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A Contemplative Pedagogy: The Practice of Presence When the Present is Overwhelming

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Abstract

Through the use of contemplative practices in higher education, contemplative pedagogy is a vastly growing movement and more than capable of fostering transformative learning in a social justice curriculum. My current research is on the implementation of contemplative practices in a Women's and Gender Studies classroom and includes acknowledging the subversive work a contemplative pedagogy does in higher education. As a social justice educator, I feel it is vital to share tools with my students that not only validate their voices and lived experiences but provide them opportunities to practice self-care in connection with community care. Teaching and learning about privilege and oppression is mentally, physically, and emotionally challenging. Learning sustainable and healing ways to navigate social justice education as both a teacher and a student is nonlinear and never complete. During the spring semester of 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic required that my Gender and Social Change class transition from a face-to-face classroom to a virtual space eight weeks into the semester. I knew the benefits of implementing contemplative practices during "normal" semesters; however, I was uncertain of how best to support my students during a global pandemic. Each student had unique circumstances they were trying to navigate such as access to technology, access to healthcare, access to time and space to work from home, access to income on top of the additional responsibilities that come with living inside of a pandemic. It was my intent to meet my students where they were and offer tools for their wellbeing while teaching about internalized and systemic oppression.

Keywords: transformative learning, contemplative practices, compassionate listening, uncomfortable feelings, difficult conversations, social justice, anti-oppression, pedagogy

Teaching Social Justice

> Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action.
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> —Jack Mezirow, "Learning to Think Like an Adult"

As a women's studies scholar and teacher, I consistently search for transformative ways to introduce my students to complex and complicated social justice concepts such as privilege, oppression, and intersectionality. From the first time that I taught a women's studies course over eight years ago, I noticed many students left class with feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Once they were introduced to issues such as white supremacy, patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism, colonialism, the prison industrial complex, and other social justice issues students often felt overwhelmed and uncertain about how to contribute to systemic change. Increased awareness of one's habitual ways of thinking in relation to how oppression works on a personal and systemic level includes acknowledging our assumptions and that we are all uniquely complicit in systems of oppression. Learning about injustice and our part in it can elicit uncomfortable feelings such as anger, grief, denial, guilt, and shame as growing pains often do. Experiencing uncomfortable feelings can lead to resistance and defensiveness inhibiting our ability to stay

present and engaged in generative classroom conversations, which are a vital component of WGS and my contemplative pedagogy. Witnessing my students struggle to stay present and engaged during difficult classroom conversations around social justice is a challenge that I continue to face each semester.

Maurianne Adams, Professor Emerita at UMass Amherst College of Education, writes about the strong and often unexpected emotions students experience when their previous values, assumptions, and beliefs are called into question by new information and perspectives (2016). She explains that students' perspectives have been shaped by family, school, religion, and other institutions, and they may resist both the instructor and the course material when their core beliefs and worldviews are challenged (pp. 44–45). Students can experience uncomfortable feelings when they feel threatened emotionally or mentally. Diane Goodman, educator and consultant on diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice discusses resistance stemming from fear and discomfort in social justice education and claims:

> Since we are asking people to question their fundamental belief systems, it makes sense that people feel threatened and act resistant. Defensiveness, specifically, is a way to mitigate anxiety, assuage guilt, or protect against other painful feelings. It is irrational, an automatic reaction rather than a considered choice. When people's needs for safety and stability are not met, they turn off, shut down, and avoid new information—hardly conditions for education to occur. (2011, p. 51)

Adams believes that social justice classrooms need a pedagogy that acknowledges the emotional as well as cognitive aspects of learning, and that encourages and teaches communication skills for dialogue, critical inquiry, and complex thinking. Adams claims, "They may not be prepared to use analytic frameworks when enmeshed in their own personal experiences" (p. 28). Likewise, Mezirow discusses the emotional difficulty involved in the "struggle as old perspectives become challenged and transformed" (2012, p. 23). Students are not always aware of how to navigate uncomfortable feelings and will often disengage from the classroom dialogue or course material. Offering students resources that support their ability to nonjudgmentally observe their feelings while staying present and engaged in the difficult work of learning about social justice is crucial to their learning process.

My experience as a student felt very disembodied. I was not encouraged to bring my lived experiences as a spiritual person, as a mother, as twice divorced, as queer, as living in poverty, and as struggling with depression and anxiety into the classroom. It was as if my lived experiences could and should be left at the door; as if these identities and experiences had no effect on my knowing, learning, and being; as if they were not affected, connected, and interdependent with the issues we were learning about in class and with the sociopolitical events taking place in the world. Therefore, as a teacher I feel a strong desire to teach the whole student: body, mind, and spirit. Teaching holistically means that I value their lived experiences. I feel neglectful increasing my students' awareness of social injustice: racism, sexism, classism, ableism, white supremacy, privilege, homophobia, transphobia, systemic oppression, and internalized oppression without offering students resources for self and community care alongside tools for personal and social transformation. From my experiences as a student and teacher in WGS classrooms, I propose implementing contemplative practices as a resource for students to make mind-body connections through nonjudgmentally observing their emotional, physical, and mental experiences while engaging in difficult classroom conversations on complex social justice issues.

Contemplative Pedagogy as Transformative, Liberatory, & Subversive

A contemplative pedagogy can be transformative, liberatory, and subversive. Transformative learning may be defined as "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2009, p. 22). A contemplative pedagogy inclusive of the implementation of contemplative practices within a social justice curriculum is transformative in that it creates space in the classroom for students to pause, reflect, and choose their responses in classroom dialogues and to reflect on how they know what they know, who they learned it from, and who it serves for them to know it in this way. Mezirow writes that transformative

reasoning "may involve critically examining the epistemic assumptions supporting one's values, beliefs, convictions, and preferences and reassessing reasons that support a problematic frame of reference" (2009, p. 23). A contemplative pedagogy inclusive of contemplative practices and assignments asks students to question their assumptions, to make connections between the personal and political, to make connections between their lived experiences and the experiences of those in their communities and the world at large, and to think critically about how to enter the difficult conversations so needed to contribute to personal and social transformation. Charity Johansson and Peter Felton write about the challenges of transforming students and institutions and claim:

> A university cannot compel or guarantee transformative learning for its students or for its faculty and staff. But leaders in higher education *can* provide a fertile environment for meaningful transformation. Our goal is for our students to become their own universities, integrating what they have learned into their daily lives and internalizing the transformative process and thus continuing to grow long after they leave the classrooms, residence halls, and lawns of the college campus. In essence, alumni become the embodiment of the university. (2014, p. 102)

A contemplative pedagogy can also be transformative in that it values the individual lived experiences of students; it promotes and supports students' use of critical self-reflection through the use of the contemplative journaling; and it creates a brave space[1] for generative dialogues on difficult topics such as racism, classism, and sexism as experienced on both a personal and systemic level. A contemplative pedagogy creates space for students to turn inward and observe their assumptions around justice, privilege, internalized and systemic oppression, identity, and more. Students may benefit from resources such as contemplative practices for support in working with more analytic, abstract, critical, and nuanced thinking skills. Contemplative practices acknowledge the emotional and embodied aspects of learning. Students are provided an opportunity to understand, respect, and value others with different lived experiences, beliefs, and values through the inner work of self-reflection in conjunction with learning about different ways of knowing and experiencing the world.

A contemplative pedagogy can be liberatory if it is centered around personal and social transformation through consciousness raising and engagement with a social justice and anti-oppression pedagogy. Contemplative practices invite students into their learning process as participants and co-creators of knowledge and not simply depositories as seen in Freire's (2000) banking model of education.[2] A contemplative pedagogy connects with Paulo Freire's theory on transformative and liberatory education in that it 1) works effectively to keep education accessible to all students in the classroom regardless of their identities; 2) focuses on critical thinking as part of the contemplative work involved in developing both the self and community within the classroom; and 3) considers critical education a form of networking where each student contributes to and is part of the co-creation of knowledge production (p. 17). Inspired by Freire's liberatory education model, bell hooks confesses:

> it was Freire's insistence that education could be the practice of freedom that encouraged me to create strategies for what he called "conscientization" in the classroom. Translating that term to critical awareness and engagement, I entered the classrooms with the conviction that it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer. (1994, p. 14)

Through my participation in contemplative practices and my creation of a contemplative curriculum, I am intentionally creating space for the entire class to actively embody participation in our learning process.

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[1] For more on brave spaces versus safe spaces see Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens' (2013) work.

[2] The banking model of education is a term used by Paulo Freire (2000) and refers to students as containers in which educators as experts must deposit knowledge into the students as if they were empty vessels without knowledge or experiences of their own.

A contemplative pedagogy can be subversive in that it acknowledges and validates embodied ways of knowing such as emotions and physical senses when systems of education have historically focused on rationality and logic as more legitimate ways of knowing. When we consider systems of oppression, we may think about the Prison Industrial Complex, the Medical Industrial Complex, or the Military Industrial Complex, but we must seriously acknowledge the Educational Industrial Complex as a system capable of establishing and reinforcing oppression on multiple levels. Students are more than rational beings; they are also emotional, physical, and spiritual beings. They enter the classroom with ancestral wisdom and emotional and embodied experiences that contribute to knowledge beyond their minds. In "Transformative Learning Theory," Mezirow offers a response to colleagues who felt that he neglected the role of imagination, intuition, and emotion:

> I have noted that the process by which we construe our beliefs may involve taken-for-granted values, stereotyping, selective attention, limited comprehension, projection, rationalization, minimizing, or denial. These considerations are reasons that we need to be able to critically assess and validate the assumptions supporting our own beliefs and expectations and those of others. The way we typify persons, things, and events becomes our realities. (2009, p. 27)

Through self-reflection, students are invited to observe and acknowledge how their embodied and lived experiences can contribute to subverting dominant ways of knowing along with dismantling social norms and the status quo, which is useful when learning about injustice and in imagining ways to transform systemic oppressions.

Contemplative Practices in WGS Classrooms

> A form of spiritual inquiry, conocimiento is reached via creative acts—writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism—both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as site of creativity).
>
> —Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*

A contemplative pedagogy often involves the implementation of contemplative practices in the classroom. Contemplative practices are as diverse in practice as they are in historical, religious, and secular traditions. They include but are not limited to meditation, yoga, writing, dancing, walking, and singing. According to The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMind), contemplative practices are "practical, radical, and transformative, developing capacities for deep concentration and quieting the mind in the midst of the action and distraction that fills everyday life ("Contemplative Practices," n.d.). In the epigraph above, Gloria E. Anzaldúa (2015) claims that we reach conocimiento[3] through creative acts, which she defines as deriving from "*cognoscera*, a Latin verb meaning 'to know' and is the Spanish word for knowledge and skill. I [Anzaldúa] call conocimiento that aspect of consciousness urging you to act on the knowledge gained" (p. 237). She names various creative acts, which I refer to as contemplative practices, as capable of invoking a spiritual, or contemplative inquiry: writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism. Anzaldúa proposes a connection between our inner struggles faced on a day-to-day basis and systemic issues in the world.

In my search for ways to encourage and support my students' struggle to stay present and engaged in classroom conversations on social justice, around eight years ago I began implementing contemplative practices such as mindfulness, compassionate listening, meditation, and journaling in my WGS classes. I was increasingly inspired by other academics implementing contemplative practices in higher education through CMind. In 2015, I attended their summer pedagogy session at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, MA and their fall academic conference at Howard University in Washington,

[3] Anzaldúa defines conocimiento as "that aspect of consciousness urging you to act on the knowledge gained" (2015, p. 237).

DC and was inspired by the variety of ways educators were implementing contemplative practices in higher education across disciplines. I met Beth Berila, Director of the Gender & Women's Studies Program at St. Cloud University and, through CMind. Foundational for her work on implementing mindfulness in a social justice pedagogy, Berila continues to serve as a catalyst for thinking critically about the implementation of mindfulness in a women's studies pedagogy. In her book *Integrating Mindfulness Into Anti-Oppression Pedagogy: Social Justice in Higher Education* (2013), she asserts that "Integrating mindfulness offers the possibility for a more empowered embodiment, which … is critical to not only interrupting injustice but also to building more resilient and vibrant communities" (p. x). Although implementing contemplative practices in my classrooms was not new to me, Berila's work inspired me with her emphasis on the critical analysis needed to understand the complexity, challenges, and importance of implementing mindfulness in a social justice, anti-oppression pedagogy.

Contemplative Practices During COVID-19

In March of 2020, my Gender and Social Change class transitioned from face-to-face to online instruction due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Neither my students nor myself were prepared for what the second half of our semester would look or feel like because we had never experienced transitioning from face-to-face to online after eight weeks in our beloved community[4] on campus, and we had never experienced navigating living amidst a global pandemic. I assumed that my students would find contemplative practices both beneficial and challenging during the remainder of the semester, but I was not sure how participating in contemplative practices would be different both online and amidst a pandemic. Initially, I was interested in exploring the difference between online students' and face-to-face students' experiences participating in contemplative practices within a social justice curriculum. However, after listening to some of my students' experiences, I became more interested in exploring if and how students found contemplative practices useful and practical in navigating life during COVID-19.

Implementing contemplative practices in WGS courses through the years has taught me a lot. I have learned about my students' lives by listening to their experiences participating in contemplative practices in conjunction with a social justice curriculum. My students share how contemplative practices increase their self-awareness, self-compassion, and self-acceptance. They also share how these practices decrease their stress and tension levels while increasing their ability to focus and stay present. Of course, my students also report the challenges that they face while participating in contemplative practices such as finding the time and energy to practice after a full day of work, school, and parenting. Some students report an inability to sit still, often due to uncomfortable feelings or intrusive thoughts that arise when they get quiet. After implementing contemplative practices in my WGS classes for the past eight years, I did not expect a lot of surprises; however, implementing contemplative practices in an online class in the midst of a global pandemic was new to me. While there are many benefits to teaching and learning online, there are inevitably challenges we must acknowledge and be mindful of when creating online learning spaces. Andrea Domingue, Ed.D., points out how students "may not learn how to address challenging conversational conflicts and attend to cues of body language or facial expression that are evident in face-to-face encounters" (2016, p. 378). She also emphasizes the writing skills needed to participate in online discussion threads inclusive of cultural references not all students are aware of; therefore, educators must be mindful in explaining these references and encourage and support students in asking clarifying questions when they do not understand something. These challenges along with others such as access to technology, space, and time make it imperative that contemplative educators are mindful of the different levels of online participation and understanding among their students at any given time. Aside from the valid challenges to teaching and learning online, I found interesting results exploring students' self-

[4] The first week of each semester, I introduce my students to Martin Luther King Jr.'s Beloved Community through Jeff Ritterman's (2014) article, "The Beloved Community: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Prescription for a Healthy Society" where he talks about King's vision for an inclusive, equitable, and affirming community.

reported experiences participating in contemplative practices during COVID-19 compared to other non-pandemic semesters.

As I mentioned earlier, my dissertation was on the implementation of contemplative practices in a WGS classroom. After collecting data from my spring of 2019 WGS class, I continued to teach while writing my dissertation. In the spring of 2020 amidst a global pandemic, I invited my students to participate in my study in order to explore their experiences participating in contemplative practices. Five of my students volunteered to participate in my study. At the end of the semester, I asked them to respond to eight questions: 1) How are you navigating the switch from a face-to-face class to online instruction? 2) What are your ideas and strategies for effectively working at home? 3) What are some challenges you face? 4) What are you doing to stay safe physically? 5) What are you doing to stay well mentally and emotionally? 6) Are you finding any of the contemplative practices we learned about helpful during your COVID-19 pandemic experience up to this point in time? 7) From your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, what are some ideas for how we can take care of ourselves, our families, and our communities in times of crisis? and 8) Please share some connections you see between the COVID-19 pandemic and the social justice issues we learned about this semester? In this essay, I share some of my students' responses to question six, "Are you finding any of the contemplative practices we learned about helpful during your COVID-19 pandemic experience up to this point in time?" and question eight, "Please share some connections you see between the COVID-19 pandemic and the social justice issues we learned about this semester?"

Contemplative Practices as Self-Care

When students were asked if they found any of the contemplative practices helpful during their COVID-19 pandemic experience, they shared numerous ways they found the practices helpful. Self-care emerged as a theme with students naming benefits such as calming, relaxing, healing, mental wellbeing, mind-body wellness, and stress relieving as helpful to them during the pandemic. Dalina shared her experience participating in the mantra practice, "I can feel its effectiveness in calming my mind, soul, or relaxing my body after encountering stressful school and life matters; specifically, the mantra practice helps me a lot because it has major similarities to my daily belief/meditation in Buddhism." She made a connection between the mantra practice and her own daily religious practices, which makes sense because she found the practice similar to her own religious practices. In another class, a student shared their resistance and hesitancy to participate in the mantra practice due to their feelings of fear around the practice conflicting with their own religious beliefs. Learning this reminds me of the importance in acknowledging that students have unique lived experiences that connect and influence their experiences in the classroom and with the curriculum.

Students made various connections between self-care, course material, and social justice. Holly referenced one of our assigned readings by bell hooks in her response:

> In bell hooks essay 'Feminism: A Transformational Politic' (2014), she discusses the need for self-care and healing. [hooks claims] It is vital because in order to find social justice, we have to work together. Social justice starts with your own self, and if you are not healed from the injustice you've experienced it won't work.

I encourage students to consider connections between their lived experiences, their participation in contemplative practices, the assigned course material, and the social justice issues they are learning about throughout the semester. Inviting students to make these connections creates opportunities for them to deeply engage with social justice issues often seen and taught from an abstract and theoretical perspective.

Both Catlyn and Kerry shared how participating in a writing practice contributed to their mental wellbeing during the pandemic. Catlyn shared her experience journaling and what it meant to her:

> It is my emotional and mental well-being I am having trouble with. If my mind is going crazy with intrusive thoughts, I will write them down. This contemplative practice [journaling] allows me to forget about things that crowd my brain. Sometimes I will go on long walks, which helps me release precious endorphins.

Through journaling, Catlyn practiced vulnerability in confessing her challenge with emotional and mental wellness. Intrusive thoughts were a common experience among students. I have seen an increase over the years in critical self-talk and self-judgment mentioned in students' journals. A consistent journaling practice creates space for students to go within and observe their intrusive thoughts without judgement or criticism or at least to observe their judgment and criticism with compassion. Kerry also chose journaling as a contemplative practice and found a way to take advantage of living in quarantine through her writing practice:

> One thing I can take away from this is using this time in the house to actually take care of myself. Like reading a contemplative practice and using it towards my day so that it may be filled with something other than being a couch potato. One practice I like to do the most is writing down my thoughts and goals. And while doing this I can release any stress I had before, and now complete my day in a brighter light. Doing this everyday can help a lot of people other than me, and that's how I know there is a positive in staying at home. Finding what fitted me and made me feel comfortable led me into believing this will soon be over.

Kerry made a connection between staying home and discovering a practice that was beneficial for her as well as for her community. As mentioned earlier, it is important for students to make connections between their day-to-day thoughts and actions and the world at large. Students' awareness of the effects of what is happening in the world on their bodies and minds along with an awareness of their personal impact in the world has the capacity to decrease feelings of hopelessness and helplessness by increasing their sense of agency in contributing to personal and social change.

Many students shared how time in nature was an extremely useful practice in presence. Time outside served as an invitation for students to come back into their body and feel less consumed by their thoughts. Ursulina shared how beneficial time outside was for her during the pandemic:

> Contemplative practices have definitely given me a way to cope with all the thoughts going through my head. Being able to sit outside and paint, write, or just meditate has helped me check-in with myself and make sure I feel comfortable. I am thankful that I learned about this and am able to implement this into my current situation.

Based on Ursulina and many other students' experiences with contemplative practices during COVID-19, intentional time outside was a helpful practice for observing and attending to intrusive thoughts. As Ursulina pointed out, spending time outside created space for students to "check-in" with themselves as a form of self-care.

Marilyn chose yoga as her contemplative practice. She described how yoga and other contemplative practices benefited her during the pandemic: "To keep a balance of mental and emotional health, I use my contemplative practice called yoga. For peace and positive energy, I also practice other contemplative practices, including listening to music, singing, walking, dancing, and painting." Living a balanced life is a challenge for most people on a daily basis let alone during a pandemic. Marilyn's participation in contemplative practices offered her a space to create mental and emotional balance as well as provided her with a sense of peace and good energy—all helpful when living amidst a global health pandemic.

Connections Between COVID-19 and Social Justice

Students shared connections they made between the COVID-19 global pandemic and the social justice issues they were learning about throughout the semester. In this section, I will share themes of community, intersectionality,[5] mental health, privilege, and racism. Both Kerry and Ursulina emphasized a connection between the pandemic and community. Kerry referenced the beloved community that students are introduced to the first week of class:

> We may live in different communities but we all have the same goal, which is bringing out the best in the situations we are in. We have seen teachers make efforts on bringing you back into their students' lives, we have seen restaurants serve essential workers for being out on the front line. That is a representation on what a beloved community is, people standing and fighting together to help a terrifying cause.

Kerry acknowledges the work that teachers do in engaging students to connect. She also acknowledges restaurants for serving the community of essential workers in dire times. As mentioned earlier, I introduced students to Martin Luther King Jr.'s concept of a beloved community early in the semester. It helped students acknowledge important connections between the beloved community we cocreated in our classroom and the work needed to create a beloved community outside of the classroom during the pandemic.

The connections that students made between the pandemic and social justice were lengthy but poignant. I felt the desire to share them in their entirety in order to capture the nuance. Ursulina shared connections between capitalism and the pandemic:

> There is a social justice connection everywhere, enough for me to write a whole new paper about it. The most that has stuck out to me is about how disconnected we are as a nation. The virus does not care about what political party you belong to, your race, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Yet there still seems to be division as to what we should and should not do. There comes a point where we have to listen to the facts without sugar coating it: people are dying, this is a highly contagious disease, for as much as we might miss it, "normal" will never be the same until this disease no longer exists. We, as a society, cannot be selfish and demand to leave [home] because of personal boredom. Being bored is a privilege—the fact that staying home could save a life and people still chose to ignore this shocks me. No other nation has had to protest to "the right to leave their home." The pandemic seems far from over, but people are eager to return to "normal." It truly shocks me how brainwashed this capitalist economy has people. Though the future seems uncertain, we must remember to take things one day at a time. Everyone's best looks different, and we should not judge one another for what peoples' best could be. I will continue to do my part to help my community and I hope people will do the same.

The complex connections Ursulina makes between capitalism and the pandemic are important because it illustrates her ability to understand how capitalism works in people's lives and relationships and indicates a deeper understanding of systemic oppression. Learning about capitalism earlier in the semester increased her awareness of a need for collaboration and collective work versus individualism. I appreciate Ursulina's awareness and emphasis on the current state of our nation as well as its effect on a global scale.

I consistently invite students to contemplate the connections between our daily lived experiences and the systems and structures that some of us benefit from and are complicit in through intersectional

[5] Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and refers to the multiple forms of oppression BIPOC belonging to multiple marginalized groups experience simultaneously.

theory and analysis. Marilyn's intersectional approach illuminates the connection between systemic forms of oppression and the unique ways in which people are affected during a global pandemic:

> The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated severe social injustices related to intersectionality, including age, race, ethnicity, and economic status… Unfortunately, during a press conference, the President blamed China and called the coronavirus the China virus. Following his statements, people of Chinese ethnicity were attacked and beaten. This occurrence is one example of a connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and the social justice issues we have studied. The narrative shifted to African Americans being mostly affected, which brought the pillar of Slavery/Capitalism to mind. It involves the continuous enslavement of African Americans through systems like a prison, promoting negative perspectives, and capitalizing their labor. In Chicago, Blacks represent seventy percent of the people who have died. Systemic social issues surge these outcomes, including inadequate healthcare, lack of livable wages to purchase food and supplies necessary for quarantine, and lack of opportunities to work from home. The pillar of Genocide/Colonialism operates in the colonializing and genocide of Native people. These Indigenous people's voices are missing from the narrative.

Marilyn made clear connections between the global pandemic and the treatment of marginalized groups beginning with xenophobia around the blaming of China and Chinese people for the virus and transitioning to the historical lack of access to resources in Black, Indigenous, and People of Colors (BIPOC) communities. In the beginning of the pandemic, we heard messages in the media that COVID-19 does not discriminate, but now we see it is much more complicated than that because COVID-19 affects marginalized communities differently. Holly takes an intersectional approach in her response as well by emphasizing the connection between the pandemic, privilege, and racism:

> I found that I can connect this pandemic to other social justice issues. COVID-19 is not only a health and mental health crisis, but it is also a crisis of individuals who earn low incomes, homeless individuals, individuals who are over 65, and people of color. Many have lost their jobs because they are not "essential" and for those who are "essential" they are at risk of catching the virus. Some precautions we take to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is not practical for homeless individuals. They lack the access to soap, water, proper care, medications, and when available, they stay in crowded shelters. They are also poorly treated when it comes to chronic illnesses, which puts them at a greater risk of the infection. During outbreaks such as this one, we see attacks on marginalized groups increase. The racism towards Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans blames them for spreading disease.

Holly understands how minoritized[6] groups and individuals are affected and oppressed through racism and a lack of access to resources such as jobs, healthcare, and housing. Learning about social justice issues throughout the semester such as privilege, oppression, racism, classism, sexism, and ableism helped students understand and provide a more nuanced and critical analysis of how different people are experiencing the pandemic.

Imagining the Future

[6] I. E. Smith (2016) explains the importance in naming and claims, "I believe that "groups that are different in race, religious creed, nation of origin, sexuality, and gender and as a result of social constructs have less power or representation compared to other members or groups in society" should be considered *minoritized.* Women are not minorities; they are one of many minoritized groups … People who are minoritized endure mistreatment, and face prejudices that are enforced upon them because of situations outside of their control." ("Minority Versus Minoritized: Why the Noun Just Doesn't Cut It")

> Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.
>
> —Victor E. Frankl

More research on the implications of a contemplative pedagogy as capable of 1) creating space for responding more meaningfully, 2) creating space for what Johansson and Felton describe as "disequilibrium" with a belief that it will "open the way for change that we hope will be significant and lasting—indeed, transformative," (p. 16) and (3) creating space for students' to be uncomfortable. In these ways, contemplative pedagogy can be useful in the field of transformative teaching and learning. Educational interventions such as contemplative practices are useful in ensuring "the learner acquires the understandings, skills, and dispositions essential for transformational learning [possible components of a contemplative pedagogy]" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11). If we can imagine a contemplative pedagogy as transformational in how it acknowledges both the personal and political work taking place within a social justice classroom, I believe contemplative practices are a very useful point of departure. As I continue in this area of research, I imagine the possibilities of the capacity of contemplative practices to increase students' ability to stay present and engaged in difficult conversations around social justice while experiencing uncomfortable feelings. I anticipate one of the implications of a contemplative pedagogy will include more generative classroom conversations, and ultimately, personal and social transformation.

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