Where Inner Change Meets Social Change:
Connecting Contemplative Practices and Social Justice in Higher Education

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Introduction

I majored in suffering at Amherst. Motivated by my own experiences of suffering, I wanted to understand what suffering is and why we suffer. These questions led me to examine suffering in the form of social injustice. During my sophomore year, I took a course called "Anthropology of Food," which made me aware of my blindness to the inequalities that exist about the production and consumption of food. I felt the ethical implications of what I was learning, but I was unsure of what to do and aware that there was much more that I didn't know about systemic injustice. The next semester, I took a philosophy course called "Moral Blindnesses," hoping to understand my own blindnesses more and figure out what to do with the suffering that I was becoming to see more clearly. I also took a course called "The Literature of Repression and Resistance," which is an Inside-Out course that took place at Hampshire County Jail. Every week, Amherst students and incarcerated students came together to discuss American slave narratives, memoirs of the Civil Rights movement, stories of working people's struggles, and other forms of injustice.

Outside of class, I engaged in contemplative practices such as journaling to connect what I was learning to my own experiences and to the questions that kept me up at night. Although my professors didn't explicitly encourage this, journaling helped me connect my coursework to my inner life. I became more aware of the suffering that I saw in myself, in what I was reading, and in the world around me. It awakened my concern for social justice. However, I felt sad, stuck, hopeless, and overwhelmed. I often cried while sitting in bathroom stalls of my dorm, feeling the

weight of the world's suffering. Although I started to learn about social change, I didn't learn how to cultivate the inner change that is needed for effective social justice work. I didn't know what to do about the pain that I felt. I also didn't know enough about how oppression works, and how to take action to change it.

My experiences led me to question how contemplative practices and social justice can come together in higher education to liberate ourselves and our world from suffering. Through my journaling practice, I realized that learning about social justice is not enough if we don't connect it to our inner lives (and vice versa). Inner change and social change are interconnected, and can bring about change in ways that they couldn't have when done separately. Moreover, individuals are a part of the world in which they live. The change that they wish to create also needs to happen within themselves. Contemplative practices (which cultivate inner and social awareness), when combined with social justice (which furthers liberatory consciousness, critical analysis, and engaged action), can lead to inner and outer transformation. When integrated together, they can help higher education meet more fully its mission of developing the individual and the common good.

In this thesis, I examine how a contemplative pedagogy rooted in social justice bring the "worlds" of contemplative practices, social justice, and higher education together. I engage in multiple modes of inquiry to explore this question, such as: reading relevant literature about inner and social change; participating in conferences about contemplative pedagogy; doing contemplative practices; doing action research, which is "disciplined process of inquiry conducted *by* and *for* those taking the action" (Sagor)[1]; and engaging my community in this

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[1] Sagor, Richard. "What Is Action Research?" *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*. N.p., 2000. Web. 23 Apr. 2016.

inquiry. I want to live and embody an education in which these three "worlds" come together. I hope to develop an experiential understanding of my research, as well as the capacity to create a more contemplative, socially just education as a student and a soon-to-be graduate.

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Integrating the Worlds of Contemplative Practice, Social Justice, and Higher Education

My contemplative engagement with my education led me to the core question of my Independent Scholar thesis: How can we integrate contemplative practices, social justice, and higher education together in a way that cultivates both inner and social change? To explore this question, I will discuss the connection between contemplative practices and social justice. Then, I will show how a central mission of higher education is individual transformation and the common good. Next, I will discuss contemplative practices and social justice can help us meet this mission in practice. Finally, I question what would be required for such change to occur and how a contemplative pedagogy rooted in social justice can further this process.

Contemplative Practices: What They Are, What They Offer, and What Is Missing

Contemplative practices are ways to engage in critical first-person inquiry. These practices can have both an internal and external focus, fostering greater awareness of the ways we live and act on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic levels. There is a wide variety of practices, which makes it difficult to provide a precise definition because they can come in many forms. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society's "The Tree of Contemplative Practices"

illustrates some of the practices that exist. The tree in the diagram organizes some practices into different categories:

- *Stillness Practices* (meditation, quieting the mind, silence, centering)

- *Generative Practices* (lectio divina, visualization, beholding, loving-kindness meditation)

- *Creative Practices* (contemplative arts, improvisation, music and singing, journaling)

- *Activist Practices* (pilgrimages to areas where social justice issues are highlighted, work and volunteering, vigils and marches, bearing witness)

- *Relational Practices* (council circle, dialog, deep listening, storytelling)

- *Movement Practices* (labyrinth walking, walking meditation, yoga, dance, qigong, aikido, tai chi chu'an)

- *Ritual/Cyclical Practices* (ceremonies and rituals based in spiritual or cultural traditions, establishing a sacred/personal space, retreats)

The contemplative tree highlights two main intentions for doing these practices: to cultivate awareness as well as communion and connection. These intentions "encompass and transcend differences in the religious traditions from which many of the practices originated, and allow room for the inclusion of new practices that are being created in secular contexts." These practices stem from spiritual, religious, and wisdom traditions as well as secular roots. Even activities such as gardening and eating "may be understood to be contemplative practices when done with the intent of cultivating awareness and wisdom" ("The Tree of Contemplative Practices"). These practices can foster aspects of inner change, such as: wisdom, honest self-reflection, patience, calmness, a sensitive and realistic sense of ethics, clarity of purpose,

interconnectedness, focused attention, awareness, skillful listening and communicating, creativity, and more (*The Activist's Ally: Contemplative Tools for Social Change*).
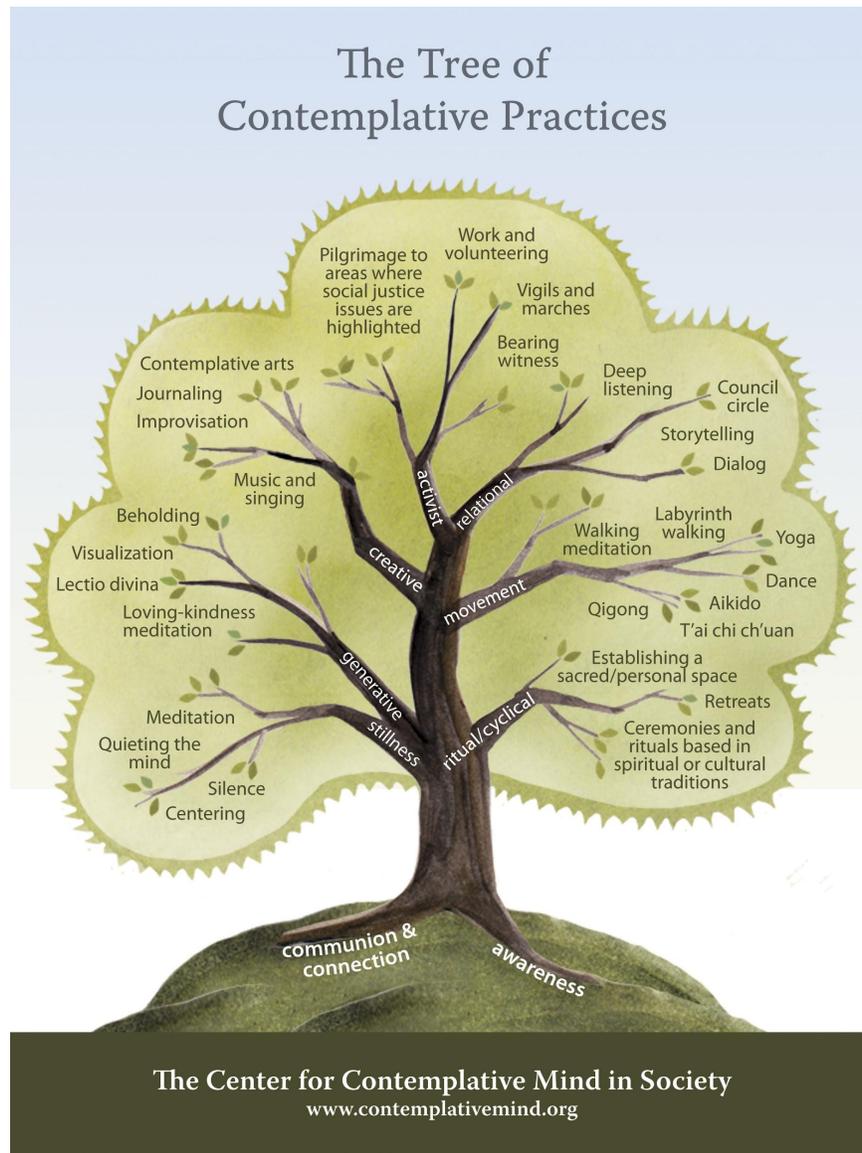
© The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Throughout my education at Amherst College, I have engaged with various kinds of contemplative practices. When I was a senior in high school, I began to question who I was, the

meaning of life, and what the purpose of higher education is. I carried these questions with me when I began my Amherst education. My ongoing practice has been asking big questions about meaning, purpose, and values. I wanted to follow my intellectual curiosity and develop a sense of direction in life. I engaged in self-inquiry on my own, assuming that everyone else was doing the same because that was why they chose to attend Amherst. I realized that this was not necessarily the case. After a discussion with my first-year advisor Professor Barbezat, I felt that this self-inquiry should be integrated into our education, and that it is important to reflect on these questions as a community so that we can learn from each other. In Fall 2013, I created *Defining Amherst*, an initiative about exploring the purpose of an Amherst education, and improving our community to further that purpose. I engaged students, faculty, staff, and alumni to reflect on who they are, why they are at Amherst, what they value, how they want to shape their lives, and how they can contribute to the world.[2]

After Defining Amherst, I continued my practice of asking big questions and engaging others with these questions. During the summers after my sophomore and junior year, I interned at Open Future Institute (OFI)[3] as a Civic Engagement Scholar.[4] While I was there, I helped develop the QUESTion Project, an initiative that seeks to create spaces for high school and college students to reflect on questions of meaning, purpose, and values.[5] Working with my OFI

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[2] My friend Seewai Hui '16 and I published some of these conversations through a Defining Amherst column and photo project in *The Amherst Student* (to see a collection of this material, visit the Defining Amherst website listed in the Works Cited). In February 2014, Seewai and I organized the Sophomore Summit with the Career Center and the Dean of Students, creating a space for sophomores, college seniors, and alumni to discuss these life questions together and explore how we can create a meaningful college experience.

[3] Open Future Institute is a non-profit organization founded by Gerard Senehi '82. OFI developed the QUESTion Project, which brings big questions into education. For more information, visit: http://openfutureinstitute.org.

[4] The Civic Engagement Scholar is an internship program created by the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) that supports students in pursuing public service internship. For more information, visit: https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/cce/intern/ces.

[5] Here is a description of this initiative: "The QUESTion Project empowers young people to explore their values, worldviews and aspirations, while developing the courage to forge their own identity and future with meaning and purpose. It addresses the most important questions and choices that young people face as they become young adults

family was a formative experience for me because I joined a community that recognizes the importance of asking these life questions and their impact on ourselves and the world. We talked about choice, purpose, fearlessness, interconnectedness, and the bigger picture by sharing our life experiences with each other and engaging in deep listening. I realized that I can make social change by working with others to bring attention to the importance of examining our inner lives as an essential part of our education.

In the past few years, I've had the chance to experience multiple practices noted on the "Tree of Contemplative Practices." In addition to my self-inquiry and work with Defining Amherst and Open Future Institute, I have engaged in are mindfulness meditation, music and singing, journaling, and more. I started my meditation practice during my sophomore year after taking an Interterm course called "Mindfulness-Based Meditation and Relaxation for Students" taught by Adi Bemak.[6] Mindfulness meditation is a secular practice that is influenced by *vipassana* (insight) meditation from Theravada Buddhism. It is the practice of "maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment." It "involves acceptance, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them—without believing, for instance, that there's a "right" or "wrong" way to think or feel in a given moment.[7] When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune into

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and begin to take responsibility for their own life and future. It enables them to question and define their outlook on life, pursue their deepest aspirations, and define their role in making the world a better place. By engaging youth with some of life's biggest questions, we empower the change-makers of today and tomorrow to shape their lives with inspiration, meaning and purpose" ("The QUESTion Project").

[6] Adi Bemak is a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) teacher at Valley Mindfulness and at the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. She is also on the Teachers' Council of the Insight Meditation Center of Pioneer Valley, as well as the Buddhist Advisor at Mount Holyoke College and a mindfulness-based psychotherapist. ("Adi Bemak").

[7] Note that this approach may be viewed to be in conflict with social justice views and social action. However, having non-judgmental view of our present moment experience without thinking it's "right" or "wrong" does not necessarily ignore that injustice exists and needs to be changed. This goes back to our intentions for our practice. Is it for both personal *and* social transformation?

what we're sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future"

(Mindfulness Definition).[8]

As much as contemplative practices are excellent ways to develop inner change, they

don't necessarily help create a more socially just world. Practices such as meditation can be used

for personal transformation while ignoring its potential impact on societal transformation. In

Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy, Laura Rendón is concerned about how spirituality

is currently viewed as a form of individual development without an awareness of the needs of the

larger world. She builds upon Carrette and King's discussion in *Selling Spirituality: The Silent

Takeover of Religion* about individualized spirituality and religion:

> Given that spirituality and religion are socially constructed concepts with contested definitions that change over time, I agree with Carrette and King (2005) that rather than trying to define the terms, we should focus on (a) identifying forms of spirituality and religion and how they evolved and (b) determining who is benefiting from different views of the terms. According to Carrette and King, today's view of spirituality with a focus on self-development and enlightenment is problematic… The problem is not so much focusing on the interior life of individuals but on closing off the individual from an awareness of interdependence and one's role in society. In the authors' view, today's spirituality, with a singular focus on self-development, is nothing more than another form of psychologized religion, privatized and commodified to serve modern corporate interests. When all we do is focus on our self-awareness without a concomitant emphasis on social consciousness and action, what remains is a self-serving, individual blindness to world needs. (8-9)

The intentions that we have for engaging in any kind of contemplative practices matter. Are we

doing our practice for our own self-benefit, or are we also doing it for the benefit of the world?

Without an ethical dimension, practices such as mindfulness meditation can become the kind of

spirituality that Rendón, Carrette, and King would be critical of: one that focuses solely on the

"interior life of individuals" without "an awareness of interdependence and one's role in society"

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[8] This practice became more prevalent in American society because of Jon Kabat-Zinn, who developed a secularized practice of mindfulness when launching the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program in the University of Massachusetts Medical School in 1979.

(8-9). Indeed, the presence of mindfulness in American society is an important phenomenon to unpack, as it can be "privatized and commodified to serve modern corporate interests" (8-9). In "The Muddied Meaning of Mindfulness," an article in *The New York Times Magazine*, Heffernan writes:

> Although mindfulness teachers regularly offer the practice in disenfranchised communities in the United States and abroad, the powerful have really made mindfulness their own, exacting from the delicate idea concrete promises of longer lives and greater productivity. In January, during the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, [Jon] Kabat-Zinn led executives and 1 percenters in a mindfulness meditation meant to promote general well-being (Heffernan).

This passage raises the question about our intentions and purposes for engaging in contemplative practices such as mindfulness meditation. In a time of growing economic inequality, what does it mean for 1 percenters to practice mindfulness for "longer lives and greater productivity?" To what extent has mindfulness been privatized, commodified, and corporatized at the expense of the common good? Has mindfulness become "just another way to keep employees undistracted and to get them to work harder for nothing but airy rewards?" (Heffernan) The article continues:

> No one word, however shiny, however intriguingly Eastern, however bolstered by science, can ever fix the human condition. And that's what commercial mindfulness may have lost from the most rigorous Buddhist tenets it replaced: the implication that suffering cannot be escaped but must be faced (Heffernan).

With mindfulness meditation as well as with any contemplative practice, true inner transformation requires not an avoidance, but a facing of our human condition, which includes facing individual and systemic suffering. This echoes Rendón's stance that "spirituality and religion should never be isolated from the social, political, and economic world," rather than serving as an "individualized and corporatized" way to "promote the values of consumerism and capitalism" (9). When we approach our practices for not only our personal benefit but also for the world's benefit, we face our own suffering and the suffering of the world. If our practices

don't involve facing this suffering, we stay blind to the injustices that exist in our world and are unable to take action to change them. We are also not fully being with the reality of our world.

To go even further, I argue that engaging in contemplative practices with the intention of benefiting the world and not just the self is not enough to further social justice. To be fair, having an ethical dimension to our practices can have a positive effect on the way we live and interact with others and our environment. However, there are limits to our good intentions and actions if we lack a liberatory consciousness (which I will explain further in the next section), which includes: a knowledge of social justice issues, an understanding of our own positionality when examining where we're situated in these issues and how they affect us and our communities, and the skills needed to take action against injustice. For example, reflecting on questions of meaning, purpose, and values can help us develop a sense of direction in life and perhaps a desire to contribute to the world, but it doesn't mean we understand oppression, how it works, and how to act in socially just ways. As well-intentioned as we might be, contemplative practices alone aren't enough. In a talk and podcast called "A Buddhist Call to Action," Rev. angel Kyoto williams, an African-American Zen Sensei and activist, offers an example that illustrates this point:

> It's not that folks of color never came into the door, it's just that they never stuck. It's not just that queer folks never came, it's just that they left. It's not that transgender folk didn't come, it's that they left. In some cases, [it's not that] women didn't come. It's that they left. They couldn't stay because the environment, the habitat, meaning the place in which people abide, was not a welcoming one…. We have to do the work. And if the Buddha didn't lay out an anti-racism training that doesn't mean we can't go out and get one anyway. *We're not gonna go and find in the Dhammapada [a Buddhist scripture] a laid out anti-racism training for us.* And that doesn't mean that we can't do that work for ourselves, that we can't pull from the essence of the teaching and come to understand that this is what is called for to be liberated. *And this teaching, this practice is about being liberated. And whatever is necessary to get liberated, to get unstuck, is what we need to do and that's what our practice is* (Shambhala Meditation Center of New York, italics mine).

Here, angel Kyoto williams talks about the issue of diversity and inclusion in Western dharma communities (this problem also exists in higher education). As much as we intend to create a space in which marginalized people (people of color, LGBTQ, women, etc.) can come and feel welcome in their communities of practice, it does not necessarily happen. Just because our contemplative practice doesn't have an "anti-racism training that doesn't mean we can't go out and get one anyway," williams says. Part of our practice includes engaging in anti-racist or other forms of anti-oppression training in order to create an "environment," a "habitat," and a community that is a welcoming space for all. In order to work towards both personal and social transformation, we need to integrate our practices with an understanding and analysis of social justice issues at the individual, interpersonal, and systemic levels, and develop the skills and strategies needed to take social action. All of this is needed to "get unstuck" and "get liberated." This liberation involves being with what is for others and for ourselves.

After reflecting on my own experiences as well as those of others, I realized that contemplative practices can have a profound impact on transforming our inner and outer worlds. They can help us cultivate skills and qualities such as self-awareness, insight, creativity, compassion, connection, attention, and more. However, we must be cautious of practices done solely for the sake of personal growth in a way that ignores our connection to the larger world. If we want to address our own and the world's needs, and if we want liberation, we must recognize that contemplative practices need to be rooted in social justice.

Social Justice: What It Is, What It Offers, and What Is Missing

There are many ideas of what social justice is and what it looks like, and precisely defining it is difficult as is the case with contemplative practices. I will use this definition from

Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, which describes social justice as "both a goal and a process." It includes "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs," and a "vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure." It also involves "social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, and the broader world in which we live" (Bell 3). Creating a socially just world requires continuously acting on our individual and collective commitments to address inequity in our societies and our global community.

My understanding of social justice developed while I was at Amherst. I took some courses related to social justice, which increased my understanding of how oppression and inequality exists in our lives, our society, and our world. At the same time, I started learning more about social justice issues through co-curricular activities, thanks to the presence of the Women's and Gender Center, the Queer Resource Center, and the Multicultural Resource Center.[9] Furthermore, I crossed paths with people who are passionate about social change and creating more just, anti-oppressive communities on campus and beyond. These influences increased my awareness of injustice as well as my desire to lessen the suffering of our world.

Advancing social justice involves multiple kinds of efforts, many of which are included in Barbara J. Love's definition of a liberatory consciousness:

> A liberatory consciousness enables humans to live their lives in oppressive systems and institutions with awareness and intentionality, rather than on the basis of the socialization to which they have been subjected. A liberatory consciousness enables humans to maintain an awareness of the dynamics of oppression characterizing society without giving in to despair and hopelessness about that condition, to maintain an awareness of the role played by each individual in the maintenance of the system without blaming them for the roles they play, and at the same time practice intentionality about changing

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[9] I also attended an Organizing for Social Change Interterm course in January 2014, and participated in initiatives such as Amherst Reflects (a program that brings faculty, staff, and students together to talk about big questions) as well as a Difficult Conversations workshop to learn how to have challenging dialogues about social justice.

the systems of oppression. A liberatory consciousness enables humans to live "outside" the patterns of thought and behavior learned through the socialization process that helps to perpetuate oppressive systems (599).

In other words, developing a liberatory consciousness means being aware of privilege, and of how we've been socialized to accept and perpetuate systems of oppression. It is an active questioning of how oppression occurs on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic levels. It is about stepping back from our own experience and seeing how our "patterns of thought and behavior" are shaped by oppression, in order to take anti-oppressive action. Love also refers to terms related to liberatory consciousness that social justice educators have developed:

> Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, described it as developing critical consciousness. Carter G. Woodson described it as changing the "miseducation of the Negro." Michael Albert's humanist vision and bell hooks' feminist critical consciousness are examples of other ways that a liberatory consciousness has been discussed (600).

An often used term is Freire's "critical consciousness," which is "an individual's ability to recognize social and economic inequities that often result in marginalization, powerlessness, violence, and exploitation, and to take action to eradicate such inequities" (Rendón 10). Here, I use "liberatory consciousness" as an umbrella term to refer to the varied ways in which people engage in consciousness raising.

Although most of my courses were not explicitly related to developing a liberatory consciousness (not all social justice courses are taught through anti-oppressive pedagogies, nor do they always connect the course material with our lived experience), I had a taste of this by reflecting on the material that I was learning in class in relation to my own experience and the world around me. My experience reflects the first two elements of liberatory consciousness that Love described, which is awareness and analysis. Awareness "involves developing the capacity to notice, to give our attention to our daily lives, our language, our behaviors, and even our thoughts. It means making the decision to live our lives from a waking position." It also "means

noticing what happens in the world around you" (600). The second element of liberatory consciousness is analysis, which involves thinking and theorizing about what we notice going on in ourselves and the world. In other words, it means to "get information and develop his or her own explanation for what is happening, why it is happening, and what needs to be done about it… Awareness coupled with analysis of that situation becomes the basis for determining whether change is required, and if it is, the nature of the change needed" (601). I developed both awareness and analysis by connecting what I was learning in my courses and co-curricular activities with my lived experiences and those of others. To some extent, I became more aware of the kinds of social justice issues that we face, as well as how the different forms of oppression (racism, sexism, classism, etc.) are embedded within these issues.

Liberatory consciousness involves not only developing awareness and analysis, but also action and accountability/ally-ship, which are equally important components of social justice work. Love explains that the action component

> …proceeds from recognition that awareness and analysis are not enough. There can be no division between those who think and those who put thinking into action. The action component.. Is based on the assumption that the participation of each of us in the liberation project provides the best possibility of gaining liberation for any of us… [It] requires each human to take some action in every situation when the opportunity to transform the society and move toward a more just world presents itself (601).

Social justice requires not only becoming aware of and analyzing how oppression occurs within ourselves and our communities. It also involves connecting what we learn inside and outside of classes and putting our "thinking into action" in order to liberate our world from injustice. The fourth component of liberatory consciousness is accountability/ally-ship, which "requires that individuals accept accountability to self and community for the consequences of the action that has been taken or not taken," and participate in "perspective sharing and allyship in liberation work" (Love 602). Rendón provides a similar description of what social justice includes,

pointing to the importance of action, accountability, and ally-ship: "taking action to transform entrenched institutional structures to ensure that people from all social group memberships have equal access to resources and opportunities;" "acting with love and compassion to work with people who have less privilege and resources;" and "working to heal and to provide hope for all people, especially those who are victims of social and economic inequities" (10).

From my experience of learning and reading about social justice, I noticed that the contemplative, inner dimension of social justice is often missing from conversations about oppression, inequality, and creating change. (On the flip side, conversations about inner change often leave out social justice work, as I mentioned when talking about contemplative practices.) I realized that social justice work is often missing essential components that contemplative practices can offer. Contemplative practices can help us connect with the inner dimensions of creating social change. They can address the potential pitfalls that we might encounter as we develop the four components of liberatory consciousness: awareness, analysis, action, and accountability/ally-ship. Contemplative practices can prevent us from getting stuck in our internal responses when engaging in awareness and analysis. They further our action and accountability/ally-ship work by connecting us with *why* we want to create change and helping us become more self-aware with *how* we go about doing so.

Contemplative practices can help us get unstuck on our quest for liberation. Without a form of contemplative engagement, we may risk getting stuck in oppression and being unable to take effective action. Since we are part of systems of oppression, we risk replicating injustice if we do not cultivate inner awareness. (Although contemplation and social justice work occur outside of higher education, I will speak to their connection within higher education for the purposes of this thesis.) First, let's look at the first two components of liberatory consciousness:

awareness (in which we notice what is happening in our lives, language, behavior, thoughts, and what is happening the world) and analysis (in which we think and theorize about what we notice in the world). Although both can lead to important change, there are limits to that change if we engage in awareness and analysis solely on an intellectual, conceptual level. In *Integrating Mindfulness Into Anti-Oppression Pedagogy*, Beth Berila writes:

> ...anti-oppression pedagogy does not always help students fully *embody* their learning. In Women's Studies course, for instance, students cultivate social awareness and feminist political consciousness. They learn how to apply the concepts from class to their own lives and the world around them. They also develop leadership, advocacy, and empowerment skills. But all of these tools have their limits if students cannot fully *embody* them. To really integrate these lessons, they need to be absorbed into our very selves, not merely learned at the level of the intellect or political consciousness (12).

What Berila mentioned about cultivating "social awareness and feminist political consciousness" and "applying the concepts from class to their own lives and the world around them" parallels Love's awareness and analysis components of liberatory consciousness. The "leadership, advocacy, and empowerment skills" also point to the action component as well. However, something more than learning about oppression at the intellectual level is needed for students to fully embody social justice. She came to this idea after observing how "many Women's Studies students become empowered intellectually and politically, only to still express self-denigrating sentiments, end up in abusive relationships, or have disordered relationships to food and their bodies," and how feminism "sometimes failed to reach the deepest layers of self or provide all of the tools [she] needed to bring [her] feminist empowerment to a more integrated level" (3). Berila continues:

> Though feminists talk of "consciousness raising" or "raising awareness," we often mean an analysis that brings with it evaluation, critical thinking, and even judgment. These forms of analysis are crucial to social justice work, but they are not the kind of awareness that enables and informs embodiment, at least not the first step… One can be an expert on the sociopolitical factors that cause something to happen and still not know how it manifests deep in one's body or why it produces certain responses in others. One can

understand the theory of patriarchy without being fully present in the moment of its eruption within oneself. To undo the system, we need both parts. We need to see the larger system at work and try to dismantle it, but we also need to be present with how it takes form within ourselves and our neighbors at any given moment. Once we can do the latter, we can begin to cultivate the equanimity to make different choices about how to engage it (whenever that is possible) (44-45).

Here, Berila suggests that embodying social justice needs an awareness that goes beyond an intellectual understanding of oppression and how it plays out in our lives and communities. This is because oppression affects our minds, thoughts, feelings, bodies, and behavior. Developing an embodied awareness helps us understand how oppression "manifests deep in one's body" and "takes form within ourselves and our neighbors at any given moment." Contemplative practices can bridge this gap between intellectual understanding and embodied awareness by helping us examine our own "emotional, physiological, *and* cognitive responses" without getting stuck in these experiences when learning about social justice and taking anti-oppressive action (20). Throughout her book, Berila explains how contemplative practices such as mindfulness meditation, yoga, tonglen, journaling, contemplative listening, loving kindness, and more can

> … enable students to cultivate emotional intelligence, learn to sit with difficult emotions, recognize deeply entrenched narratives they use to interpret the world, cultivate compassion for other people, and become more intentional about how they respond in any given moment. All of these abilities can transform dialogues about power, oppression, and privilege from intense reactionary debates into more relational, empathic, and reflective experiences (15).

Having dialogues about social justice, facing our own and others' suffering, and examining privileges that we do, and don't have, are difficult things to do. However, they are necessary for change to occur. Contemplative practices can help us face the challenges of social justice work by fostering the inner skills that help us work with our internal responses, hold compassion for ourselves and others throughout this process, and increase our ability to respond more intentionally rather than acting out of reactivity or habitual behavior.

The connection between our inner lives and social change is often overlooked when people engage in or talk about social action. If we want to create effective social change, we must also transform our "inner" world so that we can embody the change we seek to make in the "outer" world. Contemplative practices can support the action and accountability/ally-ship components of developing a liberatory consciousness, by helping us transform our "inner" world, and by extension, our "outer" world as well. They can help us connect with *why* we want to create change and help us become more self-aware about *how* we go about creating change.

We can develop more clarity about how we can engage in social action when we explore why we want to create change. People often find a sense of meaning and purpose by engaging in social justice work, whether or not they come from a religious, spiritual, or secular orientation. Spiritual activism, also known as engaged spirituality, is a way that changemakers have bridged their inner work (connecting to their motivations and reasons for engaging in social justice) and outer change (taking action and developing accountability/ally-ship). In *The Love That Does Justice: Spiritual Activism in Dialogue with Social Science*, Edwards and Post write:

> Spirituality in activism is not new, but it is too often ignored by those who do not see it as a driving dynamic. Yet many of the great social activists from early anti-slavery Quakers to the Civil Rights Movement were spiritual activists within a monotheistic framework… The spiritual background of so much social activism is often ignored by standard histories of the media… Martin Luther King [Jr.], shaped to his core by the notion of *agape* love and the prophetic call for justice, often invoked the Prophets of the Hebrew Bible. After being described on the news as "the son of a minister," rather than as the minister he himself was, he once responded with the following: "They aren't interested in the *why* of what we're doing, only in the *what* of what we're doing, and because they don't understand the why they cannot understand the what".

Social justice work doesn't require us to have a religious background in order to make change. In *Progressive Community Organizing*, Loretta Pyles notes that people such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dorothy Day were inspired and drawn by religious teachings to do their social justice work, while people like environmental activist Julia Butterfly Hill felt

spiritually called by Nature. Pyles adds that organizers with "a more secular orientation" may

find that their work has "spiritual or existential meaning to them." For some, experiencing

"consciousness raising and the feelings of group identity and solidarity" constitute "religious or

spiritual experience or awakening" (176). Whether we come with a religious, spiritual, secular,

or existential approach, both passages point to the importance of asking why we want to make

change. Engaging in contemplative practices such as self-inquiry can help us clarify the "why"

question and inspire us to take action from a more intentional, self-aware place. Connecting to

our sense of meaning and purpose for taking social action can also be a way to sustain ourselves

throughout this challenging lifelong process.

When working towards social justice, we risk missing out on creating effective social

change if we focus solely on the "outer" dimensions of social action without also focusing on

how our "inner" dimensions influence *how* we go about creating change. Edwards and Post bring

up the inner challenges that come with social justice work:

> Those spiritual activists who work for social justice and human rights are engaged in a contentious struggle and will be controversial-- even hated and persecuted-- for their actions. How do they deal with indifference, risk, hostility, imprisonment, and rage? The activist focuses a great deal of psychological energy on a sustained engagement with the powers that be. Essential character traits include courage in the face of threat, perseverance in the face of indifference, composure in the face of rage, equanimity in the face of hostility, and integrity in the face of imprisonment (8).

Facing "indifference, risk, hostility, imprisonment, and rage" requires a lot of "psychological

energy" and the ability to sustain ourselves when we encounter resistance to change. It takes

courage, perseverance, composure, equanimity, and integrity to keep going in our social justice

work, which contemplative practices can cultivate. Edwards and Post continue to speak about the

importance of examining one's inner life when making social change:

> In part, spiritual practice is important to many activists because it helps to guard against the "thieves of the heart"-- the greed, ego, anger, fear, and insecurities that will likely

> pollute or erode the success of even well-intentioned efforts to be a positive force for change in the world… Great inner strength is required to confront the structures of power in the world unselfishly, without demonizing one's enemies, alienating potential allies, or holding on too tightly to a particular vision of ends and means that can eventually become a prison. It is only by operating from the space where we are joined together in some deep sense that we are likely to find true common ground in facing up to the collective problems that confront us. How do activists, with all their human frailties, participate in love when engaged in actions that can easily give rise to bitterness and hatred? How does the spiritual activist refuse to hate the people who perpetuate injustice? How can an underlying love of all allow the activist to cope with adversity? How does the spiritual activist maintain a "higher self?" The answer is that they cultivate love, courage, and hope through spiritual practice in the face of indifference and weariness. Spiritual practice becomes both a spiritually- and politically- subversive activity (8).

They use the term spiritual practice, which I would equate to contemplative practices, an umbrella term for all kinds of practices whether they come from spiritual, religious, or secular roots. In this passage, they point to the many ways in which our inner life can affect how we create social change, either in positive or negative ways. In order to make effective change, our "outer" efforts need to be supported by our "inner" efforts to be aware of what is driving or influencing us when we are making that change. When does "greed, ego, anger, fear, and insecurities" distort the change that we intend to make? How can we develop the "inner strength" to work on the action and accountability/allyship components of liberatory consciousness, so that we have the courage to confront systems of oppression and avoid "demonizing our enemies" or "alienating potential allies"? How can we can cultivate more compassion and collaboration, instead of falling into bitterness, hatred, hopelessness, and despair? To address these challenges, we need to pay more attention to our emotions, motivations, and habitual thoughts and behaviors. We need to find a way to build inner strength and energy to create social change, whether we find that through practices that connect us with a community, or through practices that provide a space for us to listen to our inner voice.

In sum, social justice involves developing awareness, analysis, action, and accountability/ally-ship, all of which make up the liberatory consciousness. Noticing what is happening in our thoughts, actions, and what we see in the world around us, understanding how oppression works on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic levels, taking action for social justice, and acknowledging our responsibility to the world and our role in working with others are important parts of social justice work. This work can be done more thoughtfully and effectively when we engage in contemplative practices that help us connect our inner transformation with social transformation.

Higher Education: What Is It For?

Before we look at the place of contemplative practices and social justice in higher education, let's first look at the current state and mission of higher education. There have been many discussions about the "crisis" in higher education, which includes: the rising cost of tuition and student debt, the problem of access to higher education for disadvantaged students, the changing student demographics and the lack of institutional support for these students, the neoliberalization of higher education, the role of technology such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) in education, the lack of job security for adjunct faculty, the questioning of the value of liberal arts colleges, and more.

To address the changes and challenges that colleges and universities face, we first must examine a fundamental question that affects how we might respond to this "crisis": What is the purpose of higher education? Have we lost our mission? Harry Lewis, a professor and former dean at Harvard, believes that this is the case. In *Excellence Without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education*, he writes:

…universities have forgotten their larger educational role for college students. They succeed, better than ever, as creators and repositories of knowledge. But they have forgotten that the fundamental job of undergraduate education is to… help [students] grow up, to learn who they are, to search for a larger purpose for their lives, and to leave college better human beings (xii).

Helping students "learn who they are," "search for a larger purpose," and "leave college better humans beings" are the stated missions of colleges and universities. Meeting these missions is not easy, especially in a society in which higher education is becoming increasingly instrumentalized. For many, college serves as a form of accreditation and individual economic opportunities. Nowadays, it is necessary to have a degree beyond higher education to have access to better job opportunities. Although this purpose itself is not always a bad thing, I believe that it has clouded our larger vision of the purpose of education, which is to empower students to examine their lives in relation to what they're learning, and to develop a sense of connection and responsibility to the world. Moreover, our society's decision to subsidize higher education suggests that there is value to going to college beyond the sole purpose of individual economic gain, and that it plays a role as a public good. In *What is College For?*, Ellen C. Lagemann and Harry Lewis write:

…the social benefit of higher education is commonly attributed to the collective effect of individual returns. That calculation reflects standard economic logic. College becomes an engine of social change when members of previously disadvantaged groups achieve greater educational access and then become more productive… Yet higher education has vital public purposes beyond aggregated individual economic benefits. Colleges and universities should be forums for invention and social innovation that benefit *all* of us (9).

To address the challenges that we face in higher education and in the world, it is imperative that we look at the mission of colleges and universities beyond the "aggregated individual economic benefits that they can bring." Rather, we must inquire into how higher education can benefit us

all and serve the common good. A lot is at stake, and students will have an increasing impact on the world and our collective future. Lagemann and Lewis continue:

> We live in a democratic society facing serious challenges, domestic and international. Global political and economic instability, a communications revolution that has undermined old principles of information freedom and control, damage to the climate and threats of ecological collapse, peril in the supplies of food, energy, and medicine, and water in many parts of a highly interconnected worlds, challenges to public education at all levels, and growing social and economic inequality at home and abroad all contribute to a cacophonous national and transnational discourse (10).

Rebecca Chopp, the president of Swarthmore College, echoes what Lagemann and Lewis say about the mission of higher education and how it should help us address the twenty-first century challenges of our nation and world, as well as help us shape a better future for us all (17). Although she speaks specifically about the role of a liberal arts college in a democratic society, the mission of higher education can also extend to colleges and universities across the U.S. more broadly: to "educat[e] leaders and citizens to realize their individual potential and build their capacity to serve in a democratic society" (13).

As is the case with many institutions of higher education, Amherst College's mission is about developing the individual and the common good. On their website, Amherst states that their mission is to educate students of "exceptional potential from all backgrounds so that they may seek, value, and advance knowledge, engage the world around them, and lead principled lives of consequence" (Mission of Amherst College). Our mottos *Terras Irradient* ("Let them enlighten the lands" or "Let them give light to the world") and "Lives of Consequence" suggest that our education will prepare us to make some kind of important contribution to the world, however we might interpret "giving light" and living a life of "consequence." Furthermore, the 2015 Strategic Plan states that Amherst offers a "combination of [intellectual] rigor with a strong

sense of community and an ethic of care" (3). This document also recognizes what Lewis,

Lagemann, and Chopp say about the important role of higher education in a democracy:

> A flourishing democracy needs a population that is curious, open-minded, aware of advances in knowledge, and capable of contributing to those advances. Now more than ever, it relies on creative problem-solvers and principled decision-makers who are agile enough in their thinking to handle rapid change, uncertainty, and an increasing sense of threat. (3)

According to the Strategic Plan, Amherst's aim is to educate students so that they have the

qualities of mind, such as curiosity, open-mindedness, ability to understand and contribute to

advances in knowledge, in order to address our world's complex, ever changing challenges. The

"ethics of care" aspect of education also comes into play here, as the ability to meet these

challenges and contribute to a "flourishing democracy" requires not only knowledge but

"understanding," which former Amherst President Peter Pouncey defines as "knowledge

deepened by sympathy" (3). This kind of "understanding" and "ethics of care" involves

recognizing "our interconnectedness with one another and with the environment of which we are

a part" and "commits us to acting on that understanding" (4). As is the case with Lewis,

Lagemann, and Chopp, Amherst is responding to society's skepticism about the value of higher

education, especially that of a liberal arts education. The Strategic Plan is one way in which

Amherst is trying to articulate its mission in a climate in which "job readiness and financial

returns dominate discussions of [the] value [of a college degree]" (5). In light of rising costs in

higher education, social and environmental challenges, and the instrumentalization of a college

degree for individual economic gain, colleges and universities face pressure to articulate their

mission and reexamine their role in contributing to individual transformation and the common

good.

I question how much Amherst College is meeting its mission in practice. How can we "give light to the world" and live "Lives of Consequence" if we're not actively engaging ourselves to reflect on what these mottos mean to us? How can we meet our mission if we don't encourage everyone at Amherst to question the purpose of their education, and whether their actions inside and outside of the classroom reflect that purpose? How can we develop an "ethics of care" (3) if our education doesn't give enough space to examine our inner lives or teach us how to love ourselves and our communities? How can we cultivate a lived, embodied understanding of our "interconnectedness with one another and with the environment of which we are a part" if we don't actively encourage learning about social justice and developing our liberatory consciousness? Does this exploration into interconnectedness and social justice connect our intellectual understanding with our lived experience in a way that we can examine our internal cognitive, physiological, and emotional responses as we learn about and create social change? How can we commit to "acting on that understanding" (4) if we don't learn the practical skills necessary to create social change through community-based learning, and if we don't examine how our inner lives affect the way we engage in social action? How can we fully embody and live out a mission of inner change and social change?

To be fair, I was able to examine my inner life through contemplative practices, learn about and engage in social justice, and question the purpose of higher education thanks to Amherst College and the people and available resources. However, having these experiences made me realize that Amherst requires many more changes in order to fully live up to its mission of empowering students to develop intellectual agility, an ethics of care, and contribute to the world. To some extent, my experiences creating Defining Amherst and working at Open Future Institute as a Civic Engagement Scholar sponsored by the Center for Community Engagement

gave me the space to explore the purpose of my education, to ask the big questions in life about who I am, what I find meaningful, and my connection to the larger world, and to bring these questions to my communities. Connecting what I was learning in my social justice-related courses to my own life strengthened my desire to take action to decrease suffering on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic level. However, I think that my experiences with contemplation, social justice, and higher education are not reflective of the educational culture of Amherst in general. I want to create an education in which we can address these issues, examine our inner lives, and figure out how we can create a better world. I want these components to not be something done on my own or as an "add-on" to higher education, but to be fully integrated and seen as central to fulfilling the mission of an Amherst education. To do so, we need to relate to *Terras Irradient* and Lives of Consequence as more than just platitudes to be reiterated during the annual convocation and commencement. We need to take a serious look at what our mission means and what we need to do to meet that mission. This means re-examining and re-envisioning education itself. It means expanding our sense of what teaching and learning look like, as well as taking action to create more just communities inside and outside of institutions of higher education.

Higher education, for better or worse, plays a role in shaping our society and our collective future (and vice versa). If the purpose of higher education is to develop the individual and the common good, colleges and universities can serve as a space in which we can cultivate inner change and social change in our learning communities. Integrating contemplative practices and social justice into higher education can help us further that mission in a way that educates the whole person and contributes to the common good.

Integrating the Three "Worlds" of Contemplative Practices, Social Justice, and Higher

Education

My explorations into the "worlds" of contemplative practices, social justice, and higher

education led me to see how each "world" can contribute to inner and social change. I realized

that each "world" is missing components from the other "worlds" that are necessary for deep

change to occur.

Contemplative practices can lead to inner and social change by: developing our self-

awareness of our mental, physiological, and emotional responses; providing greater clarity to our

sense of meaning, purpose and values; fostering our sense of interconnectedness to our

communities and the environment that we are a part of; increasing our capacity to face our own

suffering and that of others; inspiring and sustaining us when engaging in compassionate action,

and much more. However, contemplative practices alone do not necessarily lead to deep change

and full liberation from suffering and injustice if they are not done with the intention to benefit

the world beyond one's self, and if they are separate from social justice work and developing a

liberatory consciousness.

Social justice can transform us as individuals and as a community by developing our

liberatory consciousness, in which we: become more aware of how injustice operates in our lives

and local and global communities; analyze and develop our understanding of social justice

issues, take action to create a more just society at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic

levels; and recognize our responsibility to the larger world and form ally-ship with others in this

journey towards creating a socially just world. This social justice work has its limits without

contemplative practices, which open us to our inner lives so that we develop greater awareness of

what's happening within us and in our communities when we learn about and engage in social

change. These practices can also help us connect with why we want to create change, and help us be more intentional about how we go about creating that change.

Higher education can play a role in developing the individual and the common good, which is what they state they want to do. Colleges and universities can have a profound impact on how we can collectively work together to address twenty-first century challenges as well as the "crisis" in higher education. They provide students with the necessary critical thinking and understanding to make effective change. But without the presence of the "world" of contemplative practices (which serve as experiential ways to engage in self-examination and to explore our interconnectedness with the world), as well as the "world" of social justice (which involves developing our liberatory consciousness in learning about, acting, and collaborating for social change), higher education is overlooking important ways in which the mission of individual and social change can be fully met in practice.

The integration of the "worlds" of contemplative practice and social justice in higher education can lead to deep, transformative change on an individual and collective level. Using the chart below, I will show *how* these three "worlds" can come together for both inner and outer change to occur. I will point to how each aspect of the chart calls for an expanded sense of teaching and learning. Along the way, I will also point to ways in which the culture of higher education gets in the way of addressing all of these aspects, and suggest what needs to change in order for transformative change to occur.

Chart by Vivian Mac

This chart identifies four aspects that are necessary for inner and social change to occur in higher education: (1) first-person critical inquiry; (2) second-person critical inquiry; (3) third-person critical inquiry; and (4) practical skills for engaged action. This chart is inspired by Francisco Varela, a scientist, philosopher, and meditator who explored consciousness from the "third (objective/impartial), second (inter-subjective/relational) and first (subjective/embodied) person perspectives" (RSA). The chart also echoes Lagemann and Lewis' "tripod of civic education," which involves "students' capacities for thinking intellectually, for making moral judgments, and for taking actions that bridge ideas and norms" (15).

Note that these aspects are interconnected and often overlap with each other. There are various methods of teaching and learning that address one or more of these aspects at the same time. I will explain these aspects separately but will draw connections among them when appropriate.

First-Person Critical Inquiry

A first-person critical inquiry is an examination of one's inner experience. As described

in the beginning of this chapter, contemplative practices are ways in which this kind of self-

examination can occur. This process is "largely empirical," in which we investigate truth through

"inner research and first-hand experience" (Grace, 99). These practices come from philosophical,

religious, spiritual, and secular roots. There has been a long history of first-person critical

inquiry, as people have engaged in practices such as:

> Buddhist meditation, various forms of yoga from Hinduism, Christian prayer exemplified
> by contemplatives such as Saint Theresa of Avila, radical questioning through dialogue
> as it was expressed by Plato, the self-inquiry of Ramana Maharishi, meta-physical
> reflection from the Sufi tradition that leads to deeper intuitive insight of the heart (*qalb*),
> and the absorbed contemplation recommended in the Jewish Kabbalah (Morgan, 200).

Contemplative pedagogy integrates various forms of contemplative practices to bring first-person

critical inquiry into education. It uses "forms of introspection and reflection that allow students

to focus internally and find more of themselves in their courses" (Barbezat and Bush, 9).

Contemplative education, although it looks different in current times, has existed in antiquity,

with "archaic trance ritual practices," "early monastic traditions of Classical Greece (5th-4th

centuries BC) and Classical India (2nd century BC-13th century AD)," to the "contemporary

Western religious education that has evolved from Greek monastic traditions" (Morgan, 199).

Despite the long history of contemplative engagement, the current culture of education is to

"privilege intellectual/rational knowing," which includes "intellectual reasoning, rationality, and

objectivity" at the exclusion of examining one's "inner knowing," which includes "deep wisdom,

wonder, sense of the sacred, intuition, and emotions" (Rendón 26-27). This is the case in higher

education, in which intellectual and rational knowing, which I refer to as third-person critical

inquiry, has the strongest presence, overshadowing the equal importance of inner/contemplative knowing, or first-person critical inquiry. Educators and scholars have traced this imbalance back to the Cartesian mind/body split, which influenced the "distrust of the contemplative and subjective in cognocentric and rational approaches to education," leading to the disconnection between the "inner and outer worlds" and "the psyche and soma" (Morgan 212).

Contemplative pedagogy aims to address this disconnection between inner and outer knowing by educating the "whole student" in a way that "social, emotional, and spiritual development, together with academic achievement, are intertwined (indeed, become interdependent) to engage the full complexity of the learner's cognitive and intuitive skills" (Rendón and Kanagala 62). In *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, Barbezat and Bush identify the variety of objectives of contemplative pedagogy:

> 1. Focus and attention building, mainly through focusing meditation and exercises that support mental stability
>
> 2. Contemplation and introspection into the content of the course, in which students discover the material in themselves and thus deepen their understanding of the material
>
> 3. Compassion, connection to others, and a deepening sense of the moral and spiritual aspect of education
>
> 4. Inquiry into the nature of their minds, personal meaning, creativity, and insight (10-11).

They add that contemplative practices are not intended to "replace other effective means of learning," but as "powerful complements for instruction across the curriculum" (19).

Indeed, contemplative pedagogy's integration of first-person critical inquiry with other ways of knowing (such as third- person inquiry) can transform teaching and learning in a way that cultivates inner and social change. This pedagogy pushes back against what Parker Palmer calls the "academic bias against subjectivity" that "deforms [students'] thinking about themselves and their world" and "alienates them from their own inner lives" (19). Students are

no longer treated as "passive recipients of information and memorized facts" and teachers are no longer seen as the sole expert "in charge of everything that took place in the classroom" (Rendón and Kanagala 63). Against the banking model of education, students are empowered to bring their own experience to what they're learning, which "deepens their understanding of both themselves and the material covered," "retain[s] their knowledge better once they have a personal context in which to frame it," and sees the relevance of the material to their lives and the world around them (Barbezat and Bush 6). This has profound implications for inner and social transformation. For example, when students are engaging in third-person inquiry into topics such as social justice, inequality, and oppression, they connect to the course material to their own lives rather than seeing that material as something "out there" or disconnected from their lived experience and the current problems in our world. Rendón writes that this bridging of first- and third-person critical inquiry represents a participatory epistemology, in which the subject (the student) connects with the object (the course material). When contemplative practices are integrated with the course material, what arises is both knowledge and wisdom (24). Connecting the student's experience and the course material, or inner and outer knowing, is essential because knowledge alone will not change the world. In addition to learning how to think critically and intellectually engage with what we're learning, we also need to reflect on how we will use this information and for what purposes. This brings in questions about what we find meaningful and our interconnectedness with others and the environment. This calls for exploring ethical questions about how we should act, interact, and live in the world given what we just learned. To meet higher education's mission of developing the individual and the common good, we will need this kind of deep engagement with what we're learning.

Second-Person Critical Inquiry

Second-person critical inquiry is a relational and interactive kind of learning that is associated with intersubjective education and the experiential education movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Simmer-Brown 7). First-person critical inquiry is also a form of experiential learning, and can overlap with or include second-person critical inquiry, especially when contemplative practices that are more relational in nature (such as council circle, dialog, deep listening, storytelling) are involved. The use of second-person critical inquiry and intersubjective approaches to teaching and learning are still in development. According to Olen Gunnlaugson, "sufficient attention has not yet been given to contemplative pedagogy from second-person perspectives, with a present gap in the literature concerning intersubjective approaches to pedagogy and learning" (26-27). To clarify the term "intersubjective," he defines its position as "represented spatially as *between* us, in contrast to *inside* us (subjective position) or *outside* us (objective position)" (27). Situated in between first- and third-person critical inquiry, second-person inquiry is about "the shared processes of knowing born through and inside relationship" (27).

Teaching and learning methods that reflect the intersubjective, interactive, and relational nature of second-person critical inquiry come in various forms. This includes: field trips, service learning, group dialogue, outdoor education, community engagement projects, and other forms of community-based learning (Simmer-Brown 7; Sarath 1846; Grace 106). Second-person pedagogies include social justice, liberatory, and engaged pedagogy (Grace 106). When integrated with first- and third-person critical inquiry, second-person inquiry provides an experiential understanding of the material that students are learning and serves as a way to practice relating to ourselves and others. Fran Grace, who teaches social justice courses, employs

a second-person pedagogy which she calls the "Pedagogy of Emergency," and argues for its

integration with first-person critical inquiry in order for deeper inner and social change to occur:

> The learning emerged from intense dialogue, and sometimes this dialogue created emergencies. Students saw each other as living texts or experts on their multiple contexts of life experience: race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, religious identity, socio-economic class, sexual expression, and personality type. We worked primarily with interactive formats: in-class debates, fishbowls, group discussions and presentations, guest speakers, practitioner panels, dance and drama, spoken word, and community service work. (106)

Despite her efforts to "pry open [her students'] parochial worldviews" and revolutionize them

into agents of empowerment of world change," Grace saw that "the result was more often pain-

producing than empowering" (106). She realized that second-person critical inquiry "frequently

shutdown dialogue instead of opening it up" because students lacked self-knowledge and were

"unaware of the inner source of their prejudice and projected it onto their peers" (106). She

continues:

> I came to see that my social justice courses taught students the importance of their humanity, but not how to cultivate their wholeness or dignify the wholeness of others. They learned about the differentials in socioeconomic power, but not the universal power *within*. Without learning the skills of self-inquiry and contemplative awareness, the students remained imprisoned in their own unconscious biases, stereotypes, past wounds, unexamined expectations, and peremptory judgments (107).

Grace would agree with Beth Berila that interior, contemplative learning serves an important

function in deepening social justice work inside and outside of the classroom. Inner change,

which includes cultivating our own "wholeness" and that of others, being aware of our internal

responses, and being less reactive to our "unconscious biases, stereotypes, past wounds,

unexamined expectations, and peremptory judgments," are ways we can create social change

from inside out.

Third-Person Critical Inquiry

Third-person critical inquiry is usually the kind of inquiry that is given the most attention in higher education. It involves content-based, analytical teaching (Grace 106) of the discoveries of scholars across disciplines from the position of the "removed observer" (Simmer-Brown 6). It is associated with "outer knowing (intellectual reasoning, rationality, and objectivity)" (Rendón 27), as well as the analysis component of liberatory consciousness (Love 601) in which critical analysis and theoretical frameworks are used to understand oppression.

Since I have already touched upon ways in which connecting third-person critical inquiry with first- and second-person critical inquiries can lead to deeper learning as well as inner and social transformation, I will discuss ways in which third-person critical inquiry can be strengthened. One aspect of this is decolonizing education and decentering the dominant, white perspectives. Rendón writes about the academy's "agreement of monoculturalism," which leads to the "almost exclusive validation of Western structures of knowledge," the "subjugation of knowledge created by indigenous people and people of color," "course offerings that preserve the superiority of Western civilization," and "the dominant presence of faculty and administrators… who subscribe to monocultural paradigms of knowledge production and comprehension" (41). To fully address social justice inside and outside of higher education, we must confront the politics of knowledge: which ways of knowing are considered better or more legitimate, what is and isn't included in the curriculum, and who is or isn't contributing to the production of knowledge in the academy. Departments such as Black Studies, Women's and Gender's Studies, and ethnic studies have played a role in critiquing monoculturalism and offering other forms of knowledge production. On a related note, more needs to be done to

increase the diversity of students, faculty, and staff in higher education, as well as create an environment in which they can flourish.

Another aspect of third-person critical inquiry is that it should go beyond monodisciplinarity. In order to fully understand ourselves and the world, we need to engage with what we're learning through the lens of more than one discipline or perspective. Integrative learning is an approach that recognizes the importance of "connecting skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences, applying theory to practice, using diverse and even contradictory points of view, and understanding issues and positions contextually" (Rendón and Kanagala 65). To implement this kind of learning in practice, educators will have to go beyond their disciplinary silos and collaborate across disciplines to teach courses that invite interactions of different perspectives and ways of knowing. Interdisciplinary learning is a way to foster integrative learning. In "Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges in Teaching," David Oxtoby argues that interdisciplinary learning contributes to the learning aims of higher education, and that "interdisciplinary problem-based learning foster the kind of creative, integrated knowledge educators hold as ideal" (81). He is concerned that there is not enough interdisciplinary learning and research in higher education, especially in liberal arts colleges. He writes that "most liberal arts colleges fall short of the ideal of those flexible interdisciplinary habits of mind that we seek, at least in principle, to convey in our students" (78).

A third-person critical inquiry that goes beyond monoculturalism and monodisciplinarity can affect inner change and social justice because it challenges the notion of Western perspectives and structures of knowledge as the best and only form of knowledge. This can reveal ways in which education has been colonized, and how there is a hierarchy that limits what knowledge should be taught, how that knowledge should be taught and known, and who is

allowed to contribute to that knowledge. Challenging monodisciplinarity allows us to engage in what we're learning (such as social justice issues) in a way that holds multiple perspectives together and goes beyond a surface-level understanding of the challenges we face.

Practical Skills for Engaged Action

  In addition to the three critical inquiries, we need to develop practical skills that are necessary for engaged action. To create change, we need to learn the hard and soft skills that enable us to act upon the ways of knowing that we have developed through these various inquiries. A community organizer, for example, would have to learn the strategies to mobilize the members of the community around social justice issues. A social worker or social justice educator would need the necessary vocational training in order to be able to do their jobs. The specific skills that students learn will differ depending on their educational context and career aspirations, yet there are 21st century skills, which "broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed—by educators, school reformers, college professors, employers, and others—to be critically important to success in today's world." Here, I include some the skills on the list: critical thinking; research skills; creativity; perseverance; oral and written communication; collaboration; information and communication technology (ITC) literacy; civic, ethical, and social-justice literacy; economic and financial literacy; global awareness; scientific literacy and reasoning; environmental and conservation literacy; and health and wellness literacy (Glossary of Education Reform).

The Journey of Connecting the Three "Worlds"

Contemplative practices and social justice can connect in higher education through the integration of first-, second-, third-person critical inquiry, and practical skills for engaged action. Educating the whole person for the development of the individual and the common good requires an understanding of our inner lives and relationship with the larger world. By connecting knowledge, wisdom, and practical skills, we are able to act in ways that further inner and social transformation. In the following chapters, I try to bring these worlds together in creating a more contemplative, socially just education.

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2

Education for Liberation?:
A Contemplative Autoethnography

Is education for liberation? Liberation of our "inner" and "outer" worlds? Liberation from suffering and the causes of suffering? To explore these questions, I write what I call a contemplative autoethnography. In "Autoethnography as a Transformative Research Method," Dwayne Custer defines autoethnography as a "style of autobiographical writing and qualitative research that explores an individual's unique life experiences in relationship to social and cultural institutions" (1).[10] In my contemplative autoethnography, I draw upon this approach while emphasizing the contemplative dimension that underlies my educational experiences and my desire for social justice. To support my writing process, I engaged in contemplative practices such as mindfulness meditation, loving kindness, journaling, praying, and singing.

I wrote this autoethnography as a contemplative practice of storytelling and being vulnerable. I invite you to join me on a contemplative journey as you read this chapter. May we love and live life's questions together.

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[10] Custer, Dwayne. "Autoethnography as a Transformative Research Method." *Qualitative Report* 19.37 (2014): 1. Print.

1. The Edge

I leaned over the balcony and saw my death. I looked down at the wooden floorboards, picturing how I'd jump and become mangled limbs crushed into a lifeless heap. Contorted, twisted, and bleeding. There's a chance that I'd survive. I'd be confined to a wheelchair, unable to walk, or stay bedridden with a broken spine. Perhaps it's best to fall head first. That might be quick and fatal, if done right.

I shuddered at the gruesome thoughts. I felt afraid because the moment I looked down the edge, I saw my future. Soon, nothing would stop me from jumping over. If I don't get help, this will be me, I thought. Maybe it won't be a balcony, maybe there will be a different way to kill myself, maybe I won't be physically dead, but I won't be alive inside anymore.

Not yet. Perhaps it was a fear of dying. Perhaps I wasn't ready to give up my self. There was something in me that wanted to keep going, that knew that my time wasn't over. I knew what I had to do when I walked into my room and went to sleep.

I think I found love that night.

2. The Awakening

I felt that there was something more to life. There had to be something more to existence than getting good grades, getting into a good college, and getting a good job. Yet I didn't know what I wanted in life. No one thought to ask me and I didn't think to ask myself. There is something more to life, but what is it?

Who am I?

Why are we here?

What is the meaning of life?

Questions bubbled within me, questions that I didn't know how to ask myself, questions that didn't exist in school, questions that should've been held gently with cupped hands.

This was the beginning of my journey of no longer being disconnected from myself, no longer feeling like I don't belong in the world, no longer living the dual life. My breakdown was a breakthrough. The edge was an awakening.

I realized that like Edna Pontellier, the main character in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, I would give up the essential but I wouldn't give up my self, no matter how lonely this journey is and no matter if the world doesn't understand. My questions were my companions, which I brought with me to Amherst.

3. Universal Questions

I felt anxious while sitting in the lecture room of Introduction to Astronomy. I was no longer hearing what my professor was saying, and the PowerPoint slides faded away from my view. Astronomers are out there investigating the planets, stars, nebulae, and galaxies, seeking to understand the nature of the Universe. And here I was, worrying about the paper that's due next week. My petty worries seemed trivial in comparison. The universe continues on after I die, after we die. The sun will burn out in five to seven billion years, expanding into a red giant. We will likely die by then, if we don't ruin our planet and kill ourselves first.

The least I could do is to leave this Earth a slightly better place than I found it, I thought. Doing more love than harm. My unsettledness lessened but remained, as if I were floating away from the ground into space. What is the point of all that I'm doing, all that we're doing, if what we do doesn't last? Is it all futile struggle? Or does it not matter that we will all die? How much

can I really contribute, and how can I make my time here count in a place of no guarantees? How can I reconcile my simultaneous significance and insignificance in this world?

These questions have no static answers. I realized, much later, why I was sitting in my astronomy class in the first place. I was wondering about what's out there, yearning for something bigger, reaching out towards the enticing, mysterious unknown, unsure of what I would find…

4. Who am I?

I am a dust mote in space, a ball of debris with specks of purple and blue, floating in the stillness of the universe. I am now a human being, bathing naked in the black sea, staying still as I look up at the starless sky.

5. I Am. I Am. I Am.

These atoms come together……….…….to form a body.

Being cohesive. Put together. Impenetrable. Set in stone.

We're caught up in this obsession when the truth is that

We're made of stardust…dust of stars that will one day

Return to the earth, de..com.po.se…..di.sp.er.se…..dis..

in.t.e.gr..a..t.e, as our bodies age and emerge anew. The

Badump. Badump. Badump. of our insisting heartbeats

Become "I am. I am. I am." We drive by TD Bank ads

That declare "Too much is never enough," also known

As "You are never enough." Our minds get caught in

The drive of To-Do's, Efficiency, and Productivity, so

We can justify ourselves to ourselves, so we can claim

The "I am. I am. I am." We declare ourselves as if we

Already know what our paths are and where they will

Lead…..When did the unspoken expectations become

Internalized? Hide your fumbling, know the answers,

Sound smart, look good, get good grades, don't forget

The next task on your life checklist, forget the stardust,

Forget to live every minute because that's for Poets and

Saints, forget to ask "Who am I?"........Strive to become,

become, become. Strive for the "I am. I am. I am."........

Un...ti..l.....th.e....at..o..ms....don't....co.m.e..tog.et..h.er..

6. Unpleasant Feelings

When thinking about where I feel stuck while living my life, I feel vulnerable. It is not a matter of becoming more vulnerable, but recognizing how vulnerable I already am all the time. I feel vulnerable because I don't know what the future holds, and am unsure of what I believe in and stand for. I'm uncertain about the meaning and purpose of all that I'm doing, and whether the meaning that I made up for myself is the "right" thing to do. I feel vulnerable because knowing that I will die one day, I am afraid of wasting the life I have and not realizing it until it's too late.

Past the shields of my slumping shoulders, I feel the tenderness of my heart. I think about how easily I can get hurt. Someone could come up to me with a knife and stab my heart, both

literally and figuratively. I could "fail" what I'm doing with this thesis or anything else that I'm doing, whether that means not meeting my own expectations, or that of others. Yet what is failing, and failure by whose standards?

7. Letting Go

How can I let go and accept my mortality, my imperfection, my uncertainty?
What will I find if I do let go and accept my mortality, my imperfection, my uncertainty?

8. Walking Meditation

Happiness is hearing the crisp sound of melting snow streaming into a gutter by a frozen tree. It is looking at the blades of grass rising from the snow-covered ground. It is watching how the sun colors the shades of popping green grass. It is looking up at a tree to see the lines and grooves of its branches and leaves. It is remembering the moon obscured by clouds and embracing life's imperfection.

I realized how much I have missed in life because I didn't stop to notice what is here. How often do we see the beauty in the impermanent, imperfect, and mundane? How can we see this beauty within ourselves? All of these connections are within a walk's reach if only we offered our attention.

Is this living?

9. Subway Meditation

I share a wordless summer morning with commuters as we head to work.
Chug chug chug chug chug click clack

chug chug chug chug chug

Breathing. Inhale… exhale…

Boom boom boom boom. Muffled beats of a song playing in someone's headphones.

We are all here together, strangers huddled in a moving capsule travelling at thirty miles per hour. A daily repetition. Close and distant at the same time. How strange is that?

Chug chug chug chug chug click clack

chug chug chug chug chug

"This is a Manhattan-bound D train. The next stop is…"

I don't know why I'm crying. I open my eyes to take a peek. No one is watching. Some eyes are closed. Some eyes are focused on playing Candy Crush or watching video clips on their phones. If some eyes were watching, none showed any signs.

Boom boom boom boom

Breathing. Inhale… exhale…

"Stand clear of the closing doors, please."

Ding-dong.

Gratitude. I'm softness sitting on a solid orange seat. I have felt what it's like to be invisible. I have felt what it's like to be seen. How far I've come in life, how lucky am I to be loved.

Chug chug chug chug chug click clack

chug chug chug chug chug

I lift my glasses, wiping my tears with a sleeved wrist.

Breathing. Inhale… exhale…

I look at my wrist.

"Vivre." To live. A daily reminder.

Is this living?

10. Underground Desire

I once read an article about the bacteria and microbes you'd find on a New York City subway pole. *E. coli, proteus mirabilis, salmonella, staphylococcus aureus, micrococcus luteus, bacillus subtilis, serratia marcescens*, who knows what else. I subway surf to avoid touching the poles, spacing my legs strategically so that I won't touch the germs, leaning forward and backwards with each twist and turn of the train, feeling slightly on edge for fear of bumping into someone else if I lose my balance.

I think I picked up my germaphobic tendencies from my parents, and from living in New York City my whole life. It's a place where common sightings include dripping subway water and large rats scurrying along the third rail. Whenever I go back home in Brooklyn after travelling on the subway, I take off my clothes to switch into my clean pajamas, or shower right away to get rid of the city grime clinging to my skin. I was different in Paris, where I didn't mind wearing my *metro* clothes indoors or skipping showers as I pleased.

The seats of the Paris *metro* are disgusting but comforting. The cushioned seats come in dark blues, purples, and reds, depending on the line you take. The colors are a smart move, because they make it harder to see the compressed layers of dirt left by each commuter. The colors, however, fail to hide the butt imprints that no amount of train maintenance can undo.

Sometimes, I wonder what would happen if I didn't care about germs at all. I would spread my arms and legs across the train, rolling back and forth on the seats as my hair hangs down its sides, smearing myself in dirt without a worry. A whiff of tunnel air would creep in through the crack of an open window, mixing with the smell of fresh baguettes.

I wonder what it would be like to do the same thing in nature. I'd smell the drying morning dew as I dig my bare feet into the dirt, squeezing the wet soil between my toes as earthworms squirm out and about. I'd roll around in the grass, snagging tiny branches and ants in my clothes. Then I'd lie on my back, looking up at the tree, squinting when the sunlight escapes through the gaps between the leaves. Nothing would hold me back from greeting life.

Is this living?

11. (In)visible

The heels of my boots clicked against the cobblestones of the Parisian streets as I walked three blocks towards the *metro* on my way to class. I turned the corner and reached the last block, whose sidewalk wraps around the perimeter of the church. At a corner of the church is the *metro*, a small underground train station called *Notre Dame de Lorette*.

As I made my way towards the *metro*, I noticed the foul stench of urine and feces sitting at the bottom of the trees on the street blended with the smell of bread and croissants at the *boulangerie* across from the church. A few people slept along the sidewalk on cardboard boxes with their bits and pieces of belongings. I continued walking and reached the staircase of the *metro*, where people were walking in a single file to go down into the station.

Every day, a man with short, greying black hair sat on the top of those steps, holding a paper cup with a few *centimes* inside. He sometimes shook the coin cup as people walked down the stairs, but most people didn't pay attention as they hurried off to work. Other times, he left his cup on the floor as he stared off into the distance, not paying attention to the people who didn't pay him attention. He would be gone by the evenings, leaving an empty bottle of alcohol and cigarette butts by the comer of the staircase.

I was afraid of approaching the man and giving him money. I felt guilty because part of me would rather avoid him instead of acknowledging his existence. It seemed like all of us commuters had numbed ourselves to the visible suffering of others to the point that the man on the staircase became invisible to us. Seeing him every day bothered me, because I realized how much I've been conditioned to ignore SDFs (*Sans Domicile Fixe)*, or homeless people, on the streets while growing up in New York City. I thought about how my worries about writing papers seem trivial compared to those of people who don't have their basic needs met. I was studying abroad in Paris for fun while people are trying to survive day by day. It also made me realize how scared I am of approaching someone. I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to bear what I might see in their eyes.

Bit by bit, I developed a routine of dropping fifty *centimes*, and sometimes a euro or two, into his paper cup as I walked down the stairs. "*Bonne journée.*" I would say. Have a nice day. He sometimes would give me a slight nod and a small smile. Sometimes he had no reaction.

The more I did it, the less anxious I felt about approaching the man and others that I walked by in Paris. Yet I didn't really know who they are and what their lives are like. I never knew them beyond the label "homeless." I don't know why we live in a world where people struggle to get the resources they need, and why we ignore the suffering that we see around us. I feel uncertain about how much change I can create, because offering a few euros is only a temporary fix for systemic issues that I don't fully understand. How can I be with my fears and uncertainties?

What is living when the world is hurting?

12. Death

I remember the day my high school mourned a student's death. I remember being in yoga class, lying down in *savasana*, or corpse pose, feeling jealous of a dead person. If I had died, who would mourn for me?

If the man sitting on the stairs of the *metro* had died, who would mourn for him? Or is he already dead to us?

13. Living Spectre

The word "sexy" came in a low whisper, for no one's ears to hear but his and my own. He brushed against my left shoulder as he walked past me.

I turned around to see who it was. I wanted to see his face. Maybe he was wearing a suit. Maybe he had dark hair. Maybe I will be able to see him if he turned around to give me a second look. As I looked down Murray Street through my glasses, all I saw were the backs of a few people dressed in greys and blacks, on their way to work. No one turned around to meet my gaze. The moving figures became smaller, slowly blurring into the greens of New York City's City Hall Park at the end of the street. There were sounds of tires rolling on the pavement as the cars drove past, but I didn't notice any of it at that moment.

It was as if he was never there, as if none of this had happened. Why won't he show himself? Did he smirk to himself? Was he proud? The living spectre disappeared and left no signs. Only he and I knew what happened that summer morning, and perhaps I am the only one who remembers.

14. The Living Spectre is Oppression…

...except I didn't know it at the time when I met it on Murray Street. Or the time when a group of men driving by the street catcalled at me as I walked by myself. Or the time when a man sat next to me on the subway and harassed me while the other passengers stayed silent. Or the times that I get comments about the tights that I'm wearing when it's not his business. Or the times that girls in my middle school get in trouble for wearing leggings, because it's too revealing and distracting for the boys. Or the time when the gym teacher spent the whole period talking about how girls are inferior to boys at sports. Or the time that I was judged as being less capable of doing my work because I'm a woman. Or the time I said, "Don't be a girl."

These experiences are a small slice of the many ways in which women and girls face oppression and violence every day across the world. How can we all work together to stop this from happening? How will we learn how to do our education doesn't teach us how to be understand how injustice and structural violence occurs? How to be with our own and others' suffering without drowning in it? How to have the courage and understanding to take social action?

15. Asian-American

"Did you ever want to be white?" my friend asked.

I paused.

"Yes…" I said.

"Me too."

I had paused because she had suddenly asked this question. I was unsure of how she might respond herself, being half-white and half-Chinese. I was unsure of how I would respond

as a Chinese-American. No one had asked me this question before. I felt a seed of unease for those few seconds, because I couldn't give a firm "yes" or a firm "no."

After that conversation, I remembered the time when the seven-year old Vivian looked at her own reflection. She was home in Brooklyn, alone in her parents' bedroom on the second floor of the house, facing the white, circular vanity mirror sitting on top of the dresser. She looked at her ponytail and at the tiny baby hairs that stood upwards as if they were trying to run away. She thought about having blond or brown hair, because that would be more interesting than plain black hair. She stared into her own eyes, wishing that her eyes were a little bigger and colored with specks of green or hazel like her classmates in elementary school. She looked at her skin and wanted less yellow.

Vivian stood in front of the mirror, imagining herself growing older, getting taller, becoming more beautiful. Her mirror self became blurrier the older she became in the mirror. Her imagination was failing her, but Vivian had hope that she would become pretty one day.

I now wonder who the reflection in the mirror really was.

16. Reflections

Why didn't I realize oppression while growing up? If we don't learn about it, how can see past the reflections of the distorted mirrors and recognize our true selves? How can we love if we don't recognize these intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic distortions?

17. Who am I?

I. Twenty-one year old Asian American woman from Brooklyn. Senior at Amherst College. Plays music, reads books, and loves desserts. Accurate descriptors, but is that the totality of who I am?

II. Am I a collection of memories, section #1-21?

III. What makes me me if I am always changing?

IV. What does it mean to be a self shaped by a society made of selves?

V. How might we honor the unknown in each person, recognizing the parts that are ineffable, changing, unrealized, unrevealed?

VI. How might we regard others without reducing who they are?

VII. How do we open to the deepest insights about the self without ignoring the realities of how social identities influence who we are and who is or isn't othered?

VIII. Who are we when we consciously or unconsciously value some lives more than other lives?

IX. Turn to question "I" and repeat.

18. *Things I've Said or Heard*

"Who am I?"

"Don't be a girl."

"Why are you eating so much? You'll get fat."

"You weigh yourself three times a day."

"She a New Yorker… but she is Chinese."

"*Ni hao.* Are you from China?"

"You're not eating weird Chinese food today."

"That's so Asian."

"A Twinkie: yellow on the outside, white on the inside."

"Sexy."

"Women are emotional."

"Be careful. Don't drink too much, or you'll get raped."

"I was surprised that you did better than I'd expected… because you're a woman."

"That's great, so I don't have to wear that much makeup for you."

"Employee of the month? That picture looks like a mugshot."

"I'm no saint. I'm no saint."

"Hi, how are you? Can you give me a few dollars? I have no money for food. I can't get food…

Hi, how are you? Can you give me a few dollars? I have no money for food. I can't get food…"

"I want to just lie on this sidewalk and not wake up again."

"Everyone's alone with their sadness."

"I'm OK."

19. SILENCE(D).

SEE SECTION #5 (I WISH I HAD THE COURAGE TO SPEAK UP).

20. "OK?" "OK."

"Are you OK?" Franci asked me. Pursed lips. Tightened jaw. I gave a slight shrug. "Did something happen to you?" she said. She extended one arm towards me, hugging me from the side and squeezing my shoulder with her hand as we crossed the street at Columbus Circle, passing by the taxi cars and the Time Warner building. She was referring to how I cried last night when I had dinner with her and Gerard.

I no longer remember why I cried, but it had to do with oppression, about racism, the Charlie Hebdo shootings and Islamophobia, having difficult conversations with my French host

mom about gays, about how self-awareness and asking big questions should not be separate from social justice, about my suffering and the world's suffering, about the suffering that I don't know about and don't see, about how I felt sad.

She probably was worried that something traumatic happened to me, like being raped or something terrible like that. "No, nothing happened to me," I looked at her and said as we continued our way through the rush of the New York streets. "I'm OK."

I immediately felt as though I wasn't telling the full truth. The small moments of injustice lie latent in my memories and my body, festering within, sometimes bubbling up to the surface through my tears and stiff shoulders. Injustice doesn't only exist within small, isolated moments— it is part of the air we breathe, it colors the lens through which we see, it feeds on our silence. It is the living spectre. We choose to not look at it straight in the eyes, or in other words, we are afraid of looking at the spectre within each of us.

Injustice inhabits us, and we embody it. It inhabits us from within and without, and we embody it in the way we think, speak, and relate to others on a micro and macro level. My own suffering and our collective suffering are not separate. How could I possibly feel OK?

21. Truth

I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive.

When I was at the edge over four years ago, I *chose* to live.

I wanted to see what life had to offer and what I had to offer life.

My own suffering led me to see the world's suffering.

Please, teach me how to love.

What more is there to do?

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Storytelling

I wanted to tell you a story about

    Why I am

        What I learned

           What I saw

             How I felt

  A story about

    Suffering

        Questioning

           Awakening

  A story about

    Wonder

        Stillness

          Joy

  A story about

    Reality

        Silence

          Pain

  A story about

    Living spectres

Living life

Living death

I wanted to tell you a story about

Daring to be happy

Knowing whence I came

Saving the only life I could save

Learning to liberate through love

Finding a centeredness that challenges all centers

Life asks me to love my

Fear

Uncertainty

Hopelessness

Life whispers that I can

Shed my garments

Spread my questions

Share my self

Life wants me to tell you a story

So that I can let go.

Tell me, what does life whisper to you?

3

The Wisdom of Equanimity:
My Retreat at Insight Meditation Society

In February 2016, I attended "The Wisdom of Equanimity,"[11] a six-day meditation retreat at

Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, MA. I wanted to live out my research on connecting

contemplative practices and social justice in higher education by participating in this retreat. I'd

like to start off by acknowledging that are many kinds of contemplative practices that come from

spiritual, religious, and secular traditions. These practices have led educators to shape their

contemplative pedagogies in different ways. One of the practices that contemplative educators

often discuss is mindfulness meditation, which is a secular practice influenced by insight

meditation (which is a central practice at IMS). After practicing mindfulness meditation for three

years, I wanted to deepen my practice by attending my first retreat. Adi Bemak, my meditation

teacher, suggested that I visit IMS, which is "one of the Western world's oldest and most-

respected meditation retreat centers" (About Us). IMS focuses on two kinds of practices from

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[11] Here is a description of the IMS Retreat: "Equanimity grows through learning to attend in a consistent manner to any experience which might arise. Inclusion is the path, not denying reactivity and preference, but learning to be in wise relationship to them. As we open mindfully to sensations, emotions, situations and other people with equal respect, life can feel workable without needing to be perfect. This silent retreat is open to all. An optional daily period of mindful yoga will be offered by Ericka Phillips to support your sitting practice – great attention will be given to create a session that is welcoming and accessible to all bodies, ages, abilities and gender expressions." For more information, visit: http://www.dharma.org/meditation-retreats/retreat-center/retreat-description?id=388.

Theravada Buddhism, insight (*vipassana*) meditation[12] and lovingkindness (*metta*)[13] meditation.

By attending this retreat, I hoped to (1) examine my own experience of the relationship between inner change and social change; and (2) explore the integration of contemplative practices (such as meditation) with social justice and higher education.

My Experience of the Retreat

Why Inner Change is Important for Social Change

To create social change, inner change is necessary. Thomas Merton recognizes the importance of both inner and outer transformation:

> If we attempt to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening our own self-understanding, our own freedom, integrity, and capacity to love, we will not have anything to give to others. We will communicate nothing but the contagion of our own obsessions, our aggressiveness, our own ego-centered ambitions (The Activist's Ally: Contemplative Tools for Social Change).

Here he says that our capacity to give to the world is connected to our inner work of cultivating self-understanding, freedom, integrity, and love. This insight is important to keep in mind if we want to dismantle injustice and oppression. In *Framing Deep Change*: *Essays on Transformative Social Change*, Claudia Horwitz and Jesse Maceo Vega-Frey write that "individual suffering comes to life in collective forms" and "society is a manifestation and projection of our internal turmoil" (8). They continue:

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[12] Insight (*vipassana*) meditation is "the simple and direct practice of moment-to-moment mindfulness. Through careful and sustained observation, we experience for ourselves the ever-changing flow of the mind/body process. This awareness leads us to accept more fully the pleasure and pain, fear and joy, sadness and happiness that life inevitably brings. As insight deepens, we develop greater equanimity and peace in the face of change, and wisdom and compassion increasingly become the guiding principles of our lives" (FAQ about IMS).

[13] *Metta* "is the Pali word for friendship or lovingkindness. It is taught as a meditation that cultivates our natural capacity for an open and loving heart. With its roots in practices said to be taught by the Buddha himself, metta is traditionally offered along with meditations that enrich compassion, joy in the happiness of others and equanimity. These practices lead to the development of concentration, fearlessness, happiness and a greater ability to love" (FAQ about IMS).

> Individual hatreds lead to violence of all forms — state-sanctioned oppression, violence, war, domestic and sexual abuse. Greed leads to unjust economic system, distrust of others, the construction of individuals as mere factors of production, non-livable wages, exploitation of natural resources and the insatiable desire to consume regardless of cost. Delusion in the news, media, and advertisements promote a sense of individualism and isolation, over-consumption and hubris on an individual and national level (8).

Horwitz and Vega-Frey point to ways in which hatred, greed, and delusion affect both the individual and the collective. Since the individual is a part of society, and society is made up of individuals, social justice work needs to happen from within and from without.

Contemplative practices such as insight meditation can support this process of connecting inner and social change. This practice involves being mindful of our present moment experience of our thoughts, feelings, body, and environment, without being attached to them or judging them. IMS lists the benefits of meditation, some of which include: "connect[ing] to our feelings;" "expand[ing] our sense of who we are, beyond our fears and self-judgment;" "awaken[ing] our capacity for insight and wisdom;" "transforming our worldview from one of isolation and confusion to one of connection, clarity, and compassion;" and "broaden[ing] our perspective and deepen[ing] our courage, based on seeing things just as they are" ("Benefits of Meditation").

I signed up for the retreat, curious to see where this experience would lead me. In this section, I discuss some of the challenges that I faced during the retreat, which made me question how my inner life affects my ability to create social change.

Renunciation

It wasn't until that I started the retreat that I experienced the challenges of renunciation. I knew from reading the general information about IMS that I had to honor the "noble silence," meaning that I was expected to refrain from speaking, in order to stay focused on our practice. The noble silence also includes "avoiding reading, writing, keeping a journal, receiving mail,

using the telephone, or otherwise keeping busy and distracted."[14] The silent aspect of the retreat

didn't bother me too much, but I felt uneasy about giving up the other activities, even if it was

only for six days. During the car ride on my way to IMS, I started feeling dread at the prospect of

not being able to use my cell phone or access the internet, mostly because I wouldn't be able to

text the person I'm dating (whom I missed already). Removing myself from my daily life made

me realize how I often use my cell phone and laptop to distract myself or avoid doing things I

need to be doing. Fortunately, I wasn't able to use my cell phone even if I wanted to, because I

had neither cell service nor internet signal at the retreat center. In one moment of desperation, I

re-read old text messages on my phone, but then I resolved to only do it once. And in an attempt

to reassure myself in response to the lack of internet connection, I thought to myself, "Even if I

can't do something while I'm in my room, I could at least sleep as a way to pass the time." There

were other things that I had to renounce, such as spending time with others, reading, and eating

food and desserts whenever I pleased. By the end of the second day of the retreat, I began to

adjust to the culture of IMS as a retreatant, feeling a bit surprised by the little pleasures that I had

to give up, but also beginning to come to terms with my situation.

Resistance to Practice

Waking up at 5:30am and meditating until 9:15pm laid bare my resistance to the practice. It

was more meditation than I've ever done in a day. Since the summer of 2015, I've been

meditating for ten minutes per day. I realized that part of the reason why I did ten minutes is

because I wanted to avoid any more practice than that. I sometimes felt impatient during my

daily meditation. I would sometimes check the timer to see how many minutes I had left, or feel

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[14] Here is the "Essential Course Information" with information about noble silence:
http://www.dharma.org/sites/default/files/IMS_info.pdf.

relieved when it was over because I could then go to the next activity. During the retreat, my resistance became even more pronounced. At the beginning of the retreat, I found myself counting down the days until the retreat would end multiple times. I often found myself thinking "When is this going to be over?" for most of the sitting and walking meditations. My resistance intensified whenever I felt sleepy, especially during the early morning sittings. It was difficult to make myself stay awake and not let my body slump forward. I also didn't follow the daily schedule all the time, and often used the walking meditation time to take a break from meditation, or to take a nap.

Like with my struggles with renunciation, my resistance to the practice shows how I tried to avoid my present moment experience. I felt bored, tired, and impatient and wanted the retreat to end. I realized that I need to be more aware of my resistances, because that can affect my ability to contribute to social change. In *Let Your Life Speak*, Parker Palmer says that "spiritual traditions are primarily about reality…. an effort to penetrate the illusions of the external world and to name its underlying truth" (26). Contemplative practices are ways to look past our distorted perceptions and to meet reality, no matter how difficult it may be. My resistance to my practice shows that part of me wants to run away from reality. This is what James Baldwin warns us about in *The Fire Next Time*:

> I have met only a very few people… who had any real desire to be free. Freedom is hard to bear. It can be objected that I am speaking of political freedom in spiritual terms, but the political institutions of any nation are always menaced and are ultimately controlled by the spiritual state of that nation…. Privately, we cannot stand our lives and dare not examine them; domestically, we take no responsibility for (and no pride in) what goes on in our country; and, internationally, for many millions of people, we are an unmitigated disaster…. We are capable of bearing a great burden, once we discover that the burden is reality and arrive where reality is (88-91).

Baldwin connects political problems in our country and our world to our spiritual freedom. He means that addressing the issues that our world faces requires examining our lives and taking

responsibility as a collective. He believes that we are capable of "bearing a great burden," which is reality, and "arrive where reality is." This reminded me of contemplative practice, which is intended for being with reality, examining ourselves, and getting liberated. This is not an easy task, but it affects my capacity to create change. If I resist looking at reality, how can I change it?

Indulging in Thinking

It was challenging to focus on nothing else but my meditation for the entire retreat. My resistance to the practice helped me see how much I wanted mental stimulation. I realized how much I like to think. I was engaging in what IMS co-founder Joseph Goldstein calls "endlessly engaging thought loops" (166). Thinking is not a bad thing in and of itself, but I found myself wanting to think as a way to distract myself from meditation when I'm bored with concentrating on my breath, or other objects of meditation. For example, I found myself thinking about the future, fantasizing about going on a summer vacation to Europe with my boyfriend, and planning the logistics of the trip in my mind. I enjoyed thinking about it, and let myself do so for about ten to fifteen minutes more, even though I noticed that my mind had wandered.

My desire to indulge in thinking carried over to the group interviews and in the evening dharma talks. Although doing the group interviews and listening to the dharma talks are also part of the practice, I found myself liking these sessions because of the mental stimulation. Listening and participating in conversations energized me, improved my mood, and motivated me to continue to practice. It was, however, also a way to avoid silent meditation. A couple of times, I found myself thinking, "Yes, I get to skip this meditation session to do a group interview!" Besides dinner time, the dharma talks were one of my favorite parts of the evening. I enjoyed listening to the teachers' life stories and learning about the Buddhist teachings. I resonated with a

comment that a fellow retreatant shared after the retreat when she joked, "Everyone goes to the dharma talks because that's the only entertainment we get for the day." It was interesting to notice that the group interviews and dharma talks supported my practice, but also gave me an excuse to enjoy thinking.

My desire to think is driven not only by the desire for mental stimulation, but also by worrying about this thesis. My concerns about my thesis are closely tied to worrying about the future and discomfort with uncertainty. As with almost any endeavor, there is an element of uncertainty about how things will turn out. I was worried about what I would write for this thesis, whether I would finish it on time, and whether I would do a good job on it. While meditating, I noticed several times when my mind became distracted by thoughts about my thesis. At moments like these when I'm thinking about the thesis or trying to figure something out, my head tilts forward and my body contracts. My chest feels constricted and my shoulders are huddled inward, as if my body is trying to collapse into itself. I feel more contracted, maybe because my "I want to figure this out" mentality makes me restless and worried.

My desire to indulge in thinking and my worries about my thesis are indicative of what Thomas Merton calls the "contagion of our own obsessions" and "ego-centered ambitions." These obsessions and ambitions get in the way of what Horwitz and Vega-Frey call "true freedom," which is the "internal capacity not to be the victim or captive of any form, of any experience, of any condition." They add that contemplative practices help us develop "deeper understandings of who we are and what is needed in a given moment that are based on realities beyond the conceptual, the intellectual, the known" (*Framing Deep Change* 10). It is a nonconceptual understanding of ourselves and of reality that goes beyond thinking. At the retreat, I got caught up in my experience and wanted to find safety in thinking and in the known,

especially pertaining to my thesis. In contrast to "Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Victor Frankl" who had "profound experiences of awakening" while in "the confines of oppressive forms such as prisons or slavery," I felt trapped at a retreat that was intended to liberate us all from suffering and the causes of suffering (*Framing Deep Change* 10). I felt humbled by my inner struggles, and realized that there is much more practice to do.

Clinging and Aversion

I cling to what is pleasant and avoid what is unpleasant. When things feel good, I want to hold onto that feeling, and when things don't feel good, I don't want things to be the way they are. For example, I cling to the pleasure that I experience when spending time with my boyfriend. For most of my life, I prioritized my education and spent a lot of time focused on my studies. I came to realize that dating is much more fun than doing homework. Although cultivating relationships with others has become more important to me and has provided many learning experiences, I realized how easy it is to be attached to pleasure. For most of January 2016, I lived a hedonistic lifestyle, indulging in worldly pleasures that distracted me from writing my thesis. I'm not planning to renounce all pleasure, but I want to find a healthier balance between the extremes of hedonism and full renunciation. By having more distance from my boyfriend and other kinds of distraction during the retreat, I was able to remind myself that life is not all about feeling good, and that I need to focus on what is important to me and take steps that go in that direction. Instead of eating, drinking, and napping all day, for example, I'll have to work with my writing anxiety instead of avoiding it, or thinking "I don't want to feel this way."

I think that meditation can support our ability to act more skillfully by increasing our awareness of our habitual responses to pleasantness and unpleasantness. Ng'ethe Maina and

Staci Haines write that practice is "a canvas in against which all of our anxieties, fears, anger, denial are vividly painted for us to see" (*Framing Deep Change* 29). These resistances "show up again and again" and are there for us to see them "all the time if we are present and attentive." By looking at our "default practices," which are "our learned behaviors and reactions that are inherited through our life experiences" (27), we can be more informed about "what new practices [we] can engage to shift toward what and who [we] want to be" (29). In other words, contemplative practices such as meditation can help us unlearn our conditioned habits and behavior, and be more capable of making choices that are more aligned with what we find meaningful.

There are multiple examples through which I discovered how my resistances and default practices shaped my behavior at the retreat. For example, I went outdoors for my walking meditation, but went back inside after a couple of minutes because I didn't like how the snowy weather made my legs feel cold. Another example is how I had judgments about food during the retreat. IMS served breakfast at 6 a.m., lunch at 12 p.m., and dinner 5:15 p.m., and I wasn't used to the eating schedule. I worried about being hungry before the next meal time and about not having enough to eat. This affected how much food I got, especially during lunch because it is the heaviest meal of the day. Even though I managed to finish almost all of the food that I served myself because I tried to be aware of how much I could actually eat, there might have been a couple of times in which I ate more than I normally would at Amherst because of the scarcity mindset that I had when getting food. Another food-related example was when I ate a peanut butter cookie. When I saw that the kitchen made peanut butter cookies for dessert for one of the lunches, I immediately thought, "I don't like peanut butter cookies." I took one anyway, because dessert isn't usually served with every meal and I wanted something sweet. After taking a bite of

the cookie, I realized that it was delicious, and I wanted another cookie. However, it was too late to get more because the kitchen staff were already cleaning up and putting away the food.

These examples show how our thoughts, behaviors, and actions are often conditioned by what we like or don't like, and how we can suffer because we cling to what we like and resist what we don't like. Being aware of how this happens in our lives is a first step towards being more intentional about how we act, so that we are not automatically acting out of habitual responses that don't serve our wellbeing or that of others. Sheridan writes, "Until we are able to transform our own fear-based, delusional ways of being, we are destined to perpetuate injustice regardless of our political, economic, and political struggles" (204). Avoiding discomfort (walking outside and going back inside) or feeding greed (getting more than I need or wanting another cookie) can offer my ability to create effective social change if I replicate these behaviors in the way I engage with others.

Living in Alignment with Intentions

I found it difficult to follow through with my intentions. By working on this thesis, I'm taking a step towards my intention to decrease suffering on a personal and societal level through both inner change and social change work. I found it hard to change my habits and live my intentions in practice. For example, I avoided writing my thesis because it made me feel anxious, even though doing the writing would further my intention to create change. Sometimes, I found myself experiencing doubt about my intentions. Questions like "Do I really want to this?" and "Do I really want to end suffering?" cross my mind. I wonder how I can tell if my intentions are my true intentions. Is it something that is felt, like an emotional response? Is the emotional

response always reliable? How do I know if I'm headed in the right direction? Or is it not useful to get caught up in the doubt?

I experienced the challenges of sticking with one's intentions during the retreat as well. At the beginning of the retreat, I did some free-writing to identify my intentions for attending the retreat. I wrote that I wanted to:

- Have this retreat experience that I've been putting off and get more in-depth support for my contemplative practices
- Do more movement-based practices such as yoga, tai chi, and qigong
- Develop insights about the thesis and the connection between inner change and social change
- Foster a deeper awareness of what might be blocking me from connecting with others and writing/researching
- Be more at ease in difficult situations by understanding the nature of my mind and how it works
- Connect to my mind and heart
- Gather more energy to do my writing
- Work with anxiety and self-judgment
- Develop more patience

Even though these were my intentions, I noticed my own resistance against doing things that would bring me in the direction of the change I want to create. I knew, for example, that I would benefit from doing more movement-based practices and being more aware of my body, yet I felt reluctant to make the trip to the yoga sessions while I'm at Amherst, and I didn't feel excited about doing yoga during the retreat. It is interesting that despite my reluctance to do yoga, I tended to be more present while doing yoga in comparison to the meditation sittings, and my mind wandered less. Goldstein points to the importance of reflecting on the purpose of our practice when we are struggling with it:

> If we're trying to be mindful in all these various ways, but are still getting lost in a flurry of mental activity, wise reflection can help bring things to balance. We can reflect on our purpose for practicing. Why are we doing this? We can remember that the fundamental purpose behind all our efforts is the purification of our minds, freeing ourselves from the forces of greed, hatred, and ignorance. And we can remember that we're doing this not

only for ourselves, but also for the welfare of all. In this reflection, we reconnect with our respect for the practice and respect for ourselves in doing it. (160)

Acting in alignment with my intentions isn't always enjoyable in the pleasure-seeking sense, but this is how change occurs. Rev. angel Kyodo Williams writes that change happens in the present, not the past nor the future: "How we are showing up right now is the state of our transformation" (17). Without clear intentions and a commitment to being with reality and with the present in spite of the discomfort, we won't be able to see situations clearly and take effective action to change them.

Integrating Contemplative Practices with Social Justice and Higher Education

Social Justice

Although the retreat wasn't explicitly about social justice, I learned from my retreat experience and from reading literature that contemplative practices can further social justice work (and vice versa). Rather than treating contemplative practices as a form of navel-gazing, or a way to separate oneself from the world's problems, there are changemakers who integrate contemplation and social justice in their lives. They connect their inner liberation with outer liberation through engaged action. Throughout my research process, I found organizations that directly address this connection between inner and social change.[15] Furthermore, I learned about "transformative change," which Robert Gass broadly defines as "a systems approach, deriving its power by attending equally to hearts and minds (the inner life of human beings), human behavior, and the social systems and structures in which they exist" (*Framing Deep Change* 12). It "tends to be multi-disciplinary, integrating a range of approaches and methodologies," and

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[15] Here is a non-exhaustive list of organizations that bridge contemplative practices with social justice: such as: Movement Strategy Center, Social Justice Leadership, Center for Action and Contemplation, Rockwood Leadership Institute, Generative Somatics, The Stone House, Center for Transformative Change, Interdependence Project, and The Presencing Institute.

aims to be "irreversible and enduring" (12). Social activists involved in transformative change are taking on more holistic social change approaches. They go beyond the approach of engaging and mobilizing people "through facts, analysis, and critical thinking" in the tradition of progressive social change. Gass writes, "While embracing the importance of intellect, transformational change equally engages the heart of our deepest aspirations, what we care most deeply about, what we love" (14). These components can be cultivated through contemplative practices.

There may be challenges that come with bringing contemplative practices into social justice. For example, the context and setting in which these practices occur matter, because the messages might be heard in various ways by different people. The insight meditation practice of being with the way things are without judging them might be misinterpreted as a way to accept injustice. Here, we have to hold the paradox of being with things are they are, which then enables us to take action to change it. Another example of possible misinterpretation is the idea that "we're all the same," which I heard during the retreat. There is truth in this statement. There are commonalities in our human experiences that can serve as way to connect with one another. At the same time, I imagined that saying something like "we're all the same" would not go well in a setting where a group of people are having a dialogue about racism. From my experience of participating in dialogues about oppression, one of the "rules" that we talked about is to not to assume that we all have the same experiences, because we all have different social identities. This would involve using "I" statements to describe one's own experience instead of assuming that everyone else feels the same way. The idea of a common humanity or "we're all the same" can be a way to erase difference, continue the idea of color blindness, and prevent people from not acknowledging the privilege they have and their role in perpetuating oppression. Another

comment that might be misinterpreted is "It's all in your mind," which could potentially hinder social change. It is true, in a sense, that a lot of the suffering that we experience is in our minds and in the way we perceive things. At the same time, this phrase could be interpreted as a dismissal of structural oppression, which is a form of suffering that is not just in our minds, but part of the the realities of many. When trying to see how to bring contemplative practices and social justice work together, we have to think about the potential difficulties that may arise.

Higher Education

Contemplative practices such as meditation can help us meet the aims of education. Barbezat and Bush examined scientific research on meditation and found that they can increase "concentration and attention;" "mental health and psychological well-being;" "connection, generosity, and loving kindness;" "understanding of the course material;" and "creativity and insight" (23). The insight meditation practice of mindfulness of moment-to-moment experience reminded me of William James, who says:

> The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will…. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education *par excellence* (424).

One aspect of insight meditation is that it helps us practice paying attention. Being able to focus and sustain our attention is important when trying to learn or do something. This applies to learning about social justice, which can be a difficult process because it involves facing suffering, oppression, and examining ourselves. Social justice calls for looking at reality rather than shifting our attention to something else that is easier to cope with. In addition, practices such as meditation help us stay with our present moment experience, which is essential if we want to learn and create change. In "Aims of Education," Alfred North Whitehead writes, "The

present contains all that there is. It is holy ground; for it is the past, and it is the future" (2). This ties back to what angel Kyodo williams says about how transformation happens not in the past or the future, but in the "now" (17). Since higher education often says that its mission is to develop the individual and the common good, cultivating the ability to pay attention and attend to the present are important inner capacities that would further that mission. Furthermore, higher education, when combined with contemplative practices, provides a space to develop a critical analysis of social justice issues. This combination of contemplation, social justice, and higher education echoes Vokey's point that "transformative praxis requires joining spirituality with critical analyses of and efforts to reduce systemic oppression" (265). The understanding and knowledge that higher education fosters can inform the way we practice inner and social change.

That being said, it is important to acknowledge the challenges that might come with bringing contemplative practices into higher education. One issue concerns taking these practices outside of their original context, "whether they are from the desert fathers of the Catholic faith, the Theravada, Mahayana, or Vajrayana traditions of Buddhism, or even the more clinical protocols of stress reduction" (Barbezat and Bush 69). It is important to acknowledge the origin of the practices when appropriate, and to not introduce the practices in a way that makes students adopt certain beliefs (Barbezat and Bush 70).[16] Another challenge is for educators to understand their students' backgrounds and potential reactions to the practices. For example, introducing mindfulness, which "seems like a positive and simple act," can lead students who "have felt traditionally silenced by formal education" to feel "tension and resentment" (Barbezat and Bush

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[16] There have been ongoing discussions about integrating practices such as mindfulness meditation into higher education. There is a lack of clarity about "whether mindfulness in its secularized form is value free," the "meaning of mindfulness," and "the implication of separating mindfulness from its spiritual and traditional bases" (Lynn et al. 216). In March 2016, I attended the "Mindfulness, MOOCs, and Money in Higher Education" conference in Naropa University, where I had a chance to discuss these concerns about mindfulness in higher education. Participants also raised concerns about the dominant presence of mindfulness in contemplative pedagogy at the expense of recognizing other kinds of practices.

73). Another challenge concerns assessment and evaluation of contemplative practices on teaching and learning outcomes. Although there is a need to accurately assess the impact of these practices on students, educators also have to recognize that we might risk "watering down the very essence of what makes these practices actually work into just another set of tangible techniques and toolkits" if we reduce it to "quantifiable measures," "numbers," and "outcomes" (williams 35). Navigating these challenges requires: careful examination on the part of the educator; personal practice to understand the nature of the practice and what it might evoke in students; and professional development.

Winnie Nazarko's Dharma Talk About Equanimity and Social Action

Nazarko's Dharma Talk

I was surprised when Winnie Nazarko, one of the teachers at the retreat, spoke directly during her dharma talk[17] about the role of contemplative practice in creating social change. "We're always acting in the world. We're always acting on our intentions. Conscious intentions or unconscious intentions. Skillful or unskillful intentions," she said. I liked how she brought up the fact that we're all acting in the world, because it implies that we all take part in and are responsible for creating and changing the world we live in through actions big and small. She then said that our actions are driven by our intentions, whether conscious or unconscious, which reminded me of how developing clarity around one's intentions and motivations can further the way one goes about making change.

Nazarko suggested that acting from skillful intentions but through unskillful states is not enough for effective change. She continued:

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[17] I knew that the retreat was focused on a meditation practice that has an ethical dimension to it, but that it wasn't centered on the topic of social justice and wouldn't address all of the questions that I had.

> We can have very skillful intentions, for instance to want to be of benefit to beings, to want to change things in the world that need to be changed, or wisdom tells us that something unskillful is happening and needs to be different. We can know that and can be very unskilled in our pursuit of that. Meaning, not be tuned in enough to actually be effective. Or we can act out of a state of distress and reactivity which is so strong that the actions that we take are counterproductive and don't advance what we clearly see needs to be different.

If we don't work with our own reactivity (whether it's anger, frustration, fear, sadness, etc.), we don't see the situation clearly and can end up creating more suffering for ourselves and for others. Meditation can help us cultivate "enough equanimity that it can recognize reactivity when it's present and knows how to work with it, and is wise enough [to] realize you don't want to act from that reactivity because it's not skillful" (Nazarko).

Nazarko also brings in another aspect of social change, which involves being in resistance to "policyholders or stakeholders who are supportive of the existence of certain structures or views," and the importance of being able to work with our "span of control" in those situations as well as being able to work with the "reactivity that is present in the minds of other people." Here, she recognizes that there is a limit to how much control we have over external conditions and the consequences of the change we make, but points to how being able to work with our own minds and reactivity as well as that of others can help us create change to the best of our ability.

I felt more motivated to meditate after hearing what the teacher said, because she reminded me that my practice can help me build the "internal skills" or "soft skills" that are needed to decrease the suffering that I see in myself and in the world. It also led me to later reflect on ways in which I need more equanimity when working towards change, such as having difficult conversations about social justice and balancing solitude and community.

Having Difficult Conversations About Social Justice

I need more equanimity when I'm having difficult conversations about social justice issues. It is emotionally hard to have a discussion with others when we disagree, especially when I feel as though their views perpetuate oppression. For example, I have a hard time talking to my family about racism when they have what I perceive to be anti-black views that are common in Asian communities. I felt uncomfortable with my host mom while studying abroad in Paris, when we had different views on gay people, Islamophobia in France, and bringing sex education into schools. I felt upset, frustrated, and hurt during and after the conversations because I felt as though they held narrow views about groups of people that are reflective of and contribute to the unjust world that we live in. I feared that they will hold onto these views, and I felt hopeless about how much change can happen. I also noticed an urge to distance myself from them because of their views, thinking that "I'm not like them," which is a way of disconnecting myself from them. These conversations triggered my reactivity, and made it difficult to listen to what they were saying, and responding without getting caught up in emotional turmoil.

I'd like to learn how to let go my attachment to what people think. It ties back to what Nazarko said about figuring out what our "span of control is and how to work with it." It is an ongoing inquiry to figure out how I can connect with people who have different views about social issues so that we both can learn from, respect, and care for each other without having an "us" and "them" mentality, as that leads to further disconnection. At the same time, how can I remain committed to my values and being open to the possibility my views might be limited or wrong? How can I keep my heart open and love everyone unconditionally? How can higher

education serve as a space to explore these questions, examine our habits of mind, body, and heart, and develop socially just ways of living together in the world?

Balancing Solitude and Community

This point about being with myself and being with others is related to what I shared about having difficult conversations about social justice. I noticed that I often feel uncomfortable when interacting with people, especially when I don't know them well. Unlike some people at the retreat, I didn't find the noble silence to be challenging. I felt comfortable with being in silence. It was when the noble silence was broken at the end of the retreat that I found myself feeling more uneasy about talking to people.

There is a lot to learn through solitude and silence, but I find that part of my spiritual practice right now is to be in the world more. This involves collaborating with others, being up close with the suffering of others, and sharing my ideas, values, and experiences with others as a way to create change. In order to make actual change, I have to move beyond loving people from afar and develop relationships with people, even if it is sometimes messy and difficult. It is important to note that solitude and community are not an either-or situation. In *A Hidden Wholeness*, Palmer writes:

> Solitude does not necessarily mean living apart from others; rather, it means never living apart from one's self. It is not about the absence of other people-it is about being fully present to ourselves, whether or not we are with others. Community does not necessarily mean living face-to-face with others; rather, it means never losing the awareness that we are connected to each other. It is not about the presence of other people-it is about being fully open to the reality of relationship, whether or not we are alone (55).

Being in solitude helps me recharge and reflect on what I value and where I'm going in life. I also believe that being able to be with myself helps me be more capable of being with others. Alternating between being by myself and being with others is a big part of my goal of connecting

inner change with social change. My challenge is to carry out the inner skills that I develop through meditation beyond the retreat and into the world that I am a part of. One thing that I have been doing to work on this is to be present when I feel discomfort, especially when I'm having difficult conversations or encountering conflict with others. It doesn't mean that I automatically feel greater at ease when being with others, but it a step towards working with my internal responses and being more capable of making intentional choices about how I engage with my communities.

My Act of Social Change at the End of the Retreat

At the end of the retreat, I had a chance to connect my meditation practice to social action. Everyone had gathered in the meditation hall to ask questions and share our retreat experiences. I wanted to bring up Winnie Nazarko's talk about social action, and bring to everyone's attention questions about the connection between inner change and social change. I felt that we didn't discuss this topic enough, yet it is an important inquiry because it is about exploring how our contemplative practices and inner transformation can be used to further social justice in all levels of community. I felt nervous about volunteering to speak, because I was debating whether or not I should speak, I found that I was too distracted to listen to what others were saying. By the time I raised my hand, the closing session was about to end and I was the last person to speak. I introduced myself and told everyone about my thesis on connecting contemplation and social justice in higher education, and how that was the reason why I was at the retreat. I shared a bit about the difficulties I faced during the retreat, such as renunciation and resistance to meditation practice. Then, I told Nazarko that I appreciated how she connected our practice and developing equanimity to making effective social action.

I didn't expect much to come from my decision to speak, but I ended up making a larger impact than I thought. After the retreat officially ended, around eight people came up to me to talk about what I shared. One person was interested in my thesis and wanted to read it after I finish it. Another was a community organizer in Boston who is part of a group of organizers who bridge contemplative practices with activism. Others shared readings that reminded them of what I was talking about and thought it might be of use, another found out that I also was at Amherst and invited me to join her tai chi group, or told me that they were glad that I brought up an important topic.

One person also shared her understanding of how inner change leads to social change. She told me about how she faced a lot of negative stereotypes about Asians during the Vietnam War, for example the view that Asians didn't care about people's lives as white Americans did. She then told me how she wondered how her meditation had to do with social activism. She asked a teacher during a retreat that she attended long ago, and the teacher brought up the concept of karma. Karma, the teacher told her, is not about fate or the idea that there is no way around what happens. It is about how choosing to act one way leads to a variety of choices of how to act. Making a particular choice leads to other choices. For example, if you decide not to choose Choice A or B, and go for Choice C, choosing Choice C leads to choices that open up as a result of Choice C, such as Choices E, F, G, and so on. Choosing Choice F leads to a whole host of other choices, and this choice-making continues on. From my understanding of what she shared, choosing how to act is a form of activism. Social activism is about recognizing how each action leads to some kind of consequence for oneself and others, which then leads to more choices on how to act next in light of that consequence. Making intentional choices are small but powerful ways of creating change. Practicing meditation can increase our ability to make such

choices instead of falling into automatic, or unconscious behavior. Instead of getting caught up in our reactivity, we can create more space in our minds to look at what's happening and to make better choices for ourselves and others. What she said reminded me what Nazarko said about how developing the inner skills to work with our reactivity can help us be more skillful changemakers. I was surprised by how passionately she shared her story with me, and touched that it was important enough to her that she chose to share it with me.

The idea that making intentional choices is an act of social change relates to what I did at the end of the retreat. I shared what I thought was important to share, and that small action led to consequences that I didn't anticipate. I didn't know that my words would touch others to the point that several of them became motivated to talk to me about what I said. I also didn't know that a single comment would lead me to make connections with others who are interested in contemplative practices and social change. This action has already led to more actions that further social change. I try to talk about my research in class and in conversations with my peers and professors. I sometimes feel reluctant to do so because it is a hard topic to explain, but I generally feel more willing to talk about it because I believe that my decision to do so can affect others in a positive way. At this point, this is how I can contribute to the learning community that I am a part of at Amherst (and beyond). This is a continuous process, and I look forward to seeing where this all leads.

One lesson that I learned from this experience is that I can create social change by showing up when I'm with others. It means being vulnerable in spite of discomfort, uncertainty, and fear of judgment, in order to share my questions, ideas, and experiences with the world. This is difficult for me because I tend to hold back when I'm with others, especially when I don't know them well. I also felt disappointed during the spring semester of my junior year because I

felt as though I didn't have a community at Amherst that cared about both inner change and social change. Although I do feel that there is a lack of such a community, I don't feel disconnected because I realized that this is where my role comes in. No matter where I am, I can take action to build communities that care about these things by having conversations about inner change and social change, and about the role of education in supporting this change. As I had experienced at my retreat, engaging in contemplative practices such as meditation can help me make choices that lead to positive change. Practicing equanimity around difficult emotions helped me connect with others at the end of the retreat, and motivated me to continue to use the power of my words and experiences to create change.

Living the Questions

The retreat reminded me of how it's important to look at social change and my thesis from a bigger perspective. It is important to think about how to create structural changes in society, but it is also important not to overlook small acts of change. Social movements can lead to widespread change, but the movements themselves consist of small actions made by each person. Similarly, a thesis is made up of one word after the other. Every "big change" is made up of small components that make that change happen. I consider contemplative practices such as meditation to be an example of a small but transformative act of social change. By practicing meditation, I am training my inner capacity to make change in subtle ways. It can remind me of what's important and make me think about whether my actions are in alignment. It can help me work with my reactivity when organizing for change, opening up my capacity to respond effectively in situations instead of becoming overwhelmed and unable to see the situation clearly. It can help me assess how I am feeling in my body so that I am not overexerting myself, or

neglecting my wellbeing. The practice that I engaged in during the retreat can have a positive impact on how I create change in myself and in my communities.

I left the retreat feeling as though there is so much more inner work to. This experience reminded me that I should see my contemplative practices and engaged action (my lived experience and "putting it into practice" aspect of my research) equally as important as my conceptual engagement with the research. To do so, I decided to increase my daily meditation from ten minutes to twenty minutes, and to go to two group meditation sittings per week. I realized that I've taken on challenging work for my thesis, and this is only one step in the lifelong process of inner and social transformation.

The transition of going from the retreat back to daily life went smoothly. I reconnected with my friends the day that I got back, and had the chance to look at my two hundred new emails. I also experienced heightened sensitivity to things around me. When I opened the piano, for example, I saw piano keys that looked the brightest that I've ever seen them. It felt as though I was looking at something new and unfamiliar, even though I've seen the piano many times before. Another moment of heightened sensitivity was when I was walking from my dorm to the Arms music building. I saw the snow falling slowly onto the ground, and felt myself moving through the space as I was walking. The next day, I felt centered, calm, light-hearted, and open because of the effects of the retreat. I was able to be more aware of the people around me rather than being in my head as I usually am. Part of me wanted to keep feeling this way even when I knew meditation is not about clinging to a certain state. With that being said, I know that I can come back to this calm and open state through practice.

The retreat left me with many questions. How can my inner work move systemic change? What are the strengths and the limits of contemplative practices in furthering social justice? How

can colleges and universities provide a space to think about and practice this inquiry in community? These questions remind me of Rainer Maria Rilke's words:

> Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

The retreat was a wonderful opportunity to practice being patient with what is unsolved and living the questions. I am curious about where all of this will lead. I hope that my inquiries will continue in thought and action, and that by living and loving these questions, I can be of benefit to the world.

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4

Globalization, Inequality, and Social Change:
Creating a Contemplative, Socially Just Education Through Community Engagement

Throughout the Fall 2015 semester, I collaborated with Angelica Alvarado '18, Valerie Salcido '17, and Cameron Wade '17— three of my classmates in Professor Leah Schmalzbauer's "Globalization, Inequality, and Social Change" Sociology course— to organize a community engagement project about the Valentine Dining Hall staff and their experiences working at Amherst College.

Why Create a Community Engagement Project?

I wanted to create a community engagement project to experience how contemplative practices and social justice can come together in higher education. I became interested in doing this because of past experiences. I took a course called "Anthropology of Food" with Professor Gewertz as a sophomore. I remember sitting in class as we discussed Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History,* feeling sick to my stomach. I felt viscerally what I was learning. As a dessert-lover and a former food writer, I had never really thought about where my food comes from and its connection to inequality. I was ignorant of the historical context of sugar and its connection to colonialism, slavery, and industrialization. My view of

food has changed since taking that course. I confronted my own privilege and blindness about how the food I enjoy is linked to suffering. I felt I was learning something not abstract or "out there," but a reality that continues to affect our world today. Although I became more aware of the inequalities that exist within global food systems, I felt confused about what to do with what I learned. I felt overwhelmed and paralyzed, not sure of how I could create systemic change as an individual, and how I can be ethical consumer in a globalized world.

I was worried that I, along with other students, would learn about these social justice issues without questioning their ethical implications, or examining our own role in these issues, or knowing how to create change. I realized the necessity to focus not only on creating social, but inner change as well. Individuals are part of the social system in which they seek to create change. In order to create social change, they also have to change themselves so they don't replicate the kinds of inequality they seek to overcome. Working on our inner selves is essential if we mean to create effective social change. My Anthropology of Food experience shows that being able to work with my internal responses (cognitive, emotional, and physiological) without feeling immobilized is crucial if I want to create change. Here contemplative practices would have supported my inner change while learning about and engaging in systemic change. Without addressing these missing aspects of our education, I questioned how colleges and universities could fully effect the mission of developing the individual and the common good.

Creating the Community Engagement Project as a Contemplative Facilitator

Learning about social injustice influenced my sense of meaning in life and the trajectory of my Amherst education. Being exposed to the suffering that I saw through my coursework, I wanted to learn how to create a more compassionate, just world. I didn't want to feel stuck or

overwhelmed anymore, unsure about what to do about what I was learning. I wanted to create stronger connections between the classroom, and our interactions with our communities. I wanted to be more capable of cultivating both inner and social change, while engaging my community in inquiry. As an Independent Scholar who became inspired to create a more contemplative, socially just education, I saw that creating a community engagement project was an experiential and experimental way to meet these aims.

Some educators have already been integrating contemplative pedagogy with community engagement. Carlos Silveira, an art professor at California State University, teaches a course called "Cross-Cultural Perspectives in Art Education." Silveira emphasizes the connection between theory and action, engaging "students in *working the community* through activist [art] projects that extended beyond the classroom and into the social world of the community" (Rendón 99-101). In addition to engaging the community, students in his course enact self-reflexivity through reflection papers, in which they examine their values, beliefs, and emotions as they engage in social justice work (Rendón 102). Another such educator is Dena Samuels, a sociology professor at University of Colorado. Her course on "Social Justice, Sustainability and Living Mindfully" incorporates both contemplative practices and community engagement by working with local organizations such as the Colorado Springs Food Rescue.

After attending Center of Contemplative Mind in Society's Eleventh Annual Summer Session on Contemplative Pedagogy[18], I wondered how I could bring more contemplation and social justice into education. Although I am a student, not an educator, I felt that I could play a role in shaping teaching and learning. This could happen because I am a part of a residential

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[18] This summer session is "a week-long intensive that prepares higher education professionals with resources to: support innovation in curriculum development; create inclusive, inquiry-based environments in the classroom and on campus; and incorporate contemplative awareness and practice within all aspects of higher education." For more information, visit: http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/summer.

liberal arts college, in which "intense coexistence" and "comingling of curricula and extracurricular aspects create an experience that is about the formation of individuals within community" (Chopp 21). Similarly, Barbezat and Bush see the residential college, or university, as a "rich laboratory that engages [students'] action and learning in their communities" (202). They argue that there is no such thing as "extracurricular" activities, because "every action and interaction is an opportunity for learning and cultivation," whether it involves "students' curricular, residential, and social lives" (201). Creating a community engagement project that involves students, faculty, and staff was a way I could contribute to my learning community.

A Brief History of the Val Community Engagement Project

In September 2015, I met with Professor Leah Schmalzbauer to propose doing a community engagement project as a "Globalization, Inequality, and Social Change" final for her sociology course. I initially thought that I would organize a project outside of the classroom, but Leah suggested that I involve my peers in our class. This would give me the opportunity to collaborate with my classmates, get to know them better, and explore how our course connects to creating change. I realized how engaging with the community can mean interacting with people that I am already with, instead of automatically reaching out to people outside of my courses (I didn't think of it this way at first, because I rarely felt as though I was part of a strongly connected classroom community at Amherst).

During the next couple of classes, I invited my peers to join the community engagement group. Half of the class (about twelve people) expressed their interest, and four people attended the first meeting on October 7th. We introduced ourselves, established the purpose of the community engagement group, discussed what contemplation means to us and what experiences

we have with it, and brainstormed possible projects that involve globalization.

During the second meeting, we invited Leah to join in, we talked about focusing our community engagement project on Valentine Dining Hall. Val serves as a microcosm of globalization, when we look at how the food is sourced, produced, and distributed; the staff that work at Val; and the students who work and eat there. Val is part of the daily life of many at Amherst, and this is a way for us to begin where we are as we explore how we can move individual and social change. We decided meet at the Val terrace for our meetings together.

For the third meeting, I asked our finalized group (Cameron, Valerie, and Angelica) which aspect of Val and its connection to social change they were most interested in. We all agreed that we were most interested in learning about Val staff's working experiences and their interaction with students. We were interested in getting to know the Val staff and explore our connection to them as students. We wanted to see how inequality does or doesn't exist within these relationships.

In November, we interviewed nine Val staff about their experiences working in the dining hall.[19] In the meantime, we made plans to organize a Val Staff Appreciation event in December to build community among Val staff, students, and faculty. We wanted the community to recognize the daily contributions of Val staff. We also wanted to create a space where students, staff, and faculty could have actual conversations going beyond daily greetings. While we were planning the logistical aspects of the event, we continued to develop a better understanding about Val staff by: doing a shift at Val; going on a tour of the Val kitchen to see what goes behind getting the food onto our plates; and tabling in the Val atrium to encourage

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[19] I interviewed two recently-hired full time servers in their mid-twenties and Debbie, the manager of Student Dining Services. Valerie interviewed three student workers. Cam interviewed Charlie, the Director of Dining Services, one full time supervisor of the dish room/janitorial tasks, one full time culinary staff, and one student worker.

students to show appreciation by signing a surprise "Thank You" banner that we presented to staff during the final event.

Creating a Contemplative Space

I consider community engagement form of contemplative practice because it fosters self-reflection, connection, and action. It involves being more aware of ourselves and our relationships to our community. Throughout the project, I wanted to create a space in which our group could examine our inner lives as we engaged in action. As a facilitator, I felt hesitant and unsure about bringing other contemplative practices into our meetings. Doing so can be challenging, as it requires "strong preparation and professional development" to "guide faculty in their own personal practice and in designing courses and a classroom context that invites reflective practices. Furthermore, students usually respond well to these practices, but "may exhibit negative reactions given their value system, socialization, and religious beliefs" (74). Although directed at faculty, it applies to my situation as a facilitator. To address these issues, I asked my peers how they connect to themselves and what practices they use. My intention was to see if we would want to share our own practice with the group during each week's meeting.

Unfortunately, this strategy didn't work out as the pace of the semester picked up. The culture of busyness posed a challenge to creating more opportunities for contemplation and self-reflection. Someone mentioned how there is little time to reflect when there is so much work to do at Amherst. As hard as it might be to stop and reflect on our ourselves and our education, there is a reason to do so. In a climate in which higher education is becoming increasingly neoliberal, reflecting on what we're doing and why is a form of resistance:

> Four decades of neoliberal policies have resulted in an economic Darwinism that
> promotes privatization, commodification, free trade, and deregulation. It privileges

personal responsibility over larger social forces, reinforces the gap between the rich and poor by redistributing wealth to the most powerful and wealthy individuals and groups, and it fosters a mode of public pedagogy that privileges the entrepreneurial subject while encouraging a value system that promotes self-interest, if not an unchecked selfishness (Giroux 1).

Giroux argues that neoliberal policies and ideology have affected not only the "practices and principles of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and World Trade Organizations," but also "all aspects of life in the United States," including higher education (1). The commodification of education leads students to act as consumers concerned with the market value of their education, as we also discussed in our Sociology class (Saunders 62-63). Giroux is concerned that higher education is driven by "economic growth" rather than "social needs," and is losing the

> ...power not only to produce critical and civically engaged students but to offer the type of education that enables them to refute the neoliberal utopian notion that paradise amounts to a world of voracity and avarice without restrictions, governed by a financial elite who exercise authority without accountability or challenge (13).

By engaging in self-inquiry, we can challenge the consumer and self-interest approach to education. During the project, we reflected together on questions such as: why social change is important to us; steps that we can take as individuals and as a group to work towards social change; what we feel as though we need to work on to be more capable of creating change; and the challenges that we might face when creating change. I hoped that we would become more reflective of our intentions and motivations for creating change, and how this connects to how we shape our education.

In addition to engaging in self-inquiry, another contemplative activity that we did was writing a collective reflection paper on the Val community engagement project. It is rare that students write papers together. I wanted this collaborative writing practice to be an act of moving away from "overprivileging competition, individual achievement, and self-interests," and a

moving towards "an emphasis on relationships and the betterment of the collective whole" (Rendón 105). I also saw this paper as an opportunity to engage in participatory epistemology (connecting our own experiences with the course material, and creating knowledge together) and self-reflexivity (looking at our personal engagement with social change). Cam, Valerie, and I wrote this paper as part of the final project, and we each came up with three questions. In the paper, we engaged with each other by responding and adding to what each person said. We discussed how the community engagement project related to our sociology course, our understanding of inner and social change, the inequalities that we perceive in Val, etc.

Throughout the project, I engaged in my own contemplative practices to facilitate from a self-aware place. Although I would have liked to integrate more contemplative practices, I learned at the Seventh Annual ACMHE Conference[20] that I can create a contemplative space through my personal practice without necessarily bringing practices into the meetings. This connects to Palmer's call for self-knowledge as a critical component of good teaching. He says that "we teach who we are," and that the "entanglements" that he experiences in the classroom are "often no more or less than the convolutions of [his] inner life" ("The Heart of a Teacher"). Barbezat and Bush advise teachers to engage in personal practice because the teacher's presence is the "heart of teaching" (91). They add that teachers can "encourage students to strengthen their attention, sustain their commitment, cultivate equanimity and openness, realize insights, and appreciate interconnection only if we are on that path of awakening ourselves" (91). Although I am not a teacher, the same principle applies for me as a facilitator and as a human being trying to create change. I practiced meditation and piano to ground myself. They helped me stay present

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[20] Here is a description of the conference, which was held at Howard University in October 2015: "The 7th Annual Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education Conference will explore contemplative approaches to creating and sustaining just communities: approaches that foster connection while recognizing and honoring difference, with a commitment to the common flourishing of all." For more information, visit: http://2015.acmheconference.org.

without feeling overwhelmed by fear and uncertainty when interacting with my community and organizing the project. I also engaged in journaling and dialogue with others to develop ideas for facilitating the project.

Connecting the Community Engagement Project to Our Sociology Course

The collective reflection paper allowed us to connect our community engagement experiences with our sociology course on "Globalization, Inequality, and Social Change." It connected what we're learning inside and outside of the classroom, and allowed us to see ourselves and our community in our education.

We discussed invisible labor, or the behind-the-scenes work that Val staff do that isn't often noticed. Valerie drew on two books that we read from class, *Brewing Justice* by Daniel Jaffee and *Liquidated*: *An Ethnography of Wall Street* by Karen Ho. Valerie pointed to how Jaffee emphasized that "consumers buy products [such as coffee] without a single thought as to where the product came from." Valerie related this to Val, where "students complain about Val" without "thinking about where the food is coming from" and about "the people [who spend] hours preparing the food." She added that there is a "disconnect" between students and staff when students don't "throw their food away and clean up their trays," without "thinking about the people who have to clean up after them." This reminded me of what Leah said about "symbolic violence," which is when we have internalized "social hierarchies in our everyday lives and have become complicit in accepting it." Valerie also emphasized how Ho looked at "the working environment of Wall Street," examining the "different departments and sections of a Wall Street firm." Those in the "'front' were valued the most and treated incredibly well by the firms," but "those in the 'back' doing much of the grunt work" were "seen as more disposable

and not as valuable." This reminded Valerie that "some jobs are valued more than others, and that the jobs that do the hardest work are often the ones [that are the] least appreciated." She added that those working in the backroom of Val don't get the appreciation they deserve. (Cam later added his perspective, saying that Val staff feel more appreciated than Valerie had expected. The Val staff that he interviewed "felt like the students are grateful for their services" even though they have fewer "interactions with students than a meal-checker or server.")

Thinking about Valerie's discussion about the disconnection between how the product is created and the consumers of that product, I thought of something that Leah mentioned in class. She brought up Karl Marx's concept of commodity fetishim which happens when we "fixate on the product without an awareness of how that product is produced and distributed, and without an understanding of the inequalities that go into the product that we consume." If we had more time to do more research, it would be interesting to look into multiple levels of disconnection that exist "beyond cooking and serving the food," such as "researching how our ingredients are sourced." Because there is so much that we don't know about what we consume, I wondered "how we can be ethical consumers in a globalized world, especially when everything is so interconnected" and when we "don't necessarily know everything about how every product is produced and distributed."

Another topic in our collective paper involved the privileges of working or not working at Val. When Valerie interviewed student workers, she learned that the student workforce is diverse ethnically but not in terms of race. Most are nonwhite and come from a low economic background: "...the [student] workers discussed the privilege involved in being able to freely chose a job, which was surprising to me because I hadn't really thought about the fact that being able to turn down a job is a privilege." They all "eerily gave the same reasoning for why they

started working in Val: it was convenient, easy to get, could start immediately, and flexible."

This pointed up the "difference in mentality between upper and lower classes when it comes to

picking a job," because those "who grew up in a privileged background may see menial work as

below them." For those who come "from a disadvantaged background the idea of turning down a

job that pays is almost incomprehensible."

Listening to Val staff and student workers' experiences brought us to examine our own

positionality, or where we "stand with respect to power," which is "an essential skill for social

change agents" (Takacs 1). In class, we discussed the importance of looking at our own position

within ethnographies, and how that affects how we understand the people we interact with.

Question such as "From what position of power do I come from?" and "Where is home for me?"

are relevant to our project. Valerie reflected on discussions that we've had in sociology class

about our career paths and how that relates to privilege:

> I personally can choose whatever courses I want to take and know that I can pursue the career path that will make me happiest. Others, however, might have to choose to go into finance or science in order to work in fields that would pay the most even if it's not the field that would make them the happiest. It's honestly something I've never considered until I took this class and had these interviews. Being able to turn down certain jobs is a privilege that so many people simply do not have.

I am in a similar situation as Valerie in benefitting from class privilege. I never had to worry

about food insecurity, supporting my family financially, or paying college tuition. The Val staff I

interviewed were working to save up money to attend college, or to support their family.

Although I am a first-generation college student, I am able to attend Amherst, an elite liberal arts

college, and receive financial support from my parents and from the college. The issue of access

to higher education is not the same for me as it is for the Val staff.

Looking at our positionality within Val and whether or not we would work there raised

questions about upward mobility. During the summer of my freshman year, I was a food writer

for The Daily Meal, a food and drink publication. It was unpaid, but I got funding from the Career Center's Arts and Communications fellowship. Back then, I didn't question how globalization and inequality exist in food and my consumption of it. I didn't think about who was making the food that I was eating. (Before doing a shift at Val, I had never worked in food service. I've always been the person on the other side, the one being served rather than the one doing the serving.) Although I realized that I don't want to be a food writer and want to contribute to society in a different way, but that internship exemplified how upward mobility has influenced me. My parents, both immigrants who came to the U.S. when they were teenagers, took on working class jobs to support their family and struggled in school because they weren't fluent in English. My mom graduated from high school and my dad dropped out. "Being born in the U.S., being a first-generation college student, and having more resources than [my parents] did, I think that there is an expectation for me to 'do better' than my parents did financially and career-wise," I write. "I think that might be part of the reason why I didn't consider working in Val, as something not associated with improving my socioeconomic status." Valerie related to this "idea of needing to do better in order to justify your parents' hardships." She writes,

> My mom is a Mexican immigrant and my dad is from a working class background. Both of them worked multiple menial jobs just to have enough money to pay for their education. My mom had to work jobs not only to support herself but also her [family]. Now, both of my parents are Harvard alumni with successful professions. Their hard work and drive has led me to [have] so many privileges.

She continues by saying that her life is very different from her parents' lives. She says that her parents were disapproving when she got a campus job as a Safe Ride driver, because they were worried that it would "distract her from her classes." They knew how it is difficult to both work and study for classes, and told Valerie that if she "needed money that badly they could help out."

Valerie imagines that her parents would be disapproving if she told them that she wanted to work in the dining hall as a dish washer.

Whether or not we decided to work at Val, we found that the staff we interviewed enjoy working there and feel appreciated by students. Valerie notes that none of the student workers that she interviewed "hated working in Val or dreaded showing up." In fact, the student workers "enjoyed having upperclassmen and staff to look up to as role models," found a "sense of community at Val," "and met people they would not have run across otherwise." Cam mentioned that the Val staff that he interviewed feel a sense of "camaraderie… behind the scenes," and that "everybody is seen as a teammate in the small groups that they work in." He adds that they "wanted to be in the (food) service/hospitality industry anyway." That being said, Cam thinks that it's important that guests in Val don't make staff's jobs harder for them. "Every guest to Val should clean their own tables after eating and bus their trays properly, throwing away trash and placing utensil in proper slots," he wrote. Moreover, "there needs to be no stigma attached to working at Val as a student," and "if [we] have something negative to say about the food or service," leave a common card instead of "[blurting] out something disparaging in Val within earshot of workers."

Connecting the Community Engagement Project to Our Inner and Social Change

Reflections as a Contemplative Facilitator

This community engagement project increased my understanding of the connection between inner and social change. Throughout the project, I paid attention to my feelings and thoughts. I realized that I experience a lot of fear and anxiety. For example, I felt afraid when I was uncertain about what the community engagement project would look like, and whether

anyone would commit to this project. I felt unsure about how to facilitate the project and the reflections/discussions. I also felt anxious when interacting with my peers and the Val staff.

Noticing my fear and anxiety didn't make me experience any less of it, but I became more open to uncertainty about the outcomes of the project. Through meditation and journaling, I practiced being with my emotions and not letting them get in the way of my desire to create change and connect with others. I practiced being self-compassionate especially when I'm struggling, so that I don't add to my suffering by rejecting my emotions or judging myself for feeling a certain way. I also tried to be clear about my intentions for creating change and in doing the community engagement project. Focusing on what is important to me helped me go through with the project. I sometimes repeated my intentions to myself before our meetings, such as how I want all of us to grow from this experience and be more capable of creating social change. This act of being with fear reflects a "pedagogy of vulnerability," which is about "taking risks-- risks of self-disclosure, risks of change, risks of not knowing, risks of failing-- to deepen learning" (Brantmeier 96). This might involve sharing the community engagement idea with my peers, interacting with Val staff, talking about my sense of meaning and engaging others in this inquiry, etc.

Reflections as a Community Engagement Group

Our group reflected together on the connection between inner change and social change. In the collective reflection, Cam found this topic interesting:

> As a sociology major, I place much value on the reflexivity between the self and society… For society to change, many individuals have to play their role. If they do not have clarity of mind and commitment to an ideal, the shift will be tenuous or bear its own problems.

He thinks that "clarity of intentions" is crucial, because our "egos and insecurities can stymy change," making it difficult to collaborate with others if we have "an attitude that only we have the correct perspective." He thought that this didn't happen in our group, as "no one tried to dominate the process" and everyone "was receptive to all ideas." This kind of collaboration is necessary to "transform the human condition" in an "increasingly complex world." Valerie agrees that inner change and social change are connected, and that "social change has to come from within oneself":

> To be an effective leader or advocate you have to live a life you are proud of. Only then can you inspire others. I try to do that in my day to day life. I strive to be positive and to always be kind. I know maybe no one notices, but at the same time what is the point in not caring, in not finding something to be happy about? If someone wants to create change, one first has to convince others that they are someone to follow.

I saw facilitating this project as a step towards living a life that I am proud of. I found that my actions inspired others in my sociology class, even if they weren't in the community engagement group. Like Valerie, I think that how we live in our day to day life has an impact on others.

We also discussed our sense of purpose in life and how that connects to the way we create change. Cam feels "a sense of purpose to inspire confidence in people of color and encourage them… to prepare for careers in healthcare, STEM, or business." He is the "type to lead by example," being vocal when appropriate, but in most situations, he is "a ground troop or quiet warrior for a cause":

> What brings more joy is inspiring people to want to do better and feel better about themselves. That is why I really enjoyed having interviews and throwing the appreciation dinner. I want the staff to walk with their head high (which thankfully, they already do).

Similarly, Valerie finds her purpose "through knowing that [she has] helped others." The community engagement project has changed her conception of social change:

> Beforehand, I thought that someone like me, flaws and all, could never really make a huge impact. Now, however, I see that to create change it does not truly take that much.

> All it takes is giving a damn and taking small action steps in the hopes of getting other people's attention. Once the attention is there people can start adding their own ideas, and that is how social movements build.

Valerie is "cynical" in that she doesn't believe that "any single thing" will "change a whole system," but she believes "quite strongly that the little things matter." She continues, "I live my life by the belief that the actions you do have the power to make someone's day or make it worse, and that guides my thinking about how to approach social change." However, she says that people have different mindsets, and that "we cannot blame or judge people who chose to find their meanings in different ways." I really appreciated hearing from my peers about their sense of purpose and desire to create change. We don't reflect on this enough in higher education. Barbezat and Bush would agree. They write, "...[H]igher education has moved largely away from helping students discover and develop their deepest purpose. How can they decide without examining what truly matters to them?" (17) In a small way, this project created a space to share and shape what we find meaningful.

The Val Staff Appreciation Event

During the Val Staff Appreciation event on December 16th, people were interacting with one another. Around thirty staff members showed up to enjoy the food and interact with students. Other attendees included Val student workers, faculty members, Amherst President Biddy Martin, members of the Center for Community Engagement, Student Activities, the Office of Student Affairs, other students that I spoke to about the project, and more.

Debbie, the manager of Student Dining Services, said that this is probably the first time someone organized an event like this for Val staff. The staff have been talking about the event for the past couple of weeks. Debbie talked about how the AAS once presented a certificate of

appreciation to the Val staff out of all the other departments at Amherst, and how much that meant to the staff. She also noted that this is the first time she saw Biddy at an event like this. In my conversation with Charlie, the Director of Dining Services, he said that he's used to working behind the scenes at events, and it is rare that he is invited as a guest. He also mentioned that culinary staff, who don't get to interact much with students because they're always busy, got the chance to mingle with them and with staff members from the different departments of Val. Some staff members whose shift had ended at 2:30 p.m., he said, were still hanging around talking to people.

During our wrap-up reflection meeting the next day with Leah and our group, Valerie mentioned that Student Affairs and the President's Office wanted to continue to support this kind of event in the future. In the collective reflection, Valerie noted that "most people loved the idea" of a Val Appreciation event, even though it wasn't "necessarily great or extraordinary," and "some questioned why an event like this… was never thought of before." She continues, "It honestly warmed my heart to see Val staff smile and to see students asking the staff questions about their personal life. I honestly felt like we made a difference, and no matter how small of a difference it was it mattered." Even though a semester has passed, students whom I didn't know then remember the event when I mention it. I don't have the full picture of what happened and how people felt about their experience at the event, but it seemed as though it was a positive experience of community building for many. It was a step towards a kind of social change in which our community recognizes and appreciates Val staff.

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5

Addressing Anti-Blackness as an Asian American: Anti-Racism as a Contemplative Journey

On Thursday, November 12, 2015 at 1p.m., three Amherst students who are women of color organized a sit-in in the Robert Frost Library in solidarity with black students who face white supremacy on a daily basis. The sit-in was a response to the many campus protests occurring in colleges and universities across the nation, including Yale University and the University of Missouri. During the sit-in, which lasted for four days, students of color shared their experiences of racism and marginalization on campus. This sit-in led to the creation of Amherst Uprising, a student-led movement in which students demanded changes to Amherst to create a more inclusive, supportive community for students of color (Amherst Uprising). From the students who spoke about their struggles, it is clear that institutions of higher education such as Amherst have not succeeded in creating a just community in which students of color and other marginalized students could flourish and feel heard. In my four years at Amherst, I have never heard about students' experience of racism in such a public way. As a community, we usually act like it's "business as usual" and avoid having discussions about oppression. The sit-in was a break from this routine, in which members of our community stopped what we were doing to listen to each other. It was heartbreaking to listen to my fellow students' stories about facing discrimination and racism. There was so much pent-up pain that my community felt. At one

moment during the night of the sit-in, I heard a student scream while standing outside of the library. It sounded as though she was dying.

Bearing witness to the suffering of others at the sit-in caused me to feel my own suffering. As an Asian American, I connected with many of the experiences of oppression that black students shared, even though the nature of that experience is different because of our racial identities. But I didn't feel like it was my place to share my experiences at the sit-in because it was mainly about black students' experiences. After speaking with other Asian and Asian American students, I learned that students of Asian heritage experienced consciousness-raising during the sit-in and were at various stages of examining their racial identity. Some were just beginning to question their Asian identity, while others had already been exposed to this inquiry. Some students were concerned that other students were placing an unfair burden on the Amherst Uprising organizers to create a space for Asian and Asian American experiences to be heard. These conversations raised the challenge of figuring out how we can explore our own racial identity as Asian and Asian Americans (which is an important task if we want to understand and combat racism), while still being in solidarity with black students and not detracting from their movement.

My experience of the sit-in and of Amherst Uprising led me to ask the following questions: How can I contribute to anti-racism as an Asian American? What changes would need to be made in higher education to support this inquiry? How can a contemplative pedagogy rooted in social justice play a role in learning about and taking engaged anti-racist action? To explore these questions, I will share my contemplative journey into anti-racism, drawing from my learning experiences as a student who is is trying to connect contemplative practices with social justice in my own education.

My Asian American Educational Experiences

After the sit-in, I realized that in order to contribute to anti-racism as an Asian American, I first have to get educated on our collective and individual histories as Asian Americans. In order to be in solidarity with black students across higher education as well as contribute to the Black Lives Matter movement[21], we first have to understand our own histories and experiences of racism.

Looking back at my education, I didn't have much exposure to studying Asian American experiences while I went through my K-12 public education in New York City. My only substantial engagement with Asian American history was when I wrote a report about my family history in fourth grade. To write my report, I interviewed my parents about their experiences as 1.5 generation immigrants who came to New York City in the early 1980s. (They are 1.5 generation because they arrived when they were in their early teens. My mom was fourteen years old and my dad was twelve years old.) My mom came from China with her immediate family in search for a better life in 1982. Her side of the family got U.S. citizenship because my great-grandfather immigrated to America in 1915 to work in a laundromat. My dad's side of the family is ethnically Chinese and had lived in Vietnam for about 120 years. They survived the Vietnam War and left after the war, living in Hong Kong from 1978 to 1980 as refugees and then immigrating to the U.S. in 1980. As a nine-year-old, I began to learn more about the hardships that my family has faced as poor, working-class immigrants. Their experiences vastly differed from mine, since I am a second-generation U.S.-born Chinese American and first-generation college student with more economic and educational resources than my family has ever had. This

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[21] Black Lives Matter "is a chapter-based national organization working for the validity of Black life. We are working to (re)build the Black liberation movement." For more information, visit: http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/.

was my only memorable experience learning about Asian American history throughout my K-12

education. Although I took a lot of history courses as a Law and Society major at Brooklyn

Technical High School, none of those courses covered much about Asian American history and

political issues. Furthermore, discussions about racism in the U.S. often fall within the black and

white binary, leaving out other people of color such as Asian Americans, Native Americans, and

Latinx.

At Amherst College, I began to become more critically conscious of my experience as

Asian American. During my sophomore year, when I took "Anthropology of Food" with

Professor Gewertz, I wrote a paper about *yum cha* (which means "drink tea" in Chinese), a

Chinese morning or afternoon meal that includes a variety of small dishes called *dim sum* and is

served with tea. I looked at *yum cha* through the lenses of various anthropological theories. At

the end of the paper, I had a contemplative, first-person engagement with what I was learning:

> During my childhood, I used to go to *yum cha* every weekend with my family. This routine stopped around the time when I started middle school, and we only went to *yum cha* a few times a year. The reasons for this change, in my opinion, is because my brother and I have a lot of homework to do, my parents' friends cannot meet up easily because they have newborns to take care of, and my parents' decreased interest in *mahjong* (*yum cha* used to precede hours of gambling with friends). All of these reasons are true, but when I asked my mom, she said, "It's because you and your brother refuse to go and would rather stay home. Your dad wants to go *yum cha* all the time, but you guys always say, 'Not the same food again!'" This conversation likely reveals the change in how Chinese-Americans view themselves. My parents are Chinese immigrants, but since I was born here, I don't feel the need to go *yum cha* to establish my Chinese identity. From early childhood, I've taken on and kept my identity as an American-born Chinese New Yorker. I don't lack graven images like Chinese immigrants would. This suggests that recent Chinese immigrants would treat *yum cha* as a political system of commensalism more than American-born Chinese or long-time Chinese immigrants would.

Examining this relationship between food and Asian-American identity made me reflect on my

relationship with my parents, who had very different experiences growing up in America.

Looking at my past reluctance to go to *yum cha*, I felt bad about all the times that I said that I

would rather not go, instead of spending time with my parents and eating *dim sum* with them, which is one small way in which we connect with our Chinese culture through food. This experience of thinking about food also made me aware of my liminal experience of being Asian-American, of not being seen or feeling fully Asian or fully American. I felt the discomfort of inhabiting this in-between space, not belonging in one world or the other.

Another instance in which I examined my Asian American identity was when I took a Black Studies and English course called "The Creole Imagination" during my junior year. Taught by Professor Cobham-Sander and Professor Drabinski, this course focuses on postcolonial Caribbean literature and the "various aesthetic and political aspects of postcolonial struggle–how to think outside the colonial architecture of language; how to contest and subvert what remains from history's violence; and how to evaluate the claims to authenticity of creolized New World cultural forms."[22] Through this course, I became more aware of how language functions as a site of oppression and an establishment of socio-symbolic order, in which creolité/nation language is seen as lesser than "standard" English or French. In literature I read, writers tried to subvert the language of the oppressor to create something new that could speak to their Creole identities.

Although this course was not about Asian American literature and identity, connecting what I was learning from my own experiences made me question how language has been a form of oppression for me. I saw my past experiences in a new light when thinking about how I entered kindergarten knowing only how to speak Chinese Cantonese, and how I had to learn English through ESL (English as Second Language) sessions during the school day. I still had a good grasp of Chinese, but my ease with speaking this language slipped away when I stopped

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[22] For the full description of the course, visit:
https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/departments/courses/1112S/ENGL/ENGL-491-1112S.

speaking it in school around seventh grade. Since it became harder to speak the language the less I practiced it in daily conversation, I found myself feeling anxious whenever trying to speak with my parents in Chinese when I got back home from college. (My mindfulness meditation practice helped me notice the tension and irritation in my body as I was speaking.) I didn't know how to fully express myself beyond the limited Chinese words that I knew (we often speak in Chinglish, which is a blend of both Chinese and English), and I felt a sense of loss not being able to fully connect with my parents through language. I also questioned my educational experience, wondering why I learned English so that my Chinese eventually fell away, rather than having a bilingual or multilingual education. This struggle with language stayed with me into college, where I noticed that I felt ashamed and self-conscious when speaking in Cantonese with a classmate in front of non-Chinese classmates, inside the classroom where I had another English course.

The Need for Asian American Studies

At one of the meetings where students of Asian heritage gathered together to discuss Asian American issues as well as our place in Amherst Uprising, someone said, "Your education has been colonized." This is a scary but real claim to face as a student who has experienced a lack of Asian American perspectives in the curriculum throughout my education. I wasn't aware of this issue during my K-12 education, but I began to notice it at Amherst after a couple of my courses and conversations with peers led me to see how oppression played out in my past experiences. Both "Anthropology of Food" and "The Creole Imagination" were courses in which I unintentionally learned about my Asian American experience through my contemplative, first-person engagement with the course material. These experiences served as openings to my

exploration of Asian American identity, even if that wasn't my professors' pedagogical aim. But these courses didn't teach me how to fully analyze social and political issues that affect Asian Americans and other people of color, connect the material with my self-reflection, deal with my own internalized oppression, and engage in anti-racist dialogue and action.

If colleges and universities are committed to a mission of developing the individual and the common good, higher education will need to look at their role in furthering anti-racism and anti-oppression. If Amherst College's notions of *Terras Irradient*, Lives of Consequence, and an ethic of care involves the common good to the fullest sense, social justice and social action should be a central part of its mission in practice. Part of this work includes decolonizing the curriculum by having more Asian American studies courses (as well as other ethnic studies courses). These courses are not an add-on to the curriculum for the sake of including diverse perspectives. Instead, decolonizing the curriculum means decentering whiteness and critiquing dominant narratives that maintain oppression (Samudzi). These courses should be taught in a way that empowers us to examine our own experiences of living in a world built on racial injustice, and take anti-racist action from a critically conscious, self-aware place.

In my efforts to understand the role of higher education in furthering anti-racism, I learned that there has been a history of student activists who have been pushing for more Asian American and ethnic studies courses. Students started to demand such courses in 1968-1969, which led to our nation's first School of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University, as well as an Ethnic Studies department at University of California, Berkeley (Lee 306). These efforts are tied to the larger efforts of students of color in trying to transform higher education.

After a black instructor named George Murray was fired, Chicano, Native American, and African American students at San Francisco State University led the Third World Strike and

created the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) to call for changes to higher education. The

TWLF protested for "racial minority access to higher education," raising the issues of "low

minority enrollments [in colleges and universities]," "an appalling absence of racial minority

faculty members," and "virtually no support services to orient and counsel racial minority

students." Furthermore, they called for "substantive revision of the existing curriculum," or a

"'relevant' education" that "did not omit or denigrate the history, culture, and sensibilities of

various racial minority groups" (Omi 31-32). The Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA)

group at San Francisco State University joined the TWLF in protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, and

building occupations to fight for these changes (Lee 305). These aims guided the creation of

Asian American Studies programs, which "sought to unearth the 'buried past' of Asian American

history and provide a corrective to the Eurocentric bias that pervaded, and continues to pervade,

higher education," as well as "reclaim the past as a basis for consciousness-raising and the

formation of a new political/cultural identity" (Omi 32). By the early 1970s, more Asian

American programs and courses appeared in colleges and universities across the nation (with a

larger concentration in California) due to "political pressures by Asian American students and

community groups" (Endo and Wei 6).

  I felt a sense of interconnectedness after learning more about the history of Asian

American studies and how Asian American students worked with other students of color to push

for changes in higher education. Although I have never taken an Asian American studies or

ethnic studies course, I still felt grateful and inspired by the work that these students did in the

1960s and 1970s. I felt as though I was taking a small part in the larger efforts to create more

socially just educational institutions and communities. Unfortunately, I realized that this social

justice work is slow. As some mentioned during the sit-in, the struggles that students of color

currently face echo the same struggles that students of color faced decades ago. The goals of the

TWLF to increase access to higher education, increase support for students of color, and to

change the curriculum are still challenges that we deal with today. Currently, Asian American

Studies programs are still not widespread. In "Reappropriate," one of oldest AAPI (Asian

American Pacific Islander) feminist and race activist blogs, Jenn Fang writes: "Half a century

after the emergence of Asian American Studies, less than fifty of the nation's nearly 5,000

degree-granting colleges and universities offer students the ability pursue a major from a stand-

alone Asian American Studies Program." Furthermore, Asian American studies and other ethnic

studies programs continue to face funding and departmental issues, including San Francisco

State University's College of Ethnic Studies (Asimov).

I believe that Asian American studies does and should have a place in the academy, but I

wonder about the limits of this discipline in bringing about social transformation once it has been

institutionalized. In "The Middle-Aging" of Asian American Studies, Loo writes that Asian

American studies programs have to contend with its marginal position in academia and prove its

legitimacy within a traditional academic institution, which, to some extent, leads to "a curtailing

of the revolutionary spirit that gave birth to ethnic studies" (19). Loo continues:

> Asian American studies had to "assimilate" into the white-dominant values and traditions
> of the "ivory tower" while trying to retain the political and community goals that marked
> the birth of ethnic studies. Many might argue that "assimilation without annihilation"
> constitutes an inherent contradiction. The process of accommodation to academic
> institutions and its mainstream values can lead to conservatism within the activities of
> Asian American studies, since risk-taking is less likely when one occupies a "marginal"
> position (19).

In a *Boston Review* article called "Black Study, Black Struggle," Robin D.G. Kelley expressed

similar concerns about the extent to which revolutionary change can occur when students of

color are asking academic institutions for curriculum changes, more students, faculty, and staff

of color, better mental health services, reduced or free tuition, and more. He believes that "universities can and will become more diverse and marginally more welcoming for black students, but as institutions they will never be engines of social transformation. Such a task is ultimately the work of political education and activism," which "takes place outside of the university." He advocates for the undercommons, which is "a subaltern, subversive way of being in and not of the university," and a "fugitive network where a commitment to abolition and collectivity prevails over a university culture bent on creating socially isolated individuals whose academic skepticism and claims of objectivity leave the world-as-it-is intact." Kelley is concerned about how the current "programmatic adoption of diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism vampirized the energy of a radical movement [such as the Black Freedom movement in the 1960s and '70s] that began by demanding *complete transformation* of the social order and the eradication of all forms of racial, gender, sexual, and class hierarchy." He brings up the example of Black Studies, talking about how it was created "outside of university," independent of and in "*opposition* to a Eurocentric university culture with ties to corporate and military power." I think that institutionalizing Asian American studies would limit the complete transformation that Kelley is seeking, but I also think that this doesn't have to be an either/or situation. We need both educators and students working towards anti-racism both within and outside of the educational system. We need this work to happen both in the center and from the margins. Although there are real issues to face as Kelley had suggested, bringing in Asian American studies courses that attempt to decenter Eurocentrism can shift the academic culture even if its revolutionary spirit is muted. And those who work from the margins, being "*in* the university but not *of* the university" can have more freedom and space to critique and reimagine what a socially just, anti-racist education would look like and should be, possibly challenging

institutional practices of departments such as Asian American studies. A contemplative, socially just education can push these institutional boundaries both from the center and from the margins, depending on where the faculty, staff, and students are situated.

Learning About Asian American Issues as an Independent Scholar

As an Independent Scholar who doesn't have any course requirements or rules for shaping my thesis, I wonder how much I am situated "*in* the university but not *of* the university." I feel that I am in the in-between space of being a part of Amherst College, yet also not of it because my efforts to bridge contemplative practices and social justice in my education challenges the ways of teaching and learning that Amherst traditionally upholds. Having the freedom to shape an entire year of my education led me to question the politics of knowledge, as well as the institutional norms and practices that limit the kind of transformative education that I seek. Although the presence of a contemplative pedagogy rooted in social justice is not strong at Amherst, my experiences engaging with my peers about Asian American issues and anti-black racism helped me see ways in which a contemplative pedagogy would have supported our inquiries into these topics.

I participated in conversations about Asian American identity and anti-racism in meetings hosted by the Asian Student Association (ASA), an organization that was inactive for a few years but became active again thanks to Rachel Nghe '16 and other students who brought it back to campus. ASA was a space where I had a chance to engage in dialogue and deep listening with my peers about topics such as: our different experiences being Asian American at Amherst College, and how that differed from our experiences being at home and going to school prior to college; the lack of community among all Asians on campus, and how the diversity within the Asian population makes it hard to come together in a way that doesn't ignore our differences;

and how Asians are often seen as apolitical and assimilated in American society. We also

discussed our internalized oppression as Asian Americans, and I remember hearing a student talk

about his desire to have white friends and not associate with Asian students so that he wouldn't

seem "Asian" or "other." This reminded me of my own experiences of internalized oppression,

such as wanting to have whiter skin when I was a child, as well as judging other Asians for being

"fobby" (which stems from the phrase "fresh off the boat," which is associated with being recent

immigrants) when I was in high school. I had been unconsciously internalizing negative

messages about marginalized groups such as Asian American communities into my own being. It

wasn't until I went to college that I began to uncover ways in which oppression occurs in myself

and in my communities, and yet I found that my education didn't teach me how to deal with and

respond to my own experience of oppression.

From my experiences engaging in dialogue with ASA, I could see how contemplative

pedagogy can further support this process. For example, contemplative practices such as those

stemming from mindfulness meditation could have deepened the dialogues that I had about

Asian American identity. At the 7th Annual ACMHE Conference at Howard University,

contemplative educators Peter Grossenbacher, Trudy Sable, and Thomas J. Bassarear facilitated

a interpersonal mindfulness practice to support dialogues about systematic oppression. The

practice "involves noticing one's own experience as it happens, briefly detailing this experience

to another person (sans storyline) and listening (without comment) to another person's present-

moment experiential description." This practice provides "intimate exposure to others' inner

[lives] across [our] structured sequences of experiential domains, and brings to light facets of

relationship between another's experience and one's own." This interpersonal mindfulness

practice serves as one example in which contemplative pedagogy could help us be more aware of

how we are experiencing ourselves and others at the moment in which we are engaging in

dialogue. It can also help us catch ourselves when we are getting caught up in storylines and

layering our own projections onto what others are saying instead of actually listening to them.

Participating in this practice at the conference served as a reminder to connect to how I am

feeling when I am having difficult conversations about oppression, and to notice any reactivity

that I might have when speaking or listening. This practice would be especially useful for

intergroup dialogue when talking about racism.

In addition, contemplative pedagogy can also help us face our internalized oppression,

which is emotionally challenging and difficult to unlearn. Beth Berila writes:

> Internalized oppression works at the level of the subconscious, so often we are not aware
> of how deeply embedded the messages are. One of the most critical steps in the
> unlearning process is critical awareness of what feminist and anti-oppression pedagogy
> calls self-reflection. Mindful education takes this idea to an even deeper, *embodied* level
> (79).

Contemplative practices can help us deal with the "deeply embedded" messages of internalized

oppression. Rather than getting stuck in our gut reactions and automatic responses when

experiencing internalized oppression, whether it involves "verbally lash[ing] out at the person

who triggered [it]," "physically shrink[ing] to take up as little space as possible in an attempt to

disappear," "mak[ing] ourselves busy trying to control the situation," or "numb[ing] ourselves

with nicotine, alcohol, or eating," we can develop the inner skills to be more intentional about

how we respond so that we are not overwhelmed by oppression. To address internalized

oppression, Berila calls for the "cultivation of the Witness, which means the ability to observe

what is happening" so to allow ourselves to "be present with what is happening without being

consumed by it" (80). It also involves cultivating a "nonjudgmental compassion" for what we're

experiencing instead of fighting what we are feeling, which "perpetuate[s] the violence done by

external systems of oppression" (81). She encourages us to see our own reactions as a byproduct of institutionalized oppression instead of judging ourselves for feeling that way. She also encourages us to see the storylines that we tell ourselves, or the "narrative meaning we give to what are really physiological or psychological responses," are often mediated by oppressive ideologies and not representative of who we think we are (82). Having the inner capacity to recognize when we are experiencing internalized oppression, recognizing others' experiences of oppression, or talking about oppression without getting caught up in it is an important skill to have. It allows us more compassion for ourselves and others as we try to connect across differences and work towards dismantling racial and other forms of oppression at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic levels.

Examining the Model Minority Myth and its Connection to Anti-Black Racism

Having discussions about our Asian American experiences helped me better understand the issues that we face socially and politically. Like many of my peers, I was also interested in learning about how we as Asian Americans can be in solidarity with black students and fight against anti-black racism. In February 2016, ASA organized a trip to bring Amherst students to the 2016 ECAASU (East Coast Asian American Student Union) Conference at Rutgers University. It is a student-organized annual conference that seeks to "inspire, educate, and empower those interested in Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) issues" (ECAASU 2016). About a few hundred students attended the conference. At the conference, I attended a workshop called "What Does Solidarity Look Like? Combatting Anti-Blackness in Our Communities." Created by Vi Bui and Jeremy Mathis, this workshop connects "Asian immigration history and Black American labor history together," to "see how our histories have

always been intertwined in events such as the development of the 'model minority myth' and the

anti-blackness it brought." This workshop covered a lot of topics and I can't talk about all of

them here, but I will focus on the model minority myth as a way to understand how that

negatively affects Asian Americans and perpetuates anti-blackness.

Although Asian Americans have historically and still continue to encounter xenophobia

and racism, we are often viewed as the model minority, which is a stereotype that developed

during the time of World War II and the Cold War. In *The Making of Asian America*, Erika Lee

writes that Asian Americans are seen as educationally and socioeconomically successful, and are

deemed the "poster children of American success and are sometimes even called 'honorary

whites'" (373-374). This stereotype is used to perpetuate anti-black racism:

> Rather than referencing a slow U.S. economy, the growing disappearance of blue-collar
> jobs, deteriorating inner cities and public schools, and the continuing legacies of centuries
> of institutionalized discrimination, African American poverty has been increasingly
> explained as the by-product of a dysfunctional culture with delinquent family values
> (375).

The model minority attributes Asians' alleged American success to their values and culture, such

as their emphasis on learning and "strong family structures" (375). This stereotype is used as a

way to accuse African Americans for being poor because of their culture and lack of family

values. The attitude here is, "Since Asians are so successful in America, why can't black people

do the same?" while ignoring the factors that Lee expresses and ignoring the history of slavery.

Lee shows how this misconception also extends to other people of color, such as Latinx:

> Beginning in the 1960s, Asian Americans and their so-called traditional Asian cultures
> were pitted against African Americans who were said to have dysfunctional families and
> culture. In the 1990s, some pundits turned to the growing population of Latinos as an
> example of unfit cultures" (381).

Moreover, the model minority stereotype is also used to warn white Americans that Asian Americans are "*too* successful for their own good, hurting deserving white Americans and competing with other more deserving minorities" (376).

The model minority stereotype is a myth because it is false. It harms Asian Americans, blacks, and other people of color by maintaining white supremacy, masking the issues that our communities face, and pits people of color against other people of color. Counter to the image of Asian Americans as the model minority, the Asian American population is diverse both ethnically and socioeconomically, and inequalities exist within this population. Lee writes:

> There are many examples of educational and economic success, but the [Asian American] community is from homogenous. And highlighting only the successful characteristics obscures the significant population of Asian Americans who still struggle to survive, live in poverty, are unemployed or underemployed, and have low rates of education. Asian Americans are in fact what some call a "community of contrasts," with significant diversity and disparities within and between different groups (376).

For example, my family's history challenges this model minority myth. Both of my parents grew up in America without a lot of money and had to work to support their families. My mom's family had enough money to pay for three months worth of rent, but they soon ran out and had to find ways to support themselves financially. When my mom was fourteen years old, she would go to a garment factory in New York City after school to work with her mother and sisters. My dad's family members are refugees from Vietnam. They both didn't know English well enough to do well in school, and my mom graduated from high school while my dad dropped out. Some of my dad's peers who came from Vietnam joined gangs, did drugs, or got incarcerated.

Asian Americans occupy a place in U.S. society in which we are seen as a model minority, benefit from anti-black racism, and yet also face oppression. Asam Ahmad writes about how non-Black people can address anti-blackness in our communities:

How can we, non-Black people of color, show our solidarity with Black folks and Black bodies that are continually under threats of violence in ways that we will never know or experience? A good place to start would be by acknowledging our own internalized anti-Black racism, by talking about the legacies of prejudice and hate that have been passed from generation to generation, by speaking honestly about the ways in which we benefit from colorism and anti-Black racism. Perhaps the best way we can mourn right now is by having these conversations in our own non-Black people of color communities, by calling out anti-Black racism when we see it, by naming it and refusing to perpetuate it. This needs to happen in spaces where Black people are not present, or at least are not the only ones leading the discussion. It is our responsibility, as non-Black [people of color], to create spaces that address the ways we benefit from not being Black (Black Girl Dangerous).

From being a part of an Asian American family and community back at home, I notice that my loved ones have internalized anti-black racism. The generational, educational, and language gap makes it hard to have these conversations about anti-blackness. I struggle with knowing how to respond in these situations and interrupt anti-black racism in Asian communities, but I hope that my engagement with these issues and my contemplative practices (such as mindfulness meditation and sending myself and others love) would help me have these uncomfortable conversations in the future. I also have to look at ways in which I benefit from anti-black racism, such as having light skin and thus being seen as more white, or being more likely to be seen as intelligent compared to black students because of the model minority myth. These "privileges," however, are harmful for all people of color because they uphold white supremacy, hide injustices that Asian Americans face, and maintain racial divide. In order to be in solidarity with black people, I realized that part of that work means coming together with other Asian Americans to discuss and interrupt anti-black racism in ourselves and our own communities. I also hope to develop a greater awareness of Asian American issues that don't get much attention because of the model minority myth.

Conclusion

The three students of color who decided to organize the sit-in created social change in many ways. Taking part in the contemplative act of listening and bearing witness to each other's suffering inspired me and other Asian American students to explore our Asian American identities and continue the ongoing inquiry of how we can contribute to anti-racism. I became inspired to write this chapter to see how higher education can support this inquiry, which led me to reflect on my own educational experiences, examine the role of Asian American studies, engage with others about their Asian American experiences, and question the model minority myth and its role in perpetuating anti-blackness.

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Conclusion

This Independent Scholar journey has been at least four years in the making. I wanted to find meaning in life, but wasn't sure what that looked like. I started listening to my inner voice, which told me to keep exploring. Being with my own suffering and the world's suffering inspired me to see how education can help us liberate ourselves from suffering on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic levels.

In other words, I wanted to learn how education can teach us how to love. Arthur Zajonc says that the "center of our teaching and our students' learning" should be centered on the "profoundly difficult task of learning to love, which is also the task of learning to live in true peace and harmony with others and with nature" (1-2).[23] To do so, both inner and outer transformation need to occur.

This thesis was an opportunity to experiment with how contemplative practices and social justice can come together in higher education. I tried to live out this integration in my own education, by: telling my contemplative story through an autoethnography; practicing insight meditation at a retreat; creating a community engagement project; and learning how I can contribute to anti-racism as an Asian American.

Throughout this year, I realized that I cannot stay silent anymore. I started to find my voice and recognize my ability to create a more contemplative, socially just education. I realized

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[23] Zajonc, Arthur. "Love and Knowledge: Recovering the Heart of Learning through Contemplation." *The Teachers College Record* 108.9 (2006): 1742–1759. Print.

that I can engage my community in this process, even if that comes in small actions, such asking questions that I've come to trust to be important. I no longer feel alone in this journey. I'm grateful for the support of my advisors and mentors, for meeting contemplative educators committed to social justice, and for the people who wanted to learn about my thesis. I'm grateful for having the chance to connect to myself, connect to others, and live out what I find meaningful.

That being said, there is much more work to do. I found that it was difficult to integrate contemplative practices and social justice into higher education. I tried to do so in a way that combines first, second, and third-person critical inquiry with practical skills for engaged action. All of these are important components of educating for both inner and social change. I would like to see how others are meeting the challenge of combining these aspects together. I am interested in learning how students are creating a more contemplative, socially just education. I believe that students and educators have a lot to learn from each other in shaping higher education.

Further directions for this research can include: assessing and evaluating the impact of contemplative practices; deepening our understanding of what contemplative pedagogy is while recognizing that is still growing and changing; and seeing what a contemplative pedagogy rooted in social justice might look like in higher education outside of the U.S. Although my thesis couldn't include everything about this topic, I also want to learn more about community organizing, develop a critical understanding of issues such as environmental justice, and experience more contemplative practices.

I finish college with a sense that the quest for love, liberation, and social justice is for life. There will always be more to learn, experience, and discover. Rev. angel Kyodo williams talks about the endless journey of getting free:

> It's endless, it just keeps going on and on…. It's like you could just be on the highway and you don't have to keep looking for the exit. Just drive. We've got a ways to go. Enjoy the journey. Settle down for the journey of getting free. Instead of the persnickety self-consciousness that keeps us from our freedom because we are constantly worrying about "How am I doing?" [and] "How are we doing?" Not done yet. Not done yet. And there's a freedom in that just in and of itself…. [T]hat's not a burden, that's a joy.[24]

May we all find the strength to keep going. May we meet each other's suffering with openness, even when love and justice are hard to bear. May we find joy in the "not done yet."

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[24] Shambhala Meditation Center of New York. *A Buddhist Call to Action (Part 2)*. N.p. Audio Recording. Meditation in the City.