

Teaching Mindfulness with Mindfulness of Diversity

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Introduction.

At a recent retreat for mindfulness teachers, one of my fellow attendees, a man who, if asked, we would identify as “white,” who spoke with a European accent, noted that I was the only “Black woman” in the group of more than 200. “I imagine you’re used to that, though,” he said. I nodded, and we continued on without further reflection on these apparent facts. After all, he was right: in my more than 10 years of experience within a variety of communities focused on practicing and teaching mindfulness, I am more often than not one of the few, if not the only, Black woman in the room. Within and across a variety of mainstream, Western mindfulness communities, people of color across the spectrum remain significantly underrepresented. (Kaleem, 2012).

This brief conversation with my colleague remained a source of reflection for me for days afterwards, arising both in and out of formal meditations. Obviously, he had noticed the fact of my racial difference from nearly everyone in the group. He had noted it *to me*, while talking with me alone. He had mentioned it without any reference to the meanings he himself, to his own race and gender, or to any meanings he might attach to these differences. And yet, in so doing he had implicitly acknowledged a sense of unifying relationship around the unspoken category of his own so-called race, amongst the large group of others who so identify, even given its historically troubling associations. At the same time, he was naming or acknowledging his sense, his awareness, of some dimensions of experience of the world that are, in some ways, different from mine.

Why Include Talk about Race in a Book For Teachers of Mindfulness?

Some of you may be wondering why this conversation should matter to any of us at all. After all, one of the ways that mindfulness practitioners and many in the Buddhist community have referred to the topic of race is to view it as a topic for the unenlightened, or, to put it more euphemistically, for those at a lesser developmental stage along the path. In addition, even when

we are willing to examine these issues from the standpoint of embodied human experience, most of us believe that while this may be an issue for some folks out there, *we* are not biased by or infused with racial feeling or thinking. We are comfortable with the belief that bias isn't much of a problem, and that the demographics of our teaching settings, even if worthy of some note, are not really relevant to our experience of them.

Indeed, most of us are confident that through the practices of mindfulness, and with the development that emerges from study and embodiment of the deeper teachings of Buddhism, bias based on social identity characteristics necessarily goes away – or at least, diminishes to the point that we need not give such aberrations any attention. Indeed, many may be of the view expressed by one mindfulness teacher on hearing about my work in this area: that it isn't the fact of bias that is the problem, it's the fact that we (or I) talk about bias that creates the problem. Otherwise, she seemed to believe, it would not exist.

As I discuss more fully below, there is certainly good reason for hope that mindfulness practice can reduce some forms of bias. Over time, we may be either less prone to judge people on the basis of characteristics that we know to be part of the illusions of the material world; or, we may be more quick to notice and work against the possibility that such biases will impact others in the world. Indeed, recent research that suggests these outcomes are real in the world are one part of my own motivation to teach and to practice mindfulness. In a world of so much division based on perceived differences in race, culture, religion and other socially-created bases for identification and ranking, I am heartened by the nascent evidence that these practices may play a verifiable role in minimizing these impacts in the lives of our children and theirs.

Nevertheless, I strongly disagree with the notion that awareness of race and the sense of the importance of addressing it more effectively is simply an indication of some lesser level of development as a mindfulness practitioner. As race is a facet of the embodied experience, which itself is ultimately illusory, it is no less a candidate for our awareness practice than is the sense we have of having a separate body is itself. Thus, we should be grateful when we hear some part of ourselves or others voicing the conclusion that we don't need to talk about issues of social identity in a mindfulness-based teaching setting. Such statements often reveal more about the willingness, or not, of the speaker to bring awareness to the part of the community or other environment in which such biases are not merely present but are, in fact, sources of ongoing suffering. They reveal areas in which we have gone blind or hardened our hearts to a particular kind of suffering. They may also ultimately point the way toward some aspect of our woundedness about these matters that is itself seeking healing. Such statements are worthy of attention, of being brought with skill into engagement with mindfulness practices, and of compassionate responses.

So: About Race and Mindfulness in an M.B.S.R. teaching setting.

I did not find my colleague's straightforward reference to the largely taboo subject of race in the midst of our M.B.S.R. retreat to be at all offensive. For one thing, I had already been identified to the group as someone interested in looking at race and other forms of bias through the lens of mindfulness, and so I thought that this may have been the reason my fellow teacher felt free to speak to me about this issue that we so often avoid in mixed company. For another, this fact had not escaped my own awareness. Part of my experience as a being taught to think of herself as a Black woman, such conditions are in fact common.

Indeed, rather than cause me any concern, I felt somehow heartened by his mentioning of this obvious fact. And in taking the risk of raising this issue with me, when so many others had not mentioned it at all, this man seemed somehow a bit more trustworthy than others in the room. For a moment, it felt as if I were no longer carrying that part of my experience – a dimension that I must deal with virtually all day and every day – entirely alone.

What this colleague was doing was speaking aloud about aspects of our experience of the world with which we inevitably relate every day in myriad. It is a dimension of experience that we all know, an aspect which shapes our relationships with others, in often, if not mostly, unacknowledged and unspoken ways. It is the dimension of experience to which we might refer, if we were to give it a name, as “racial.” And however we might define it, use it, or deploy it in Western settings, it inescapably communicates something about our relationship to status and power, and about how we relate to others along those dimensions as well.

Relationality, as Jon Kabat Zinn and others repeatedly teach us, is the heart of mindfulness. Mindfulness makes us more aware of the ways in which “we,” each of “us” however defined, relate with everything else in our experience. This is certainly true in my own experience. Whether sitting with awareness of breath, and noticing the relationship of body to breath, and of embodied breathing to *that which breathes* and from there to the pool of mystery in which “it” sits (that which we call things like “the earth” and “the environment”), sitting in choiceless awareness or engaged in some other practice, I am made more aware of the interactions between what I call “me” and what is called, well, everything else. When breathing the air that I did not create, where does my body begin and the air end? In these ways, mindfulness practice is, to me, a constant reawakening to the reality of lived interbeing between the so-called self and other. It is a constant waking up to nonduality or oneness. And on the plane of our relative, social relationships with others, it is a waking of to the ways that that oneness is or may be interrupted, again and again on any given day, by experiences that are in some ways influenced by race.

Thus, for years I have practiced with bringing mindfulness to awareness of relationality in all of its manifestations – including, among many, many other sometimes relevant aspects of my social identity, my own and others' relationships with race, and the relations between myself and those whose identities mark them as racially Other. And while sitting, simply noticing thoughts about the brief conversation I had on race at the retreat rising and falling in

consciousness, I sense again the insight that “my race,” and the race of others in even such seemingly stripped-down social settings, is relevant in ways that I do not fully understand. I take a breath and opened to questions:

Why *are* Black women so rarely seen in Western mindfulness settings?

How *do* my mindfulness practices assist in the ongoing work of racial justice?

And *what did it mean* that my colleague and I, two seasoned members of the Western mindfulness teaching community, could see and acknowledge facts along these lines, and then go on as if there might be nothing more to see, to be with, to do or to say about it?

In this Chapter, I inquire into those and similar questions. I not only discuss the specific issue of bias based on race and color, but I also issue a gentle challenge to teachers of Western mindfulness to commit to the work of bringing greater awareness to the specific issue of bias based on race and color into mindfulness, M.B.S.R. and MBI (Mindfulness-Based Intervention) teaching and learning communities. In the limited pages available to me here, I hope to make the case for rejecting our culture’s usual prescription of blindness and numbness around these issues, and of blandly hoping that they will somehow get better over time. Instead, I hope to inspire the more heartfelt path of turning gently toward the particular and unnecessary suffering caused to so many by the very ways that we continue to go blind to the operation of race and racism in our own lives and in those of our fellows in the world.

I place particular emphasis on race and color for two reasons. One is the fact of common difficulty seeing the deep yet often subtle infusions of race and racial meaning in contemporary Western cultures, especially in the United States, the deep meaning and effects that have led to and continue to lead to an inordinate amount of unevenly distributed suffering. Adding to that history, if we have been willing to look, we have each been reminded in recent months and years of the continuing significance of race and cultural difference in interactions between individuals in communities across the globe. And in America, at least, a stunning number have resulted in the absolutely senseless loss of life. For this reason, a particular focus on our awareness of the issue of race and its role in our lives and communities seems not merely worthwhile, but in many ways, urgently necessary.

The other reason is that, as I see it, race is intimately bound up with literally *all* of our most socially relevant identities, whether they be labeled “gender,” “sex orientation,” or some other, and vice-versa. “Race is lived through class,” and through gender and sexual orientation, and so on; and, vice-versa (Nguyen, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 1997). These claims point to very subtle cognitive and social dynamics of the sort that typically elude common understanding, but for which understanding mindfulness practices may be particularly well-suited.

My hope, then, is that we will, each of us separately and together, commit to inquiring more deeply into the ways that race plays out into our own life and in the lives of others in

communities and in the broader world -- however subtly and less prominently than other aspects of identity it may appear, at the moment, to be. If however race seems so much less relevant than other identity issues in your own life and communities (and it genuinely may be) that a focus on it seems unappealing, then perhaps you will nevertheless read on. My hope for you is that this mindful meditation on race and on how this aspect of identity intersects with all others, operating subtly on all of us in different and nuanced ways, may assist you in exploring the bringing of mindfulness more fully to bear on the full range of identities and dynamics that arise, including such potentially divisive dimensions of experience as religion, culture, and immigration status.

As a concrete support for this often difficult but essential work, I offer a few examples of the many ways we might experience and be with what we may begin to recognize more frequently as racial experience, within ourselves and in the lives of others. My goal is to support efforts intentionally to engage mindfully with lived experiences of racism -- within ourselves and in the lives of others -- through mindfulness-based awareness and compassion practices.

The continuing significance of race and color, of these aspects of experience to which, together, we are gently turning our attention now, has recently been chronicled by other analysts both in and out of the mindfulness community (see, e.g., Coates, 2015; Alexander, 2012). It is a pervasive if unacknowledged feature of our everyday lives. This is so despite the dominant embrace in America and in many other cultures, at least at the official and formal levels (if not in each of our hearts) of the ideal of colorblindness. Colorblindness is the idea that the best way of dealing with racial and other forms of perceived social identities is to be “blind” to them. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is believed by many to have suggested in his sea-changing “I Have A Dream,” speech, we are to see others not by the color of the skin but “by the content of our characters.”

Why “Colorblindness” Is Incompatible with Mindfulness and MBI-Teaching.

Given the deep entrenchment of the notion of colorblindness as the best way to reflect the lack of bias towards people of color, or at least to appear what in America is called “politically correct” around the issue, contemplative inquiry into the notion and its implications is worthwhile.

We might begin by asking: what is the actual experience of colorblindness? Does it arise as a *literal* blindness, or complete lack of perception, of race? Are we completely unaware of racially-differentiated bodies or of other aspects of our social and material worlds (neighborhoods, schools, music and so on)? A simple reflection on our experience every day, including the brief story with which I began this Chapter, reveals that most often, it does not. While colorblindness has been endorsed by many as the best way forward in the post-Civil Rights era, each of us is reminded daily that race still matters. In America and elsewhere around

the globe, we still really do see race. We actually see race and other forms of social identity differences between ourselves and others all the time.

Depending on our own very personal experiences with racial identification and meaning-making in our lives, we each generally see race whenever we encounter another. Moreover, racial identification has seeped into our understanding of various geographical and institutional spaces, such that neighborhoods and schools, for example, may be racially-identified, in subtle or not-so-subtle ways in our minds.

And yet, despite some similarities in this among us, we also often see race very differently, one from another. So it is worthwhile to turn specifically toward the often difficult questions of how race (and other identities) appears and impacts us *in each of our own lives*.

For example, for those racialized or trained to think of themselves as “White,” and particularly while inhabiting traditionally white spaces, race is very often not noticed unless or until a racial other appears in an otherwise unexpected place. The *raced-ness* of white experience, then, the *Whiteness* of it, often may be perceived as raceless. Indeed, a major dimension of the experience of Whiteness is its transparency, or invisibility, often, to those sharing the experience. Hence Whiteness, and the privileges or social and institutional benefits associated with it, are often difficult to see (McIntosh, 1988). This is partly because the issue isn’t whether or not we intend to be privileged or to be racist or not. Instead, we are examining not merely our own emotional and cognitive experience, but we are looking at the systems and structures that have evolved, for centuries, to privilege and to subordinate, all based on race and color. It is hard to see, as scholar Peggy McIntosh says, that we are in systems, and that systems are in us (Rothman, 2014).

Therefore, the work of examining the role and implications of race in the life of a person who has been racialized as White is often particularly challenging. A great deal of compassion and patience is required to do so, and most of us are seldom given the space and other support necessary to do so. As an unfortunate result, we too often take comfort in the notion that through colorblindness, through ignoring racial difference as much as possible and leaving history aside, we stand a good chance of overcoming the legacies of racism without having to do very much more work.

Perhaps for these reasons it seems that despite various indications that race and color still matter very much in our lives, we have become less willing to turn toward the problem of race-based bias and racism. For years, we have been given to believe that with the advent of the above-described societal commitments to colorblindness in law and in public policy, we would somehow see the end of racism “by and by” as the Christian spirituals say. Even those on the liberal or progressive end of the political spectrum have tended to believe that, as Martin Luther King suggested, we must judge one another “not by the color of our skin but by the content of

our character.” Thus, the appeal of colorblindness reaches most all of us, to some degree or another.

Unfortunately, we have taken this largely well-intentioned point of view too far. Somehow, however, in our efforts not to judge one another based on color, we have interpreted this powerfully encouraging rhetoric to mean that it would be best, and certainly less racist, not to recognize race or color *at all*. Since no one wants to be judged racist or racially biased, most of us have engrained in our minds the notion that the best indicator of that position is “blindness” to race, and to other potentially “divisive” factors.

And for those working for justice in the world, such findings are more troubling than might be obvious. Research has shown again and again that colorblind framing does not support effective redress of public policy issues and debates related to equality and equity -- instead, such framings may actually diminish the efficacy of efforts for reform (Mazzocco, 2006).

Despite all of this, if colorblindness were, in fact, humanly possible, there might not be much need for a more mindful approach to this issue. However, research within the field of neuroscience also provides fairly clear indication that the brain’s functioning does not permit any of us to disregard what may turn out to be relevant information by the strength of our good intentions and strong will. As such, and as most of us know from simple, everyday experience, none of us is actually blind to race or color. Given the high stakes historically associated with color-based and racial line drawing, stakes that continue to permeate our lives today, social organization could ill function without efficient means of recognizing such differences, however silently or seamlessly in our social settings. So even when we try to be colorblind, we are brain-trained to fail.

For example, research confirms that most of us harbor race-based and other unconscious biases. Despite Dr. King’s plea, we really do judge people based on race, or on the color of others’ skin. As we try to behave as if we don’t see race, we have developed elaborate ways of seeing-while-not-seeing. We use coded language, such as “urban welfare recipient” when we mean Black or Brown. (Haney Lopez, 2015). Indeed, research indicates that those who have escaped the embrace of the *explicit* biases and forms of *explicit* racism of the sort that motivates terroristic hate killings in temples and churches even in the 21st century nevertheless hold *implicit* biases that, in cumulative, may be even more effective in perpetuating inequality (Staats (Kirwan Institute) 2014). We are all searching for ways of living more effectively with these basic dynamics.

In fact, research confirms common disconnects between our own, explicit belief in our ability to see beyond race and to resist bias, and our unconscious or implicit mental meaning-making around race and color. Thus, even if we try to act adopt a colorblind view in the world, it doesn’t work because our brains don’t actually work that way. Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dissonance results from implicit and explicit efforts to comply with social norms

against recognizing race and color. Despite professing to be more or less colorblind, social psychologists have found that when confronted with a racial Other, anxieties cause us to, for example, arrange seats farther apart than we might otherwise, to over-anticipate disagreement and conflict, to avoid potentially charged topics that actually lead to enhanced understanding. Professing to be colorblind amidst all such evidence to the contrary has been deemed by some to be a new form of racism – colorblind racism.

Indeed, as indicated above, both insight and analysis suggests that implicit bias may actually be heightened by the societal emphasis on colorblindness, a notion that dates to the 19th century, and played an important role in the civil rights movement of the mid-20th. When embraced by conservatives in the late 20th century, however, it became a basis for largely shutting down effective understanding of race and its impact in our lives.

While the ideal of colorblindness and other efforts to ignore social differences has widespread appeal, mindfulness counsels something else. Indeed, at its core, mindfulness is about increasing awareness of often underappreciated aspects of our daily lives. It might be that mindfulness is a radical waking up to one of the most hidden-in-plain-sight aspects of every day life, and that is the way it has been and is continually being shaped by ideas and practices rooted in the ongoing construction of race and race-based hierarchies in the world.

By the way, some of us might be heartened to know that Martin Luther King would most likely wholeheartedly agree. After all, in the oft-misunderstood passage of his famous speech, he counselled us not to be blind to color, but instead asked that we not *evaluate people* based on our inevitable recognition of such differences. He asked not that we not *see* color, but that we “judge... not by the color of [their] skin but by the content of [their] character” (Kind and Washington, 2003). Indeed, there is virtually nothing in the storied work and life of Martin Luther King that would suggest that he believed that the non-recognition of race, in all circumstances, is necessary to effectuate racial justice.

And this is a good thing given that, as indicated above, when we examine our behavior and the operation of our institutions, we find much evidence to suggest that not only do we all continue to see race, but that race still impacts our lives and shapes our life chances. It may be our failure to see race and its implications that is the greatest of our blindspots.

In sum: since it is not only a false model of how the mind actually functions, but is also ineffective as a matter of public policy supporting equality and equity, the time has come to recognize plainly that colorblindness is not the answer. Obviously, we might benefit from a new way of dealing with these dynamics in our lives. Could it be that the practices of mindfulness might be part of the solution?

How and Why Mindfulness Can Help.

To think of this question, to consider addressing the challenges of racism and other forms of Othering in the context of mindfulness is, for some, to raise an issue that many believe may be a departure from the noninstrumental foundations of mindfulness. I want to suggest that, like other teachers over the years, I view the question of instrumentalism versus noninstrumentalism through a lens large enough to contain and indeed merge the two. What we might call instrumentalism here or elsewhere (for example, in the invocation of a lovingkindness meditation) may be better seen as a path to the noninstrumental. It may be that the greatest gift of the work of mindfulness to the world may be its capacity to help us see these patterns in our lives and in the world more clearly, to experience our inherent interconnectedness, and from there, to assist us in acting more effectively and compassionately in response to the race- and other identity-related conflicts that plague our world.

So then, what, if anything, might we do to help minimize pervasive biased reactions to the racially, culturally or otherwise “different”? As I discuss more fully below, through more than ten years of engaging with law students and mindfulness practitioners seeking greater understanding of race in our daily lives, I have been working with a set of practices that support not only working with differences that may arise (and sometimes painfully), but also bringing greater understanding to bear on how they operate and impact experience in the world. I call these practices ColorInsight practices.

As we all know, as a general matter, mindfulness practices assist us in becoming aware. This state of awareness encompasses the multitude of feeling tones, thoughts, sensations and perceptions by which we know the world, and the patterns and habits by which we have become conditioned to respond to these perceptions and stimuli. Naturally then, mindfulness may assist us in becoming aware of habits and patterns associated with the phenomenon of race in our lives.

As the experience of race is embodied, and connected to thoughts, sensations, perceptions of likes and dislikes and so on, mindfulness practice provides limitless opportunities for enhancing awareness not merely of racial difference, which alone means nothing, but of the many, various and mostly subtle ways in which we relate to these differences. Over time and with practice, mindfulness brought to bear on this field of experience in our everyday lives can lead to insights about how these perceptions shape our own actions and those of others in ways which reflect these subtle mental and social interactional dynamics. This awareness is what I refer to as mindfulness-based ColorInsight.

Why Mindfulness Alone is Not Enough: The Work and the Joy of Mindful Awareness of the Racially-Constructed Self.

While mindfulness alone may reduce bias, there is more to the problem of racism in America than biased minds. Systemic patterns of injustice, patterns which routinely result in the privileging of many or most over the few, call out for the application of the particular expertise

of mindfulness. In preparation for such work, as individuals on this journey, and as teachers responsible for serving others in a diverse world, we have an often under-appreciated set of ethical obligations to our students. Given the destructive nature of racism, the prevalence of its legacies, and the ways that understanding these dynamics is difficult to many, we must include among those obligations the obligation to consider the ways that our larger cultural contexts both do and do not engage us in experiences that sound in race and racialization, that give us body-based, first-person knowledge of what these concepts mean. We might engage the practices of mindfulness as supports for becoming more aware of the nature and imprints of what we call race and of the practices of making race, that is, of racialization, in our own lives.

At the outset, we might reflect on two important dimensions of this work. Like all serious courses of study, the work of developing greater insight into race and its meaning in our lives will require learning that is not merely first-person, or based on our own experience, but is primarily often focused on third-person epistemologies or ways of knowing – from recognized authority dispensing information about concepts and phenomena. (Varela, 1993)

As just one example, consider the concept at the heart of this section of the Chapter, the concept of race. I use the word race, a word familiar to most everyone, but one which carries many different and often unexamined meanings. To better understand this and other terms that will arise as we reflect on these experiences together, we would first do well to consider third-person sources of information – definitions and discussions detailing how those words are defined by scholars in the area, subject to critical thinking and constructive thinking together – individual and collaborative evaluation in the process we know as learning and thinking together. (Thayer-Bacon, 2014.)

However, to develop mindfulness-based insight into these words, we not only hold our third-person inquiry in a space of openness to critique and the learning more, but we might also deepen our understanding of these terms by the inclusion of first-person ways of knowing using mindfulness practices developed specifically for this purpose. The multifaceted and layered work of developing our knowledge in this area through first, second and third person means of knowing is what I have referred to elsewhere in greater detail as ColorInsight. (Magee, forthcoming 2016.)

There are many ways to engage mindfulness in support of the study of a range of interdisciplinary social science dimensions of ColorInsight (historical, psychological, and so on). For our purposes, it would seem that this dimension of the work may be well served by contemplative inquiry grounded in the study of summaries of some of the most important definitions and insights of the field and then committing to building on these cursory understandings through ongoing study, criticism and mindful inquiry over time. In the next sections of this Chapter, I present some of the ways of doing so. Here I draw on my own work and that of a deep body of scholarship to provide a starting summary with the goal of providing a

basis in contemplative inquiry focused on the relevant social sciences, as a basis for fostering common understanding, at the primarily cognitive level, about these issues going forward.

Similarly, there are many ways to use mindfulness to develop our innate and embodied capacities for deeper understanding in this area. Thus, in a section to follow, I explore some of the ways that the eight week course in M.B.S.R. provides ample opportunities to explore the development of insight into the operation of race in our own experience, within our classrooms and within the communities in which we practice.

The Rightness of Teaching, Learning and Meditation on Bias

Just as many of us have come to see a sort of deep freedom as one of the benefits of mindfulness, available to any of us, we might inquire into whether mindfulness may assist us in experiencing a broader sense of social justice. My own experience is that indeed it does. By establishing ourselves in awareness that racial injustice is simply a particular kind of suffering, and yet a pervasive and under-acknowledged one in our world and within mindfulness communities, we may be guided toward a way of engaging mindfully with suffering based on the issue of race and/or color, wherever it arises.

The teachings upon which mindfulness is based provide ample indication of their usefulness for inquiring deeply into suffering of all kinds, knowing the causes and developing a path toward freedom therefrom. One might suppose that, given the prevalence both of problems and conflicts around race, and the difficulties we have in addressing them well, we might have long ago thought specifically to bring mindfulness directly and explicitly to bear on such suffering in Western mindfulness circles.

And yet, oddly, this has most often not happened. Instead, we have most often experienced the typical patterns of silence around these issues into our teaching settings. And when the effort is made to raise these issues in mixed dharma group, failure often results.

This does not have to be so. Indeed, there are many ways that mindfulness may be skillfully brought to bear on issues of race and racism, using practices and lessons aimed at raising awareness at the personal, interpersonal and systemic levels. Developing skillfulness in this area should be considered important for teachers of mindfulness, not merely because we each have blindspots and unhealed wounds around these topics that cause us unnecessary suffering, or even because our failure to do so could very well interfere with the creation of safe spaces for the support of our participants. We should consider it important to do so because of our awareness of interconnection, of the interdependent co-arising of each and all. Race-based suffering affects and is affected by each of us. Assisting others in becoming aware of this fact is

a natural pathway for mindfulness into the world. In this way, we stand to relieve the suffering of individuals, communities and a world in need of the compassionate support for healing that may be the greatest gift of our work.

For example, liberation theologian and educator Paulo Freire noted the power of teaching and learning to liberate those who are oppressed in communities and large world. Oppressions based on identities vary from region to region, from community to community, but they exist everywhere. Mindfulness-based pedagogy, encompassing both *what* we are prepared to offer as appropriate, and *how* we address these issues in our teaching sessions, can assist us in bringing about a new dimension of liberation for ourselves, and more importantly, for those whose suffering consciously includes more intense form of harm based on identity-based Othering.

Indeed, it bears repeating: most of us have suffered some form of this kind of injury. For various reasons, our injuries may be more or less intense, and may be more or less present in our field of awareness.

For example, for a mindfulness practitioner, a woman with features often associated with Asian heritage living in America, Sweden, or in other Western cultures, it may be the subtle insult of not being seen or taken seriously, except as an object of exotic sexual desire.

For another mindfulness practitioner, a man racialized as White, it may be the memory of having walked unknowingly into a neighborhood racialized as Black, and being surrounded by a group of young Black men who threatened to do him harm.

Another mindfulness practitioner, a (so-called) woman whose racial features and coloring are not immediately recognizable as falling into any one expected category or another, it may be the subtle reminder of the presumption of difference and possible Outsider status that arises with the unintentionally harmful question, “No, I mean, where are you *from*?”

And for yet another mindfulness practitioner, man given to identify as Black and as American, it may be the deep fear of violent assault, physical or psychological, that he has come to see as possible for himself or any of his loved ones any time we are stopped by a police officer, or followed by an apparently white male with a baseball bat while roller blading in a suburban park -- regardless what we may be seeking to do to make ourselves acceptable, to fit in, to make our race “go away,” to be seen as human beings (see e.g., Steele, 2010).

Each of these moments of experience, when considered as a single moment or series of moments, may be more or less meaningful or worthy of reflection. But depending on the context – the time, the specific location in the country, the demographics of the communities in which routinely we live and work – one’s experiences may be more or less tilted in one way, or patterned. Such patterns have effects that may be seen as cumulative. And our classrooms are not immune or necessarily protected from instances of bias, stereotyping or other examples of

what experts call “identity threats” (Steele, 2010). Even if we manage never to bring any of these dynamics in, they may well be brought in by a participant.

Thus we must develop the intention to see more clearly the signs of racial or other identity-based exclusion. We must be willing, at least to some degree, to “read our classrooms” with a view toward identifying or “sleuthing” the person who might be feeling vulnerable to a sense of not belonging, and taking steps to make that person feel more welcome and identity-safe (Steele, 2010).

To become aware of the ways that we have each suffered injury around these matters is not to endorse an identity of “the victim.” Especially as mindfulness teachers, we strive to be open to all. In this case, this means openness to looking at such critical incidents in our own and in others’ lives as examples of a particular kind of suffering, one associated directly with racism and its close associate colorism. Again, recognition is the first step in mindful inquiry, and hence the first stage on the path toward deeper insight. We recognize that suffering along these dimensions exists – whether through attachment, aversion or ignorance, according the traditional teachings, or perhaps due to some other cause. We accept that this is what is happening in the present moment – without reacting in judgment, without fighting with reality. When we are ready, we may investigate or inquire more deeply into the nature of our suffering around this particular issue. And we may do so without identification, without making this experience another aspect of our limited sense of who we are.

As we practice working with bias and with the goal of enhancing inclusivity, we may find ourselves taking concrete steps to make our teaching and learning environments more safe and inclusive for all of our students. Thus, and with some degree of what traditional Buddhist teachings would call the Eightfold Path, we embrace Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Action and Livelihood, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, applied specifically to the investigations of the causes and conditions of racism as it operates in specific ways in our time. In this way, we may further relieve a dimension of our own suffering and the suffering of others.

Humility, Sensitivity to Context and Love as Foundational Commitments

To begin to accept that the dislocations created by race are more pervasive than we might have been given to think and that we’ve all suffered in some way around these matters is by no means to suggest that we have all suffered *in the same way or to the same degree*. For each of us, suffering around these issues has varied depending on a great many things. Particular context is critically important to understanding how and when these factors may be contributing to suffering in our world.

And, because each of us may have had very different experiences of all of this, we are often not in a good position to guess what another has seen or lived around these issues. Thus we need assistance in examining our own experience more closely, in sharing those experiences with others, and in learning from others about their experiences around the issue of race.

Mindfulness can be a powerful tool for raising awareness of the limitations of our own experiences, and assisting us in communicating with others to learn more. Perhaps one of the biggest impediments to effectiveness in this area is the sense that we “already know” all that we need to know, that we have already developed the sensitivity and awareness that we need. But like all aspects of our experience, the practices required to remain in awareness may indeed be ongoing. As demographics and social norms change, we may find ourselves differently challenged today than we were ten years ago, despite twenty years of sitting! Our task is simply to practice coming to our senses in this area as in others (Kabat Zinn, 2006), to practice knowing ourselves, in this area as in others (Santorelli, 2010). We are practicing becoming aware of the dimensions of experience that signal bias, and working to shift into openness, in each moment. In this way, we may also find our way back to our sense of uplift, to aspects of our experience with so-called Others that bring us pleasure, and to what we have in common even when we may have very much that may be said to mark us as “different” from one another. Indeed, it can lead us to the experience of joy that comes from recognition and connection and can arise moment to moment throughout our days, increasing our overall well-being and health.

And yet there may even more. Arthur Zajonc suggests that the deep basis of contemplative inquiry is what might best be simply called love. (Zajonc, 2011). Here, love might be defined as the desire to overcome the sense of separation that many feel between social identity groups – a sense of separation which many practitioners of mindfulness understand to be illusory. (Tillich, 1962) Indeed, the Pali word, *metta*, or lovingkindness, might be an even more appropriate frame for this work, resting as it does in the unconditional friendliness that is at the heart of this aspect of our work.

The focus on possible links between knowing, deeper understanding, and love or lovingkindness seems particularly important as we turn specifically toward the work of inquiring more deeply into the nature of race, racism and other forms of social-identity-based bias in the 20th century. More than anything else, we must bring to these efforts a sense of love, compassion, equanimity, and openness. We must bring the will, the intention at each moment, to work toward keeping our teaching spaces, and our own hearts, as inclusive as possible. And when we falter, as we inevitably will, we practice bringing ourselves back into alignment with our goals as soon as we notice that we have lost our way.

What Are Some Specific Teacher Preparations that Support Inclusive Teaching?

More concretely, experts in teaching and learning about diversity effectively note the importance of two dimensions of the work: both *how* we teach and *what* we teach. In mindfulness, as in teaching about diversity, the “teaching” is probably best thought of as facilitating. We seek to create environments in which traditional teaching and learning takes place, and information is shared from teacher to participant, but more critically, in which insights

arise among participants as trust grows, risk-taking occurs and self-reflection leads to growth, together. I will focus on the question of how we teach in the following section. Here, I'll discuss some framing considerations regarding how we should prepare to facilitate these discussions by being prepared to assist in our participants' examination of the key concepts that may present themselves.

What we do to raise our own knowledge about the relevant identity issues is important. And yet, we should not expect ourselves, or any particular mindfulness teacher, to become experts on the teaching of race. Instead, we might realistically aspire to become more familiar, over time, with the core teachings of racial formation and systemic racism by studying, and being prepared to discuss as necessary, three key categories of information:

- **History as Dharma:** Begin or continue our own learning about the history of racism, sexism, sex-orientation bias, cultural racism, xenophobia or other forms of bias in your community. The recorded history of oppression against people of color and other systematically subordinated groups provides the critical information necessary for deep understanding of the nature of problems that arise today. In addition, such records are themselves sources of contemplative inquiry. (Young, 2014) There are numerous resources available to assist us in this ongoing aspect of our work. For example, in the United States, such organizations as Facing History, Facing Ourselves provide free and concise resources for self-study across a broad range of the most common identity-based challenges to justice in that country. Wherever you are, you should be willing to engage in study about the fissures and histories that live on in the experiences and cultures of those most present in your environments. Reflect on the ways such matters may be present in mixed MBI settings. What results from such reflections may vary for each of us. Jack Kornfield has stated that as a result of such examination of our history, he made a personal commitment to always include at least one reference to racism in his public talks.
- **Key Concepts as Scaffolding:** Psychologists and other social scientists have developed deeper understanding of the dynamics by which race and racism are made and re-made each generation, and given us new language for describing them. For example, such core terms as race and racism have been redefined to emphasize the constructed nature of each. (Omi and Winant, 1991). Important concepts also help people who have suffered name their injuries and particular vulnerabilities, and begin the process of healing from them. A few of the central concepts that have been researched extensively in the last decade include such notions as Privilege, Structural Racism, Colorism, Microaggression, and Stereotype Threat. Here, too, there are numerous resources available to support more effective cognitive understanding of the dynamics of bias today. (See, e.g., Adams and Bell, 2007.) Becoming familiar with these and other key terms in contemporary

discussion of these issues may go a long way in establishing your trustworthiness to students from a wide-variety of backgrounds.

- **Lived Experience as Essential “Text”:** Sociologists agree that a key to understanding the operation of race and other identities in our lives is reflection on the lived experience of individuals, the lived experience of race in each of our lives. Our own first-person experiences that reflect the very processes by which race is made and remade in every generation, in each community, and in every institution, must be examined as we would third-person texts. And we must see the importance of learning from one another’s experiences in diverse community as well.

What Are Some Specific Practices that Support the Development of “ColorInsight”?

As teachers, each of us might focus with intention on developing a greater awareness of the role of mindfulness in our lives. As the opening story indicates, doing so may be essential to creating a sense of trust among participants from an increasingly wide background, and being adept at dealing with whatever arises in group inquiry. Doing so may be more difficult for some than for others. Each of us must decide for ourselves where we are on the spectrum of capacity and comfort with all of these dimensions of experience, and rely on our practices to support us in deepening and moving forward.

Fortunately, the classical practices of mindfulness lend themselves to the cultivation of deep awareness that would encompass the experience, process and practices of racialization -- the processes by which we make and remake meaning around race, processes that often lead to various forms of race-based bias, whether on the individual, interpersonal, or institutional-systemic levels.

This work is not easy work. Developing deeply in this area requires a deep commitment to doing so. For the reasons we’ve already uncovered together, I believe that such a level of commitment should be firmly encouraged among teachers of mindfulness in the 21st century. As a result, such teachers may be in a good position to work on healing around race and racism for ourselves. This is a necessary first step, an important obligation of teachers who wish to create spaces in which anyone, from any background, may feel welcome and may trust that their particular suffering will be met with understanding and love.

But there is more good news. If we commit to this dimension of the work, we may also ultimately live our way into the position of being able to support guided inquiry that facilitates individuals in experiencing freedom from their own experience of racial wounds and the fears that result from racial injury -- a particularly valuable gift to those of us who have suffered racial subjugation over many years and in many places over the years, through which we who have actually been victimized may experience a measure of true freedom. Perhaps more importantly,

we may support those more familiar with experiences of privilege to move through the emotions that accompany reckoning with our racial history, its present day legacies, and the transformative implications of moving toward equity – including fear and the uncertainty that naturally arises from real change.

Thus, for example, a modified mindfulness of everyday experience executive use, such as the mindful eating exercise (the classic “raisin meditation”), may be modified and deployed as a ColorInsight practice. Instead of bringing our attention to this object that we hold in our hands and examine through the senses, we bring the same level of awareness to a close examination of this outer layer of our embodied self.... What does it feel like? To the touch? From the inside? What about bringing the sense of hearing to it: what does this top layer of the self sound like? We might taste it, or not... If we decide *not* to or to do so, notice what thoughts arise from your decision making process here And: what about the smell of it? What do we notice when we bring our eyes to focus on it? What thoughts, judgments arise?

Alternatively, a body scan meditation might be guided in such a way as to include a reflection on the skin. Weighing on an average (for adults), about 8 pounds, the skin is the largest organ of the body. Why is it not more commonly included as a point of focus in the traditional body scan instructions? I think this is because of the large extent to which we have been trained to ignore the skin, to behave as if we don't notice color, as it just “doesn’t matter.” Bringing awareness to the skin through a body scan can be a gentle reminder of the literal fact of the particular skin we are in, and open the door to deeper reflection on its impact on our experiences of the world everyday.

Following exercises such as these, we reflect gently and with compassion on what came up. An open-ended prompt for group discussion might used, such as the following: "What did you feel, notice or think about this exercise? Was there anything that surprised you?"

When I have done this exercise alone, so much comes up! I marvel at my own golden brown skin, which to me, seems to reflect the colors of the earth and sun, together. But I recall the time when I was dressed in one of my best little black dresses at a law school faculty-sponsored social, and a senior white male law professor on my faculty pulled me in for a one-on-one disclosure: "I hope you don't take this the wrong way," he said, putting me on notice of an upcoming offensive move, "but you remind me of a beautiful, perfectly fit *horse*." Was it my brown skin or some other feature that caused him to make such a statement? I will never know. I wish I had had sense of self to turn that comment into some sort of retort about how he must have seen some gorgeous horses in his day.... But instead, it left me wounded. It felt like a veiled attack, a microinsult (Sue, D et al., 2007). And even now I sometimes wonder whether in the eyes of other Whites, I seem like some sort of animal because of my particular combination of skin tone and features.

What comes up for those racialized as White? As Asian or Yellow? As Brown? As an Indian? Or in the various other ways that we do race in the contexts in which we live?

What comes up for *you*?

I offer these as just two of many practices that might be brought to bear within MBSR to deepen understanding of the nature of race in our lives. Similar practices could assist us in understanding the related and intersecting roles of gender, sex orientation and class. This chapter, then, is a call for MBI and other mindfulness teachers to examine how social identity shows up in our lives, even despite our own "enlightened" thinking about the way that we are not defined by our identities! Our own experiences as teachers can give us some sense of the potential for exercises such as these to raise awareness of race in our own lives, of its subtle, often meanings -- and of the not so subtle or hidden meanings and continuing significance, to ourselves and to others. We can begin also to imagine some of the ways that we might mindfully deepen our own and others' understanding of these issues.

I complete this introductory overview of the practices that I call ColorInsight with a proposed addition to the teachings on perception. Mindfulness increases our ability not merely to be aware but to know something about our level of awareness and, whatever its state, about its incompleteness. So we might consider bringing attention to the issue of perceptions around race.

“Critical Incidents Reflection,” a personal narrative practice: a mindful writing or journaling exercise may be a useful early step in focusing attention on perception. One such exercise invites participants to focus on critical incidents, or particular moments when they learned something new and important (for them) about the nature of race.

For example, participants might be instructed to sit in silence and with awareness of breath for a few minutes. The instructor would invite a shift from conscious sitting to a period of Focused Personal Inquiry into the topic of race in their own lives. Then, the instructor might one or more of the following prompts:

- When did you first learn something about the meaning of race? Reflect and recall at least on early memory of an incident in which you learned something that “stuck with you” about the meaning of racial or color-based differences in life.
- What is the race that is most often associated with you? With other people in your most frequent places of work or our fields of awareness?
- What thoughts, sensations or emotions arise in you when you are asked to reflect on your own racial experience? On that of others?

Using Mindful Speaking and Listening in Dyads, and Guided Large Group Inquiry to follow, participants might be lovingly supported in engaging in the practices of mindful

awareness of one another's suffering; and, of bearing witness to that which has wounded and may yet be healed. In this way, they may be gently and compassionately supported in opening themselves to the experience of interconnected oneness – of the mosaic of human awareness – and, to the experience of transformed consciousness that may and often does result.

Conclusion.

Teaching mindfulness is a great privilege. With it comes the call to make ethical commitments to meet each participant in our teaching and learning communities with as much sensitivity as possible. This is where lovingkindness and compassion thrive, and where sympathetic joy may be genuinely felt and equanimity genuinely challenged. Working together at this particular growing edge is often difficult. But the call to do so is at the heart of the work of bringing mindfulness into Western societies. Ultimately, it may be the greatest gift of Western mindfulness: the ennobling work of co-creating truly inclusive spaces for teaching and learning mindfulness and the mindful Way of being, again and again.

American history, and even world history, has been shaped in important and ongoing measure by the concept of race and by the patterns of distributed privilege and subordination that this concept has served to pre-figure, justify and legitimize. Turning toward the suffering of race is but one way to experience the challenge and the joy of our inherent interconnectedness. Working to do so more effectively may be the radical heart of the mission of the Western mindfulness teacher, a mission that will be increasingly critical and perhaps even central to the work of mindfulness in the decades to come.

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