Jones, 1982; Rogers, 1961). In contrast, Ellis (1962) emphasises the role of the individual's interpretation of his or her experience in terms of beliefs and cognitions (Dryden, 1990; Ellis, 1962, 1973). Both of these psychologists reveal the central importance of subjective experience; whereas Roger's (1961) focuses on its primary value, Ellis (1962) focuses on how the individual's cognitions and beliefs mediate their experience to create meaning.

Existential psychologists such as Frankl (1969), also view the subjective reality as primary. Frankl's (1959, 1969) conception of Existential psychology includes the premise that the individual's primary purpose is the search for meaning. The individual derives meaning from his or her experience (Frankl, 1969). It is postulated that there is no single objective reality, but rather 'multiple realities' exist as each individual's experience of life is unique and subjective (Angen, 2000; Mouton, 1996; Smith, 1995). Since the subjective experience is primary, the researcher requires a method of trying to understand these 'multiple realities'. Self-psychology writers term the ability to gain a glimpse into the subjective experience of another individual 'vicarious introspection' (Bacal, 1995; Ornstein & Ornstein, 1995). Vicarious introspection refers to the ability to understand another person's experience from his or her perspective. Empathy is the method that is a

prerequisite to vicarious introspection (Bacal, 1995; Ornstein & Ornstein, 1995). Since it is only the individual who has the ability for introspection into his or her subjective experience, it is through empathy that others may hope to hear what that experience is like for the individual. Empathy as a method, involves 'empathic resonance', which entails listening to the individual's subjective account as it experienced by him or her (Ornstein & Ornstein, 1995; Bacal, 1995). The Humanistic/Existential perspective will be useful in terms of guiding this research, as it emphasises the unique human ability to derive meaning, insight and understanding from experience (Ellis, 1973; Frankl, 1969; Rogers, 1961). This is in keeping with my aim, namely to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience and process of meditating.

2.3   Current research findings

2.3.1 Developing an understanding of the TM research

There are to date over 500 studies that have been conducted over the last 40 years on the holistic benefits of TM (Roth, 1994). These studies have been conducted at 210 different universities and research institutions in 27 countries (Wallace, 1993). Articles on TM have appeared in more than 100 scientific journals, making TM the most widely researched meditation technique for developing human potential (Wallace, 1993). During the past four decades, an estimated four million people from all cultures, religions and educational backgrounds worldwide have learnt the TM technique. It has been used in universities and schools in many countries, including the nationally acclaimed CIDA City Campus in Gauteng. The benefits of TM have been measured and reported by medical experts and scientists (Orme-Johnson, 1987; Roth, 2995, Wallace, 1993). It has been

scientifically proven that TM decreases stress and fatigue, increases relaxation and increases one's creativity and productivity (Anderson & Stevens, 1988; Orme-Johnson, 1987; Roth, 2002).

The majority of the research appears to support the TM movement's claim that TM has holistic benefits as is evident in the scientific research studies to be discussed in the following section. For the purpose of this thesis, the previous research on TM has been condensed and categorised into three sections, namely cognition, physiology and behaviour. This systematic categorisation has been used to organise the various studies into a coherent format.

2.3.2 Cognition

TM has been found to enhance performance on intelligence-related measures (Cranson, Orme-Johnson, Gackenbach, Dillbeck, Jones & Alexander, 1991). Students at the Maharishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa, who regularly practiced TM, increased significantly in intelligence (as measured by intelligence-related measures) over a 2-year period, compared to control subjects from another Iowa university (Cranson et al., 1991). This finding corroborates the results of two further studies showing increased IQ scores in Maharishi International University students (Nidich, Nidich & Rainforth, 1986; Dillbeck, Assimakis, Raimondi, Orme-Johnson & Rowe, 1986). These findings correlate with enhanced academic performance in postgraduate student meditators (Kember, 1985), improvements in general intelligence and reaction-time measures

(Cranson, 1989) and enhanced creativity (Jedrczak, Beresford & Clement, 1985). It is noteworthy that no insight is given into how these changes were subjectively experienced by the participants, in particular the participants' understanding of how these changes were brought about.

In addition to enhanced intelligence, TM has been found to develop greater field independence (Dillbeck et al., 1986; Fergusson, 1992; Fergusson, 1993). Field independence has been associated with an increased ability to assimilate and structure experience, cognitive clarity, improved memory and a stable internal frame of reference (Roth, 1994). Field independence indicates the growth of a stable internal frame of reference that makes the individual more self-sufficient and independent of the 'field' of the physical and social environment. These individuals have broader comprehension and improved ability to focus and are better able to see another person's perspective (Roth, 1994). Higher levels of field independence were found in college student meditators as compared with non-meditating students (Fergusson, 1992; Fergusson, 1993). This correlates with findings of increased field independence in child meditators, as compared with children at a Montessori school. (Gelderloos, Lockie & Chuttoorgoon, 1987). This improvement in TM meditators is noteworthy as it was previously thought that these basic perceptual abilities did not improve beyond early adulthood (Gelderloos et al., 1987). I feel that these findings are important as greater field independence will not only improve academic performance, but will reflect a growth in psychological maturity on such indicators as increased internal locus of control and a stable internal frame of reference. My study intends to supplement these findings with in-depth subjective

corroboration. Once again, it would be useful to know exactly how the participants perceive these changes and what meaning it contains for them.

Further studies on perception and memory have been conducted which corroborate the above (Dillbeck, 1982). In a study conducted by Dillbeck (1982), college students practising TM displayed significant improvements in performance over a 2-week period on a perceptual and short-term memory test involving the identification of familiar letter sequences presented rapidly. They were compared with subjects randomly assigned to a routine of twice- daily rest with eyes closed, and with subjects who made no change in their daily routine. The control groups did not make significant improvements in their performance (Dillbeck, 1982). This study corroborates two further studies, which correlated TM with improved perceptual and psycho-motor speed (Jedrczak, 1982) as well as perceptual and conceptual flexibility (Heinstedt, 1990). These studies prove that TM does seem to produce significant improvements in certain cognitive abilities. It would be interesting to understand the relationship between these cognitive improvements and the other findings reported such as increased psychological maturity, which I will explore later in this chapter.

Related to cognition, a number of studies have researched the effect of TM on neurological functioning. In a study undertaken by Beresford and Clements (1983), greater orderliness in brain functioning was observed as EEG coherence increased between and within the cerebral hemispheres during TM (Beresford & Clements, 1983). EEG coherence is a quantitative index of the degree of long-range spatial ordering of the

brain waves (Beresford & Clements, 1983). This correlates with other changes that have been found such as optimisation of neurological functioning during TM (Lyubimov, 1992; Orlova, Petrenko & Lyubimov, 1992). These studies have objectively researched the cognitive changes associated with the TM experience. This has been correlated with a particular state of consciousness termed 'Transcendental Consciousness' (Wallace, 1993). According to the literature, this experience stimulates a more coherent style of neurological functioning and results in more comprehensive, focused and intelligent thinking (Roth, 1994, Wallace, 1993).

The above-mentioned findings all highlight a holistic improvement in cognitive functioning. These studies indicate changes that can be objectively measured but fail to illuminate the subjective aspect of these findings. It would be useful to understand how the individual experiences these changes and what meaning it has for him or her. Having explored the impact of TM on cognitive functioning, the impact of TM on physiology as well as the implications thereof shall now be explored.

2.3.3 *Physiology*

Studies such as those of Dillbeck and Orme-Johnson (1987), Farrel (1980) and Gallois (1984) have uncovered unique physiological functioning during TM. A comparison by meta-analysis found TM produced a significant increase in basal skin resistance compared to eyes-closed rest, indicating profound relaxation (Dillbeck & Orme-Johnson, 1987). Deep rest and relaxation were also indicated by decreases in respiration rates and

11

plasma lactate levels compared to ordinary rest (Dillbeck & Orme-Johnson, 1987). Other

indicators of deep rest during TM included reductions in metabolic rate and heart rate

(Farrel, 1980), decreased breath rate (Gallois, 1984) and lower oxygen consumption

(Garnier, Cazabat, Thébault & Gauge, 1984). However, coupled with deep rest are

indicators of alertness (Gallois, 1984; Splittstoesser, 1983). This state of restful alertness

has been measured and described as unique alpha brain wave activity (Travis, 1990) and

unique combinations of brain waves (Splittstoesser, 1983). These physiological indicators

of deep rest are therefore different from those found to occur during waking, dreaming

and deep sleep (Dillbeck & Orme-Johnson, 1987; Splittstoesser, 1983).

TM has been proven to improve health and lead to more positive health habits (Roth,

1994). In two companies that introduced the TM program, managers and employees who

regularly practiced TM improved significantly in overall physical health, mental well-

being, and vitality when compared to control subjects with similar jobs in the same

companies (Alexander, Swanson, Rainforth, Carlisle, Todd & Oates, 1993). In addition,

TM meditators reported significant reductions in health problems such as headaches and

backaches, improved quality of sleep, and a significant reduction in the use of hard liquor

and cigarettes, compared to personnel in control groups (Alexander et al., 1993). This

corroborates four other studies which found improvements in general physical and mental

well-being in industrial workers (Haratani & Henmi, 1990), improved immune response

to stress (Blassdell, 1990), increased psychological health in students at the Maharishi

International University (Gelderloos, 1987) and increased psychological health in long

term TM meditators (Gelderloos, Hermans, Ahlstrom & Jacoby, 1990).

12

These studies indicate that during the practice of TM, the body gains a unique state of restful alertness. It is important to note that the studies mentioned thus far primarily used objective outcome measures, in that they set out outcome criteria that can be measured objectively by a scientist in a laboratory. These studies provide concrete evidence that TM does in fact produce definite measurable changes in physiological functioning. The importance of these findings is very significant because for the first time, meditation and science have met half way. Before these studies were available, meditation was considered by the Western world to be suited only for spiritually inclined people and thus would not be suited to the modern Western man or woman (Wallace, 1993). It is perhaps due to these sentiments that the TM movement set out to provide hard scientific validation for their technique, hence the focus on the objective aspect of TM (Wallace, 1993). This has led to a proliferation of these types of studies, while research of the subjective aspect of the TM experience has been neglected.

It is the purpose of this thesis to study the subjective aspect and show that it too is of fundamental importance if one wishes to gain a comprehensive understanding of TM. Research has been conducted to assess the impact of the afore-mentioned physiological benefits on the behaviour of the individual. The following section describes the impact of TM on behaviour.

2.3.4 Behaviour

A major finding that has been extensively researched with regard to TM and behaviour is that of increased relaxation and decreased stress (Alexander, Robinson, Orme-Johnson,

Schneider & Walton, 1994). A 3-month study of managers and employees who regularly practiced the TM technique in a manufacturing company and a smaller distribution-sales company showed that TM practitioners displayed more relaxed physiological functioning and reduced tension on the job, when compared to control subjects (Alexander et al., 1993). Broome (1995) conducted a study on stress management in organisational development. He researched the effects of TM on psychological, physiological and organisational variables at the worksite. His findings concluded that test groups showed significant reductions in both psychological and physiological stress symptoms.

The theme that is emerging is that the practice of TM appears to assist in decreasing the wide-ranging psychological, physical and behavioural ill effects of workplace stress (Alexander et al., Broome, 1995). This correlates with other studies that have found TM to be superior compared to other relaxation procedures in terms of normalising the bio-chemical effects of stress (Alexander et al., 1994) and neuroendocrine mechanisms (Walton & Levitsky, 1994). Relaxation here is construed to be behavioural rather than exclusively physiological. It is possible that these two factors, behaviour and physiology are interlinked. As mentioned earlier, it would be important and useful to understand the subjective domain of experience with regard to these improvements in health.

In addition to the decreased stress and health benefits previously mentioned, further benefits were found such as increased productivity. TM has been shown to be highly effective in improving employee productivity and creativity (Orme-Jonsson, 1987; Schmidt-Wilk, 1996). Gustavsson (1990) provides an explanation of this and states that

employee's stress levels decrease during meditation, and this leads to an improved state of consciousness where employees can express more of their latent creative potential. In his review of research on the application of the TM program in the workplace, Schmidt-Wilk (1996), states that regular practice of the technique leads to improved job performance and productivity. Therefore, while Orme-Jonnson (1987) and Gustavsson (1990) concentrate more on improvements in creative potential, Schmidt-Wilk (1996) focuses primarily on TM leading to improvements in job performance and productivity.

TM has been correlated with decreased cigarette, alcohol, and drug abuse (Alexander, Robinson & Rainforth, 1994; Aron & Aron, 1983). A statistical meta-analysis of 198 independent treatment outcomes found that TM produced a significantly larger reduction in tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use than either standard substance abuse treatments (including counselling, pharmacological treatments, relaxation training, and Twelve-step programs) or prevention programs (such as those used to counteract peer-pressure and promote personal development) (Alexander, Robinson & Rainforth, 1994; Aron & Aron, 1983). This corroborates the findings from three other studies which correlate TM with decreased drug and alcohol abuse (Nidich, 1980), decreased cigarette use (Royer, 1994) and decreased substance abuse among TM meditating students, chronic users, and prison inmates (Gelderloos, Walton, Orme-Johnson & Alexander, 1991). These results are certainly impressive, but no understanding was given of why TM produced results that were more effective than the other methods that have been used. Subjective research in this area would explore how the individual experiences this process.

It is proposed that as a result of increased productivity, creativity and decreased stress, TM also contributes to improved relationships (Friend, 1975; Frew, 1974). Previous studies conducted by Frew (1974) and Friend (1975) demonstrate a vast improvement in relationships in the work setting. The study by Jonsson (1975) complements the previous work of Frew (1974) and Friend (1975) who found improvements in job performance, job satisfaction, job stability and relationships with co-workers and supervisors in those practicing TM. Gustavsson (1990) researched the effects of TM on two top management teams. The general trend was that manager's work relations improved significantly. A further discovery was in line with that of the previous study by Frew (1974) namely that the effects of the individuals practicing TM also had a profound effect on co-workers and colleagues who were not practicing the technique.

In relation to the above-mentioned findings, two further constructs have been researched with regard to TM, namely self-actualisation and self-concept. Research has revealed an increase in self-actualisation when practising TM (Alexander, Rainforth & Gelderloos, 1991). Self-actualisation refers to realizing one's inner potential, expressed in every area of life (Wallace, 1993). A statistical meta-analysis of various independent studies indicated that the effect of TM on increasing self-actualisation is markedly greater than that of other forms of meditation and relaxation (Alexander, Rainforth & Gelderloos, 1991). Related to self-actualisation, TM has been found by Turnbull and Norris (1982) to lead to an increased strength of self-concept. Self-concept refers to the individual's perception of his or her 'self' (Turnbull & Norris, 1982). In one study in particular, one month after beginning TM, subjects experienced an improved self-concept in comparison

to before learning the technique (Turnbull & Norris, 1982). Participants developed a more strongly defined self-concept and came to perceive their 'actual self' as significantly closer to their 'ideal self.' No similar changes were observed for matched controls (Turnbull & Norris, 1982). These findings suggest that TM may help an individual to become more aware of his or her 'actual self' and express more of his or her inner potential.

These findings seem to indicate that, through TM, individuals reduce stress, and increase in self-actualisation enabling them to continually grow in effectiveness in their professional and personal life. This thesis will add to this body of research by describing the subjective dimensions of these experiences.

2.4   Conclusion

This literature review has integrated the current research into three areas, namely cognition, physiology and behaviour. The purpose of this categorization is manifold and will now be explained. The first reason for this categorization is to integrate and unify the diversity of research and secondly to show that the current research reveals the profoundly holistic impact of TM in the life of the individual in terms of cognition, physiology and behaviour.

I have argued that the research on TM conducted thus far has been primarily objective and quantitative. While the need for these types of studies has been explained earlier, it has also led to a neglect of the study of the subjective aspect of TM. I have argued that

the previous studies conducted on TM are largely superficial because one does not gain an understanding of how individuals experience the changes brought about by TM. For example, TM has been proven to improve academic performance and reduce stress (Roth, 1994, Wallace, 1993). To gain an in-depth understanding of these findings, one needs to understand how the individual subjectively experiences these phenomena and the meaning it has for him or her. It is proposed that the results of this thesis will enable the reader to gain insight into how the meditator subjectively experiences the changes and processes associated with the above-mentioned findings. A thorough understanding of the subjective aspect of TM should complement the objective findings conducted thus far. The purpose of this thesis is to provide insight into this subjective aspect, which will enrich and supplement the previous research.

In conclusion, this chapter has described the theoretical framework guiding this thesis and reviewed the relevant current literature. It has argued that there is minimal in-depth research on the subjective features of the TM experience, in particular the process that the individual undergoes as a result of meditating. Having reviewed the relevant literature in the area of TM, the following chapter shall discuss the methodology used throughout the course of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology used throughout the thesis with particular reference to IPA. I will explain how IPA will accomplish the aims of this thesis. The procedures used for data collection and analysis will be explained and thereafter reflexivity issues will be addressed.

3.2   Research design

This thesis is informed by the qualitative research paradigm. Its aim is to explore and describe the subjective experience of TM and extrapolate the essential meaning of this experience. Qualitative research is concerned with how the individual constructs his or her reality and gives importance to the way people feel and experience their world (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Such research stems from the epistemological assumption that there is no one universal reality for a social phenomenon, but rather 'multiple realities' that are contingent upon each individual's situation and context (Angen, 2000; Mouton, 1996). The underlying philosophy of qualitative research stems from the interpretive paradigm (Willig, 2001). The interpretive philosophy is an ontology, which holds that the nature of knowledge is subjective (Neuman, 1997). Thus, the qualitative researcher becomes the main instrument for data collection, immersing him or herself in the data and interpreting participant's words and actions in great detail (May, 1993).

The subjective experience of TM is considered the 'subjective reality' of the individual and therefore, it should be understood within this context (Smith, 1999). It is this 'subjective reality' that I intend to describe. It has been argued throughout this thesis that there is a lack of in-depth qualitative research on the subjective experiences of TM, providing only a superficial understanding of TM. The rich subjective accounts provided in this thesis will facilitate a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the meditating process.

3.3   Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Phenomenology is a school of thought that highlights individual's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world (Trochim, 2000). IPA may be defined as 'an attempt to unravel the meanings contained in accounts through a process of interpretive engagement with the texts and transcripts' (Smith, 1999, p. 189). Phenomenological research, which is inherently qualitative in nature, attempts to understand an individual's experience from his or her perspective based on his or her own account of it (Smith, 1999; Willig, 2001). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has been selected over other qualitative methods, as its sole purpose is to unravel the meanings in individual's experiences in a systematic and detailed way (Smith, 1999).

This differs from other similar approaches, as it does not intend to develop an inductively derived theory such as in grounded theory (Willig, 2001). Moreover, it also does not set out to show how certain discourses are used to achieve particular effects in specific contexts as in discourse analysis (Willig, 2001). Whereas a case study approach would be

used to analyse the unique subjective experience of a single case, IPA is specifically designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the quality of individual experience, and to explicate the essential meaning of the phenomenon under investigation (Willig, 2001).

3.4   Participants

I approached the TM centre in Cape Town to select possible participants needed for this thesis. I then telephonically contacted the selected individuals, informed them of the research and ascertained whether they would be willing to participate. I compiled a list of participants who volunteered to assist in the research and who were eager to share their experiences.

The sample consisted of ten participants (three men and seven women) who regularly practised TM, for varying lengths of time. Some participants had been practising TM for more than fifteen years, while others had been practising for only a year. The participants were all South African men and women, ranging from 35 to 85 years of age. The participants were all middle class working citizens.

3.5   Data collection

The semi-structured interview is a popular method used for collecting qualitative data (Grbich, 1999). A semi-structured interview is a conversation, whereby the researcher attempts to cover a loosely defined topic while encouraging the participant to freely express him or her self within the parameters of the specified topic (Smith, 1995). IPA usually works with transcripts of semi-structured interviews. Other forms of data can also

be used, such as diary entries (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). The purpose of the semi-structured interview for this thesis is to generate data that is suitable for phenomenological analysis. As such, the questions used in the semi-structured interview were open-ended and unrestrictive (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). A list of the questions used can be found in Appendix A. This allowed the participants to speak freely about whatever was most important to him or her. The interview took place at a convenient and quiet venue, normally in the participants' home or work environment. Each interview lasted approximately 40-60 minutes. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

My motivation during the data gathering process was to listen to the meditators' experiences in order to gain a better understanding of how individuals subjectively experience and derive meaning from TM. The semi-structured interviews were non-directive in nature and characterised by unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding. Non-directive means letting the participant guide the direction of the interview. Unconditional positive regard refers to an attitude of sensitive respect for the individual subjective experience. During the interviews, I used to open ended questions to allow the participant to begin an exploration of his or her experience. My intention was simply to facilitate this exploration and to make sure that it remained relevant to the thesis topic. I generally let the participant guide the process, if he or she became stuck or did not know how to proceed, I would introduce a theme in order to facilitate the process.

3.6   Data analysis

The procedure of interpretive engagement used in IPA was facilitated by a series of systematic steps whereby the researcher initially identified themes and integrated them into meaningful clusters first within and then across cases (Willig, 2001). Its procedures are quite similar to the subjectivist version of grounded theory with regard to the researcher attempting to immerse him or herself in the data, as well as in the use of coding procedures. IPA takes an idiographic approach in that each transcript is analysed one by one and integrated in later stages of the research process (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). Each individual transcript was analysed in this way and then the master themes were integrated to describe the essential shared meanings of the phenomenon under investigation.

The first step in the analysis according to IPA necessitated reading and re-reading the individual transcript (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). At this stage, I made rough notes reflecting my thoughts and observations in relation to the text. This involved writing themes, ideas and descriptions that emerged as part of the initial engagement with the transcript. The second step of the analytic process involved identifying themes that would describe each section of the text (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). These themes aim to capture the quality of the section of the text that it is trying to describe (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). At this stage, themes were formed which contained the essential meanings of the participants' accounts.

The third stage involved an attempt by the researcher to 'introduce structure into the analysis' (Willig, 2001, p. 55). I listed the themes that emerged in stage two and thought about the relationship between them. Themes that were related were then organised into clusters, since they shared meanings. Other themes became sub-themes at this stage as they described a particular aspect of a theme. This stage also involved moving back and forth between the analysis notes and the transcripts to make sure that the themes describe the essential meaning of the data (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). The main aim of this stage was to introduce structure into the analysis, organising the themes into meaningful clusters (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). The fourth stage in the process involved introducing further structure by compiling a summary table of the organised themes (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). The summary table listed each theme and the page number, line and quote summary to make for easier identification at a later stage.

At this stage, I began either integrating themes into one another or dropping themes that do not reflect the essential meaning of the participant's account (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). The researcher's own interests and orientation influence the decision with regard to which themes need to be rejected or included at this stage (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). My own values as the research thus had a big influence on the data analysis process, which is essentially interpretive.

This whole process, from stage one to four was repeated for each transcript. The final stage involved the integration process. At this stage, the structured themes produced from each transcript needed to be integrated. Willig (2001) posits that the data used in IPA is

usually based on purposive sampling, in that participants are selected according to the criteria relevant to the research question (Willig, 2001). Therefore, the group of participants are homogenous in that they share the experience of a particular phenomenon; in this case, it is TM (Willig, 2001). Therefore, I examined all of the transcripts to gain a generalised understanding of shared or common themes between all of the participants. Smith et al (1999) points out that this process needs to be cyclical, in that emerging integrated themes need to be continually crosschecked with the transcripts to ensure they accurately convey the participants' essential meanings (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). As the integration process continued, common themes began to emerge between transcripts. Eventually master themes emerged which captured the essential meanings of all the participants.

Throughout the integration process, master themes expanded and themes were either integrated into the master themes or dropped until four master themes developed that described the essential meanings contained in participants' accounts. As mentioned earlier, the researcher's own values and worldview play a prominent role in the decision of what and how the final themes are presented. The themes are thus a result of the researcher's interpretive engagement with the texts. Once these master themes had been developed fully, they were once again crosschecked with each transcript to make sure that they represented the shared meaning of all the participants (Smith, 1995; Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999; Willig, 2001).

3.7   Reflexivity

It is important to note that I am a South African male and to acknowledge the impact that I had on the research process. I was frequently asked by the participants whether I also meditate. I explained to them that I had meditated before and I was interested in the subjective experience of meditation. It was clear that they wanted to know more about me. I can only speculate that by me telling them elements of my own experience, it would be easier to share their personal experience with me, as we had this experience in common.

Although, being partial to the technique, I am aware of its benefits and limitations. My own values and worldview have impacted on the research process, even though I held a respectful stance towards the TM technique, while at the same time being open to its critiques.

IPA fully acknowledges and incorporates the researcher's own perspective and involvement in the research process (Smith, 1995). It is realised that it is impossible to gain direct access to the participants' inner world. Thus, the Phenomenological analysis is always an interpretation of someone's experience. This interpretation, by necessity, includes the researcher's own view of the world and the nature of the interaction between researcher and participant (Willig, 2001). My own involvement in the research process made its full impact with regard to data analysis. It is here that I immersed myself in the data and through a process of interpretive engagement, developed the themes presented in

the following chapter. This act is 'interpretive' in nature. As stated above, this is why IPA is an interpretive method of analysis.

3.8   Ethical considerations

My aim was to create a safe and empathic environment for participants, with conditions conducive to the facilitation of the participant's exploration of their experience. Informed consent was gained from each participant. Prior to each interview, the participant was explained the nature of the research and what it entailed. Strict confidentiality was maintained regarding any information acquired during the research process. Participants' confidentiality has been ensured, as their real identity has not been used. The participants were treated with respect and sensitivity.

I followed a policy of no deception in that I had no hidden intentions or motives, nor did I hide any information from the participants. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time in the research process. Finally, the participants were briefed before the interviews by being told the full aims of the thesis and were encouraged to ask any questions that they may have had.

3.9   Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology utilised in this thesis, which was used to gather in-depth accounts of participants' subjective experiences with TM and then to analyse these accounts to bring out the essential meanings shared between the participants. An account of the IPA method was given along with a description of the

participants. This was followed by an elucidation of the method of data collection and

data analysis used. Reflexivity and ethical issues were also discussed. The following

chapter presents the results of the analysis of the ten participants' accounts.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS/INTERPRETATION

4.1   Introduction

The following chapter presents the results of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the interviews with the participants. Four master themes emerged from the analysis, which provide a summative condensed version of the subjective meaning of participants' experience and process. By continually comparing these themes to the previous research, I will show how they add depth and insight to the previous findings on TM. The descriptions of the master themes include quotes from all ten participants so as to present their experience in a way that can be felt and understood by the reader (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999). This is to allow the quality of their experiences to come through with minimal interference or alteration. Under each theme, the general idea is explored followed by individual deviations within the theme and comparisons with previous research.

4.2   Theme 1: Positive change in attitude

Participants described significant changes that occurred in their outlook, attitude and behaviour since learning TM. These changes will be described under two sub themes, namely 'Spirituality' and 'Self and other' respectively.

4.2.1 Spirituality

Participants reported changes in their attitude that they considered to be of a spiritual nature due to the profundity and deep meaning that they attributed to them. This was described by participants as being a sense of wholeness or unity, encapsulated in the quote *"we are all one"*. Participants felt they were more in touch with their essential spiritual nature. *"First and foremost it reminded me that I'm a soul, and this is just a vehicle through which I experience"*. Participants felt that meditating led them in a spiritual direction. *"I've become more spiritual. Ten years ago I'd never think to say that I'm beginning to get more spiritual"*. Furthermore, this spiritual awareness includes the realm of emotion as not separate from the spiritual experience. *"It reminded me that I'm an emotional being"*.

This spiritual dimension was experienced as a deep sense of peace and inner fulfilment. *"Spiritual is the right word. Meditation opens up a new dimension, awareness of things and yourself. It is a good feeling to meditate. The feeling afterwards is fantastic, it's real peace"*. Participants felt that meditation helped them to find a sense of peace, which seems to become lost as one lives in a stressful world. *"You just need to shut out the trivia of ordinary life and just slow down and calm down and use the gifts that we have been given"*. Meditating therefore helped the participants to find a sense of tranquillity when life became too stressful. Along with inner peace, participants also felt they became more aware of things that they were not previously aware of. *"It makes you much more aware, the world becomes a better place, there's another dimension to life"*.

Participants felt that meditation was a way for them to grow spiritually and to get in touch with a deeper meaning in life, a sense of wholeness. *"It becomes a tool to create an awareness about the parts that make up the whole...It reminds me that I'm a representative of something bigger than this illusion that we are living in"*. Participants stated that the spiritual growth that comes about from meditating impacts on all aspects of life. *"Through that oneness, life for me becomes more of an experience and more fun"*. In addition, participants reported that meditation helped them to bring a sense of spirituality into everyday life and that it was maintained. *"Through meditation, I can stay in oneness, or to put it in a better phrase, 'stay in the moment' all of the time"*. It is apparent that the spiritual growth brought about by TM enriched the lives of the participants in that it made their experience of life more fulfilling and meaningful.

Participants also described an increased awareness with regard to the purpose of life, which included a transformation in desires and goals that reflected their inner growth. *"Suddenly you realise that those material things aren't going to solve your happiness, it's inside, not outside. You still have your goals and you still go for it, but not for the same reasons anymore"*. Participants' desires and goals became more magnanimous and altruistic. There was a turning away from selfish behaviour towards behaviour that reflected their growing sense of unity and wholeness. *"Before you were looking for the car and the money and all the rest of it. Afterwards you start looking at different things, you start looking at, at possibly assisting people"*.

Participants felt this growth reflected their newfound inner fulfilment, where the need to search continually for external happiness had been lessened. *"It's something you can't explain, you know where you're going and why you're here, but you seem to get a little better understanding once you start meditating. You start seeing reasons and then it's not so important having to understand everything"*. Participants expressed an increased state of inner fulfilment, whereby they became less reliant on the outside world for their fulfilment. *"I never understood exactly what it was that I was supposed to do. Through TM, suddenly I realised I don't have to change, I'm already perfect"*.

Participants emphasized the practicality of meditation, which facilitated the experience of *"beingness"* that could not be experienced through intellectual understanding alone. *"I knew all of those things intellectually but I never accepted it, until I experienced TM. It is one of the most profound things that have ever happened in my small life, in my small world"*.

These changes in attitude suggest that meditation has a profound impact on a person's life, by providing an experience of a deep peace, which facilitates spiritual growth and personal transformation. Participants stated that this spiritual growth enriched all aspects of their lives, leading to changed goals and desires as they found fulfilment within themselves.

4.2.2 Self and other

The next sub theme to emerge from the participants' accounts was the conception of self and other. Participants' accounts suggested that their experience of self and other changed dramatically after practising TM.

Participants felt that after meditation, they were able to interact with the world in a more positive way. *"When you have actually done your meditation and you go out into the world, everything is heightened. I am calmer, everything is more positive".* Furthermore, participants described how the relaxation and stress release brought about by meditating impacted on their behaviour throughout the day. Participants felt calmer and this had a direct impact on their interpersonal relationships. *"I'm much calmer, gentler on the children and more understanding, more patient".* .This sense of calmness in turn led to reduced stress in daily life. *"I didn't get rattled by things. Driving in the traffic didn't bother me...I don't judge others. I can see another person's point of view more easily. I think it is definitely easier to relate to people".* Participants described a change in their self and in their attitude, that more conducive to living harmoniously with others and their surroundings. *"I think I'm a more understanding person, more open. Everything is more positive now because of it".*

Participants felt that they continued to experience stress, but that their meditation mediated this, allowing them to tolerate their negative emotional states more easily. *"Even though I might feel dreadful, it is always the thought beyond that, that having meditated, knowing that there is something beyond the material here and now".*

Participants indicated that meditation allowed them to gain a broader perspective on life that helped them remain balanced in their outlook. *"I still feel saddened by things that are going on, but there's some sort of stronger insight into things. I'm more intuitive too because of that"*.

Since meditating, participants experienced a sense of inner freedom, which allowed them to cope much more effectively with daily life. *"Meditating made such an unbelievable difference in the way I cope, the way that I see things and the way that I respond. Things which would have gotten on my nerves, just don't and I think that I'm much more patient with my children"*. Participants noticed that they were able to relate to others more easily and that their relationships improved after meditating. *"I had my mother staying here for Christmas and I really noticed the difference. She would irritate me and I would be able to not get upset and so everything is much easier"*. Participants felt that they were able to react to others in a way that was more self-enhancing. *"When my husband says things to me which I do not agree with, I can just say 'I don't agree.' Whereas before I would have been offended and angry"*.

Participants stated that things which used to affect them, did not bother them as much anymore, *"Conflicts build up everyday, but you become calmer. People sense this and they see they don't get a reaction and thus, their reaction changes"*. Participants were adamant that what had changed was not the world but themselves, and they were aware that as they changed, their experience of the world changed. *"I think that what has changed is not my job so much as me"*. Participants felt that if they changed, others

would react to this change. *"If you're in a situation that bothers you, just change yourself, the way you deal with it, the things you put in and then everything changes"*.

Participants expressed that meditating increased their sensitivity so that instead of reacting on impulse as they would in the past, they were now able to react to things in a more constructive manner. *"Before I used to react and now it's unusual for me to do so. If people cut in front of me in the road, it's their issue, whereas before I used to get excited about it, hoot or flash my lights"*. Participants felt that meditating helped them to deal with emotions such as anger and sadness, which would otherwise have a negative impact on their happiness. *"It calms things down and controls certain aspects that can get out of hand from time to time"*. Participants could use meditation whenever they felt overwhelmed, so it became a great help when needed. *"Meditation was a shield, for keeping you physically in balance and mentally balanced and also for being able to help people in a more meaningful way"*.

It is not that the participants were immune to emotions such as anger, sadness or anxiety, but the majority experienced a notable decrease in there frequency and that they would be able to recover their positive emotional state quicker than they previously could. *"It's kind of water off a duck's back, I don't have that anxiety. I still get anxious, irritated and angry but it's not as severe as it used to be"*.

Participants described this change as first occurring within themselves, whereby their internal stress had been replaced by a sense of peace. When participants felt

overwhelmed by stress, they would retreat somewhere private and meditate for a while to regain their composure. After meditating, they would be able to deal with the problem in a more constructive and positive way. *"If someone did something that I was irritated with or that made me angry at the office, I often used to say things that I would regret at a later stage. I would come upstairs, sit down, for ten minutes take a break and try and get a bit of TM done. This allowed me to think about things and how I wanted to react"*.

One participant had a contrasting experience from the other participants in that she felt an increase in aggression as a result of practising meditation. Yet, this was not necessarily construed as negative, as the participant felt that she could more easily express her irritation, whereas before she would not. *"I sometimes feel I am more aggressive. Not assertive, but aggressive, short on a fuse now, than I imagined I was before. It has affected me in my interactions in situations where ordinarily I might have bitten my tongue. I now actually reflect the irritation, but it doesn't linger"*. For this participant, she also felt that meditation and helped her to become more determined, which she construed in a positive way. *"There are contradictions, as on some levels, I have become more determined, more aggressive, but it's momentary"*.

However, for all the participants, meditation seemed to have a beneficial influence. Participants felt that they were able to overcome negative feeling towards others more quickly *"You seem to think more clearly about things and people. You can throw back something that is useful, instead of just being annoyed by it"*. They noted a profound shift towards becoming more relaxed in their attitude towards self and others. *"At meetings I*

would be very vociferous and argue points heavily, but lately it is not an issue anymore. I

try to look at it from a different perspective".

Participants reported a decrease in worry and anxiety. *"You've got a totally different outlook on life, where there aren't so many hassles anymore. I now take it quieter, go slower and accept that whatever is going to happen, will, so why panic and worry".* Participants' priorities changed in that they became more interested in others and sensitive to the feelings of others. *"I think more about the needs of other people, I'd like to be able to do a lot more for the less fortunate".*

Participants indicated that others noticed a change in them, and sensed that they seemed happier and calmer. *"I get comments like 'oh you look pretty this morning' or 'you've lost weight', but I know I haven't lost weight. It's not as if I'm looking particularly pretty this morning, but maybe It's just the composure or look on your face, you're not looking so anxious or stressed out".* All of the participants described an increased sense of clarity. *"My ability to look down the road in terms of the business, where I'm wanting it to go and what I'm wanting to achieve has improved".*

4.2.3 Comparison with the previous research

The above-mentioned results corroborate the previous holistic research findings on TM. Participants' experience of deep peace correlates with Alexander et al's (1994) finding of increased relaxation and reduced stress. Participants reported TM to reduce the stress and strain of modern living and their sense of peace gained from meditation could be

construed as increased relaxation and reduced stress. TM was therefore useful as a stress management technique confirming Broome's (1995) finding that TM acts as a successful stress moderator in the workplace and Alexander et al's (1993) finding that TM moderates the ill effects of workplace stress.

Participants' attitudinal shifts also correlate well with the prior finding of increased self-actualisation in meditators (Alexander, Rainforth & Gelderloos, 1991). The participants' accounts suggest that they became more positively self-actualised through meditating in that they felt they were growing in a positive direction, which was self-enhancing. Alexander et al's (1994) findings linked the growth of consciousness experienced through meditating, with the successful navigation of the developmental stages used in modern psychology (Alexander, Heaton & Chandler, 1994). They found that TM meditators' growth potential and experience extended beyond the developmental stages of modern psychology. Participants' accounts suggest that they experienced an increased sense of wholeness and spiritual development that seems to suggest significantly higher levels of self-actualisation. These findings correlate with the prior finding of 'increased strength of self concept' attributed to TM (Turnbull & Norris, 1982). Meditators were found to be more in touch with their actual self as opposed to a 'false self' (Turnbull & Norris, 1982) Participants' accounts suggest that they felt in touch with their most authentic self and their highest self-aspirations.

These results also corroborate Chandler's (1990) finding of increased ego-development and improved affective functioning. Participants were increasingly able to moderate their

negative emotions and were more in touch with an inner sense of wisdom, which they were able to express in their interactions with others. In addition, participants were more oriented towards positive values than prior to meditating. This confirms the findings of Ahlstrom's (1991) study where he found increased psychological health in meditators and that they were oriented towards positive values (Ahlstrom, 1991). The results of this study also correlate with those of Gelderloos (1987), who found increased psychological health, intrinsic spirituality, and well-being amongst meditators. A further corroborative study is that of Jedrczak et al. (1982), where they discovered increased well-being, greater sensitivity to other's feelings and greater responsiveness in meditators. All participants noted an improved ability to relate to others, as they were more tolerant and positive. These results correlate with Hanley and Spates' (1978) study where it was found that meditators were more tolerant of others and more sociable.

These findings also support the research of Handmacher (1978), who found a decrease in the need for acceptance from others and increased affection towards others amongst TM meditators. This study also correlates with Holeman and Seiler's (1979) finding of meditators improved perception of others as well as Hahn and Whalen's (1974) study highlighting decreased hostility towards others. Participants' accounts suggest a holistic improvement in their ability to engage with others in a more mutually satisfying and constructive manner. Nidich and Nidich (1983) found moral growth in meditators and this aspect is confirmed by the participants' accounts in this study as they reported becoming more sensitive to the needs of others.

Participant's newfound peace and relaxation spilled over into other areas of their lives, enriching their relationships with spouses, family and colleagues. This finding correlates with the previous finding by Frew (1974) and Friend (1975) of improved relationships in the workplace. This theme echoes Jonsson's (1975) study where he found that meditators experienced improved job satisfaction and job stability. Furthermore, participants' accounts correlate with Willis's (1974) finding of improved self-concept and better adjustment among meditators (Willis, 1974). The same can be said for Throll and Throll's (1977) finding of a calmer, more confident and friendly attitude among meditators and finally Throll's (1978) finding of an increased capacity for warm interpersonal relations among meditators.

4.3   Theme 2: Altered state of consciousness

The second master theme to emerge from the analysis is that of an altered state of consciousness and extraordinary perceptions and experiences reported by the participants. Altered experiences included those that occurred both during and outside of meditation.

4.3.1 During meditation

Participants described an altered state of consciousness that occurred while meditating. This experience was perceived as very different from the normal waking state of consciousness. *"I had a distinct experience of separating from myself, almost being outside myself. As I realised I was moving. I was actually having an out of body experience"*. Participants also experienced a feeling of unity and wholeness during

meditation. *"I felt totally at one with everything and I had no sense of time and no sense of being separated, but just aware, totally aware of being and nothing else".* Participants felt this experience to be a state of pure awareness that seemed to transcend time and space. *"At times I would disappear. I know I wasn't asleep, but I wasn't there either, there was a sense of time having passed by and being totally unaware of where I was".*

Participants described this distinct condition as a state of *"beingness"*. *"You are in an altered state of consciousness, you aren't aware of it until you return from it".* Participants felt this state occurring while meditating was extraordinary because it could be described as a state of complete undivided awareness, yet it is a state of awareness where one is unaware of anything in particular. *"You are aware of everything, whilst you are aware of nothing".*

Two participants had unique experiences while meditating. *"I saw lots of colours, rather like a kaleidoscope. Moving colours, contracting, expanding colour, receding and coming forward again, then pinpoints of white light that would come from far away and then get expanding".* Another participant described an isolated experience whereby he felt that he was in two places simultaneously. *"The last couple of months I am able to be in two places at once. I'll be aware of my surroundings and at the same time, I would be aware of where you are".*

4.3.2   Outside meditation

Participants felt that their consciousness was altered after meditation. They described this state of consciousness as an elevated and alert state. *"When you first do it, you go on a high. You have tremendous rushes where all your experiences are heightened"*. Participants also felt unusually refreshed after meditating, in that meditation would refresh them after a tiring day. *"I try not to do it before going to bed, because sometimes it has the opposite effect in that you really feel awake and refreshed and you know, you're awake for another three, four hours afterward"*. Participants reported that they could do more because of this extra energy. *"If I was going out for the evening and I was very tired, then I would meditate before we went out. Afterwards you feel like a new person again"*. However, if participants had difficultly sleeping, then meditating for a short while would help them to fall asleep. *"If I wake up during the night, I often go and meditate, to get me to fall asleep again. I always do feel a lot more relaxed"*.

4.3.3   Comparison with the previous research

Many participants described "peak experiences" or experiences of "unity". The participants' accounts correlate with the prior research findings that TM meditators experience a sense of unity in meditation (Gelderloos & Beto, 1989). Gelderloos and Beto (1989) found the experience of this transcendental consciousness to be a frequent experience among meditators. The participants' accounts confirm this as all of the participants described a similar experience of this unique state of awareness. These findings confirm Alexander et al's (1987) discovery that transcendental consciousness is a unique state of consciousness distinct from waking, dreaming and deep sleep. However,

participants did not experience this altered state of consciousness every time they meditated, but intermittently.

The findings of this research also corroborate an interesting prior finding by Alexander et al (1984) that correlated the experience of transcendental consciousness with an improved self-concept and increased self-actualisation (Alexander, Alexander, Boyer & Jedrczak, 1984). Alexander et al (1989) also correlated this unique state of consciousness with greater neurophysiological efficiency and increased energy and creativity. Participants' accounts suggest that the experience of this altered state of consciousness while meditating is profoundly enriching and growth promoting. Gelderloos et al's (1990) findings linked the physiological indicators of transcendental consciousness with increased psychological health.

Participants did not describe specific physiological changes, but rather the subjective experience of transcendental consciousness, characterised by a sense of elevated mood as well as increased energy after meditation. It is proposed that there is a link between this experience and participants' increased self-actualisation, since participants reported feeling elevated, highly energized and creative immediately following their meditation. Weis's (1975) findings depict an immediate increase in alertness, an elevated mood, decreased fatigue and an increased readiness for activity immediately following the practise of TM. In addition, Torber, Metersdorf and Desel (1976) found an increase in elation following meditation and these findings are corroborated by the results of this study.

Dillbeck (1988)'s research review concluded that all levels of subjective life are enriched from the experience of pure consciousness through TM (Dillbeck, 1988). Participants' accounts confirm this and suggest that the experience of pure awareness enhances their subjective experience of life. Weis (1975) also found a decrease in aggression and irritation in meditators immediately following their meditation. This finding is correlated with the participants' accounts as they reported using meditation as a way to control their irritability and to immediately calm their emotional levels. These findings suggest that the altered state of consciousness experienced while meditating leads to increased alertness and energy.

4.4   Theme 3: Meditation as a growth Process

4.4.1   Stress release

Participants described certain experiences they had while meditating as a stress release process. Isolated events occurring while meditating, such as discomfort or unusual sensations were seen as stress releasing and were interpreted as a healing process for both body and mind. One participant described an experience where she felt that she was falling. *"It is that kind of 'whoops' feeling in one's tummy and it was palpable and it left me with an energised experience at the time and also afterwards"*. Another participant experienced tightness in her throat while meditating, which she interpreted as a re-experiencing of a drowning sensation, which she had in her youth. Her meditation teacher explained to her that this was the body's way of releasing the stress of that previous traumatic experience. Since this stress release process, this participant has less fear of water. *"I don't swim, because of my near drowning experience and I can't override the*

messages that keep passing through my head when I swim underwater. But now I don't experience the panic in water that I did before".

Participants described pains that sometimes occurred during meditation, particularly in areas where they had a previous injury or tension. One participant described her experience of the stress release process. *"I had many problems with my back, especially the upper part of my back, which is still intermittent. Now it's loose, so it definitely releases it".* Participants reported that this release of stress and tension was a gradual process. They added that following this process, they feel transformed. *"I had a lot of very strong physical reactions from the beginning and I often felt like a muscle would spasm when I was meditating. I do not have any of that anymore. In a way, it is quite boring now, very ordinary".*

Participants expressed that often it can feel like the stress is intensifying just as it is releasing. One participant had a prior problem with fatigue and felt unusually tired in the first few weeks of meditating. As she carried on with her meditation, her fatigue gradually diminished. *"I could feel the tiredness getting less. I get tired but now it is not the same. It's now just a superficial tired because I've had a long day, it's not that deep fatigue I had before learning meditation".* Participants felt that this stress release process was a worthwhile endeavour that takes its own time, as it is a process. *"My teacher said it takes two to three years to clear the majority of your stress that you carry through your life. I'm feeling like I'm halfway there and definitely feeling different".*

4.4.2 Development of consciousness

The section illuminates the growth process that participants underwent as a result of meditating over time. Participants described a rich growth of consciousness that occurred. This growth was reported to be cyclical, in that it feels like much change is occurring for a while and then suddenly there is a sensation that nothing is happening. Participants described this experience as being the difference between deep and surface meditations, in that at times meditation is not deep but rather on a surface level. However, meditations can also feel very deep. Participants indicated that these cycles reflected patterns of growth, whereby surface stresses were being released and once this process was completed, the meditator can reach a deeper level of consciousness. *"I'm happy to cope with the lag at this stage, because of all the surface stuff that I possibly have to work through before I reach the deeper levels of consciousness. It's all kind of the trivial stuff and I'm happy to wait"*.

Participants described the changes that occurred in their consciousness after meditating regularly over time. They reported becoming more sensitive and appreciative of subtler aspects of life. *"You move into a finer level, one does not feel much different, but perception is different and the more you meditate, the more this happens"*. Participants also reported that over time, their meditations became less intense, in that they had fewer strong reactions. Meditation became more of a subtle and refined process. *"It has gotten more ordinary, in the beginning it's more of a satisfying thing. Now there is not that very strong reaction. I'm sure there's probably as much going on, but it's not as obvious"*.

Participants reported that with time, it became easier to achieve an altered state of consciousness. *"It feels that I get into it (meditation) more quickly. Sometimes, I just start to meditate and I am already in that special place"*. Participants reported that meditating becomes a part of ones routine and that they need to continue to practise it to keep up their sense of accelerated progress. *"I'm pretty diligent and it almost got to the point where I can't not meditate"*.

Participants emphasised that this growth process was worthwhile continuing. *"I am convinced that the practise of it is important for me to continue. When I go through a rough patch with it, I always try to remind myself that this is part of a process"*. Participants reported that there are times when meditation is not as satisfying as it used to be or it ceases to be enjoyable. *"I'm still seeking the return of that wonderful experience, it's at times disappointing, and I feel that maybe I'm not doing it right"*. It was unanimously felt that the meditation experience was a constantly changing process, whereby no two meditations are exactly the same. *"One tends to go through ups and downs. Sometimes nothing happens and you just go quiet and it's a very nice feeling. I think it's the beta waves and the normal waves and then you get the other waves"*. Participants described a plateau effect where they felt like they were not making any more progress. *"I did hit a plateau, but what you gain is never really lost. That initial sort of high that you go on is never completely gone"*.

Participants stated that at times it felt like nothing was happening at all. *"Suddenly I stopped noticing anything at all and I found at that point, I started getting bored"*. They

however, felt that this developing process would continue as long as they continued to meditate regularly. *"So whether it goes in waves or whether it's different, if you keep constant with it, you will see it goes in constant waves"*. Participants reported times when they would have an isolated meditation experience that would be deeply relaxing and enjoyable. These experiences came in waves, and were not constant. *"It is just very nice being there and rarely do you get to this place, where it is very pleasant"*.

Participants felt that the developmental process of meditation was a long and gradual journey. *"I think it is a very long process, people have been doing it for 20, 30 years and I'm only on three years. I've got a long time to go, so I can only see that possibly, many years in the future it definitely will get better"*. They stated that the longer one meditates, the more advanced one becomes as a meditator. *"I think the more you meditate, the deeper you can get. You get more experienced and understand it better"*.

4.4.3   Comparison with the previous research

This section describes the rich growth process that participants underwent while meditating. They felt that this process was cyclical as more stress was released and deeper states of consciousness were reached. Participants' accounts of their growth process supplement prior research findings. Alexander et al (1994) studied advanced human development occurring as a result of meditation. It was concluded that the higher states of consciousness brought about through the practise of meditation met all the criteria of advanced human development, as proposed by modern psychology. This

current research suggests that meditators undergo an accelerated growth process as they develop towards higher states of consciousness.

A further study by Alexander et al (1990) implied that the higher states of consciousness brought about by meditating fulfils the aspiration of developmental psychology, namely to comprehend the full development of human life. Participants' accounts confirm that meditators do experience an enhanced growth process, which they feel is a continuous process that takes many years of practise. Furthermore, a paper by Alexander and Boyer (1989) outlines the sequential unfolding of higher states of consciousness, and reviews the scientific research indicating the development of these higher states through TM. Alexander and Boyer (1989) describe a similar process as reported by the participants of this study, whereby the development of consciousness takes place sequentially over time through the regular and sustained practise of meditating, as more and more stress is released. The participants' accounts in this study thus confirm the findings of Alexander and Boyer (1989).

This theme suggests that meditators experience a stress release process that occurs in cycles or waves, which enables one to reach deeper states of consciousness. This process repeats itself in waves that rise, plateau and then recede. No prior research was found that confirmed this study's findings of the intricate stress release process. However, such an understanding of this process is well known in the TM movement (Roth, 1994, Wallace, 1993). Both Roth (1994) and Wallace (1993) describe a similar process in their informational books on TM. However, in-depth research on this aspect is lacking.

The fact that participants reported that this growth process spanned many years of practise, is confirmed by prior research such as Nidich et al's (1983) finding of a correlation between length of time meditating and increased EEG alpha coherence. Their findings suggest that the longer one meditates the more advanced and developed one becomes.

4.5   Theme 4: Holistic health improvements

Participants' accounts describe holistic improvements in health. They stated that their practise of TM led to health benefits that were physical, mental and emotional. Meditation was reported to improve many areas of their life, for example, sleeping and decreased tension. Participants felt that each benefit worked synergistically to produce a holistic effect. One participant reported that her asthma had improved, a benefit that she also attributes to getting better sleep at night. *"My asthma improved and I think my concentration levels are a lot better. I'm sure it is as a result of meditation and sleeping better"*. Moreover, participants reported an improved level of concentration, which helped them to accomplish more in the day and hence increase their productivity. *"Maybe I was just procrastinating, or maybe I wasn't concentrating properly, but things that used to take me three or four days now take a day's good work and I'm finished"*.

Participants emphasised that their stress levels were reduced as a result of their increased productivity. One participant described how he could read far more as a result of improved concentration. *"Previously when I wanted to read, I used to fall asleep. Now, I can read a hundred times faster than I used to be able to!"* Participants reported that

meditating gave them the emotional benefit of calmness. *"You can have patches of depression, which you can control and improve or dispel with TM. Then they're not 'down periods' anymore"*. Participants also reported that meditating helped them to heal on an emotional level. *"If you've had any spells of heartache, it heals that. It has a healing effect on any relationships that have taken strain"*.

4.5.1 Comparison with the previous research

The holistic health benefits reported by participants include improved concentration, clearer thinking, improved emotional and mental health, increased energy and improved sleep. These benefits correlate with the previous literature in the field. The current research findings confirm the findings of Ankelsaria and King (1993) who found improved health in police officers who meditated and Jedrczak et al's (1988) research highlighting improved health in TM meditators. Participants' accounts of improved sleep patterns confirm Alexander et al's (1993) findings of decreased insomnia and reduced fatigue.

The emotional benefits reported by participants corroborate the findings of Alexander et al (1989) of improved mental and emotional health in elderly meditators. Baer, Nidich and Abrams (1981) found that TM led to improved concentration in schoolchildren who meditated, and linked improved concentration to greater enjoyment of school and improved academic performance, while Kember (1985) found improved academic performance for graduate students who meditated.

The current research confirms these findings as participants reported that their improved concentration led to increased productivity with reduced stress and thus greater enjoyment. Participants' accounts also correlate with Jedrczak et al's (1982) finding of improved ability to focus on tasks in meditators. These results therefore lend weight to previous findings, namely improved health, increased concentration and focus, increased relaxation and decreased stress and fatigue.

4.6   Discussion: relationship between the themes

The relationship between the aforementioned themes will now be explored. It is noteworthy that the master themes presented in this chapter are interrelated. They are not isolated but rather each theme enriches the reader's understanding of each other theme.

Participants reported an altered state of consciousness that was experienced while meditating. This state of pure awareness, in turn led to a feeling of increased energy and alertness after meditating. This finding is related to the positive changes that participants reported in their attitude towards self and others. Alexander et al (1984) specifically correlated the experience of transcendental consciousness with an improved self-concept, increased self-actualisation and a greater internal locus of control. The results of this study correlate with these findings as the participants experienced a link between these two aspects.

A study by Nidich et al (1982) further confirms this relationship as they found a correlation between high frontal EEG coherence and pro-social behaviour. The results of

this study lend extra weight to this finding, linking transcendental consciousness with an increased pro-social attitude and pro-social behaviour. A correlation between transcendental consciousness and enhanced moral reasoning has been researched (Orme Johnson, Wallace, Dillbeck, Alexander & ball (1981). The results of this current research suggest that there too is a link between the experience of pure awareness and increased moral awareness. Research by Alexander and Boyer (1989) linked the development of higher states of consciousness with increased self-actualisation and accelerated psychological development. The participants in this study correlated the advancement of consciousness with increased self-actualisation and inner and outer fulfilment, confirming Alexander and Boyer's (1989) findings. It is also noteworthy that Alexander et al (1984) also correlated the experience of transcendental consciousness with reduced symptoms of stress, such as anxiety and aggression.

Participants associated the release of stress with their positive attitudinal changes, suggesting that as their stress levels were reduced, their attitude was transformed and their relationships with others were enhanced. In line with this, participants noted a decrease in anxiety, irritability and aggression. A study by Gelderloos (1990) study correlated the experience of transcendental consciousness with improved physical and mental health. The results of this current research suggest that there is a relationship between these two aspects, as participants reported an improvement in health, which was linked to the experience of an altered state of consciousness during meditation. Furthermore, this study suggests a link between the release of stress through meditation and improvements in health. This confirms the findings of numerous studies showing that

stress release is linked with improved physical and mental health (Alexander, Langer, Newman & Chandler, 1989; Haratani & Henmi, 1990).

4.7 Conclusion

The participants' subjective experiences have been described and presented as four master themes, namely 'Positive change in attitude', 'Altered state of consciousness', 'Meditation as a growth process' and 'Holistic health improvements'.

These themes were chosen because they describe the essential meanings shared by the participants. Direct quotes from participants' accounts were incorporated to provide qualitative descriptions of these themes. The themes were compared to the previous research on TM and were found to corroborate the majority of the previous research findings. The following chapter summarises the key findings of this thesis. It further explores their implication for the research on TM. Lastly, recommendations for future research will be addressed.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by summarising the key research findings. This is followed by the implications of this thesis and recommendations for future research. The aim of this thesis was to delve into the personal experiences of individuals who practise TM. It has been argued throughout this thesis that the subjective aspect of TM is of primary significance and that its study is essential if one is to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of TM. The previous research findings can be seen as somewhat superficial in that they reveal the effects of TM, but do not address the subjective meaning that TM has for the individual or how the individual subjectively experiences the changes brought about by the technique.

5.2   Summary of the key findings

A phenomenological analysis was used to describe the essential meaning of the meditators' experience. These findings were presented as four master themes namely, 'Positive change in attitude', 'altered state of consciousness', 'Meditation as a growth process' and 'Holistic health improvements'. Participants described changes in attitude that were decidedly positive and they found that their interpersonal relations improved. Participants reported an increased ability to connect with people. These positive changes were linked to the unique state of consciousness experienced while meditating. They described this experience as a state of pure awareness, distinct from the states of waking,

dreaming and sleeping. Participants also conveyed a sense of increased alertness, energy and elevated mood that followed meditation.

They emphasised that following meditation, they usually felt a decrease in fatigue, accompanied by a heightened sense of alertness. Participants also reported holistic health improvements such as improved concentration, improved focus and increased productivity. These benefits were linked to the altered state of consciousness brought about through meditation. It was reported that meditation helped participants to heal on an emotional level, as it had a calming influence and assisted them in controlling intense emotions such as anxiety, sadness and anger. Participants expressed that regular meditation became a rich process of growth. The longer they meditated, the more they felt that their consciousness was developing, as their perception became increasingly refined and they began to appreciate the finer aspects of life.

This growth entailed a stress release process whereby deeper levels of stress would be released over time. This stress release process was said to occur in waves, as it became possible to experience deeper levels of consciousness as layers of stress fell away. The findings of this study corroborate the prior research, as the results of this current research suggest that TM leads to a unique state of consciousness, which in turn leads to greater alertness and energy. Furthermore, the results of this study provide insight into the subjective experience of the growth process that meditators undergo. It too illuminates the subjective experience of stress release. The results of this study corroborate the prior research suggesting that TM leads to improved health and increased self-actualisation. It

was found in this study that the participants experienced improved physical, mental and emotional health, along with a more positive attitude towards themselves and others.

The findings of this study are relevant as they supplement the previous research on TM, providing the subjective aspect of the TM experience. It is suggested that individuals can grow and change significantly over time by practising a meditation technique such as TM. These findings therefore reveal that the TM technique can be used to compliment other forms of intervention when considering how to facilitate each individual's growth. In summary, the subjective accounts of the participants were found to corroborate and supplement the objective findings from the previous research on TM, thereby adding new insight and meaning.

5.3   Implications and recommendations for future research

The thesis results corroborate the previous research by providing rich, in-depth descriptions of how these previous findings are subjectively experienced. This has important implications for the research on TM. This study shows that individuals undergo a process of growth that is accompanied by a stress release process. This study sheds light on this growth, revealing it to be a dynamic and cyclical process. It is recommended that future research further explores this growth process to provide additional understanding and insight.

5.4   Limitations of the research

I acknowledge that my own perceptions and views have influenced the research process, in particular the data analysis. It is noteworthy that due to this research being qualitative in nature, my own inferences and interpretations as the researcher, are an essential part of this thesis. IPA acknowledges this 'interpretative' aspect, as an inevitable part of the research endeavour and it is not seen as a limitation.

5.5   Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis describes the subjective experience of individuals who practise TM. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the relevant data, which was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Results of the participants' experiences consisted of four master themes, which contained the essential, shared meanings of participants' accounts. The results suggest that TM is a subjectively rewarding and positive process that boosts personal growth, enhances interpersonal relationships and improves general health. The findings of this thesis strongly corroborate the previous research and literature on the TM technique, in that participants described an overall beneficial and positive experience from the meditation process, a finding common to the majority of the research on the technique. This thesis suggests that TM can be used as a tool to help the individual develop and grow holistically.

It is the subjective aspect, which has enabled the researcher to make such deductions, without which, only an objective, superficial knowledge would prevail. A purely

objective stance lacks the rich in-depth descriptions provided by the essential subjective

element, emphasized throughout this thesis.

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APPENDIX A

Interview schedule / Themes

1. Tell me about your experience with TM?

2. Tell me about the impact of TM in your life?

3. How has TM impacted on your life, experience, outlook, attitude, and perception?

4. How has TM affected your outlook, on your self?

5. What has it been like for you as a meditator?

6. Can you give me any examples of what you are talking about?

7. What has it been like for you practising TM?

8. Are there any other examples you can give me?