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

Shelly P. Harrell

Abstract

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.

Keywords
culture, African American, soul, contemplative practice, meditation, mindfulness, liberation, oppression

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References


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To learn contemplative practice is to learn what we need so as to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly. It is a deeply revolutionary matter. Wow! He really does put it boldly. Let’s try to unpack what this wise and holy man is saying in his very gifted way. First, contemplation is the key to prayer. Most of us would think that contemplation is prayer, but Williams goes even deeper: it’s a stance that makes prayer possible. Otherwise prayer is just formulas, repeating clichés that we think God likes. Contemplation is resting in God. As Paul says, “We do not know how to pray” (Romans 8:2.


