



Exploring Nondual Awareness: Understanding the Experience and Factors Contributing to Its Development

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Exploring Nondual Awareness: Understanding the Experience and Factors Contributing to Its
Development

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Abstract

Nondual awareness is a state of awareness focusing on a sense of unity and oneness and free from subject-object fragmentation. Existing research on this type of awareness reveals that it can be cultivated through various meditative, mindful or psychedelic practices and can have significant effects on one's mental wellbeing. However, studies on this topic are still very limited. There is little understanding on the direct experience of nondual awareness phenomenologically. Similarly, existing studies lack exploration on nondual awareness's effects on one's sense of self.

In this study, I conducted a mixed method research study exploring the direct experience and contributing factors of nondual awareness. Through analyzing quantitative survey data, I discovered a significant positive correlation between one's level of nondual awareness and self-compassion. And through qualitative interviews, key themes around the experience of nondual awareness are discovered such as initial disorientation, peace and oneness, shedding control and agency, and improved mental wellbeing. These study results help provide deeper clarity into the nature and experience of nondual awareness and its potential effects on mental wellbeing. By understanding its positive influence on self-compassion, peace and happiness and getting qualitative insights on how it can be induced through meditation and various life experiences, we can expand future studies and potentially develop new forms of mental health treatment/meditation programs.

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Chapter I.

Research Problem

Nondual awareness is understood as a state of awareness free of subject-object fragmentation (Josipovic, 2021). To be free of the subject-object fragmentation means to experience a state of awareness characterized by a sense of oneness, and to not have one's experience be defined and limited by the distinction between self or what is "me" and other or what is "not me." In the state of nondual awareness, the distinction between self and other is experienced and understood as a conceptual overlay that is so common and pervasive that we take it as real rather than as conceptual categories, and this limits us from the powerful experiences of awareness that underlie these concepts—experiences of unity or oneness characterized as radiant and blissful (Josipovic, 2021). Studies show nondual awareness can be induced through meditation practices (Dor-Ziderman et al., 2013; Dambrun, 2016) and psychedelics (Tempone-Wiltshire & Matthews, 2024). This awareness is also associated with reductions in negative or mixed emotions (Dor-Ziderman et al., 2013). However, empirical studies of the experience of developing nondual awareness and its potential long-term effects are limited.¹

Since meditation is considered to be a reliable way of inducing nondual awareness and this type of awareness is reported to result in important changes in the experience and conceptual understanding of the self, I would like to investigate the following questions:

1. Does meditation influence the likelihood of experiencing states of nondual awareness?

¹ Review of current literature does not show much data on the direct experience or effect of nondual awareness

2. How does nondual awareness affect one's sense of self? 3. How do people understand their experience of nondual awareness?

To explore these questions, this study includes two kinds of research: quantitative research into the relationship between nondual awareness, various meditation traditions and self-compassion,² and qualitative research into individual's subjective experience of nondual awareness.

Definition of Terms

Nondual Awareness: Josipovic (2021) defined nondual awareness as a type of self-awareness free of subject-object fragmentation. It dissolves the duality boundaries between self and other and focuses on bringing a sense of unity and oneness between the self and its surroundings. It is also referred to as a sense of selflessness. I'm especially interested in the subjective experience of this awareness and what it means to have a more fluid and less rigid sense of self and what benefits and challenges it brings.

Meditation: It is the training carried out by an individual through techniques so that attention and awareness can be focused in such a manner so that a state of mental clarity and emotional calm and stability is achieved. According to various traditions, there can be several possible meditation traditions and training such as mindfulness-based meditation (Jones, 2022), loving-kindness meditation (Lippelt et al., 2014), open-awareness meditation (Davidson & Kaszniak, 2015; Brown et al., 2022). To satisfy the purpose of this study and gain better understanding of what could induce nondual

² In the methods section that follows, the choice of an assessment of self-compassion will be presented and justified in light of other potential measures not chosen.

awareness, I have included participants across a range of types of meditation so long as they meet the study criteria of being more than 18 years old and having a consistent and regular practice.

Self-Compassion: Self-compassion involves the ability to treat oneself with kindness, care, and understanding when experiences of pain, failure, or difficulties arise; it involves a lack of self-criticism or judgment. It assumes that one realizes that suffering is part of the shared human experience and can thus view personal struggles with a mindset of noticing, accepting, and responding compassionately to one's own imperfections. Birnie et al. (2010) categorized three fundamental components of self-compassion: 1. Showing kindness and understanding to oneself instead of harsh judgments, 2. Understanding one's experience is universal and part of the larger humanity instead of separating and isolating, 3. Not overidentifying with painful thoughts and feelings.

Chapter II.

Background of the Problem

Nondual awareness is a type of conscious awareness that dissolves the duality boundary between self and others. It challenges the notion of absolute subject and object and creates a sense of unity and oneness. Many meditations, mindfulness practices, and contemplative traditions have techniques for cultivating nondual awareness. Practitioners of these techniques aim to enter an enhanced state of consciousness where the constructed notion of subject-object duality falls away, and nondual awareness reveals itself to be explicitly present. Advaita Vedanta practice uses self-enquiry to induce nondual awareness (Dahl et al., 2015) by contemplating questions such as “who am I?” and directing attention to awareness regardless of its content. This means paying attention to the state of awareness underlying any contents of the mind. Open awareness meditation is also said to lead to nondual awareness. Dzogchen, as a tradition in Tibetan Buddhism, focuses on “open presence,” which also redirects focus toward nondual awareness in the present moment (Dahl et al., 2015). Deroche and Sheehy (2022) investigated into Jigme Lingpa’s teaching in Meta-Awareness and nondual meditation within Dzogchen Buddhism. Jigme Lingpa (1730–1798) differentiates between effort-dependent conditioned mindfulness and Dzogchen mindfulness which integrates effortlessly with awareness itself known as rigpa. Traditional meditation practices employ mindfulness to manage attention and remove distractions while Dzogchen reveals that genuine mindfulness exists within us as an innate self-awareness. The writings “Ocean of Qualities and Cudgel to Discern the Real” assert that awakening occurs through direct natural awareness instead of stepwise progression. Jigme Lingpa combines traditional

step-by-step progression with instantaneous realization to present meditation practices that defy the notion of effortful deep awareness by advocating for an inherent and spontaneous mindfulness that transcends thoughts and concepts, which is nondual meditation. Zen Buddhist tradition of “just sitting” (Loori & Leighton, 2002) is a similar way of focusing on “being aware” instead of on the content of experience as a technique for cultivating nondual awareness. Empirical evidence from these contemplative practices provides helpful insight on how to access nondual awareness. What all of these techniques have in common is using meditation to focus attention away from the content of the mind to the underlying ability to be more broadly aware of the nature of the mind itself.

After researching Asian nondual contemplative traditions, Josipovic (2021) proposed an insightful list of the qualities of nondual awareness: being or presence, emptiness, nonduality, luminosity or radiance, non-conceptual reflexivity, bliss, singularity or unity, no self/self, boundless, timeless spaciousness, and ecstatic pleasure. Josipovic (2021) also defines this nondual awareness as “consciousness as such”, which refers to a state of consciousness without dualistic discrimination and categorization of its content. For example, when an individual walks into a room full of people, his/her consciousness is aware of the events happening in the room but has not made any judgment or categorization between “me” and “other”; that is the stage of nondual awareness. For most people this sense of awareness passes without being noticed because they are habituated to focus on the discriminating process of the mind.

Nondual awareness is not isolated from its content and is not an indeterminate unknowing substrate (Josipovic, 2021). This means nondual awareness coexists with the

contents within the awareness. It just does not differentiate between self and other, but it knows what is going on. It is the ground from which all cognition, concepts, and conceptual distinctions arise (Laukkonen & Slagter, 2021). It encompasses all experience and is aware of the dualistic contents of the cognitive processes that discriminate and categorize, but is not limited to or bounded by them in a way that creates a sense of separation between self and other. The study by Josipovic and Miskovic (2020) highlighted the distinction between nondual awareness and Minimal Phenomenal Experiences (MPEs). Minimal Phenomenal Experiences describe states of consciousness which contain little to no mental content that occur during deep meditation or transitions to sleep and during sensory deprivation. Several researchers believe Minimal Phenomenal Experiences represent core consciousness without additional content. The authors propose that Nondual Awareness (NDA) represents consciousness-as-such because it exists independently of mental content levels and arousal states. In MPEs the emphasis lies on diminished content whereas nondual awareness concerns itself with awareness that exists independently of both content and arousal.

The effects of cultivating nondual awareness are mainly discussed within contemporary traditions or meditation programs. Only a few academic studies investigate its practical impacts, but the results are promising. Research found nondual awareness able to reduce negative and mixed emotions (Dor-Ziderman et al., 2013). Another study also shows nondual awareness helps with increasing one's sense of happiness and decreasing anxiety (Dambrun, 2016). Startle response has also been reported to be reduced via nondual meditation practice (Antonova et al., 2015). I will dive deeper into these promising results in the following sections. It's worth noting that the term

“nondual” is not very commonly used in studies, but it holds the same conceptual idea as the term “selfless,” which is used in a few studies.

For example, Dor-Ziderman et al. (2013) conducted neurocognitive studies on the “selfless” mode of awareness developed through long-term Buddhist meditation practice. Twelve long-term mindfulness meditators were recruited for the study, and both magnetoencephalogram (MEG) recordings and first-person descriptions were collected. During the study, participants were instructed to enter different states of awareness: narrative self-awareness (what characterizes “I”), minimal self-awareness (experience what’s happening to “me” in the present moment) and selfless mode of awareness (experience what’s happening at the present moment without “me” at the center). MEG recordings were conducted during the process. And the participants were asked to fill out retrospective reports (including an emotional content report) and introspective reports afterwards. The MEG results showed that selfless awareness is linked to weakened beta-band activity in the right inferior parietal lobule. This demonstrated the possibility of beta band mediating the subjective “self as I” conscious experience. Results of the emotional content report indicated that compared to narrative self-awareness, selfless awareness also displayed less intense negative and mixed (both positive and negative) emotions.

Body scan meditations focusing on relaxing the sense of bodily boundaries to induce selflessness (nondual) awareness have also been shown to decrease anxiety and increases happiness levels (Dambrun, 2016). This research is based on the Self-Centered/Selflessness Happiness Model (SSHM) proposed by Dambrun and Ricard (2011). This model predicts that an increase in degree of selflessness will increase one’s optimal emotional state (Dambrun, 2016). The experiments conducted by Dambrun

(2016) assigned 27 participants for body scan meditation and 26 participants as the control group. The participants were given guided meditation audios, and the control group was asked to lie down and rest in silence and not fall asleep. Afterward, both groups were given a questionnaire to assess their happiness and anxiety levels. Participants after body scan meditation were reported to have a reduction in the salience of body boundaries and higher happiness levels compared to the control group. It is important to note that the research session is conducted one-time only and lacks evidence of enduring effects and replicable results.

Open presence is a form of nondual meditation (Dahl et al., 2015) used in many contemplative traditions such as Zen Buddhism and Dzogchen. Lutz et al. also calls this “open monitoring” meditation (Lutz et al., 2008). Instead of concentrating on a specific object, practitioners of open-presence meditation focus on keeping their attention open and receptive to all that is happening within their awareness. A study by Antonova et al. (2015) on startle response and meditation also reported an association between open-presence meditation and reduced startle response. During the study, 12 participants were instructed to conduct open presence meditation, and their acoustic startle reflex was measured by electromyography (EMG) afterward. The result showed a decrease in sensory habituation and startle response which means the participants stayed more aware and present and less likely to lapse into an inattentive state of “autopilot” or get startled. This study shows the potential of nondual awareness for mediating fear or anxiety response.

A recent study by Gutierrez, Dorais, and Niles (2024) points out nondual awareness’s moderating role in fostering empathy among counselors through centering

meditation. The authors conducted a four-week randomized controlled trial involving 73 counseling graduate students from various universities across the United States. Participants were randomized to either an active condition of twice-daily centering meditation or a waitlist control. The centering meditation practices in the intervention group were done based on set guidelines according to Keating's 2002 approach: one selects a sacred or anchoring word, sits in stillness, and, when the mind wanders, refocuses attention to the word in a non-judgmental manner. In the study, the outcomes at baseline, mid-intervention, and post-intervention were measured by the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire TEQ. Nondual awareness was measured using the Nondual Awareness Dimensional Assessment-Trait. The results indicated that, among treatment participants, empathy had significantly increased as compared to the controls. The overall effect was moderated by nondual bliss, described as feelings of love, awe, deep interconnectedness. However, the other dimension of nonduality, self-transcendence, was not directly related to empathy; this therefore suggests that it is the affective constituent of nonduality which bears more importance in promoting empathic growth. This study adds to the growing body of literature relating to contemplative practices and their impacts on psychological well-being. These data suggest that nondual awareness, promoted through centering meditation, may enhance not only counselor resilience and reduce burnout but also promote interpersonal connections and therapeutic effectiveness in practice. Given the ever-increasing significance attributed to mindfulness and contemplative practices during clinical training, this study makes a case for including nondual states, particularly those related to positive affect, in the development of a counselor.

Van Lente's study (2024) focuses on the importance of nondual awareness, alternatively referred to as oneness, as one of the mechanisms through which mindfulness promotes well-being. This research not only employs a three-study framework to present the actual definition of nondual awareness (oneness) but it also proposes a concrete way to measure and empirically test the role of nondual awareness (oneness) in mediating the effects of mindfulness. The first study conducted was the collective intelligence method with 41 experienced meditators ($N = 41$) to identify the core components of nondual awareness. A group discussion was conducted during which participants provided qualitative insights about their lived experiences of nondual awareness, which led to the identification of seven core themes: foundational orientations (e.g., wholeness, unboundedness), action orientation (e.g., free-flowing responsiveness), self-perception (e.g., ego-dissolution), other-perception (e.g., interconnectedness), deconditioning and embodiment (e.g., clarity, aliveness), emotions (e.g., inner peace), and interpersonal emotions (e.g., open-heartedness). The meta-analysis of these themes reveals that the most influential factor was the foundational orientations, such as the sense of boundlessness, which caused the strongest effect on other aspects of nondual awareness (oneness).

Based on this, Study 2 set out to create a reliable psychometric instrument that was the Oneness Experience Scale (OES)—to gauge the quantum of oneness (nondual) experiences scientifically. A wide-scale survey ($N=500$) was conducted which included both factor analysis and validation to generate a refined scale that is the final version of the scale, containing 21 unique factors across 84 items relevant to the phenomenon of oneness, respectively. The OES was shown to have high internal reliability and to be

strongly correlated with other mindfulness measures and the well-being measures. In addition, people who score higher on the scale also showed significant relationships with increased mindfulness, emotional regulation, and self-transcendence which are positive characteristics of nondual experience.

The third study used structural equation modeling (SEM) with a big sample (N=800) to check the hypothesis on whether nondual awareness (oneness) is a mediating variable between mindfulness and well-being. The participants were administered standardized tests on mindfulness, nondual awareness (oneness), and well-being, and it was found that indeed nondual awareness (oneness) is a significant mediating factor for the relationship between mindfulness and well-being. To be specific, the direct pathways from mindfulness to well-being were found to be less strong when the effect of egolessness was taken into account, which indicates the fact that a large portion of positive impact by mindfulness is exerted through nondual awareness. In particular, among several types of nondual awareness, ego-dissolution and openness were the main factors that accounted for the increase in well-being. Besides, the research also revealed that long-term meditators had a stronger, more stable sense of nondual awareness, which suggests that the sense of nondual awareness is deepened through regular mindfulness practice.

Among the many significant effects of nondual awareness is the erasure of self-referential processing that results in a person's perception changing from the ego-centered view to one of the interconnectedness with the world. The traditional psychological models place the sense of self in the center of personal identity, therefore, dictating how a person experiences things and how one reacts emotionally. Yet, nondual awareness

returns the ball to the court of the self and with a direct relationship between the mind and body, gives space to the idea of the self as a cognitive construction that meditators can somehow deconstruct. Neurological correlates provide the proof of this assertion, indicating that long-term meditators have reduced activation in the medial prefrontal cortex, which is the central area of the default mode network that is in charge of self-referential thought processes (Brewer et al., 2011). This entails that through the practices of mindfulness, individuals identify less with their personal stories, thus, they are able to experience a decrease in ego-centric processing. They consequently become kinder, more altruistic, connected to others and develop a well-being that is not contingent on external achievements or life circumstances. Through the transcendence of the self-centered view, nondual awareness fosters a more or less permanent feeling of joy and completeness, which is far deeper and more stable than it would be otherwise.

It is worth noting nondual awareness and the loss of sense of self does not only provide positive effects. Research has found the dissolution of self can also be associated with adverse experiences. Lindahl et al. (2017) conducted a mixed-methods study on Western Buddhist meditation practitioners focusing on challenging experiences. Their interview data shows the most common change in the practitioners' sense of self is a change in self-other or self-world boundaries. Practitioners reported boundary dissolving and merging with the environment. Their experiences range from blissful to neutral to fear and terror. "Loss of sense of ownership", "loss of sense of agency" (the loss of a "doer" of action) and "loss of the sense of basic self" are commonly described. For practitioners who had negative experiences, they felt a sense of minimal self "such that they felt like they no longer existed at all or that they would disappear or be invisible to

others”. Because these meditative experiences that result in a dissolution of a sense of self can be disorienting and troubling, it may be valuable for teachers of advanced meditation techniques to incorporate appropriate set, setting, and supports parallel to those in guided psychedelic journeys.

Chapter III.

Research Design

This study utilizes exploratory mixed methods design and is conducted in two phases. Phase one is a quantitative study investigating the relationship between meditation, nondual awareness and self-compassion. Phase two is a qualitative study interviewing 3 participants on their subjective experience around nondual awareness and its effects.

Methods

For the quantitative part of my study, I have selected 3 assessment instruments for exploring the relationship between meditation, nondual awareness, and self-compassion.

For nondual awareness I selected the Nondual Awareness Dimensional Assessment (NADA), created by Hanley et al. (2018). This is a self-report assessment tool for evaluating nondual awareness. The main dimensions of nondual awareness assessed by NADA are bliss and self-transcendence. There are two types of assessments based on NADA: Nondual Awareness Dimensional Assessment–Trait (NADA-T), which focuses on evaluating the enduring general level of nondual awareness in an individual, and Nondual Awareness Dimensional Assessment–State (NADA-S), which focuses on assessing the moment-to-moment nondual awareness state immediately after mindfulness practices. The completed NADA-T consists of 13 items: four for relational self-transcendence, four for annihilational self-transcendence, 1 item for the noetic quality of nondual awareness, and four bliss items (Hanley et al., 2018). Hanley et al. (2018) used bifactor exploratory structural equation modeling and validated that these NADA

dimensions as compatible with the nondual awareness construct. The efficacy of this assessment is also validated by examining its convergent validity compared to the theoretically aligned constructs with nondual awareness.

To explore how nondual awareness affects one's sense of self, I selected the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS). Self-compassion is the ability to treat oneself with empathy, kindness and understanding. By evaluating one's level of self-compassion, we are able to evaluate their perceptions towards themselves, such as how they view their own humanity, their level of acceptance towards thoughts and emotions, and their attitudes towards imperfections. If nondual awareness has an effect on one's sense of self by reducing the dualism between self and others, and fostering an interconnected and holistic perspective on personal and interpersonal experiences, then this awareness should be reflected in one's self-compassion level.

The SCS was developed by Dr. Kristin Neff in 2003 to measure an individual's level of self-compassion. It consists of 26 items that assess how people typically respond to feelings of failure, inadequacy, or suffering. The scale captures the three main components of self-compassion, each measured in both positive and negative forms, making up six subscales: Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgment, Common Humanity vs. Isolation, Mindfulness vs. Over-Identification.

This assessment tool is the most suitable for our purpose because it provides a comprehensive evaluation on one's relationship with him or herself. It encompasses both positive and negative aspects of one's perception towards themselves and the six subscales combined are useful for evaluating if nondual awareness has made a holistic impact on one's sense of self.

Phase One: The Quantitative Study

The process of the quantitative study includes online participants recruitment, survey distribution, data collection and statistical analysis on the final data.

Participant Recruitment and Demographic Information

The sample size of this study is 41. The participants were recruited by posting in these online forums discussing meditation and related practices:

<https://www.reddit.com/r/meditation> and <https://www.reddit.com/r/mindfulness> and

included men and women with a wide range of meditation experiences from 3 months to 30 years. The only exclusion criteria implemented is an age limit requiring adult participants (18+ years old).

Demographic information was collected using Qualtrics survey software. Once participants click the survey link, they receive an informed consent form. After accepting the consent form, the participants were asked a screening question to make sure they are 18+ years old. After passing the screening, the participants are asked about their basic demographics, including age, length and style of meditation. They then proceed to the SCS questionnaire. After completion, they are also asked to complete the NADA-T questionnaire. Once all questions are answered, the participants are asked if they are willing to join a follow-up interview if selected. They are then given a thank you message and exit the study.

Assessment Instruments

In this study, length of meditation and nondual awareness level are the independent variables, and self-compassion is the dependent variable. Demographic data such as age, and meditation styles are included as descriptive variables.

The Nondual Awareness Dimensional Assessment–Trait (NADA-T) Hanley et al. (2018) was used to assess nondual awareness level. As noted above, the NADA-T assesses two dimensions of nondual awareness: bliss and self-transcendence using 13 self-assessment questions with Likert scale responses on of “Never or very rarely,” “Rarely,” “Sometimes,” “Often,” and “Very often or always” (see Appendix 1).

The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) Neff (2003) was used to assess self-compassion. It consists of 26 items to assess how individuals respond to personal failure or suffering, based on three components: 1. Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgment: Being kind to oneself versus being critical. 2. Common Humanity vs. Isolation: Recognizing shared human struggles versus feeling isolated. 3. Mindfulness vs. Over-Identification: Maintaining balanced awareness of negative emotions versus becoming overwhelmed by them. Participants rate statements on a 5-point Likert scale (see Appendix 2).

Data Analysis

I used SPSS to analyze the collected data. Demographic data and research variables are analyzed by creating an overview of the descriptive features of the data, such as the different meditation methods, age range of the participants, their attitudes towards follow-up interviews, etc. And the relationship between length of meditation and nondual awareness level are analyzed using linear regression. The relationship between nondual awareness level and self-compassion score are also analyzed using linear regression.

Phase Two: The Qualitative Study

The process of the qualitative study includes participants selection and recruitment, Zoom interview and the final analysis on the interview data.

Participants

I selected three participants for the in-depth follow up interview based on their high nondual awareness score and different levels of meditation experience. Participant 1 is a woman in her 40s with a NADA-T score of 3.46 and has been meditating for 14 years, 3 times a week. Participant 2 is a man in his 50s with a NADA-T score of 4.38 and has been meditating for 20 years, usually aims for 1 hour per day. Participant 3 is a man in his 40s with a NADA-T score of 4.23 and has been meditating for 16 years, 1-3 hours per day. The highest NADA-T score possible is 5.0.

Data Collection

The interviews were 30 minutes long, conducted by me and recorded via Zoom with questions focusing on the following areas:

1. The frequency, format and purpose of participant's meditation practices
2. Other experiences that induced nondual awareness
3. The direct experience of nondual awareness
4. Effects of nondual awareness
5. Challenges of nondual awareness
6. Participant's understanding of sense of self

Data Analysis

Interview data was transcribed from Zoom, then coded and analyzed via Taguette (Rampin & Rampin, 2021). Thematic coding was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. A list of key themes was developed, representing the core findings of the qualitative part of this study. Following thematic coding, value coding was applied (for example, codes like “mystical belief”, “intellectual belief”, “peace”, “disorientation” are used) to identify and interpret the values, beliefs, and attitudes expressed by participants regarding nondual awareness and their sense of self.

Chapter IV.

Results

This mixed methods study revealed correlations between meditation experience, nondual awareness and one's self-compassion levels. Specifically, nondual awareness was found to have a significant positive correlation with one's self-compassion level. Participants from the follow-up interviews also reported a higher level of mental well-being and an altered view of self which they attribute to nondual awareness. This altered view of self is mostly centered around having a more comprehensive understanding of the inter-connectedness between self and others which creates a sense of peace and acceptance.

Results from the Quantitative Study

The demographic data shows open-awareness and mindfulness meditation are the two major practices among the participants. 29.2% participants practice open-awareness meditation, 39% participants practice mindfulness meditation, and 31.7% participants practice mixed methods of meditations.

The result of the simple linear regression of nondual awareness and self-compassion indicates that the overall regression model has statistical significance. From the following figure 1, $F(1, 39) = 34.229$, and $p < .001$ indicated nondual awareness level is a significant predictor for self-compassion. And $R^2 = 0.467$ showed about 47% of variance in self-compassion can be explained by nondual awareness. This indicates that a higher level of nondual awareness is positively related to a more acute degree of self-compassion.

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9.243	1	9.243	34.229	<.001 ^b
	Residual	10.532	39	.270		
	Total	19.775	40			

a. Dependent Variable: self_compassion
b. Predictors: (Constant), nondual_total

Figure 1. Regression Model Between Nondual Awareness and Self-Compassion

The linear regression exploring the relationship between the length of time spent meditating and nondual awareness, however, shows the regression model (figure 2) was not statistically significant [$F(1, 39) = 0.972$ and $p = 0.330$]. This indicates that the length of meditation does not significantly predict one's self-assessed level of nondual awareness. There is still a small, non-significant positive correlation between these two variables. The model explained only 2.4% of the variance in nondual awareness ($R^2 = 0.024$), suggesting that while some relationship may exist between meditation time and nondual awareness, it is weak and not statistically meaningful in this sample.

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	189.898	1	189.898	.972	.330 ^b
	Residual	7622.346	39	195.445		
	Total	7812.244	40			

a. Dependent Variable: nondual_total
b. Predictors: (Constant), How long have you been meditating? (years and months)

Figure 2. Regression Model Between Meditation Time and Nondual Awareness

Results from the Qualitative Study

The interviews revealed several themes across different areas of participants' nondual awareness experience. The findings are organized into the following areas: (1) experiences that induced nondual awareness, (2) the direct experience of nondual awareness, (3) effects of nondual awareness, (4) understanding of the nondual awareness and self. These findings emerged from the thematic analyses and they correlate with the designed questions as they cover all core aspects explored by the questions: experience inducing nondual awareness, experience of nondual awareness, effects of nondual awareness (both beneficial and challenging) and changes in the sense of self.

Experiences that Induced Nondual Awareness

Three key themes emerged regarding the experiences that induced nondual awareness.

1. **Intense Meditation Practices:** All three participants reported to have an intense meditation practice, some of which are rooted in spiritual practices. Participant 1, who has a lower NADA-T score comparing to the other 2 participants, has reported to meditate 2 or 3 times a week, while the other 2 participants meditate daily, but all three of them have a dedicated practice. As noted by participant 1, *“So I've been doing spiritual practice since 2010... I had spent about a month spending two hours every morning doing spiritual work, which included meditation”*. Participant 2 states he has been meditating for 20 years in a Buddhist tradition: *“...one is called shikantaza³, which is just simply sitting or just sitting,*

³ This is a type of Zen meditation

and it's an open awareness meditation...". Participant 3 mentioned, "...daily meditation practice, maybe at least an hour a day, two hours a day, maybe. And then I'm sitting meeting with people for four hours or so, not every day, but maybe four or five days a week"

2. **Life Crises:** Interview participants who had a high score on the NADA-T also stated having gone through a significantly challenging time. These life crises combined with an introspective meaning seeking led them into the deep, prolonged meditation and spiritual practices, which then tend to contribute to the realization of nondual awareness. Participant 2 has gone through a difficult time in marriage *"my wife and I were having problems, and I'm like, I might have to leave my wife"*. Participant 3 went through intense depression: *"I was severely depressed and just looking for a reason to live..."*
3. **Prolonged Hyper-Focus on an Inquiry:** The immediate and temporary experience of nondual awareness was described as resulting from a prolonged hyper-focus on one inquiry. Participant 2, described focusing on the meaning of unconditional love: *"I was contemplating what essentially was like my capacity for unconditional love... it's like if you say the same word over and over again in your head, it like, kind of loses meaning... all of a sudden it was like, what am I even thinking? And at that time, I had this visceral sensation in my head where it was just kind of like...do you know The Heart Sutra? So it was like Avalokitesvara searching for the insight that would lead him to the other shore, discovered that all five skandhas were equally empty, kind of thing. I had what felt at the time like that experience."* Participant 3 described contemplating the meaning of life and

death: *“So all of my doubt, all of my pain, went into the question to why should I live? Why? Just why. And at some point, after several months of this, of just being absorbed in with this question, the question fell away and with it, all that pain, all of that weight, depression, anxiety, fell away with it, with like the dropping of a single thought.”*

Direct Experience of Nondual Awareness

Three prominent themes were identified in the direct experience of nondual awareness.

1. **Multi-Stage:** Participants highlighted the experience of developing nondual awareness usually includes multiple stages: starting from a temporary taste or glimpse of a nondual state to existing in a consistent understanding of nondual awareness. *“I had the experience before a couple times through meditation, but not in a particularly profound way...”*, said participant 2. Participant 3 also states something similar: *“It was remarkable that one day or one moment I was suffering, and the next moment light as a feather... but after three months or so, some suffering returned”*, and then *“A couple of weeks later, after a long walk, I lay down on my bedroom floor and became spontaneously absorbed in the feeling of my pulse, of my heart beating, I could feel it in my fingers and toes and my neck, all through my body, until all I felt was just this pulsing, and not even really a sense of a body, just this pulsing... It was like you could say two dimensional, one dimensional, no dimensional. There's just none of that structure.... that experience of no structure didn't last and that was the only thing that interested*

me”, and lastly “... (after further inquiry) there was something in the body that seemed to fade... what I would call that now is maybe like a subtle form of greed, but it's like this, this claiming of involvement in something that's happening all on its own and doesn't require my involvement. (and now) it seems more and more true to me to say that all experiences are implicitly non dual.”

2. **Dissolution:** Another key theme of nondual experience is the feeling of dissolution. The feeling of the rigid reality and sense of self falling away is reported by 2 participants. Participant 2 noted: *“I have felt that full dissolution... it's like the difference between being in a film and realizing that you're watching a film, and it doesn't really matter, but you're still excited about the film...”*.

Participant 3 states, *“it seemed like layers of I couldn't say what it is, but something just fell away. Everything fell away, time, space, physicality, everything just fell away.”*

3. **Peace:** The direct experience of nondual awareness was also associated with peace and joy for the participants. According to participant 1, *“I'm able to let a thought run without attaching myself to it, that thought is very individual from oneness... There's no separation. So that thought for me is (a reminder of) me being separate so that I'm able to not respond to it, or even if I do respond, it's natural... There's more peace, which is me not separating myself from anything, or being the whole being the one”*. The experience is similar for other participants. *“I had like, three weeks of that really peaceful... where is my fear, anxiety and regret? I can't find it anywhere”* (participant 2) and *“There's no technique, there's no purpose. It's everything is in a state of peace, right where it.*

It's the whole universe is meditating, and I release myself into it by doing nothing at all.” (participant 3)

Enduring Effects of Nondual Awareness

Participants identified 2 major themes as the long-lasting effects of nondual awareness. Two participants also pointed out challenges of having nondual awareness.

- 1. Effortless Emotional Stability:** Participants described feeling emotionally stable without having to intentionally regulate their thoughts and behaviors. When discussing his improvement in social anxiety, participant 2 states: *“(how to interact with people) now it is not a concern at all in my planning, which is different from it not being concerned at all in the moment of me planning for it.”*. Participant 3 notes that *“there isn't a sense of like hanging back or holding back from experiencing, trying to manage and filter it in any way... There's not a sense of being at odds with myself.”*
- 2. Trigger Management:** Participants report nondual awareness helps them manage triggers when they use it as a baseline to become more aligned with their values and beliefs. Participant 1 states nondual awareness creates space between her and her triggers: *“that thought (the trigger) for me is me being separate, so that I'm able to not respond to it, or even if I do respond, it's more natural”*, and *“true self is oneness....my response from within is letting me know how I'm feeling, what I'm thinking, so I can feel when I'm out of line with my true self... when I felt the frustration and I felt like I couldn't meditate, that was actually letting me know that I was using something to keep myself from being one.”* Similarly participant 2

shared: *“it's about like recognizing those triggers that pull you away from this flow state (nondual), and then like making them be less like imminent.”*

3. **Challenges:** Two participants discussed challenges they experienced during nondual awareness. Participant 1 stated: *“it gets harder in the sense of, I'm more sensitive to me being separate... you notice your pain points more.”* Participant 3 mentioned feeling disoriented: *“the process of inquiry is maybe even necessarily disorienting, because you are coming out of some kind of fixed orientation and entering into, essentially the unknown, so that is disorienting.”* But also explained the disorientation is temporary: *“it's not disorienting on an ongoing basis, because the sense of disorientation is the dropping of a fixed orientation.”*

Understanding of Nondual Awareness and The Self

There were two major different themes regarding the participants' understanding towards nondual awareness and how they view the concept of self.

1. **Mystical:** One participant expressed a believe that the experience of nonduality is a spiritual truth, hence they engage in practices towards realizing this mystical truth. As stated by participant 1, *“so for me, true self is the oneness. It's a power, a spiritual power... meditation is the visceral connection to it, whereas the studying for me is the intellectual knowledge of it.”*
2. **Intellectual:** Two participants expressed a more intellectual understanding of their nondual experience. Participant 2 believes: *“self is a logical concept that is important and useful in daily life. However, the self is not actually representative of a thing.”* and compares nondual awareness as the unprovable truth in

mathematics: *“he (Gödel, a mathematician) proved that in any sufficiently sophisticated representational system that there will always be unprovably true statements, statements that are true and yet unprovable. I feel that the way that Buddhists talk about non duality is a linguistic representation of the perspective of Godel when he's looking at math as a representational system.”*

Participant 3 views the sense of self as a coping mechanism: *“it (self) might be in the sense of providing that false sense of safety. You just need to develop this coping mechanism of knowing how things are, so that I can know how to respond or who to be, and in general, rather than just meeting the situation fresh and entering from a place of not knowing, is quite vulnerable and can be scary.”*

Chapter V.

Discussion

The results from the quantitative research suggest that there is a significant positive connection between nondual awareness and self-compassion, which implies that people who possess a higher level of nondual awareness have a greater degree of self-kindness, a stronger sense of common humanity, and a lesser degree of over-identification with negative thoughts or feelings. These results evidently prove nondual awareness can impact one's self-perception and thus help with developing a more compassionate and accepting attitude. The challenges arising from a small observed effect size of the quantitative data do not diminish the beneficial findings of nondual awareness improving mental health, reducing self-criticism and enhancing emotional resilience.

The findings from these data also lend support to the hypothesis that meditation practice can promote the development of nondual awareness as well as create positive mental states. The connection found between nondual awareness, length of meditation and self-compassion reenforces the idea that meditation techniques can produce cognitive and emotional transformations which then give the practitioner psychological benefits. While more research needs to be done to check the strength of this correlation, the observations of this study demonstrate that engaging in activities promoting nondual awareness can be a self-improvement strategy resulting in increased compassion and better emotional stability.

The evidence from the qualitative research suggest that nondual awareness can be developed through sustained practice of long-term, intense meditation and other spiritual practices. According to the demographic data, participants who have higher NADA-T scores tend to have meditation experience of more than 10 years and frequently participate in 2-3 hour meditation sessions. This suggests that nondual awareness is not simply an understanding of the mind, but it needs profound and prolong practice to integrate. Meditation and spiritual disciplines act as the processes that break down the tightly formed habits of self-referential thinking and therefore give individuals the liberty of seeing their own self in a different light. The amount of dedication given to the practices is crucial since sporadic or superficial involvement might not be sufficient to bring about fundamental changes in how one sees themselves and the surrounding world.

The major limitation of the mind is that it is mainly designed to note separations. This further reinforces the strong sense of individuality by means of thoughts, feelings, and sensory perceptions. Long-term meditation creates an effective way to gradually break down these conditional patterns, thus providing the meditators with a chance to explore a wider and more interconnected consciousness. This enables the meditators to realize life as not a host of distinct units but as one and whole. This change does not occur in an instant as the self-referential mind stands in the way of unbuilding. Yet, over years of effort, the practitioners become able to keep the attention focused on the nondual state which makes the experiences happen without the typical sense of "self" associated with them. The rigid and repetitive structure of these practices is also helpful for developing psychological resilience so that the practitioners do not become lost or disoriented when their sense of "I" change. Additionally, with the solid grounding in

meditative and spiritual practices, two participants have reported nondual awareness becoming a natural way of experiencing reality instead of an occasional state of mind.

The interviewees also state that living through significant life crises is one of the factors driving them to develop experiences of nondual awareness. Major depressive disorder and marital problems respectively pushed two participants to a deeply rooted meditation practice that resulted in NDA experiences. Peaceful yet disorienting are the features that come with the direct experience of nondual awareness. Participants explained their experience as feeling relief from mental suffering, shedding their identity and being in a position to let things go.

Patterns identified suggest that emotional agony and existential doubt can trigger transformational changes in perception. Facing difficulties like depression, loss, or significant relationship breakdowns could force individuals to undergo a deep investigation into their identity and the nature of their pain. On some occasions, painful moments rupture the usual way of self-reference. This means it can weaken the solid sense of a personal "self" who suffers from being attached to the pain. Meditation is a way to deal with this disjunction by offering different perspectives on how to relate to suffering, especially when it is done with intensity and fidelity. This change not only brings pain to an end but also transforms the way the pain is viewed, thus creating a state of freedom not by altering outside conditions but by realizing that there is no separate self who is in pain.

The disorientation and peace experienced through nondual awareness is in line with the paradoxical discomfort and liberation of consciousness found in major shifts. This disorientation occurs because the mind possesses rigid constructs to identify with the

stories of the self, the mechanisms of control and agency, and the dualism in everything. When these constructs weaken or dissolve, it can feel unsettling—almost as if one is losing the foundation of reality itself. However, participants admit that the loss of these central beliefs is eventually associated with the feeling of relief and comfort. When the mind is set free from grasping for control over what is naturally unfolding, individuals are able to experience life spontaneously without forcing and reacting.

Besides, the effect of life crises in nondual awareness triggers the question on whether suffering is necessary for deep spiritual insight. Not everyone who go through bad times are able to develop nondual awareness. Those who can have the tendency to look for alternative ways of reality, especially when they are not satisfied with the common explanations for their problems. This suggests that a crisis can turn into an opportunity and force people out of their ordinary perceptions, which then enables them to directly experience pure awareness before their personal self. However, the extent to which individuals integrate these experiences into their lives depends on the context in which they unfold. Nondual viewpoints gained in the crisis moments could be temporary or misapprehended if there are no right directions or practices leading to lasting transformative insights.

These findings also point out the significance of meditation and spiritual practices as stabilizing forces in the journey toward nondual awareness. While calamities might provide a breakthrough, persistent and regular practices are also needed in order to integrate these experiences. Participants capable of converting their cognition of nonduality to a more permanent state of being are usually those who spend time rigorously incorporating and deepening their realizations.

While a decrease in perceived suffering is self-evident as a benefit, participants' understandings of a dissolution of their sense of self and changes in their experiences of control and agency both merit further discussion. The lessening of one's sense of self dissolves the rigid boundary between self and other, and reduces the friction or conflict between the two. That explains why some participants experienced decreased social anxiety. It's also reflected in how participants reported to have more clarity when interacting with others and less likely to get frustrated.

The experience of self-dissolution seems to make people less self-conscious and emotionally reactive when engaging in social interactions. According to conventional experience, social anxiety often arises when one is strongly conscious of oneself as a distinct person which then lead to the trepidation of being judged, rejected, or misunderstood. When the apparent difference between self and other gradually disappears, these forms of anxiety can be reduced since the individual is no longer under the obligation to present a particular image of themselves or navigate social interactions with extreme care.

For instance, participants talked about feeling more relaxed in public situations since they were no longer filtering the interactions through layers of self-referential dialogues. They explained that instead of overthinking their words and mannerisms, they had a much wider ability to be present and react spontaneously. This change also resulted in better interpersonal clarity. Participants believe that lacking the usual mental distraction from self-evaluation allowed them to listen more attentively and to communicate more meaningfully with others. Self-promotion is no longer the focus in conversations, so they are more capable of building authentic relationships. The lack of

strict self-identification also helps the participants reducing the time they spent on defensive behaviors. Also, this led to a greater emotional fluidity. As the participants remained unaffected by trivialities of miscommunication or discord, they become more capable of navigating interactions. This creates a growing potential in accepting people as they are, without conflicts caused by external projection of expectations.

Moreover, this decline in social anxiety indicates that nondual experience could reduce one's tendency to take things personally. Most of the personal issues arising in interpersonal relationships come from the opinion that the interactions should be aligned with one's personal beliefs and tendencies. Once the rigid structure of a personal self diminishes, people start to cultivate more open and flexible discussions in social contexts, which then relieve their stress. Overall relationship harmony is achieved through this process as the participants become less influenced by external circumstances.

It seems nondual awareness also causes the rigidity of control to fall away and creates an effortless mental space for the participants. Some participants also call this a shedding of self-agency. This is the feeling that every thought, action and event are happening on its own without needing to be planned or controlled by the "self". This seems to be beneficial to the participants as they are able to stay calm and centered without having to pre-plan or over analyze the behaviors of themselves and others. As participant 3 stated: *"what I would call a subtle form of greed, this claiming of involvement in something that's happening all on its own and doesn't require my involvement (sheds away)."* And *"you don't have to do anything to hear the sound of my voice. You don't have to do anything to feel the feeling of your butt and the seat, the feeling in your fingers and toes, the feeling of your tongue in your mouth. It's just*

happening on its own... if that (sense of agency) fades and this is still happening, and not only is it happening, it's happening more clearly, more smoothly and seamlessly. Then obviously, that's not necessary, and it's not what it appears to be.”

A completely new perspective arises here. This is a radical revolution in the cognition of individuals regarding the process of reasoning, doing, and choosing. Shedding self-agency does not mean disengaging in life and always reacting passively. On the contrary, it is a way to lessen the burden of needing constant mental effort for controlling, predicting, or managing experiences. In conventional awareness, people usually feel the need to guide their thoughts and behaviors in a certain direction with forceful intention, thinking that without doing it on purpose, they might lose control and misbehave. However, participants in nondual state have a rather different experience. For them, there is no need to manage thoughts and emotions internally, interactions just come naturally.

No longer striving for effort creates a sense of relief for the participants, since the amount of cognitive strain caused by the excessive self-monitoring has diminished. Many individuals are stuck in the mindset that they need to constantly evaluate their feelings and actions and aim to predict and control the outcome of external events. This mental habit, seemingly sometimes useful, could also become the root cause of anxiety and tension. When participants spoke about their change in perception through nondual awareness, they expressed the feeling of sinking deeply into the present moment and living life without needing a micromanaging internal narrator. The decrease in over-analysis led to a heightened ability to respond to situations with clarity and immediacy without second-guessing and self-doubt.

This change also appears to correspond to flow states, where people immerse themselves completely in the present moment with ease and fluidity. This effortless engagement empowers individuals to steer their daily life with better adaptability since they no longer need to arrange every interaction or decision according to a projected ideal. Instead of sticking obstinately to specific expectations, they find themselves reacting in real-time and naturally changing behaviors according to arising circumstances. This adaptability not only improves their emotional wellness but also better their relationships, as communications are no longer burdened with self-taught obligations or the need to control.

The very process of shedding self-agency helps build a more quiescent and centered mind. Participants tell about an existence that is not isolated but deeply involved and interconnected, without the usual stress that comes with trying to predict and control everything. Instead of becoming victims of external factors, participants express a strong feeling of trust in their own responses to any occurring events. And they tend to believe that the direct experience itself has its own intelligence. This change transforms their lives into a lighter journey, no longer bound by the brain power of planning, controlling, or perfecting all actions, and in turn, allowing life to happen as it wants.

This visceral experience led participant 3 to seek an intellectual understanding of nondual awareness. Religion and eastern philosophy such as Zen Buddhism are used to explain nondual awareness. Similarly, participant 1 adopted scientific or mathematical theories to explain their understanding of nondual awareness. It seems these types of intellectual inquiries help create a coherent worldview for people who experience nondual awareness and reduce the confusion and disorientation brought by the

dissolution of self. These understandings also help them share their nondual experience in ways that others would have a better chance of understanding it without having the direct experience themselves.

The hunt for a structural ideology to comprehend nondual awareness embodies the buried human desire to give sense to experiences. Participant 3 contemplating religion and Eastern philosophy such as Zen Buddhism demonstrates how spiritual approaches could suggest narratives and norms for experiences such as self-dissolution and nondual awareness. These philosophies often highlight ideas like all-inclusiveness, the transitory appearance of things, and the deceptive nature of the self. This then presents to the participants a set of codes and conceptual scaffolding to interpret their encounter. Therefore, by aligning one's personal knowledge and experience with these ancient traditions, the participants can perceive the world as more stable and coherent. This helps reducing the confusion and existential uncertainty triggered by the changes they went through.

In the same way, the employment of scientific or mathematical theories by participant 2 is a manifestation of the adaptability of nondual awareness. It shows that this experience could be independent of cultural or spiritual limits. Individuals can form secular and analytical insights by aligning their perspectives to a more logical and empirical framework. For example, quantum mechanics, systems theory, or neuroscience can provide potential ontological explanations for nondual awareness by stating that one is a part of the universal reality instead of being a detached observer who has mystical or illusory experiences. This novel method encourages individuals who are less disposed towards religious or spiritual actions to find balance and sense in their own experiences.

These intellectual inquiries are not only geared towards the egocentric understanding. They also serve as tools for participants to express and explain their subjective experience to the outside world especially when the recipients have never encountered nondual awareness before. By the inclusion of externally derived knowledge systems, say religion, philosophy, and science, the participants act as bridges between their own experiences and the observers, thus enhancing communication and clearing up misconceptions. Their ability to convey ideas is especially relevant in the areas of teaching, counseling, and research where the principle of introducing nondual awareness is for people's benefit.

Furthermore, building a coherent worldview through the intellectual journey help with the absorption of the radical parts of the nondual awareness into one's everyday life. Lacking proper structure may lead to confusion and disorientation when experiencing nondual awareness, as it attacks the very foundational beliefs we hold about identity, agency, and meaning. Involvement in intellectual activities is one of the main routes that allow participants to incorporate such changes into their overall worldview so that they can create harmony between their inner experiences and the outer reality. This integration, besides the disorientation, gives one the necessary tools to live the nondual principles in a more dynamic and full manner with respect to their relationships, work, and personal evolution.

In the end, the deep emotional experience and the intellectual probing illustrate quite clearly the multifactorial character of the nondual awareness. Despite the fact that the immediate experience is mostly beyond description, it is through the process of understanding that the participants could really relate their insights to a wider context,

thus making them more relatable, comprehensible, and applicable to everyday life. The union of exploration and understanding as the two sides of the coin truly magnifies the value of both reflective investigation and cognitive curiosity in the process of full realization and incorporation of the potentials of the nondual awareness.

The participants reported a variety of effects of nondual awareness in one's day to day life. Increased effortless emotional stability is one of the most potent effects. This means the individuals with nondual awareness can navigate life and handle difficult emotions more effortlessly without having to intentionally control or manage thoughts and actions. Participants understood this to be a "flow state". This is especially true when it comes to dealing with interpersonal stressors such as public speaking and social anxiety. Nondual awareness enabled them to "meet the experience as is" (participant 3).

Another effect of nondual awareness is that this state of consciousness can be used to manage triggers. After experiencing nondual awareness, participants become more attuned to when they shift out of this state. This awareness serves as a reminder to reconnect with their core values and experiences of oneness, aiding them in recognizing and managing emotional triggers more effectively.

This change in consciousness suggests that one can experience peace in the present moment through nondual awareness and can also use it as a constant tool for emotional regulation. Many emotional triggers are caused by the automatic, profoundly ingrained thought patterns and behaviors inherited from the past and initiated by the environment. Consequently, people perceive them not as a conscious decision but as an automatic process outside their control. And this overwhelming feeling can lead to reactive emotions like anger, frustration, or anxiety. However, the participants recount

that after experiencing nondual awareness, they felt stronger immunity to the situations that tried to push them into the old path of habitual reactivity. The learning of the notice comes before the reactive emotions and is essential for the participants to pause, re-evaluate, and return to a broader, nondual perspective.

This seems to be a practical approach in dealing with triggers because nondual awareness significantly alters the way a person relates to their feelings. Instead of feeling like they need to hold onto a particular thought or emotion and fully identify with it, the participants believe their feelings are just passing by and could sense the distance in-between. This alternative view is more detached and less emotionally charged, which helps with problem-solving and reducing emotional suffering.

The understanding of this phenomenon also brought about a more profound attachment to their core values. The emotional triggers cause people to behave in a different way from what they want, and therefore, they regret it later or find themselves in a conflict. Thanks to their ability to recognize the transitions of nondual awareness, the participants got an opportunity to pause and reestablish contact with their original oneness of being before the reaction. This period of disorientation is converted into the decision to act more aligned with their values and, consequently, to achieve a higher emotional integrity. Gradually, their practice of seeing their challenges as opportunities to stay calm and focused was getting stronger, while the patterns of defensiveness or avoidance were getting lesser and lesser.

Moreover, the ability to handle triggers is not only limited to personal feelings, but also affects how one interacts with others. When a person is less reactive, their relationships also benefit. Sizable parts of interpersonal conflict originate from unnoticed

emotional reactions. To illustrate, one party's defensive reaction may switch on the other party's defensive reaction, leading to a lack of comprehension and tension, bringing forth interpersonal conflicts. Participants in the research mentioned their capability to stay balanced in a state of nondual awareness was a significant factor for them to handle complex discussions in a more straightforward and patient manner. Therefore, if they were able to identify when they were moving out of this state, that awareness alone could prevent them from falling into a cycle of reactive behavior, thus allowing them to respond to the problem with more compassion and understanding.

As a matter of fact, being able to differentiate and control the variations in consciousness is the one of the best gifts for the participants' emotional well-being. Instead of living in the past or being emotionally affected by external circumstances, they keep a regular check on their mind in order to get involved with transformational processes more steadily and presently. Hence, it appears obvious that the state of "nondual awareness" is not a mere abstract experience but a tool in itself that, once properly utilized, can significantly boost emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and personal relationships in day-to-day experiences.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has various limitations while also provides valuable findings for future research to expand on.

Limitations in Quantitative Study Sample Set

For the quantitative study, there are limitations due to the sample size and the demographic characteristics of the participants. Because they were recruited from online

discussion forums, they are mostly younger people with internet access in a developed country. It's also possible for the participants to self-report higher than average nondual awareness since they are active on related forums and therefore, they may have self-reported based on what they heard others report in those forums, versus having those experiences themselves. On the other hand, because there are no hard criteria limiting the minimum time one practicing meditation, the participants' meditation experience varies. The study could be stronger with a sample of more highly experienced meditators.

The restrictive features point out possible hurdles in interpreting the study's findings and also indicate the need for improvement in future research. The use of an online sample for the research affects the population structure, involving mainly younger people who are internet-savvy and people who are likely to hear about nondual awareness more frequently in discussions. This raises the issue of selection bias since the people who participate in such forums are likely to have an intellectual inclination toward the topic already. This would then, in turn, affect their responses. Their involvement in nondual discussion might affect their self-reported experiences consciously or unconsciously. For instance, it could give them a sense of having an experience that is more or less fabricated. As the study relies on the premise of self-measured instruments, there may be no way of finding out whether participants speak precisely of their direct experiences or just repeat the phrases they had gotten from the internet.

Moreover, the absence of strict standards on meditation experience results in further variability among the sample. It is probable that participants could have different ranges of knowledge about meditation and nondual practices, which would shift from freshmen to long-term practitioners. This disparity may affect data validity, as

participants with little experience may contrast and describe their states of consciousness, not as those with extensive meditation backgrounds would do. Meditators with more experience, especially those undergoing a long period of practice, could provide a more permanent and reliable ground to research the effects of nondual awareness. Having participants with a wide range of meditation experiences, the study might be unable to clearly present the experiences gained during extensive meditative training.

Another factor to remember is that online recruitment tends to attract introspective individuals who are more likely to reflect and share their experiences. Thus, they are more qualitative sources. While this can be good for qualitative data, it may not reflect all the meditator groups, including those who practice but do not participate in discussions. The subsequent studies could become more successful if they select participants from meditation retreats, monastic settings, or long-term contemplative communities, where practitioners come in contact with nonduality outside of online discourse. A longitudinal study that would follow the changes in nondual awareness over time could also help show the difference between temporary insights and deep-rooted shifts in perception.

Increased Generalizability for the Qualitative Study

For the qualitative study, since only 3 participants were selected for the interview, it has a limited generalizability and is useful primarily for deepening our understanding and potentially informing the design of future studies. The experiences and insights gathered are highly specific to each individual participant and may not reflect broader trends or patterns. There is also potential for bias as the personal experiences or

perspectives of just a few individuals may overly influence my findings for this part of the study.

The qualitative study's dependence on a limited number of participants, precisely only three, is a primary hindrance to its generalizability and its ability to produce results that depict the trends within the population. Though the insights came from a small group of people characterized by their depths and richness, these qualitative data are valuable. Still, the results are contextualized and molded by each participant's unique backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. Based on this, the findings are not portable since it is hard to judge whether the themes and patterns present in this study are shared by a more significant number of practitioners of nondual awareness or meditation.

In addition, the chance of biases in such small sample cases is exceedingly increased. The chosen participants could have a direct bearing on this by discussing topics different meditators or people who endorse nondual awareness have not experienced. For example, variables like social background, years of practice, or acknowledgment of the studied notions could affect their answers more than anticipated. This leads to conclusions that are more aligned with the members' narratives by concentrating on them rather than giving a holistic approximation of the subject-chosen inquiries.

On the other hand, the element of the researcher's bias also needs to be contemplated. For instance, in a scenario where only three people join the study, the researcher's interpretation and interactions with the participants are determined to play a paramount role in curating the data. This effect could have occurred oppositely, mainly when participants had strong affiliations that influenced their perspectives. In such cases,

their personal biases may have shaped their interpretations, leading to conclusions that aligned with either their views or the researcher's preexisting assumptions.

Even though these limitations exist, small qualitative studies like this one play a pivotal role in the exploration of real-world subjective experiences, such as nondual awareness. Dealing with an exploration of personal experience, such studies make it possible to not only uncover subtle insights but also formulate hypotheses that may assist in planning future studies. Adding a more extensive and diverse sample could allow for comparing different contexts and backgrounds, thus strengthening the findings of the future study. Triangulation, using other qualitative and quantitative data, in addition to the emerging themes, could also achieve consensus and decrease the impact of personal biases. Hence, by strengthening the research design through the inclusion of a broader range of samples, future directions can be established that help eliminate individual biases.

The area of research on the issue of nondual awareness warrants expansion in ways like a sample size increase and the generalizability of the two qualitative and quantitative studies. Adding subjects from various cultures and population groups would lead to a better understanding of the development of nondual awareness in the respective cultural and social environments. This could be achieved by facilitating the participation of individuals from various age categories, social classes, and degrees of meditation experience. With the increase in the scope, the researchers could ascertain if the patterns seen in the ongoing studies associated with cultural influences or conditions of life play a significant part in the manifestation of nondual experiences.

Additional Methods for Inducing Nondual Awareness

The search for additional methods for the acquisition of nondual awareness, such as the use of psychedelics, could make us aware of the principles at work. The employment of psychedelic drugs in therapeutic settings, which are under close surveillance, has reportedly led to the experiences of self-transcendence, ego-voiding, and interconnection, which parallel nondual awareness. Displaying the similarities and the variances between nondual awareness due to meditation and psychedelics might reveal the underlying neurobiological and psychological processes. The comparative approach may also help us realize whether these courses have the same long-term outcomes regarding mental well-being, emotional resilience, and interpersonal relationships.

Creating a comprehensive catalog related to the direct experiences of nondual awareness would also enhance our understanding of this phenomenon. The research is primarily based on self-reported descriptions that, even though they are of great value, are limited by the participants' ability to tell the elaborate, complex, and ineffable experiences. Making a standardized framework or taxonomy for classifying this phenomenon could help researchers note the reappearing themes, patterns, and variations of nondual awareness. This promotes easier comparison of findings across studies and leads to a more realistic picture of the array of nondual experiences.

Long-Term Studies on Nondual Awareness

The largely positive effect of nondual awareness on mental well-being is a testament to the fact that it is very important to conduct long-term studies to find its true effects. Whereas research often focuses on short or immediate outcomes, there is no

explanation of how these outcomes can develop over time and whether they lead to sustained changes in personality, emotional regulation, or overall life satisfaction. Long-term studies could leverage the impact of continual practice of nondual techniques, such as meditation, upon mental health and happiness over long decades or even centuries. They could also seek to determine whether or not the good side of nondual awareness can be experienced in different fields of life, for example, at the workplace, in creative endeavors, or in relationships. Thus, future research needs to strive to prune the methodologies by refining and broadening the scope of the inquiries to encompass different populations, different pathways, and the long-term impact of the transformative states. By stuffing the voids in the knowledge base, the researchers will be able to provide a better, fuller picture of what nondual awareness is and its possible application to improve mental and emotional well-being.

Investigate the Negative Impacts of Nondual Awareness

The examination of the negative impacts of nondual awareness is another fascinating research area. It would be beneficial to explore the increase in emotional disengagement, dissociation, and existential distress due to prolonged living away from self-reference thought. Nondual awareness is something most practitioners go after to cultivate peace and freedom from suffering. However, some experience it with uninvited side effects such as emotional blunting or disconnecting from life. It would be beneficial to research the factors involved to help understand how and why some individuals are more susceptible to the pitfalls of nondual awareness. Research could explore whether pre-existing psychological traits, such as a history of dissociation, trauma, or emotional sensitivity, influence one's ability to integrate nondual states healthily.

The application of integration and balance in the nondual practice serves as another central subject to be investigated. Individuals experiencing nondual awareness may perceive themselves as detached observers of psychological pain. Yet, a continuous denial of personal identity and emotion would lead to damage to social life, decision-making, and motivation. Future research could investigate whether the application of a specific grounding technique, such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, body awareness exercises, or interpersonal connectedness activities, can possibly reduce the chance of severe detachment. Also, the researchers can check if the participants who are given direction or guidance in their practice by a mentor are less likely to experience the adverse effects that come with the practice of nondual awareness. The knowledge of various nondual approaches and their impact on people's psychological health could provide realistic directions for individuals who want to integrate these emotional states into their daily lives without facing emotional numbness or disconnection.

The bond that exists between nondual awareness and trauma is yet another topic that is worth exploring in depth. Certain individuals who have undergone trauma are more likely to dissociate, which means that nondual practices might contribute positively to such a factor instead of negatively. The research on the meditation-induced phenomena of depersonalization and derealization, whether they affect individuals who have unresolved psychological issues, and if some nondual techniques are more appropriate for trauma people is very important. Teaching nonduality in a trauma-informed way would help people with specific vulnerabilities avoid experiencing psychological destabilization as a result of their practice. Moreover, the research would provide evidence on whether

nondual states, along with grounding techniques, can act as a medium for the healing process among trauma survivors.

Another promising avenue for research could be exploring the consequences of the practice of nondual awareness on meaning-making and motivation. The shrinkage of identity helps mediate suffering and promote freedom. However, some people feel a great sense of relief while others lose every meaning and are emotionally drained like the desert. On the assumption that shedding personal identity removes the framework for acquiring motivation, how practitioners navigate the switch should be examined. The investigation may explore whether there are resilient personality types when encountering existential suffering in nondual awareness and if there are ways to develop meaning and direction without restating ego rigidity. The balance between transcendence and engagement with the world could be a key area of study for those interested in refining nondual practice to foster psychological well-being.

Moreover, the impact of nondual awareness on social and moral behavior is often overlooked, but it is an important aspect. If someone stops feeling emotions and treating the self as an identity, how should that person make empathic choices, build relationships, and act ethically? Consensus on present traditions states that nondualism flourishes with compassion as a side effect. At the same time, it is mainly an open question of whether this is a universal truth or if detachment may sometimes lead to social withdrawal or moral disengagement. Looking into the effects of nondual awareness on interpersonal relationships could be a way to clarify whether these practices require the addition of relational or ethical training to keep a good balance between detaching and engaging.

The main goal of future research should be to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of nondual awareness, including its advantages and disadvantages. People who learn to integrate these states into their daily lives are the key to helping the researchers rethink nonduality approaches so that their benefits become maximal while unhelped effects become minimal. With the interest that continues to grow in nondual awareness both in spiritual and secular settings, it is crucial that practitioners are equipped with techniques that would keep them balanced in their relationship with emotions and society while they engage in detachment.

Inquiry into the Framework of Understanding Nondual Awareness

This study touched on how individuals grasp and utilize nondual experiences through the lenses of spirituality, science, and philosophy. However, due to nondual experience's subject and intellectual nature, the intersection of these frameworks and their implications needs to be investigated with more depth. Future studies can improve these findings by using comparative studies on the effectiveness of these frameworks, improving research methodologies, incorporating cultural and historical perspectives, and examining their practical applications in different areas like mental health, education, and the transformation of societies.

A critical area for further exploration is the relative effectiveness of spiritual, scientific, and philosophical methods in facilitating the understanding and application of nonduality. Spiritual traditions often highlight direct perception, intuitive knowledge, and transformative techniques like meditation or self-inquiry. Scientific paths, in contrast, investigate the neurophysiological basis of nonduality, aiming to ascertain the manifestation, brain performance alteration, and behavioral effects of such occurrences.

Similarly, philosophical thinkers try to provide a comprehensive set of logical statements, clear points of view on knowledge, and a framework of possibly broadening nonduality along with other existential or metaphysical discussions. Future study could methodically compare these frameworks through qualitative and quantitative ways. We could explore questions like which framework creates more outstanding and long-lasting transformations for the individuals' perception and if some of the frameworks are more effective for certain demographics, cultural backgrounds, or personality types; and how individuals can bridge these frameworks as they grow. By using intercultural methods that incorporate psychological evaluation, neuroscientific measurement, and phenomenological narratives, future studies could create a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which different frameworks help or hinder the integration of nondual awareness in daily life.

The most significant challenge in researching nondualism lies in the fact that it is inherently subjective and can't be expressed easily. A large number of the studies have been grounded on self-reports and introspections, which, although precious, are narrowed by the inadequacy of the language and the limitations of individual bias. Future research could bolster methodologies with neuroscientific and cognitive perspectives to focus on the physical manifestations of the brain. Tools like functional MRI (fMRI), EEG, and real-time neurofeedback could offer a picture of the biological roots of nondual states by monitoring the brain activity during spontaneous or intentional nondual experiences. Longitudinal studies could further examine the long-term effects on perception, cognition, and emotion regulation caused by the repeat exposure of such practices like meditation or psychedelics. Moreover, the advancement of artificial intelligence and

machine learning could also be employed in investigating large datasets of personal narratives due to the relevance in the disclosure of how people describe and integrate their nondual experiences.

Cultural and historical variations in the understanding of nonduality also represent a promising area for future research. Most of the existing literature concerning nonduality derives from East Asian cultures like Advaita Vedanta, Mahayana Buddhism, and Daoism, although it is also present in mystical traditions of the West, indigenous spiritualities, and contemporary secular movements. Comparative research between cultures will not only disclose the diverse ways nonduality is seen and integrated into societies but will also encourage mutual learning. Understanding the different ways culture shapes nondual comprehension may also act as a precondition for presenting nondual awareness in an undistorted manner. Besides, historical investigations could explore the knowledge and application of nonduality across the different stages of the timeline, tracing the spiritual path and secular path that led to the findings of nondual principles.

Appendix 1.

Nondual Awareness Dimensional Assessment (NADA-T)

I have had an experience in which I felt myself to be absorbed as one with all things	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
I have had an experience in which the boundaries of my self dissolved	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
I have had an experience in which all things seemed to be unified into a single whole	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
I have had an experience in which my mind expanded into space	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
I have experienced all notion of self and identity dissolve away	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
I have experienced the insight that “all is One”	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
I have experienced a feeling of oneness in which the boundaries between what is me and what is not me has dissolved	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
I have experienced a melting or merging with the others; I became others and they became me	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
It has seemed to me that my environment and I were one	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
I have experienced an all-embracing love	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
I have been surrounded and filled with a blissful warmth or energy	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
I have felt a sense of awe and wonder	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always
I have experienced a perfectly peaceful state	Never or very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always

Appendix 2.

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)

1. I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.
2. When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.
3. When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through.
4. When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world.
5. I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain.
6. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.
7. When I'm down, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.
8. When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself.
9. When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.
10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.
11. I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.
12. When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.
13. When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.
14. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.
15. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition
16. When I see aspects of myself that I don't like, I get down on myself.
17. When I fail at something important to me I try to keep things in perspective.
18. When I'm really struggling, I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it.
19. I'm kind to myself when I'm experiencing suffering.
20. When something upsets me I get carried away with my feelings.
21. I can be a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I'm experiencing suffering.
22. When I'm feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness.
23. I'm tolerant of my own flaws and inadequacies.
24. When something painful happens I tend to blow the incident out of proportion.
25. When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.
26. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.

Appendix 3.

Follow-Up Interview Questions

1. The frequency, format and purpose of participant's meditation practices
2. Other experiences that induced nondual awareness
3. The direct experience of nondual awareness
4. Effects of nondual awareness
5. Challenges of nondual awareness
6. Participant's understanding of sense of self

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