center for contemplative research

From Subject to Scientist

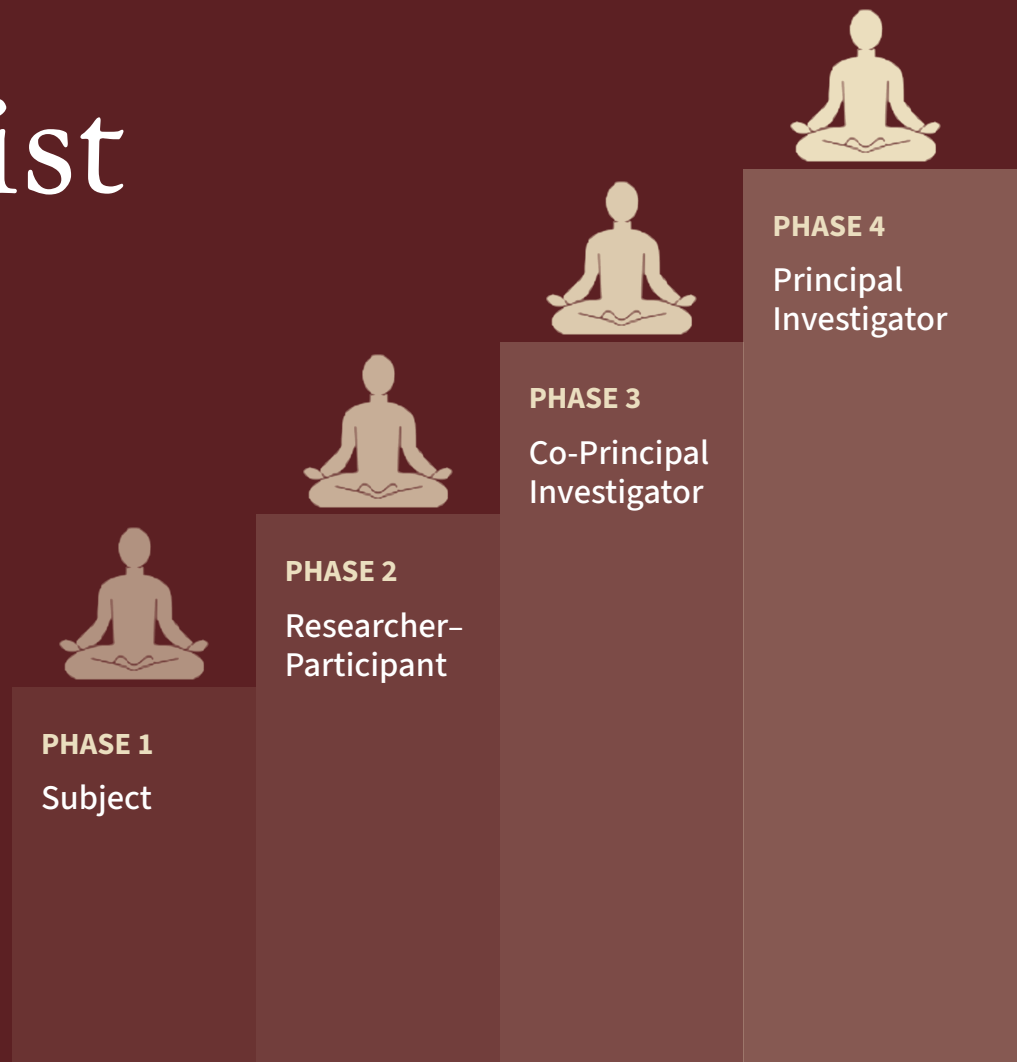
A Developmental Path for Contemplatives in Consciousness Research

Nicholas J. Matiasz, Ph.D.[1] and B. Alan Wallace, Ph.D.[1, 2]

[1] Center for Contemplative Research, Crestone, Colorado, USA

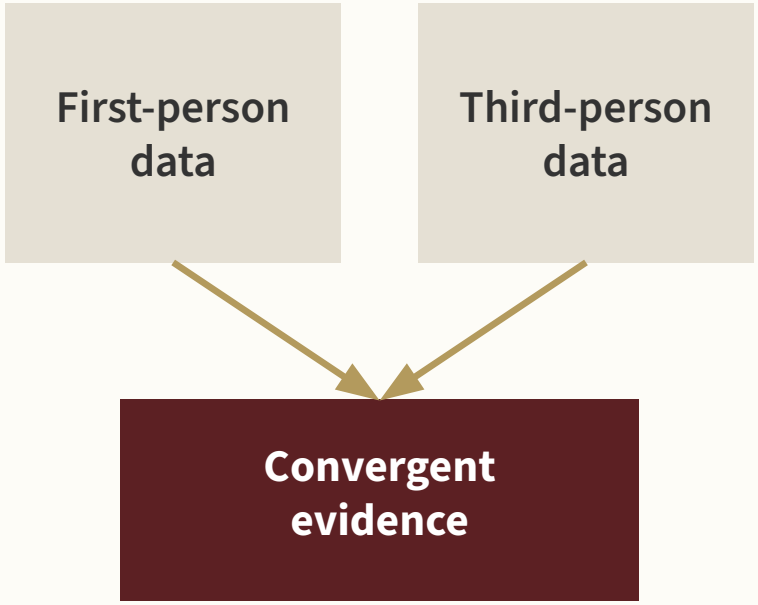
[2] Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies, Santa Barbara, California, USA

2026 Conference of the International Society for Contemplative Research · Flash Talk



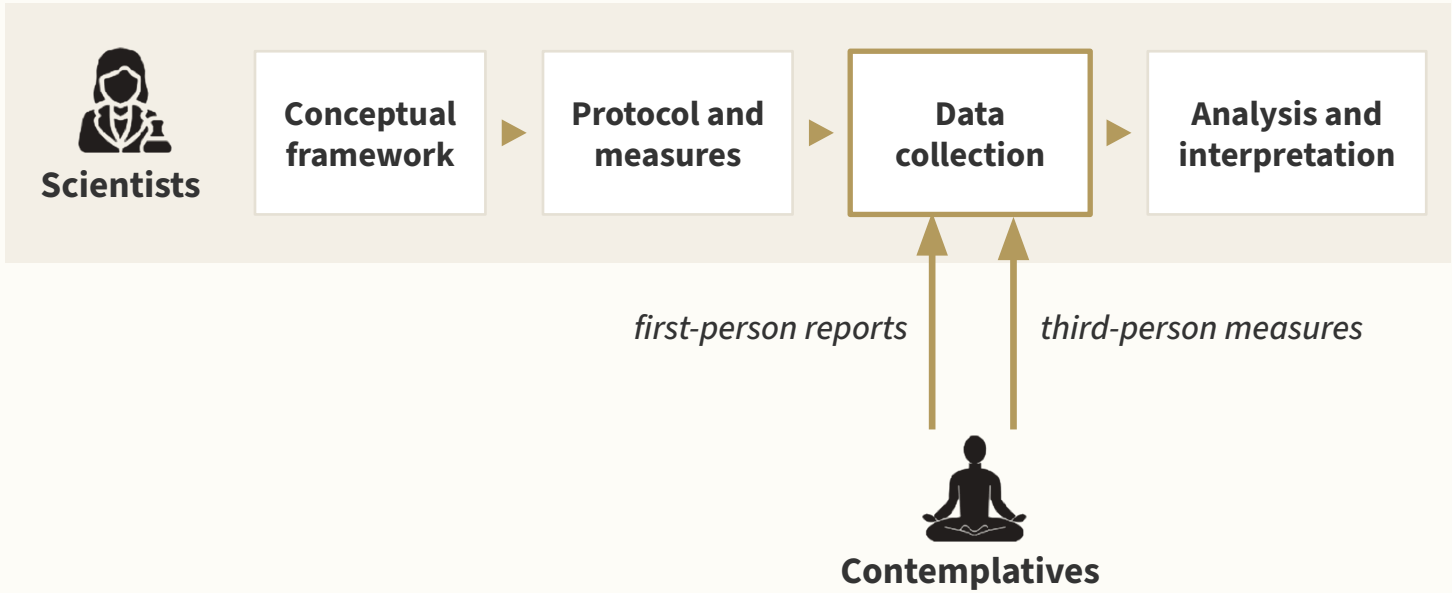
Scientists recruit contemplatives for their training but rarely involve them in design, analysis, or interpretation

THE PREMISE



Agreement across two lines of evidence is often more persuasive than replication within either one.

THE STAFFING



In many studies, the only people with advanced contemplative training may be the subjects being measured.

The current arrangement invites at least four problems

1. Meditation is treated as both the *object* and the *method* of investigation.
2. Genuine contemplative attainment cannot be reliably distinguished from inflated or erroneous self-reports.
3. Established contemplative knowledge is restated in scientific terminology and reported as a new discovery.
4. Scientists may not experience significant pressure to question assumptions absorbed during their training.

PROBLEM 1 IN DETAIL — two framings of meditation in research

	Meditation as an **object** of investigation	Meditation as a **method** of investigation
Epistemic authority	The scientist	Shared: the contemplative is a true research participant
A first-person report is	Data for the scientist to explain	A possible discovery about the mind, made through meditation
Verifying a report as a discovery	Not applicable: the report is treated as data, not as a possible discovery	Training at least equal to the contemplative's

The equivocation: citing contemplatives' discoveries to establish that a mental state exists (*method*), then giving contemplatives no part in analyzing and interpreting their first-person data (*object*).

Four phases: from subject to principal investigator

PHASE 1

Subject

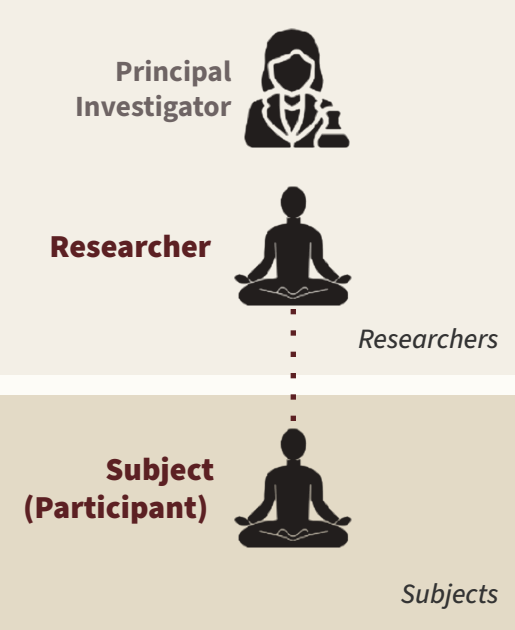
"Participant" in current usage



Contemplatives are recruited for their training, but that training plays no part when scientists interpret the data.

PHASE 2

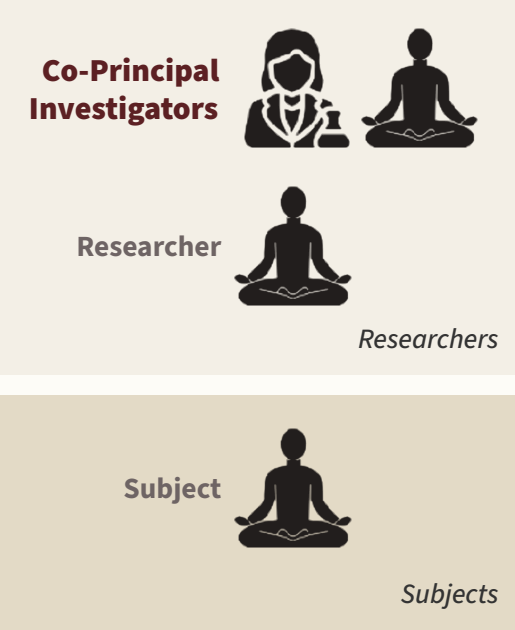
Researcher–Participant



The same contemplative provides data (e.g., EEG) and helps analyze data (e.g., first-person journals).

PHASE 3

Co-Principal Investigator



Contemplatives help frame questions, design the protocol, and interpret findings.

PHASE 4

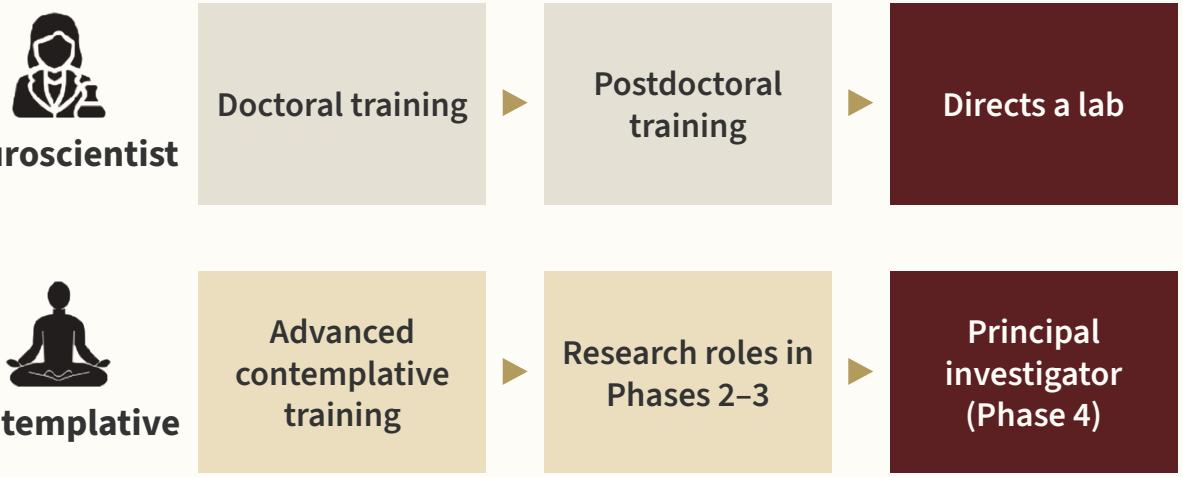
Principal Investigator



A contemplative directs the work; researchers and subjects may come from both scientific and contemplative communities.

Recommendation: develop training pathways that bring contemplatives from phase 1 to 4 — from subject to scientist

A PARALLEL TO SCIENTIFIC TRAINING



Also needed: new IRB-approved protocols in which contemplatives fill these roles.

TO BE SPECIFIED FOR EACH TRANSITION

Phase transition	1 → 2	2 → 3	3 → 4
Methodological competencies	?	?	?
Mentorship arrangements	?	?	?
Publication norms	?	?	?

Evidential convergence between first-person and third-person methods will remain mostly one-sided for as long as only one side is granted epistemic authority.