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Soulfulness as an Orientation to Contemplative Practice: Culture, Liberation, and Mindful Awareness

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Soulfulness is introduced here as an orientation to contemplative practice that centers a synergistic integration of the psychological, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of soul (deepness, aliveness, authenticity, and a healing/transformative resource) to inform the design and implementation of culturally attuned methods. Soulfulness is characterized by themes emerging from diasporic African cultural influences and inspired by an African American cultural sensibility. These themes include an ethos of interconnectedness, a relational/communal sensibility, the centrality of spirituality, creativity and improvisation, a holistic orientation to human experience, emotional expressiveness, resilience and overcoming adversity, and struggles for liberation in the context of historical and ongoing dehumanization and oppression. The "SOUL" (Soulfulness-Oriented, Unitive, and Liberatory) approach is offered as an example of innovation and adaptation that meaningfully considers cultural and contextual factors in order to maximize the effectiveness of contemplative practices with culturally diverse groups. The SOUL-Centered Practice (SCP) framework describes foundational elements to guide the development of practices grounded in mindful awareness processes and infused with qualities of soulfulness. The SOUL approach is hypothesized to be particularly resonant with historically oppressed and marginalized people of color who experience the transgenerational impact of collective traumas such as genocide, slavery, and colonization as well as the dehumanizing soul-assaults of ongoing racism and intersectional oppression. The ultimate goal of the emerging practice is to contribute to the utilization of contemplative practice for the elevation our collective well-being as an interconnected human community in the context of ongoing struggles for liberation and social justice. Implications for research, further conceptual development, and the design of culturally syntonic contemplative practices are discussed.

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What is soul? It's like electricity—we don't really know what it is, but it's a force that can light a room.

—Ray Charles

Well, I think soul is certainly a feeling that is transmitted in one way or another…It's something that's very empathetic—and it's deep. Soul is deep.

—Aretha Franklin

What does it mean to have "soul," and what does this concept have to do with contemplative practices? The word *soul* conjures up a sense of deeply felt, authentic experience and has multiple interrelated meanings that generally fall within three domains: spiritual, psychological, and cultural. Spiritually, *soul* suggests the existence of an eternal, transcendent essence beyond the material and physical (Cousineau, 1994). Psychologically, *soul* describes the depths and dynamics of our inner world or "psyche" (Hillman, 1996; Moore, 2016). Culturally, *soul* has strong roots in African American experiences and diasporic African cultural expressions, where it is associated with an expressive aliveness and connectedness born of lived experience (e.g., soul music, soul food, soul brother/sister, soul power) (hooks, 2003; Rudinow, 2010). Soul is also deeply embedded in the worldviews of Native American and other indigenous peoples around the world (Duran, 2006). This author introduces "soulfulness" as an orientation to contemplative practice that emphasizes the synergistic integration of the psychological, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of "soul" to inform the design and implementation of contemplative practices such as meditation, deep listening/dialogue, movement, journaling, creative expression, and communal ritual.

Inspired by an African American cultural aesthetic and "philosophy of soulfulness" (hooks, 2003), the *SOUL* (**S**oulfulness-**O**riented, **U**nitive, and **L**iberatory) approach is offered as an effort to explicitly incorporate experiences and expressions of soul into contemplative practices with coexisting intentions that emphasize union (interconnectedness and wholeness) in the service of personal and collective emancipation from internalized, interpersonal, and societal oppression. The approach is intentional in its attention to healing and resisting the dehumanization and soul-assaults of racism and intersectional stress/trauma experienced by historically oppressed, marginalized, minority-status, and/or stigmatized (HOMMS) groups. Soulfulness is suggested to be relevant to diverse communities and persons who share sociocultural features common to people of African descent including an ethos of interconnectedness (with persons, nature, ancestors, etc.), a collectivist/communal orientation, the centrality of spirituality, emotional and creative expressiveness, valuing authenticity, a holistic understanding of life, resilience and perseverance, and struggles for liberation in the face of oppression. The SOUL approach seeks to contribute to increasing efforts to improve the cultural attunement of contemplative practices and inform the development of culturally congruent strategies and exercises.

Cultural diversity both characterizes and challenges the world in which we live; our educational, health care, and social systems are faced with the need for meaningful inclusiveness. It is argued here that considerations of culture need to occupy a more central and explicitly named space in contemplative inquiry and that practices must be attuned to culture if they are to be optimally effective. As contemplative practices are increasingly utilized as pedagogical and wellness tools within university, health-care, workplace, and community settings, it is critical that they be constructed in ways that resonate with people in their particular cultural contexts. Practices common in the mainstream are not culture-free but rather so embedded in the dominant cultural paradigm and narrative that they come to be accepted as simply "how things are done." However, every human activity emerges from a particular cultural context, and contemplative practices are no different. For example, it is not enough to acknowledge the Buddhist origins of mindfulness meditation; it is also necessary to own that its delivery in the mainstream is strongly infused with a white, educated, upper-middle-class cultural sensibility that impacts its reception in diverse contexts (Watson, Black, & Hunter, 2016; Yang, 2017; "Disrupting Systemic Whiteness," 2017). Honoring the strengths, existing resources, and cultural sensibilities of the populations where contemplative practices are implemented requires a keen appreciation of the complexities of both intracultural and intercultural dynamics.

THE CENTRALITY OF CULTURE IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Like all human activity, contemplative practices occur within the context of larger historical, cultural, and sociopolitical dynamics. Culture and context reflect the nature of human experience as a dance between our inner and outer lives. *Culture* is understood as patterns of meaning and daily living expressed through ways of *being, believing, bonding, belonging, behaving, and becoming* and provides the foundational frames for developing worldviews, interpreting reality, and acting in the world (Harrell, 2015; Nobles, 2006). Culture is a shared phenomenon manifested among groups of people with common heritage (e.g., ethnicity, religion), geography, socially salient characteristics, or significant experiential or socialization contexts (e.g., occupational, organizational). Culture is *embedded* in social and institutional contexts, *internalized* as patterns of meaning and identity, *expressed* through actions and relationships in the context of power dynamics, and *interactive* with coexisting and intersecting dimensions of cultural diversity that reflect shared identity and experience (Harrell, 2015; 2018). Person, culture, and environment are in ongoing transaction and are ultimately inseparable. Persons are embedded in layers of culture and context (e.g., community, organizational, institutional, sociopolitical, sociohistorical); cultural and contextual forces become expressed within the biological, psychological, and relational functioning of the person; and the resulting behaviors of persons create the demands and constraints of environments and settings. Particularly relevant to contemplative practice is the perspective of cultural neuroscience, which holds that culture, socioecological environment, and mind mutually constitute each other and are co-sustaining (Barrett, Mesquita, & Smith,

2010; Han et al., 2013; Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Culture and context can influence contemplative practices with respect to availability of resources and support, location of delivery, embedded values and beliefs, targeted outcomes, and many other factors that may affect receptivity and effectiveness.

CULTURE IN CONTEMPLATIVE PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

Contemplative processes generally refer to intentional human activities that involve enhanced attention, awareness, and/or regulation of mental, somatic, emotional, relational, collective, and/or transcendent experience with various intentions and motivations (Dorjee, 2016; Roth, 2014; Wallace, 2007). They provide opportunities for enhancement of experiential and critical self-other-world awareness, expansion of consciousness, and, ultimately, transformation of how we live in the world. Conceived of in this way, contemplative processes have underlying culture-transcending functions that are natural expressions of the human experience. However, processes are broader than practices. While there are contemplative *processes* that transcend culture, contemplative *practices* were developed, operationalized, and delivered within specific cultural-historical-sociopolitical contexts; these diverse expressions of contemplative practices use particular patterns of language and communicate valued behaviors, goals, and ways of being. Contemplative practices are inclusive of many strategies including prayer, journaling, art-making, labyrinth walking, playing and listening to music, communing with nature, vigils, and dialogue circles (see the Tree of Contemplative Practices at http://contemplativemind.org/practices/tree); however, meditation is the prototypical practice and is the most visible in both scholarly and popular writing.

Contemplative practices exist within multiple world religions and cultures (Plante, 2010; West, 2016). Examples include African rite-of-passage rituals that involve periods of isolation where one is tasked with contacting both inner and transcendent resources; the Native American practice of sweat lodge ceremonies where insight, healing, and wisdom emerge from processes of physical and emotional detoxification; the use of singing, drumming, and dance as rhythmic methods to focus energy and attention and bring people into a communal connectedness; as well as meditative prayer processes that are present in a wide range of spiritual traditions (Dein, Cook, & Koenig, 2012; Garrett et al., 2011; Plante, 2010; Some, 1999). Despite the existence of diverse contemplative practices with roots in cultures on every continent, the construct of "culture" does not commonly appear in writings on contemplative studies and practices. Dorjee (2016) acknowledges that the cultural and contextual factors involved in contemplative practice have not received sufficient attention. Although it is important to broaden the scope of contemplative inquiry to include practices beyond those considered "Eastern," caution is warranted. The fascination of white European-descended people with "exotic" cultures and the transportation of native cultural practices from their original source to a Western context can be problematic (Young & Haley, 2009). Cultural appropriation is a complex topic and not the focus of this paper; however, it is important to understand the dynamics of power and the colonization of indigenous practices as

well as the need for cross-cultural respect and humility (Snavely, 2001; Surmitis, Fox, & Gutierrez, 2018). The emphasis here is on illuminating the culturally embedded nature of both the origins and delivery of contemplative practices, particularly meditation, in order to enhance cultural attunement with HOMMS people-of-color groups.

Two central concepts in writings on meditation and contemplative practice are "mind" and "self." Cultural psychology, cultural anthropology, and cultural neuroscience converge in research findings indicating that culture is inseparable from both (Ames & Fiske, 2010; Barrett et al., 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 2010). From the interdisciplinary perspective of interpersonal neurobiology, Siegel (2016) defines the mind as "an embodied and relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information" (p. 37) and suggests that "our minds are a part of an interacting, interconnected system that involves our bodies and brains, as well as the environment in which we live, including our social relationships" (p. 41). This understanding of the mind is congruent with African and indigenous conceptions, as well as being informed by multiple scientific disciplines from neuroscience to physics. The concept of self also appears frequently in contemplative studies literature (e.g., self-awareness, self-regulation, self-transcendence). In contrast with typical views of self as a single, independent, embodied individual, Siegel (2016) suggests that self is an emergent property of the mind and thus both embodied and relational. Kitayama, Duffy, and Uchida (2014) contend that the experience of "self" is a cultural mode of being. Cultural and relational understandings of self are reflected in African ideas of *ubuntu* ("I am because we are") and "extended self" (Nobles, 2006; Edwards, Makunga, Ngcobo, & Dhlomo, 2004), Native American concepts of *Mitakuye Oyasin* ("we are all related") and "the web of life" (Crazy Bull, 2013; Gone, 2010), the presence of "interdependent self-construal" in Asian cultures (Han et al., 2013), as well as in a worldview of fundamental interconnectedness present in many indigenous cultural contexts (e.g., the Maori as discussed in Rua, Hodgetts, & Stolte, 2017). These understandings extend the locus of self to include family, community, culture, ancestors, and the natural world. Emerging from the scientific underpinnings of interpersonal neurobiology, Siegel (2016) offers the term *mwe* as an integrated identity that "synergistically combines our embodied and our relational nature" (p. 323) and suggests that "the self is not bound by skull or skin" (p. 324). Consistent with African and indigenous beliefs existing for centuries, he encourages health and healing practices that move toward manifesting our interconnected existence in the ways we live with and treat each other. Implications of these ideas of mind and self suggest that contemplative practice applications that emphasize individualism (e.g., detachment and separation, control and mastery, appealing to personal success and happiness) may not resonate with people who have more collectivistic or communal sensibilities. It is important to avoid imposing generic practices that lack thoughtful consideration of the dynamics of culture and context. The remainder of this article will describe the foundations and framework of this author's *SOUL* approach as a contribution to efforts that explicitly include consideration of culture and context in contemplative pedagogy and practice.

INTRODUCING "SOUL": A CULTURALLY INSPIRED AND CONTEXTUALLY INFORMED APPROACH TO CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE

> I got somethin' that makes me wanna shout.
>
> I got somethin' that tells me what it's all about.
>
> I got soul
>
> and I'm superbad.
>
> —James Brown, "Superbad"

> [CONTEMPLATIVE TRANSLATION:
>
> I am connected to an inner aliveness that is compelled into expression;
>
> I am connected to an inner wisdom where I can find personal and collective truths;
>
> I am connected to the deepest essence of my being, an energy that stirs and moves me;
>
> I know my innate dignity and worth, that I am a person of value with gifts to share in the world.]

With its roots in the African American tradition of "soul" (understood here as a deeply felt inner attunement and connectedness that moves one to inspired expression and resonates with collective experience), the chorus of James Brown's iconic song "Superbad" expresses the sensibility of soulfulness. While the genesis and inspiration for exploring the idea of "soulfulness" came out of my own African American cultural influences (particularly music, dance, poetry, and the civil rights movement), as an academic I have immersed myself in the literature on everything "soul." The SOUL approach is informed by understandings of soul from spiritual-religious, literary, artistic, psychological, and cultural perspectives (Cousineau, 1994). I had a powerful experience of synchronicity as unrelated literatures and contexts converged and a synergistic conceptualization of a soulfulness orientation began to take form. Four core features of soul emerge from these perspectives: (a) a sense of depth or deepness, (b) an aliveness characterized by experiential and feeling modalities, (c) qualities of truth and authenticity, and (d) a resource for healing necessary for "wholeness" (along with mind, heart, and body). I offer the following working definition of soulfulness emerging from these convergences. Soulfulness is *the quality of experiencing life in a deeply connected and connecting way, an enlivened inner attunement that illuminates authentic lived experience and radiates into outer expression.* It is an "interconnected aliveness" that is often experienced as a resonating, liberating, life-enhancing, spiritually-infused energy of deep connectivity and inspired expression.

Soulfulness is further conceptualized as an empowered and empowering energy comprised of four elements: essence, experience, expression, and engagement (see Figure 1). Incorporating a soulfulness-oriented approach (the "S" and "O" in the SOUL acronym) involves activation of these interrelated aspects of soulfulness: the soul of the person (essence), the soul of living (experience and expression), and the soul of con-

nectedness (engagement). *The soul of the person* refers to contact with the deepest core of being where one feels personal and collective truths—where individual, communal, and transcendent aspects of identity are experienced and embodied in a single person. From a spiritual perspective, the soul of the person can also be understood as the intersection of our humanness and our divinity. *The soul of living* refers to the quality of living soulfully, deeply connected to both the experiential and expressive aspects of life. It honors emotional experiencing and reflects a diasporic African cultural way of being. It involves the willingness to contact our raw "whole-soul" experiencing and the courage to fully engage and creatively express the range of our lived experience—the triumphs and tears, the courage and the fears, the love we make and the losses we take. Finally, *the soul of connectedness* is related to the concept that soul is more than personal and extends into the collective space (Hillman, 1996; Moore, 2016). Facilitating this aspect of soulfulness means tuning in to the soul of others and the soul of the world. It is a connected and engaged way of being that arises from and enhanced by the other elements of soulfulness (essence, experience, and expression). It involves a sense of responsibility for others as well as for the social and physical environment. The engagement element reflects a moral imperative emerging from a realization of our interconnectedness that demands liberation and justice. Soulfulness involves listening to inner stirrings and allowing oneself to "be moved," experientially connecting to the beauty and miracles of the natural environment, to treasured values and one's sense of calling and purpose, as well as to the troubles and suffering in and of the world.

The "U" in the SOUL acronym reflects the *unitive* intention of affirming and facilitating connection. Soulfulness is fundamentally relational and rooted in the African concept of *ubuntu*, our spiritually infused and interconnected humanity (Edwards et al., 2004; Washington, 2010); it is also related to Buber's "I-Thou" relationship, the intersubjective space, and second-person experiencing (Gunnlaugson, 2011). Soulfulness promotes a sense of human belonging through resonance with shared experience and communal togetherness both within groups and across differences. It includes move-

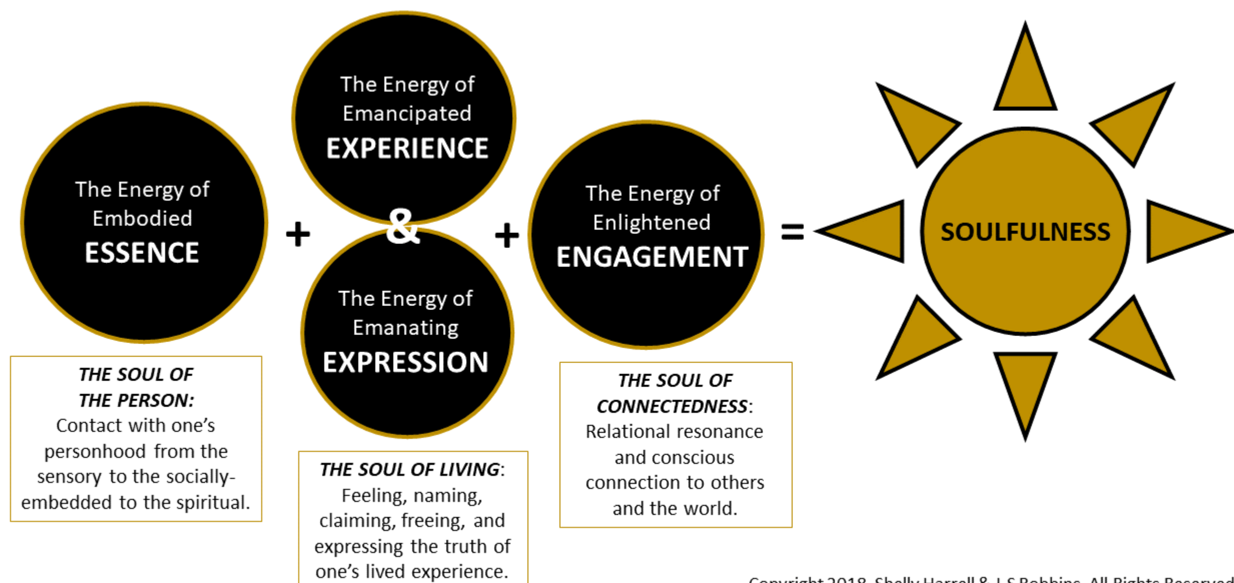

Figure 1. The four elements of soulfulness.

ment toward wholeness, harmony, and alignment of the multiple, coexisting aspects of living. The inclusive and integrative energy of soulfulness makes room for both the individual and the collective. This fundamental relationality also involves that ongoing and often challenging dance between our inner and outer lives, the meeting of internal and external experience.

Soulfulness is strongly rooted in the dynamics of the struggle for emancipation of body, mind, heart, and spirit and has an explicit *liberatory* (the "L" in the acronym) function. This includes efforts to resist, deconstruct, dismantle, overcome, and transcend systemic and internalized oppression experienced as devaluation, dehumanization, and discrimination. This feature of soulfulness is inspired by aspects of African American "soul" related to strength in adversity and a spirit of activism. Expressions of soulfulness are a testimony of one's experiences and struggles in the context of oppression, including finding joy and collective affirmation despite external events and conditions (hooks, 2003). Thus, soulfulness can be also understood as the liberated and liberating experience and expression of personal and collective struggles to survive, overcome, and thrive. Soulfulness includes a "we shall overcome" spirit that both cultivates and expresses resilience (personal and collective), as well as serving as resistance to external oppression such that it does not extinguish our inner fire, take our power, or steal our joy.

One of the central characteristics of soul that emerges from the interdisciplinary literature is its status as an emotional and experiential (vs. cognitive or mental) phenomenon. The emotional context of soul is deeply embedded in its expressions through music, dance, and the testimony of lived experience in communal contexts where others can bear witness. From profound despair to exuberant joy, soulfulness is something that is felt and shared. The centrality of feeling and intuition as "ways of knowing" are critical in historically oppressed populations (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001). There is wisdom in emotion, and emotion is part of the path to wisdom. Emotion science and affective neuroscience suggest emotion is necessary for our survival and optimal functioning (Izard, 2009; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2012). Emotion signals for us to pay attention and provides a compass for moving toward or away; it communicates important information about our experiences in the world and provides cues on how to navigate threats and challenges. Emotion evolved in the human species to facilitate adaptation and relational connectedness for survival (Izard, 2009). The pathologizing of emotional expressiveness in nondominant groups (women, African Americans, etc.) can be understood as a strategy that cuts people off from their experience and leaves them vulnerable to collusion with their own oppression. In the context of external displays of friendliness and politeness from dominant group members that can mask hostile sentiments, as well as bias in news media and research, it is important for HOMMS groups to learn to trust their experience and elevate alternative ways of knowing truth. Associating emotionality with irrationality, immaturity, primitivity, lack of self-control, or danger encourages the suppression of emotion and silences truth-telling disclosures. Soulful emotional experiencing is not the same as dysregulated emotionality; experiencing uncomfortable or painful feelings in the service of acknowledging, naming, processing, and working

through emotion can be healthy and adaptive. Contemplative practices provide strategies and opportunities for these processes; however it is important to be mindful of the manner in which contemplative concepts such as equanimity are conveyed to avoid pathologizing emotional experience and expression.

Cultural-Contextual Influences on Soulfulness

> I've known rivers: I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins. My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
>
> —Langston Hughes

> Culture is part of the soul. (Duran, Firehammer, & Gonzalez, 2008, p. 288)

Cultural influences on the conceptualization of soulfulness draw primarily from two sources: (a) African American experience and diasporic African cultural expressions (Jones, 2003; Jones & Campbell 2011; Myers, 1988, 2003; Nobles, 2006), and (b) the dynamics of living in the larger sociohistorical and sociopolitical contexts of racism and other intersectional oppressions (e.g., sexism, classism, heterosexism) relevant to HOMMS people of color. In addition, writings by Native American and Latinx scholars and practitioners have been particularly influential in elucidating the significance of culture in the experience of "soul." In the Native context, shared cultural themes of spirituality, communal orientation, and a history of collective trauma are present (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Duran, 2006; Duran, Firehammer, & Gonzalez, 2008; Gone, 2010). In the Latinx context, liberation psychology, critical consciousness, and healing from colonialism have also played a central role in the consideration of sociopolitical dynamics (Anzaldua, 1987, 2002; Comas-Diaz, 2008; Freire, 1993; Martin-Baro, 1996; Montero, 2009).

Commonly identified themes reflecting an African cultural ethos include the centrality of spirituality, a worldview of interconnectedness, expressive creativity and inventive improvisation, orality (storytelling, drumming, song, testimony of experience), and a communal orientation (Jones, 2003; Myers, 2003; Nobles, 2006). These provide an important foundation for the cultural grounding of SOUL, as well as establishing the beginnings of a framework to inform the design of soulfulness practices. Building upon these cultural origins is the special significance of "soul" in the African American experience, which has been powerfully described in both academic and popular literature and through poetry, music, and many other cultural expressions (Rudinow, 2010; Ward, 2004).

Hopson and Hopson (1998) frame soul as the central organizing concept for understanding the psychological and spiritual health of African Americans, identifying the primary dimensions of soul as spirituality, openness, unity, and love. They also speak powerfully about the damaging consequences when one becomes detached from soul or when layers of pain hide or bury it, naming alienation from culture and

community as being among the factors that disrupt soul connection. Author and activist bell hooks (2003) discusses a "philosophy of soulfulness," which holds that culturally-grounded expressions of soul (e.g., resilience, grace, compassion, integrity, pride, resistance, endurance, faith, hope, and the persistence of joy) are what have historically sustained African Americans and maintained wholeness, self-esteem, positive identity, and a strong sense of our humanity that could not be destroyed by the ongoing assaults of racism (p. 219). She contends that surrendering "the ability to feel," losing the ability to imagine possibilities, and accepting externally imposed definitions reflect attempts to manage the cultural, interpersonal and systemic violence of racism and constitute a type of "soul murder" (p. 187). Both Hopson and Hopson (1998) and hooks (2003) suggest that connection to our soulfulness facilitates contact with innermost experience, activates passion for life, and is a path toward decolonizing minds and building self-esteem. Both works identify a variety of contemplative practices that help build a bridge to soul (e.g., inner listening, prayer, self-affirmations, emotional experiencing, cultivation of compassion).

Soul reverberates and resonates; the power of validating shared experience is healing and affirming in the context of feeling others' "soul." Aretha Franklin stated that soul "is transmitted in some way" and affirmed its "deep" and "empathetic" nature, reflecting the importance of expressing and sharing it. This is manifested prominently in the African American church, which has traditionally provided a place for the soulful and communal expression of lived experience (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). As another example, "soul food" can be understood as both experiential and relational, serving as a symbol of comfort, nurturance, and community. Through preparation of recipes passed down over generations that reflect creative uses of available foods, soul food feeds the soul by communicating caring and providing a sense of connection to cultural traditions and to the family and friends with whom it is shared. However, soul music and its related dances are the epitome of African American soul (Banfield, 2015; Burnim & Maultsby, 2006; Jones & Jones, 2001; Rudinow, 2010; Spencer, 2017; Werner, 2006); they are forms of emotional expression and emotional release, as well as avenues for creativity, communication, communion, and building a sense of community and belonging (Beausoleil & LeBaron, 2013; Price, 2013; Some, 1999). Song, dance, and drumming are central elements of communal rituals in African diasporic cultures, as well as in many cultures globally.

The genre of "soul music" and the infusion of soul into multiple musical forms (e.g., jazz, blues, funk, gospel, hip-hop, rap) has been identified as central to understanding African American experience in multiple domains of life, including the personal, familial, religious, and political. Soul music is a genre that touches and awakens the soul through the expression of the depths and heights of human experience. This original African American cultural product, with roots in continental African music, is adopted and embraced in popular culture throughout the world. Banfield (2015) suggests that "anytime you talk about the gifts of Black folk, you must begin with the music. This gift is the same ocean of great musical streams of Black tradition where raising your voice

and having the courage to speak from the depths of your soul touches other souls to keep them moving as they try and make their way in the darkness. Soul music" (p. 85). Improvisation and spontaneity are characteristic of both African American music and dance, reflecting an aspect of African American cultural sensibilities that encourages the emergence of natural expression such that everything does not have to be tightly planned or choreographed.

Expressions of soul have been voices of resistance, protest, and empowerment; affirmations of cultural identity and pride; declarations of experienced and observed racism; and testimonies of overcoming and surviving oppression (hooks, 2003; Hopson & Hopson, 1998). It is not by chance that the height of soul music occurred during the civil rights and Black Power movements. References to "soul power" conveyed the notion that connection to soul is empowering for persons and communities, while referring to each other as "soul brother" or "soul sister" communicated kinship, belonging, and a sense of being seen and known. Among the soul-related strategies emerging from the African American experience of racism include: facilitating connection to the deepest core of oneself, untouched by the hate, violence, and dehumanization; engaging in authentic relationships where one can take off the mask of acceptability to whites (Fanon, 1967) and know that life behind the "veil" of racism is affirmed and understood (Du Bois, 1903); and staying "woke" to the realities of oppression and its dynamics.

The Liberatory Emphasis of SOUL

> We have to talk about liberating minds as well as liberating society.
>
> —Angela Davis

The sociohistorical and sociopolitical context of oppression supports the inclusion and relevance of liberation themes in wellness and educational strategies for HOMMS groups. The areas of liberation psychology (Martin-Baro, 1996), pedagogy (Freire, 1993), and theology (Cone, 2004) help to locate liberation in contemplative practice by attending to the internal processes and resources needed for resisting, healing, and transforming oppression. From a Native American cultural context, Duran, Firehammer, and Gonzalez (2008) discuss the nature of the cultural "soul wound," conceptualized as the intergenerational impact of devastating historical trauma that causes destruction at a deep soul level requiring a spiritualized soul-healing. This soul-wounding takes similar forms in other cultural contexts such as the Maafa, i.e., the African Holocaust (Nobles, 2006) and what DeGruy (2017) describes as post-traumatic slave syndrome, as well as the post colonization stress syndrome among Latinx peoples discussed by Comas-Diaz (2008). These constructs, which reflect the damage done by both external violence and internalized oppression to the soul of HOMMS populations of color throughout the world, are brought to the door of contemplative practice in the oft-quoted statement by South African activist Steven Biko (1978) that "the most potent weapon in the hand of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (p. 68).

The lyrics in Bob Marley's "Redemption Song," "emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds," further emphasizes the potential place of contemplative practice in liberation efforts. According to Rainey (2015), the contemplative practice of meditation "is like an Underground Railroad, it can provide us with a way out of another kind of slavery—an enslaved mind" (p. 31). Thus, central to the work of liberation is the task of decolonizing the mind (Fanon, 1967; Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2012), and contemplative practices have an important role to play in this regard (King, 2018; Kyodo Williams, Owens, & Syedallah, 2016). An African proverb states that "when lions become historians, hunters will cease to be heroes." In contexts of oppression, power dynamics operate to maintain the status quo, such that voices and stories of HOMMS communities are often marginalized, silenced, distorted, or told through the lens of dominance by someone from the dominant group. Contemplative practices can facilitate making contact with our suppressed or silenced internal voices, thus becoming our own historians personally and collectively.

The term "consciousness" is used in the context of oppression and liberation studies in different ways than those typically discussed in contemplative studies. In his groundbreaking *Souls of Black Folks*, W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) introduced the concept of "double consciousness" to identify the "peculiar sensation" of the coexisting and often conflicting identities of being both Black and American as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 4). Franz Fanon (1967) explored this dynamic in the larger context of colonialism and the psychological dilemmas of persons of African descent. In liberation psychology, *critical consciousness* (a translation of Freire's term *conscientização*) refers to critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and dialogue, including awareness of oppression, sociopolitical dynamics, power asymmetries, and their personal and collective effects (Montero, 2009; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). The contemporary terminology around "wokeness" (being and staying "woke") is similarly about cultivating a level of awareness of oppression in one's surroundings. Contemplative practices involving critical-consciousness methods also emphasize expanded awareness, connection to lived experience, and dialogic methods (Freire, 1993; Montero, 2009). Roderick J. Watts's Young Warriors program, to name one example, utilized contemplative processes through engaging young men of color in groups to explore their thoughts, feelings, and meanings in the context of rap music and observing their neighborhood environment (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999). Anzaldua (2002) focused on the inner-outer awareness dialectic in her 7-stage path of *conocimiento*, which involves moving from a sense of fragmentation to a flexible connectedness that enables personal and collective transformation through linking personal struggles with the struggles of others. The contemplative aspects of *conocimiento* are primary in her description of it as an opening of the senses and multileveled attention. She suggests that "breaking out of your mental and emotional prison and deepening the range of perception enables you to link inner reflection and vision—the mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, and subtle bodily

awareness—with social, political action and lived experiences" (p. 542). More recently, Comas-Diaz (2008) has introduced *Spirita*, a psycho-spiritual process centering the subjective experience of women of color to overcome "their oppressed mentality, and achieve a critical knowledge of themselves" (p. 13). These efforts to utilize contemplative processes to facilitate critical consciousness bring the intentional and contextual aspects of meditation and contemplative practices to the forefront in order to increase relevance and sustain motivation for HOMMS groups. All of these practices can be understood as efforts to save and heal our souls.

Engagement in culturally rooted contemplative practices has been part of surviving and thriving for African Americans and other HOMMS groups for centuries. However, given the widespread cultural alienation and disconnectedness of the 21st century, it is worthwhile to explore building upon these practices in ways informed by contemporary contemplative studies. Contemplative practices are valuable in ongoing efforts toward liberation and resistance. The seduction of society's distractions from the realities of oppression has particularly dangerous consequences, and taking the time to check in with one's experiences and perceptions—to observe and reflect—is necessary for awareness and survival. A priority of soulfulness-oriented contemplative practices is contributing to the undoing of internalized oppression (i.e., the acceptance and adoption of externally imposed, inferiority- and deviance-oriented definitions of one's identity, value, and worth). The process of disentangling dehumanizing and fragmented ideas of HOMMS groups from the truth ("soul") of persons and communities can be facilitated by contemplative practices, which provide opportunities for the affirmation of a communal and transcendent identity beyond the masks created and worn in the service of survival, coping, adaptation, and efforts to be palatable and "acceptable" to the world.

THE SOUL-CENTERED PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

The SOUL-Centered Practice (SCP) framework is offered as a foundation to guide theory, research, and practice. It aims to: (a) provide a base for inclusion of the convergent and interdisciplinary themes of "soul" (aliveness, deepness, authenticity, and a healing/transformational resource), (b) center the defining cultural-contextual features of soul inspired primarily by the experiences and expressions of black persons of African descent (expressiveness, connectedness, resilience, creativity, and spirituality), and (c) incorporate themes of liberation from oppression at multiple levels of analysis (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic) as reflected in the experiences of HOMMS people of color more inclusively. In addition to literature on contemplative pedagogy and meditation (e.g., Brach, 2013; Goldstein & Kornfield, 2001; Kabat-Zinn, 2012; Plante, 2010; Roth, 2014; Zajonc, 2009), the SCP framework is informed by multicultural psychologies (culture-centered, liberation, feminist), trauma-informed care, mindfulness and acceptance-based third-wave behavioral therapies, and the family of humanistic psychologies (person-centered, existential, experiential, transpersonal). Cultural neuroscience and interpersonal neurobiology (Siegel, 2016), stress science and behavioral/lifestyle

medicine (Walsh, 2011), methods of critical consciousness (Montero, 2009), adult and transformative learning processes (Ashby, 2013; Dirkx, 1997), and diverse spiritual traditions (Plante, 2010), have also informed the development of SOUL-centered practices.

The SCP framework seeks to provide a structure for integrating soulfulness into contemplative work in the service of increasing cultural attunement particularly with HOMMS populations of color. The framework can be utilized to guide cultural adaptations of existing contemplative practices that have demonstrated effectiveness (e.g., mindfulness meditation, journaling), as well as a foundation for developing innovative culturally specific contemplative exercises. The specific implementation should always be "local" in that the actual delivery should be implemented with an understanding of the particular cultural and contextual dynamics. This author has begun developing and piloting a set of specific SOUL-centered interventions and practices emerging from the SCP framework. To date, these practices have been utilized in teaching and training mental health professionals, in retreats with African American adults, in community-based meditation classes, in individual consultation with individuals and groups, and as part of a resilience-focused stress management program. In the latter, the soulfulness orientation is reflected in the program's primary goal of moving "from stressed out to energized within." While most of the applications have involved culturally diverse participants, it has also been observed that the practices appear to resonate strongly with many white participants, suggesting the potential for more inclusive relevance. Infused in all practices are the guiding intentions of cultural attunement and cultural humility. Further, SCPs have a larger intent to awaken, nurture, illuminate, and activate the elements of soulfulness (i.e., embodied essence, emancipated experience, emanating expression, and enlightened engagement) in the service of healing, wellness, transformation, and liberation. After a description of core soulfulness and contemplative processes, modalities and domains of practice will be discussed, and a brief overview of some SOUL-centered practices will be presented to provide a glimpse into the range of potential applications and adaptations. Finally, special attention will be given to the developing practice of soulfulness meditation.

Table 1 presents the four primary components of the SCP framework: (a) core contemplative processes, (b) core soulfulness processes, (c) modalities of practice, and (d) application domains. The first and second columns present the core processes and activating principles (presented as cultural idioms of expression) that serve as the foundation for SOUL-centered practices. These fifteen SCP *core processes* are the fundamental qualities and mechanisms responsible for hypothesized effects and outcomes (i.e., enhanced well-being, optimal functioning, and quality of life at personal, relational, and collective levels of analysis). The *activating principles* are framed as guiding phrases that are intended to trigger an experiential connection to the core processes; these principles are used as verbal entry points to various practices and serve to introduce the core processes in a way that can feel familiar and culturally resonant. Most of the phrases can be described as expressions generated by, commonly used by, or familiar to African Americans and which typically resonate in settings where African American sensibilities are likely to be present. However, given that African American culture has

a strong and influential presence in the larger US culture (with people from different racial-ethnic groups adopting its styles and expressions), it can be posited that the activating principles may resonate more broadly. It should be noted that distinctions between core contemplative and core soulfulness processes are not rigid; however, the identified soulfulness processes are more specifically reflective of and congruent with African and African American cultural features and more explicitly targeted in SCPs.

Core Contemplative Processes

Core contemplative processes and principles informed by mindfulness and other meditative strategies are presented in the first column of Table 1. *Contact* refers to being "present in the present," an experiential awareness of what is happening in the here-and-now: present-moment "be"-ing without striving to "do," acquire, or accomplish. *Connectedness* involves close witnessing of internal and external experience; it is deep listening and attunement to one's own embodied and lived experience, one's deepest and most authentic voice. *Clarity* is about the willingness to see without distortion or denial, to live wide awake and face life in all of its peaks and valleys and everything in between; it is "being woke to what is" in oneself and the world. *Commencement* is about starting anew with fresh eyes and openness to unseen possibilities ("beginner's mind"), the ability to start over in each moment, and seeing things as if for the first time;

Table 1
The SOUL-Centered Practice (SCP) Framework: Processes, Principles, and Practices

CORE CONTEMPLATIVE PROCESSES AND PRINCIPLES	**CORE SOULFULNESS PROCESSES AND PRINCIPLES**	**MODALITIES OF PRACTICE**	**APPLICATION DOMAINS OF PRACTICE**
Contact *("Right Here, Right Now")*	Communion *("I Feel You/I See You")*	Meditation	Meditative practices
Connectedness *("Bearing Witness")*	Centering *("Remember Who You Are")*	Movement	Wisdom-centered practices
Clarity *("It Is What It Is")*	Congruence *("Keepin' It Real")*	Music	Expressive-creative practices
Commencement *("Born Again")*	Calling *("Soul Power")*	Meaning	Relational practices
Calm *("It's All Good")*	Consciousness (Critical) *("Free Your Mind")*	Meeting	Experiential practices
Compassion *("The Struggle Is Real")*	Creativity *("Focus and Flow")*	Making	Daily practices
Change *("Roll with It")*	Courage *("And Still I Rise")*		Spirit-infused practices
	Coexistence *("Everything Is Everything")*		

it includes release and forgiveness of past transgressions. *Calm* refers to settling into an inner place of peace, stillness, serenity, and equanimity; not being at war with oneself or one's own thoughts and feelings; and finding that place of refuge from the storms of life. *Compassion* involves activating heartfelt feeling for the vulnerabilities and struggles of our shared humanity, acknowledging one's own pain and holding it with caring, feeling the energy of agape love and goodwill for the suffering and pain of others, and honoring the dignity and humanity of all people. *Change* embraces the wisdom of understanding that everything changes, evolves, transforms, shifts, ends; realizing and accepting of the inevitable ebb and flow of experience; and honoring the seasons and natural cycles of life. As a contemplative approach, SCPs must be informed by these fundamental qualities and principles.

Core Soulfulness Processes and Principles: The Eight Cs of Soulfulness

The second column in Table 1 identifies the *eight Cs of soulfulness* that reflect its culturally grounded features: *communion, centeredness, congruence, calling, consciousness, creativity, courage,* and *coexistence*. These are points of emphasis that characterize and are intentionally targeted in SOUL-centered practices. This author hypothesizes that integration of these features will improve the receptivity, cultural attunement, and effectiveness of contemplative practices for African Americans and other HOMMS people-of-color groups. One or more of them should thus be explicit areas of focus in the design and implementation of soulfulness practices. Theoretically, the more features a practice involves, the more intensely it is likely to resonate with culturally diverse HOMMS groups. Table 2 describes the culturally grounded origins and practice objective of each quality. An example of a SOUL-centered practice that incorporates several of the eight Cs is the *Living Wisdom Naming Ceremony*. Drawing upon the qualities of *communion, centering, creativity, calling* and *congruence*, this communal process involves generating an original name that reflects admired qualities of one's ancestors (familial and/or cultural) followed by introducing oneself to the group using this name. African *Adinkra* symbols are frequently incorporated into an artistic process where crests or meditation stones are created for ongoing meditative practices that summon and serve as a reminder of ancestral wisdom that can ground and direct one's way of being, interactions with others, and choices in daily life.

Modalities and Domains of SOUL-Centered Practices and Applications

The last two columns of Table 1 present applied aspects of the SCP framework in the form of modalities for delivery and domains of practice. A diversity of modalities are used in soulfulness practices that can be clustered into the "six Ms": *meditation, music, movement, meeting* (interpersonal interaction), *meaning* (reflective exploration of wisdom, values, purpose), and *making* (creative expression). The design of exercises can include a single modality or multiple modalities that are foundationally centered in core contemplative and soulfulness processes. Music is regularly incorporated into SOUL-centered practices due to its ability to touch the soul, provide affirmation

Table 2
Culturally Grounded Qualities of SOUL: The Eight Cs of Soulfulness

Soulfulness Quality	Culturally Grounded Foundation	*SOUL* Practice Objective
Communion	Interconnectedness and relationality; ethos of ubuntu	Facilitate connection, belongingness, relational resonance, and agape love
Centering	Rootedness and identity; cultural and ancestral grounding	Facilitate groundedness, secure foundation, contact with inner wisdom/truths, reconnection to deepest beliefs and values
Congruence	Authenticity; alignment, harmony and balance (with self, others, nature, spirit)	Facilitate authentic experiencing and interaction, speaking and living one's truth; consistency between values and behavior ("walk the talk")
Calling	Spiritually-infused inspiration and purpose	Facilitate inspired purposefulness and meaning; transcendent experience; passion and aliveness
Consciousness (Critical)	Liberation from oppression	Facilitate emancipatory processes at multiple levels of analysis (experiential, interpersonal, societal)
Courage	Perseverance and resistance; rising from adversity	Facilitate empowerment and resilience; stepping out of comfort zone and living fully
Creativity	Expressiveness and improvisation	Facilitate creative processes and expression
Coexistence	Holistic orientation; diunital logic; multidimensionality of phenomena	Facilitate wholeness, inclusion, integrative processes, "both-and" consciousness; intersectionality; dialectical awareness of co-existing opposing energies

of shared experience, shift emotion and consciousness, and facilitate reconnection to cultural and universal wisdom. The seven domains that organize the design and implementation of soulfulness-oriented contemplative practices are listed in last column of Table 1 with more details and sample practices presented in Table 3. Several of the examples refer to specific soulfulness practices that are in development or being implemented in the author's current workshops, retreats, and psychologically-informed interventions. For example, the *SoulSongs* practice involves careful and intentional song selection, mindful listening, silent reflection, collective testimony, and personal exploration and discovery processes. Another example is the *Collective Wisdom Emer-*

Table 3
Description and Examples of SOUL-Centered Application Domains

SOUL-Centered Practice Domain	**Description**	**Examples**
Meditative Soulfulness	Guided meditations and visualizations that make "soul" contact ("*SOULitations*"); emphasis on unitive and liberatory themes; use of mantras and symbols	*Soulitude* processes (e.g., *Àse* mantra *SoulWord* meditation)
Wisdom-Centered Soulfulness	Integration of quotes, proverbs, sayings, poetry, lyrics, passages from sacred texts, etc.; connection to and/or generation of personal and collective wisdom	*Collective Wisdom Emergence* (CWE) group exercise
Expressive-Creative Soulfulness	Expressions of the soul through journaling, creative writing (e.g., poems, stories, lyrics), art-making, music and singing, movement and dance, invention and innovation	*SoulSongs* meditation
Relational Soulfulness	Deep listening and fully engaged dialogue; mutuality of being seen, heard, understood, and respected; honoring human dignity, affirming shared humanity and experience; facilitation of belonging and community	*Soul-to-Soul Dialogue* for couples
Experiential Soulfulness	Experiences of feeling deeply "moved," awe, flow, etc.; visiting "soulful" places (e.g., nature's beauty and miracles); witnessing the human capacity for inspired excellence	*SoulTreks* (meditative outings in nature or to artistic performances or exhibits)
Daily Soulfulness	Intentional moment-to-moment awareness of what touches the soul; opportunities to bring daily and routine activities "alive" through enhanced sensory experience; infusing passion, meaning, and gratitude into everyday experience and events	*My Soulfulness* list and log
Spirit-Infused Soulfulness	Integration of any of the above with explicit transcendent elements (e.g., ancestral connection, reference to God, Spirit or Higher Power; religious prayer); facilitation of spiritual connection and experience	*"Living Wisdom" Naming Ceremony* (identification with the spirit of ancestors, inner "wisdom warriors")

gence (CWE; Harrell et al., 2017) group exercise that uses culturally-congruent quotes and meditative processes to stimulate connection to inner wisdom and co-construct collective wisdom relevant to selected themes such as truth, flexibility, surrender, faith, and empowerment. As mindful awareness is fundamental to SOUL-centered practice, the next section will focus on cultural considerations in mindfulness meditation with implications for implementation in diverse cultural contexts.

Soulfulness Meditation (aka *Meditation for Liberation*)

> The soul's guiding light still shines no matter the extent of our collective blindness. At any moment, at any time, we can turn toward this light to renew our spirits and restore our souls. (hooks, 2003, p. 225)

The power of turning inward and the illumination of the resources found there affirm the functions of meditation as preventive, restorative, and a methodology for opening the reservoir of soulfulness within. Soulfulness meditation is offered as a cultural adaptation of mindfulness that retains its core elements while centering the experience of soul as a vehicle for enhancing attunement with black people of African descent, culturally diverse HOMMS populations, and anyone for whom the cultural-contextual themes expressed in the *8 Cs of Soulfulness* resonate strongly. The unitive and liberatory foci of SOUL-centered practices are explicit in soulfulness meditation such it is also referred to by the author as "meditation for liberation."

While all contemplative practices are meditative in nature (i.e., they involve attention and awareness), the term *meditation* is typically used to refer to a more specific set of practices. Kabat-Zinn (2012) defines meditation as "any way in which we engage in (1) systematically regulating our attention and energy (2) thereby influencing and possibly transforming the quality of our experience (3) in the service of realizing the full range of our humanity and (4) our relationships to others and the world" (p. 1). Oman (2010) describes four features common to most forms of meditation: set-aside time for dedicated attention to the practice; integration of virtues such as compassion, gratitude, love, or wisdom; centering or stabilizing methods; and spiritually-based models, teachers, or foundational literature. Dass (1978) identified several "paths" of meditation, including mindfulness, concentration, mantra, contemplation, devotion, visualization, and movement. Four specific meditation practices have received relatively more attention in the literature: mindfulness, transcendental meditation, passage meditation, and centering/contemplative prayer (Barrett et al., 2014; Plante, 2010; Van Dam et al., 2018). Over the past two decades, mindfulness meditation has been a focus of research and practice in contemplative studies. Mindfulness is generally defined as present moment awareness with an attitude of non-judgment toward one's internal experience (Kabat-Zinn, 2012). Three primary processes, or mechanisms of action, have been suggested: attention, awareness, and intention (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freeman, 2006). In addition to its increasing integration into the mainstream of education, health care, and even corporate contexts, mindfulness seems to be everywhere in the dominant culture's public

space and is an example of a contemplative *process* where the *practice* increasingly reflects dominant European-descended cultural sensibilities (Purser, 2015; Wilson, 2014). It has become a billion-dollar industry (Kim, 2018) whose commercialization and "McMindfulness" aspects (pre-packaged, fast, convenient, bite-sized delivery) can undermine the depth and power of the practice (Purser & Loy, 2013).

However, despite its popularity, mindfulness has not been widely embraced outside of the community of predominantly white and middle-class consumers of personal-development services and concerns have been raised regarding its compatibility with lower-income and culturally diverse populations (DeLuca, Kelman & Waelde, 2018; Sobczak & West, 2013; Spears et al., 2017; Tenfelde, Hatchett, & Saban, 2017; Woods-Giscombé & Black, 2010). Specifically, the Westernized cultural presentation of mindfulness may resonate less with people of African, Latinx, and Indigenous/Native origins. Its perceived antithesis to Christian beliefs through its association with Buddhism (specifically the risk of worshiping a false god) can sometimes present a barrier (Tenfelde et al., 2017), although mindfulness has also been identified as a facilitator of prayer and Bible reading (Spears et al., 2017). Recent discussions of potential barriers to mindfulness practice have triggered an increase in the visibility of diversity efforts in meditation programs and practices (Tenfelde et al., 2017; Watson et al., 2016). Although efforts have been made to bring mindfulness to people-of-color communities, as well as settings such as schools, VA hospitals, sports teams, and prisons (Vallejo & Amaro, 2009), it does not always "take." Despite growing efforts to increase the inclusivity of mindfulness, it remains very "white" and characterized by expensive classes and retreats that make it inaccessible to many people of color (Magee, 2016; Yang, 2017). Some meditation settings are beginning to offer specific "people of color" workshops and retreats (Oppenheimer, 2015) and this is an important development. However, it is necessary that these efforts not only attend to issues of representation (i.e., "colored bodies" in the room) but also explore how the practices can be delivered in ways that are experienced as culturally syntonic.

There are multiple cultural considerations with respect to the presentation and teaching of mindfulness practices. A white, European-descended racial-cultural lens has strongly influenced how mindfulness is taught in secularized contexts such as the United States, Europe, and Australia. This cultural sensibility informs the delivery of practices that are often believed to be colorblind with a co-existing lack awareness of their own embedded cultural expressions (Magee, 2016). The language, pacing, stories and jokes shared, metaphors or wisdom quotes used, selection of particular aspects of mindfulness to emphasize, and overall "vibe" may not resonate universally nor consistently be experienced as positive. Teachings delivered in a measured, whispered, monotonic voice can be experienced as unfamiliar, "weird," or inconsistent with cultural values of authentic expressiveness, and can be perceived as overcontrolled, detached, and impersonal. This delivery can also be experienced as oppressive, with an implicit message that intense reactions and emotions should be suppressed as they may be abnormal or unwelcome (Yang, 2017). In addition, some meditation classes in-

clude overly "intimate" exercises that require sustained eye contact or physical touching, which may violate cultural norms or be oblivious to historical dynamics of intergroup relations or boundaries related to touch or personal space.

Another area of potentially incongruent practice is lovingkindness meditation, which (from a liberatory practice perspective) can unintentionally collude with the maintenance of a status quo that renders the lived experience of HOMMS group members invisible. Its delivery can emphasize "feel-good" benefits to the meditator who receives internal affirmation of their need to experience themselves as compassionate. However, these benefits frequently occur in a vacuum without feedback from or accountability to "the other" to whom they are sending lovingkindness. As such, real-world intercultural interactions may continue to be microaggressive, with defensiveness displayed when the self-perception of being a kind and loving person is threatened by actual interpersonal feedback. Unfortunately, this feedback may not be directly provided as HOMMS group members may feel pressured to keep any feelings of interpersonal discomfort to themselves so as not to offend others. Finally, marketing materials portraying images of young, thin, healthy, seemingly middle/upper-class, "blissed-out" white people can convey very individualistic and decontextualized messages appealing primarily to values of personal advancement, success, and happiness (Pickert, 2014; Wilson, 2014). These images bear little resemblance to the daily lived experience of many HOMMS people of color and can be perceived as irrelevant and unconcerned with their circumstances. While larger-bodied people of color seem to be appearing more frequently in the mindfulness media, these can be tokenized and objectified within a broader cultural norm and messaging that remains largely unchanged.

A number of recent meta-analyses have found that psychological interventions adapted for culture are more effective than, or as effective as, generic interventions (Hall et al., 2016; Peterson, Villarreal, & Castro, 2016). As such, a growing number of cultural adaptations and culturally specific interventions involving mindfulness and other contemplative practices have been described in the mindfulness-based interventions literature. Several studies have found positive effects and document the participation of HOMMS communities in mindfulness and other contemplative practices (Spears et al., 2017; Toomey & Anhalt, 2016; Watson et al., 2016; Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014). There are increasing examples of cultural adaptations to mindfulness, meditation, and yoga that draw upon cultural values and practices (Alston, 2012; Amaro, Spear, Vallejo, Conron, & Black, 2014; Ashby, 1997; Himelstein, Saul, Garcia-Romeu, & Pinedo, 2014; Le & Gobert, 2015; Magee, 2016; Woods-Giscombé & Black, 2010). A particularly creative example is Rainey (2015), who uses slave narratives and African American cultural content to emphasize themes of liberation in her presentation of mindfulness meditation as a process of moving from slavery to freedom along different stops on the Underground Railroad. Most recently, Angela Rose Black has developed the organization Mindfulness for the People to respond to the overwhelming "whiteness" of the mindfulness community and provide "oppression sensitive mindfulness training" (https://mindfulnessforthepeople.org).

Comprehensive approaches to mindfulness teachings commonly include attention to the body as the primary site of experiential present-moment grounding, and to the heart through the infusion of practices with messages of compassion and love. The importance of experiencing both "bodyfulness" (Caldwell, 2014; Schmalzl, Crane-Godreau, & Payne, 2014) and "heartfulness" (Kabat-Zinn, 2012; Murphy-Shigematsu, 2018) is reflected in the standard set of guided mindfulness practices that typically includes the body scan and lovingkindness meditations. However, "soul" is rarely an explicit focus of these standard practices, which may be related to the secularizing of mindfulness practices such that content associated with spiritual or religious aspects is removed or reframed. It is suggested by this author that the inclusion of soul as a point of entry into broader mindfulness practice deserves to be named more explicitly.

Four entry points—mind, heart, body, and soul—can be conceptualized as different "doors" into the house of mindful awareness and experienced as more or less welcoming in diverse cultural contexts (see Table 4). Enhanced cultural attunement can be facilitated by thoughtful consideration of which door to open first and the manner in which the invitation to enter is extended. Use of music and movement involves both body and soul, and can serve as an invitation to communal connection and a sense of "home" through the selection of culturally resonant pieces (e.g., African drums, Native American flute, Spanish guitar, familiar soul or gospel songs). For HOMMS group members in some contexts, the first door to open may be one of awareness of intersectional social location, sociopolitical dynamics, and sociocultural lived experience. Entering

Table 4
The Four Doors into the House of Mindful Awareness

Dimension ("Door")	**Processes Emphasized**	**Sample Mindful Awareness Practice**
Body	Breath Sensory Experience Interoceptive Awareness Movement	Body Scan Guided Meditation
Mind	Attention Metacognitive Awareness Self-Regulation Decentering	Noticing the activity of the mind without judgment
Heart	Lovingkindness Compassion Gentleness Social Responsibility	Lovingkindness Guided Meditation
Soul	Inner Aliveness/Resonance (being "moved") Authenticity/Truth/Wisdom Spiritual (Inter)connectedness Liberation from Oppression	Music, Art, Poetry, or Sacred Passage Meditation

here is an acknowledgement of "soul wounds" and communicates that this part of lived experience need not be silenced. Use of passages from culturally relevant literature, spoken-word poetry, socially conscious music, or other familiar media that resonate with lived experience are helpful strategies. Ice Cube's lyrics, "check yo self before you wreck yo self," are sometimes evoked by this author to emphasize the preventive importance of looking honestly at the activity of one's inner world to avoid potentially toxic internal processes or damaging external choices and behaviors. More broadly, this author will sometimes introduce meditation as a way to "get your mind right," a phrase that can be relatable in African American contexts. This phrase prompts awareness to not "believe the hype"; it encourages disentangling oneself from problematic or destructive messages and return to deeply-held beliefs and values. Once there is a culturally syntonic welcoming into the larger house of mindful awareness, there is often a greater openness to unfamiliar mindful awareness processes that can be more meaningfully contextualized. Cultural attunement requires that mindfulness be communicated and practiced in ways that are in sync with the rhythms of how people experience and understand their own lives.

SOUL-centered meditative practices focus on cultivating the capacity to make "soul" contact, and mindful awareness facilitates this contact through learning to be more experientially present. It is important to emphasize that a soulfulness approach to meditation is not about reinventing the wheel. The wheel works! Centuries of wisdom from diverse cultural-spiritual traditions and contemporary science converge in support of the effectiveness of meditation for health, well-being, and optimal functioning. However, the mindful awareness "wheel" may need to be driven in different ways by different drivers, or placed on different vehicles that take different routes in order to traverse a wider terrain. It is not one-size-fits-all; no single wheel design is optimal for all vehicles. But a wheel *is* a wheel and it must have basic properties in order to work. The fundamentals that make the mindful awareness wheel "roll" are central to soulfulness, such that foundational mindful awareness processes are taught as part of all SOUL-centered practices. One of the sayings in soulfulness-oriented meditation practice is "The KEY is to BE and to SEE so that WE can all be FREE." The saying captures the mindfulness elements of both presence (*be*) and awareness (*see*), as well as the central soulfulness elements of connectedness (*we*) and liberation (*free*). As Anzaldua (2002) contends, "the struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society" (p. 575).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

This author is committed to the continuing development and evaluation of the conceptual foundations and applications of a soulfulness orientation to contemplative practice. Action research, with its iterative cycles of exploration, reflection, planning, and action to inform change processes, as well as its explicitly participatory and critical perspective, is a congruent strategy for contemplative inquiry (Brydon-Miller, Green-

wood, & Maguire, 2003). Early stages of research will draw upon action research strategies (e.g., facilitating reflective group discussion of experiences with SCPs) to enhance, refine, and optimize concepts and applications. It will also be important to evaluate the extent to which the SOUL-Centered Practice framework core processes, modalities, and domains are reflected in implementation to ensure consistency between theory and practice as well as fidelity to the framework. Utilization of the SCP framework to provide criteria for evaluating specific practices is an important starting point for exploring questions of basic validity regarding whether practices are being delivered as intended. More systematic testing of effectiveness through experimental methods will be incorporated as SCP methods are refined. Since applications are still in development, there is no systematic quantitative data; however, written evaluations, post-program ratings, and anecdotal evidence suggest that the practices are resonant, impactful, and experienced positively. The vision for soulfulness includes not only more culturally attuned applications of meditation and other contemplative practices, but also the potential contribution of SOUL-centered practices to the elevation of our collective well-being as an interconnected human community in the context of ongoing struggles for liberation and social justice.

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