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Mindful Mindset, Interconnectedness and Dignity

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Abstract

There is a growing body of mindfulness research documenting the beneficial aspects of mindfulness to improve one's psychological well-being. However, mindfulness research is also criticized for reducing mindfulness to a self-enhancement tool without sufficient engagement with issues of interconnectedness and growing health and income disparities. Drawing inspiration from Buddhism, social justice, critical theory and labor studies, I propose a *mindful mindset* framework with a specific focus on dignity to address this critique of using mindfulness merely as a self-enhancement tool. The mindful mindset has seven interrelated features: (a) compassion; (b) sympathetic joy; (c) situated intersectional awareness; (d) negative capability; (e) cultural humility; (f) wonder; and (g) generosity. A mindful mindset fosters interconnectedness so that we engage with our lives with a deeper commitment to dignity. Dignity as an embodied praxis has three components: personal, intersubjective and processual. Further, I discuss the relevance of mindful mindset and dignity for the well-being of youth.

Keywords

mindfulness – mindful leadership – dignity – intersectionality – interconnectedness

1 Mindful Mindset, Interconnectedness and Dignity

In our increasingly networked and globalized world (Rainie & Wellman, 2012), people feel more disconnected from their social relationships and environment than they have in the past. Paradoxically, hyper-connectivity leaves behind feelings of isolation and disconnection that often undermine meaningful engagement with learning and social relationships (Turkle, 2011). To address

this challenge, I call for an interdisciplinary perspective for mindfulness that draws from Buddhism, intersectionality and organizational sociology. My proposed mindfulness perspective will allow us explore the phenomenological contours of interconnectedness in relation to dignity as an embodied praxis that is dynamic and intersubjective. Then I will discuss the significance of dignity in promoting individual and collective well-being of youth underscoring the need to restore dignity in increasingly precarious working conditions for youth in which pernicious dignity injuries (Lucas, Kang, & Li, 2013) undermine their agency and aspirations. In the following sections, I briefly review current research on mindfulness and the three strands of critical scholarship on the subject. Then I will outline my mindful mindset framework that fosters interconnectedness and recognizes the dignity of self and others to sustain a dignity culture and its significance for the well-being of youth.

2 Psychological Research on Mindfulness

Research on mindfulness in the past two decades has established a strong body of empirical research demonstrating the salutary effects of mindfulness on psychological well-being, memory, physical health, positive emotions, coping with workplace stress and emotional regulation (Shapiro & Carlson, 2017). Drawing from Eastern Buddhist traditions, mindfulness is conceptualized as our ability to be in the present with a non-judgmental moment-to-moment awareness. Several researchers are concerned that the Western approach to mindfulness that does not sufficiently consider the Eastern perspectives on mindfulness which emphasize the interconnected nature of our lives at the phenomenological and social level. Mindfulness practices are intended to transform fundamental worldviews and identities (Kudesia & Nyima, 2015).

Three distinct groups of scholars have criticized mindfulness research. Researchers who are interested in the psychological science behind mindfulness research are concerned by the existing literature's lack of standardization of research protocol and its acknowledgement of the adverse effects of mindfulness meditation that were concluded by from studies conducted on only a small sample of participants (van Dam et al., 2018).

Buddhist teachers and scholars have raised concerns about the commodification of mindfulness, which is termed as "McMindfulness" (Purser, 2019). Purser has argued that there is a lack of deeper understanding of terms such as "suffering." According to Purser (2019), Buddhism defines three types of suffering: (a) "the suffering of suffering" which refers to everyday stress and suffering due to stress, depression and anxiety; (b) "the suffering of change" or

our inability to understand the changing nature of our thoughts, feelings and emotions; (c) “the suffering of conditional existence” or all pervasive suffering which refers to our lack of understanding of the interdependent nature of our lives. For Purser (2019), most of the research on mindfulness focuses on alleviating the first-order suffering, such as depression, anxiety and stress, and pays insufficient attention to ethical aspects of mindfulness for personal and social transformation.

Researchers interested in social justice and mindfulness draw inspiration from engaged mindfulness teachers, such as Thich Naht Hanh, calling for a relational and social perspective that goes beyond focus on the individual experience of mindfulness to engage with social action and transformation. Thich Naht Hanh (2000) argues that the five aggregates – bodily and physical forms, feelings, perceptions, mental functionings, consciousness, and a contemplation on interdependence, will help us realize our togetherness and interbeing. Integrating critical feminist theory and Buddhist notion of suffering, Ng & Walsh (2019) call for a deeper commitment to build conditions of “trust and safety” necessary to live and transform diverse communities. They propose an ethical and engaged Buddhist framework for the need to build an ethical and safe community with a specific focus on the vulnerabilities experienced by oppressed people.

3 Mindful Mindset: an Integrated Perspective

Scholars of engaged and critical mindfulness have raised several concerns about using mindfulness merely as a self-enhancement tool not to cultivate interdependent notion of self. However, there is insufficient exploration of how to address various barriers that prevent us from realizing the interdependent and interconnected natures of our lives and critically engaging with power dynamics that perpetuate inequalities and multiple forms of oppression. We need a holistic theoretical perspective to augment meditative practices that addresses issues of power, privilege and oppression, and provides tools to reflect on our prejudices and stereotypes so that we can creatively engage with transforming the practices that prevent us from realizing the interconnected, interdependent and changing nature of self. For example, a lack of privilege awareness and holding on to essentialist beliefs about identities can prevent us from fully engaging with those who are different from us. Mahalingam & Rabelo (2013) argued that an intersectional awareness (i.e., an understanding that our identities are fluid and associated with different degrees of privileges and marginalities) will enable us to form coalitions with people who embody

different identities than ours. I propose a holistic framework for mindfulness that synergistically fosters interconnectedness. Recognizing the interconnected nature of our lives is the first step to a transformative praxis that guides our everyday interactions. I argue that dignity, *an embodied everyday praxis*, will demand the ethical practice of mindfulness that transforms and empowers self and others. In my framework, dignity is an embodied praxis – a testament to our mindful engagement with our lives that improves the individual and collective well-being.

My *mindful mindset framework* draws from Buddhism, critical intersectionality theory and social justice perspectives. Mindful mindset refers to a worldview that our lives are interconnected, interdependent and that our identities are fluid, intersectional with different degrees of privileges and marginalities with a commitment to personal and social change. Mindful mindset has seven interrelated features that synergistically foster deeper awareness of the interconnected nature of our lives: (a) compassion; (b) sympathetic joy; (c) situated intersectional awareness; (d) negative capability; (e) cultural humility; (f) wonder; and (g) generosity. The rationale for choosing these seven features is how they synergistically work together to overcome various barriers to the realization of interconnectedness and changing nature of our selves, thoughts, emotions and feelings. Generosity helps us to realize how our everyday existence is dependent on different kinds of generosity and labor of national and global populations. Generosity, compassion and sympathetic joy enhance our authentic connections and engagement with others. Negative capability and situated intersectional awareness will enable us to proactively engage with our prejudices without suppressing uncomfortable aspects of our persona. Wonder and cultural humility help us understand how to creatively engage with differences with an open mind. These seven features along with dignity provide a theoretical anchor and supplant mindfulness meditation in order to realize the transformative potential of mindfulness for personal and social transformation. These seven features will deepen our understanding of the phenomenology of interconnectedness. By linking mindful mindset framework with dignity, I argue that dignity becomes an anchor for ethical engagement of mindfulness in everyday practices. To overcome the secular aspects of mindfulness that mostly focus on the individual well-being, we need to integrate mindfulness, interconnectedness and dignity. To be a human means to have dignity (Home, 2005; Hicks, 2013). Integrating these ideas is essential to create a workplace that preserves one's dignity, a challenge in our neoliberal gig economy where precarious working conditions are becoming the norm. In the following section, I explain in detail each aspect of my mindful mindset framework.

3.1 *Compassion*

Compassion is one of the four Pillars of Buddhism, *Brahma viharas* (Salzberg, 2011). Compassion refers to our capacity to understand the suffering of others and act upon it. Using a developmental perspective, Gilbert & Tirsch (2009) outlined a compassion circle with six stages of development: (a) care for well-being; (b) distress and need sensitivity; (c) sympathy; (d) distress tolerance; (e) empathy; and (f) non-judgment. Gilbert (2009) has argued that “compassionate mind training is learning to balance our three different emotional systems – namely the system that focuses on threats and self-protection, the incentive/resource seeking system that focuses on wants and achievements, and the soothing/contentment system that focuses on safeness and connectedness (p. 418).”

Neff developed a scale to study self-compassion, our capacity to self-care when we feel shame, guilt, or disappointment when we are not living up to our own or social expectations (see for a review Neff et al., 2018). In a review of the existing body of research on self-compassion, Neff et al., (2018) found a robust negative correlation between self-compassion and anxiety, depression and negative affect. It appears that one has to consciously cultivate self-compassion in order to prevent burnout from caring for others.

Research shows that we are endowed with the capacity for compassion toward self and others, it is important to consciously cultivate both capacities (for a review see Galante et al., 2014). Practicing compassion meditation, such as loving kindness meditation, increased meaning in life, positive emotions and perceived social support (Fredrickson et al., 2009). Leiberg, Klimecki and Singer (2011) found that short loving kindness meditation interventions increased prosocial behavior. In another study, Weng et al. (2013) found that compassion training improved altruism and altered neural responses to suffering.

3.2 *Sympathetic Joy*

Sympathetic joy is also one of the four *Brahma Viharas* (core pillars) of Buddhism. Sympathetic joy refers to our capacity to rejoice with the happiness of others. Although sympathetic joy has not received as much attention as compassion in scholarly research (Royzman & Rozin, 2006), compassion and sympathetic joy are two sides of the same coin that is anchored on our capacity for perspective taking and empathy. Compassion refers to our ability to respond to others' sufferings whereas sympathetic joy refers to our capacity to rejoice with the happiness of others. However, people report more instances of their compassionate moments than their experiences of sympathetic joy (Royzman & Rozin, 2006). Other factors such as closeness (e.g., family member, friend vs. stranger) and attachment levels also shape our capacity to rejoice with

the happiness of others (Royzman & Rozin, 2006). Research suggests that sympathetic joy needs to be more consciously cultivated than sympathy and compassion.

What are the barriers toward cultivating sympathetic joy? Three factors seem to undermine our capacity for sympathetic joy: (a) prejudice; (b) jealousy; (c) social comparison. Pittinsky (2009) has argued that prejudice and stereotypes prevent us from feeling positive toward outside our social groups. By contrast, *allophilia*, an individual's feelings of affection, engagement, kinship, comfort, and enthusiasm toward members of a group seen as "different" and "other," fosters social connection and engagement. He developed an Allophilia scale to examine whether positive affect toward marginalized communities, such as Blacks, Hispanics and LGBTQ did indeed predict support for progressive social policies. Pittinsky and Montoya (2009) also found that sympathetic joy was positively related to allophilia. They argue that while sympathy was critical to reducing hatred, sympathetic joy is critical to improving positive intergroup relations.

Interestingly, in most languages there is no specific word for sympathetic joy (which is called *Muditā* in Pali). By contrast, there are many terms in all languages for the opposite of sympathetic joy: jealousy. Social comparison plays a major role in affecting our capacity to rejoice with others. Langer, Pirson & Delizonna (2010) distinguishes between mindless and mindful social comparison; the former refers to comparisons made without any attention to the social context embedded in the social comparison, whereas the latter is a dynamic process. "It is a state of awareness in which cognitive distinctions about objects of awareness are continually made, with the environment (and self) thus continually treated as emerging and novel (Langer, Pirson and Delizonna, 2010)." Thus, by cultivating mindful awareness recognizing that our lives are interdependent, we can cultivate sympathetic joy to genuinely feel happy when good things happen to people in our communities.

3.3 *Situated Intersectional Awareness*

Kimberly Crenshaw (1995) has a major influence in the study of social identities. Crenshaw (1995) has argued that the lived experiences of those who embody multiple marginalized identities should be located in relation to asymmetries in power relations and the simultaneity of their multiple marginalized experiences. For example, being Black and a woman simultaneously affects how Black women experience their lives. According to intersectionality theorists, social locations and structural factors that co-determine how we experience various identities we embody. For Cole (2009), social categories connote hierarchies and powers that have material consequences. Social categories also

intersect with each other in complex ways which offer possibilities for identifying similarities and coalition forming across seemingly different categories (Cole, 2009).

There is a growing body of research on intersectionality in which the usefulness of intersectionality as a theory and as a methodology is explored in a variety of disciplines (see, for a review, Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013). For example, Walby, Armstrong and Strid (2012) underscore the role of power differentials in the production of systems of inequalities of different valence and the hegemonic relationship between inequalities. *ColorInsight* is another example of mindfulness-based approach for higher education, particularly in legal education (Magee, 2016). Magee (2013) developed a contemplative law curriculum to become conscious of how race, class, gender and ethnicity have a profound impact on how we make sense of our world. For Magee (2013), contemplative practices increase compassion and a sense of interconnectedness and lead to a felt sense of interconnectedness mitigating the perpetuation of “entrenched patterns of power and subordination and privilege” in the legal system that denies the human dignity to women and racial and ethnic minorities.

Yuval-Davis (2012) proposed a situational intersectionality framework to understand the positionalities anchored in asymmetries of power and inequalities. For Yuval-Davis, situated intersectionality is a transversal dialogue. “The aim of these transversal dialogues is to create a common epistemology for solidarity across different social positionings and identifications, often conflictual, across borders and boundaries (Yuval-Davis, 2015, p. 641).” Yuval-Davis suggested two strategies: (a) *rooting* which is being self-reflective regarding one’s own positioning and (b) *shifting* which is attempting to understand the situated gazes of the other participants. Using these strategies together will result in a “common transversal epistemology that is used as a basis for political solidarity (Yuval-Davis, 2015, p. 641)” constituting an epistemological community. In my own research, I called for an *intersectional awareness*, a reflective understanding that our identities are fluid, situational and embedded in a matrix of privileges and marginalities (Mahalingam & Rabelo, 2013) to conduct ethically responsible community based research. Integrating Yuval-Davis (2015)’s situated intersectionality with my research on intersectional awareness, a *situated intersectional awareness* for mindfulness research where “rooting” and “shifting” will help us develop an intersectional awareness about our privileges and situated nature of our identities. Situated intersectional awareness is necessary to engage in a transversal dialog for social change and political solidarity. Integrating situated intersectional awareness in mindfulness research is necessary to overcome the shortcomings of secularization of mindfulness research, such

as using mindfulness as a self-help tool to perpetuate neoliberal subjectivities (Purser, 2019).

3.4 *Negative Capability*

Another key element of the mindful mindset framework is negative capability. For Keats (1817), negative capability is our ability to reside in a situation with an open mind, "*when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason*" (emphasis added, Keats, 1817, p. 43). For Keats, suspending ego is essential to acquiring the chameleon nature which is essential for any poet or artist to embody so that they are open to experiencing uncomfortable sensations, feelings and emotions. In method acting, when actors prepare to play a difficult character (e.g., child molester or a serial killer), their main challenge is to understand their characters with empathy in order to bring some humanity to their roles. Negative capability allows for an actor to humanize a deeply flawed or despicable character.

Scholarly attention toward negative capability in a variety of disciplines is growing. In an organizational context, Cornish (2011) defines negative capability as containing the following three characteristics: (a) capacity to be open, (b) attentiveness to diversity, and (c) suspension of ego. Mahalingam and Rabelo (2013) conceptualized negative capability as a sublime form of empathy that is critical for any researcher who is conducting research in diverse communities. In a study of MBA students' academic anxiety over mastering difficult course content, Hay and Blenkinsopp (2019) encouraged students to stay with the anxiety of not knowing – a common experience in any learning environment – to allow for the emergence of new knowledge in a learning context that fosters trust and empathy. They found that negative capability helped their students to overcome their learning difficulties.

Research on implicit bias has demonstrated that our conscious biases shape how we treat others, especially those who look and act different from us and hold opposing beliefs. Negative capability also helps us to engage with our own prejudices, stereotypes and unconscious biases with open minds, which in turn addresses our awareness of our biases. It helps us to stay with our uncomfortable feelings, sensations, and emotions towards our own shortcomings and vulnerabilities in order to authentically explore the sources of them with deeper empathy. Cultivating negative capability is critical to recognizing and accepting our own biases without resorting to avoidance out of shame and guilt. Negative capability also helps us to disrupt the invisibilities in our habitus where the relationship between our positionalities and dispositions often assumed to be "natural." It gives us the strength to engage with the present with an open mind.

3.5 *Cultural Humility*

Humility has been an object of inquiry in moral philosophy and in theology. For example, Aquinas thought that humility is primarily theological and not social (Keys, 2003). In contrast to this perspective, there is a growing body of research in social sciences and organizational studies that examine the vital role of humility in the context of our social interactions (See for a review, Tangney, 2000). Drawing from the reflexive turn in social sciences and public policy, Yanow (2009) proposes a passionate humility framework based on the “existentialist principle of engaging with others as persons, not as objects (p. 588).” Nielsen, Marrone and Slay (2010) explored the role of humility in the development of charismatic leaders. They define humility as “a desirable personal quality reflecting the willingness to understand the self (identities, strengths, limitations), combined with perspective in the self’s relationships with others (i.e., one is not the center of the universe (p. 34)’ which is a binding factor between the charismatic leaders and their followers.

Tervalan and Murray-Garcia (1998) developed the concept of *cultural humility* which “incorporates a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique, to redressing the power imbalances in the physician patient dynamic, and to developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations (p. 123).” They propose the model as a critical response to the dominant model of cultural competence in the training of social workers, clinicians and healthcare workers. Ortega and Faller (2011) argued that any helping profession, such as social work and disaster management, requires cultural humility and cultural sensitivity when working with people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. In a review of literature on cultural humility, Foronda, Baptiste, Reinholdt & Ousman (2016) identified cultural humility as a lifelong learning process with the following five characteristics: (a) supportive interaction; (b) egoless; (c) openness; (d) self-awareness; (e) self-reflection and critique. For Foronda et al., these characteristics of cultural humility need to be combined with a deeper awareness of power imbalances and diversity.

According to Ortega and Faller (2011), “a cultural humility approach advocates for incorporating a multicultural and intersectional understanding and analysis to improve practice, since together these concepts draw attention to the diversity of the whole person, to power differences in relationships (especially between workers and families), to different past and present life experiences including micro-aggressions and to potential resources or gaps (Ortega & Faller, 2011 p. 32).” Their cultural humility perspective is premised upon the notion that our lives are interconnected with a realization of the effect of our privileges on our beliefs and practices. Cultural humility is a critical feature of

mindful mindset because of its emphasis on intersectional awareness of power imbalances, suspension of ego and an awareness that we may not be fully aware (also see Velott and Forté, 2019).

3.6 *Wonder*

Wonder is a key ingredient in revitalizing our life goals and aspirations. Wonder is conceptualized in a myriad of ways as a central feature of our aesthetic sensibilities, as something that unfolds in a moment of stillness and suspension of preconceived notion as in the creative process (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), as something captures our fascination (Hansen, 2012), or experiencing the miracle of seeing something miraculous in the familiar (Wittgenstein, 1965). Wonder has garnered a lot of academic interest in recent years. Nussbaum argues that wonder and awe are distinct. For Nussbaum, wonder is “outward-moving, exuberant,” whereas awe is more associated with “bending, or making oneself small. In wonder I want to leap and run, in awe to kneel.” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 54 cited in Carlsen & Sanderlands, 2015).” There are at least two distinct conceptualizations of wonder: (a) wonder as an exuberant openness: (b) wonder as a transformative passion.

Wonder is viewed as an *exuberant openness* toward mysteries and the unknown (Carlsen & Sanderlands, 2015). In an excellent review of research on wonder in organizational research, Carlsen & Sanderlands (2015) identify four moments of wonder in organizational context: (a) arousal; (b) expansion; (c) immersion; (d) explanation. These four moments capture the process of deeper engagement with something that seizes our attention and curiosity. According to Carlsen & Sanderlands (2015), meaningful engagement with wonder as an inquisitive inquiry requires several characteristics – openness, deeper engagement with curiosity, emphatic connection to the uniqueness of the other and ability to notice and integrate emergent ideas triggered by wonder. Without cultivating these characteristics, wonder may become a shallow curiosity or a miracle.

Wonder draws the attention of sexuality theorists to study differences. Drawing on critical feminist theory, La Caze (2002) views wonder as a surprise when encountering someone who is different. Initial surprise leads to an appreciative and respectful curiosity. Wonder is an engaged inquiry triggered by curiosity. It is an intersubjective process; while encountering the other who are different, wonder leads to a progression towards understanding the other. I view wonder as a transformative passion. For example, if I wonder why some of my female colleagues are making less money than me while doing the same work, that awareness—which was originally triggered by the surprising fact—could lead to proactive engagement to transform the structures that perpetuate

these inequalities in solidarity with my female colleagues. Wonder is a key feature of a beginner's mind to be open and creatively engage with the present, with nature and with others. Wonder can be a source of sympathetic joy because it evokes exuberance. Lastly, wonder as a transformative passion also evokes compassion that triggers action.

3.7 *Generosity*

Generosity is a valued virtue in all religions, especially in Buddhism, because of the interdependent nature of our lives. Its established role in our society can be understood simply by tracking the number of calls people receive from charities seeking donations during holiday times. Yet, research on generosity is still in its early stage. Often generosity is studied as an outcome of an intervention (e.g., are people generous after participating in a compassion intervention?) or predictor of happiness. For example, when people buy gifts for someone, they feel happier than when they buy a gift for themselves. Drawing on Arthur Frank's (2004) influential work on generosity in patient care, Arber and Gallagher (2009) call for the study of generosity of spirit. Kupfer (1998) defines the generosity of spirit as generous acts that involve our thinking, feeling and emotions. Generosity shapes the moral imagination of our narratives of care (Frank, 2004). Borrowing Wallace's (1978) discussion on generosity, I view generosity as our ability to help while keeping the self-worth of the recipient of our kindness intact. I have identified six different kinds of generosities we may encounter in our lives: (a) material generosity; (b) intellectual generosity; (c) emotional generosity; (d) generous mindedness; (e) generous heartedness; (f) jinpa or vulnerable generosity.

Material or economic generosity is the most valorized and most studied forms of generosity. Acts of material generosity also require the givers to value what they give (Kupfer, 1998). Emotional generosity refers to our generous acts that involve providing emotional support to someone who is in distress or going through a difficult time. For example, if a friend takes time to console me and offer emotional support after I confess I am undergoing hardship, I need to acknowledge her emotional generosity. Intellectual generosity is when we receive intellectual support, such as the support we might receive in a team project where generous feedback from peers or friends or mentors propels our thinking in a new direction that we did not think before. Intellectual generosity also provides us a new way of thinking about a problem we have been struggling with or gotten stuck on.

Wallace (1978) distinguishes between two kinds of generosity: generous mindedness and generous heartedness. Generous mindedness refers to our capacity to see merit in others when others do not see it (Kupfer, 1998). For

example, a nurse may bring a nuanced perspective on the evaluation of an intern when others only see her failures in one particular context (Arber & Gallagher, 2009). Generous mindedness reflects giving a second chance to someone or the benefit of doubt to the recipient. Wallace defines generous heartedness as our capacity to forgive trespasses against us. Our ability to let go of “resentments and relinquishing claims against others can be generous heartedness only if it comes from a source of goodwill or compassion (Kupfer, 1998, p. 360).” Thus, generous mindedness refers to our capacity to be generous in identifying the uniqueness in others that may give them a chance to succeed. Generous heartedness refers to our capacity to forgive those who do not deserve our forgiveness.

Jinpa is a Tibetan term for vulnerable generosity (Carroll, 2007). To the popular imagination, vulnerability is not a desirable trait for a leader to possess. However, Carroll argues that being vulnerable makes a leader stronger because he/she signals their intent to be open to entertain new ideas. Such vulnerability reveals a kind of generosity that connects the leaders with their teams. Jinpa provides a refreshing look at the paradoxical yet powerful relationship between vulnerability and generosity in which the giver generously shares his vulnerability while receiving compassion and support from the recipients of Jinpa. The reversal of the relationship between giver and receiver in the dialogical nature of this relationship makes Jinpa a unique kind of generosity.

In sum, mindful mindset provides an interdisciplinary framework to cultivate mindfulness that deepens our connection to others. The seven features of mindfulness are interrelated and work synergistically. Compassion and sympathetic joy help to respond to others’ sufferings and accomplishments respectively. Situated intersectional awareness help us to be aware of our own privileges and marginalities associated with our intersecting identities and enable us to connect to others by situated imagination. Negative capability provides the necessary tools to stay with difficult, uncomfortable emotions and our shortcomings without judgment. It helps us to cultivate a non-judgmental self-reflective process. Cultural humility helps us to understand and learn from others with openness and egoless reflection. Wonder is a transformative passion that helps us to actively engage with surprise or curiosity to fully explore its transformative potential of understanding self and others. Compassion and humility are essential constituents of generous acts. Noticing and acknowledging various kinds of generosity we witness or receive everyday will provide us with insights about the interdependent nature of our lives, which will help us feel more connected to our communities. Thus, the mindful mindset framework helps us to realize the goals of forming epistemological communities as proposed by Yuval-Davis. Mindful mindset provides the tools to enable

“rooting,” “shifting” and imagination to transform our understanding of power, privilege, oppression and inequalities.

4 Mindful Mindset and Dignity

Several critical mindfulness researchers have commented on mindfulness for its lack of engagement with social issues. Purser (2019) has argued that mindfulness cannot be reduced to a self-help technique as a decontextualized individual construct. Without integrating an ethical core, mindfulness can become a tool of neoliberalism where mindfulness becomes a tool for stress management to optimize workers’ productivity without ethically engaging with the corporate policies that adversely affect the environment, workers’ lives, climate change and sustainability (Purser, 2019). Several corrections have been offered by Buddhist scholars by reaffirming the Buddhist roots of mindfulness while drawing inspirations from radical critical theory, social justice, feminist theory, contemplative studies and social and ecological activism (for a review, see Ng & Walsh, 2019). In that spirit, I draw inspiration from research on dignity to provide an analytical rubric for praxis for mindful mindset in everyday context. By integrating mindful mindset and dignity, I anchor dignity as a fulcrum of mindful engagement with our everyday lives that is ethical, transformative and sustainable. Dignity provides a much needed theoretical gravitas, everyday accountability and veracity for an engaged and mindful life. In the following sections, I will provide a brief overview on existing research on dignity before outlining the concept of dignity as an embodied praxis.

4.1 Dignity

Dignity has been studied extensively by a variety of disciplines (Rosen, 2012). Three strands of research account for the major trends in dignity research. Dignity is studied by human rights scholars and moral philosophers on whether it is an inalienable birthright as human beings (see Hicks, 2013 for a review). Dignity in healthcare settings, especially in nursing, is also a major topic of research (Nordenfelt, 2004). Labor and organizational sociologists have explored the concept of dignity in relation to labor and work (e.g., Bolton; Hodson).

Dignity is viewed as a birthright of being human by many human rights scholars (Hicks, 2013). Hicks (2013) provides a comprehensive rubric for dignity for conflict resolution and argues that we cannot treat a “human as a *means* for something else (Egonsson, 1998, p. 101).” Although there are some objections to viewing dignity as a birthright among legal scholars (see for a review, Waldron,

2015), Waldron makes a case for dignity by distinguishing between dignity as a ground of rights and dignity as a content of rights.

On the one hand, we are told that human rights “derive from the inherent dignity of the human person. On the other hand, it is said to have a right to be protected against “degrading treatment and “outrages on personal dignity.” Dignity is what some of our rights are rights to; but dignity is also what grounds all our rights (Waldron, 2015, p. 17).

Reviewing research on dignity in the nursing and caregiving contexts, Nordenfelt (2004) identified four concepts of dignity: (a) dignity as merit; (b) dignity as moral stature (i.e., dignity tied to self-respect; (c) dignity of Identity (e.g., aging, illness related identities); (d) human dignity. Using qualitative interviews, Jacobson (2009) explored the phenomenology of dignity violations. She identified that a position of vulnerability and a position of antipathy combined in a context of harsh circumstances and an order of inequality together contribute to dignity violations. For example, in the hospital, patients feel vulnerable and if the healthcare providers are indifferent to the sufferings of the patients, then such conditions are conducive for dignity violations.

Based on his work on labor and dignity, Hodson (2001) identified four factors that diminish dignity in workplace: (a) mismanagement and abuse; (b) overwork; (c) limits on autonomy; (d) contradictions of employee involvement. These four factors contribute to oppressive working conditions where workers lack the capacity to be proud of their labor and capacity to earn their dignity. Bolton (2007) distinguished between dignity *in* work and dignity *at* work. Dignity in work refers to “respectable and meaningful work with social esteem and responsible autonomy,” whereas dignity at work refers to “equitable and respectful and healthy working conditions where workers have opportunity to enjoy and cultivate dignity.” Lucas, Kang and Li (2013) show that dignity injuries in the workplace often reproduce “regimes of inequalities” (Acker, 2006). Lucas (2015) distinguished between human dignity and workplace dignity. According to Lucas, workplace dignity has three core components. Inherent dignity refers to respectful workplace interactions. Earned dignity refers to communications that recognize competence and positive contributions. Remediated dignity refers to institutional practices that mask the transactional and unequal nature of work.

These interdisciplinary perspectives highlight dignity as an inherent quality of being human and the social aspects of dignity to call our attention to dignity injuries and violations. For my specific theoretical focus, I view dignity as an *embodied praxis* with three elements: (a) personal; (b) intersubjective and

(c) processual. Personal dignity is not merely our inherited quality; it is also performative, such that how we carry ourselves has an aesthetic quality imbued with grace. According to Home (2005) an eighteenth-century British philosopher, “to behave with dignity, and to refrain from all mean actions, is felt to be, not a virtue only, but a duty; it is a duty every man owes to himself. By acting in that manner, he attracts love and esteem: by acting meanly, or below himself, he is disapproved and contemned (p. 246).” Another 18th century playwright Schiller (2005) calls grace as “the expression of a beautiful soul and dignity as the expression of a superior mentality (p. 154).” Thus, personal dignity not only recognizes the inherent human dignity but also the responsibility to behave with dignity.

The intersubjective dignity refers to the social aspects of dignity (Jacobson, 2009). Our interactions with others in various social spheres (e.g., family, peers, school and work) should be respectful with a strong commitment to consciously recognize the invisible labor (e.g., janitors, see Mahalingam, Jagannathan & Patturaj, 2019; Rabelo & Mahalingam, 2019), invisible identities (e.g., invisible disabilities) and invisible sufferings. Within the mindful mindset framework, such commitment will emanate from compassion, situated intersectional awareness and wonder. Recognizing the interdependent nature of our lives also makes us appreciate the fact that our everyday existence is possible because of the generousities of so many people and ranges from familial to ecological contexts.

Processual dignity refers to our commitment to maintain dignity cultures around us whether it is a classroom, workplace, public place or family. Taken for granted assumptions about certain institutional or organizational practices that perpetuate dignity injuries and dignity violations should be reexamined. Jacobson (2009) offers several suggestions to promote dignity at the individual and organizational level. A position of confidence, a position of compassion combined with solidarity and humane circumstances and justice will promote dignity in workplace. Being open and noticing practices around us that cause dignity injuries in our habitus is an important reflective step that is integral part of mindful mindset.

5 Mindful Mindset, Interconnectedness and Dignity

My overarching theoretical framework that integrates mindful mindset, interconnectedness and dignity is represented in Figure 1. Cultivating mindful a mindset will interconnectedness that will subsequently promote dignity at all three levels. The seven features of mindful mindset will help us to lead an engaged life in which dignity as an embodied practice vitalizes our

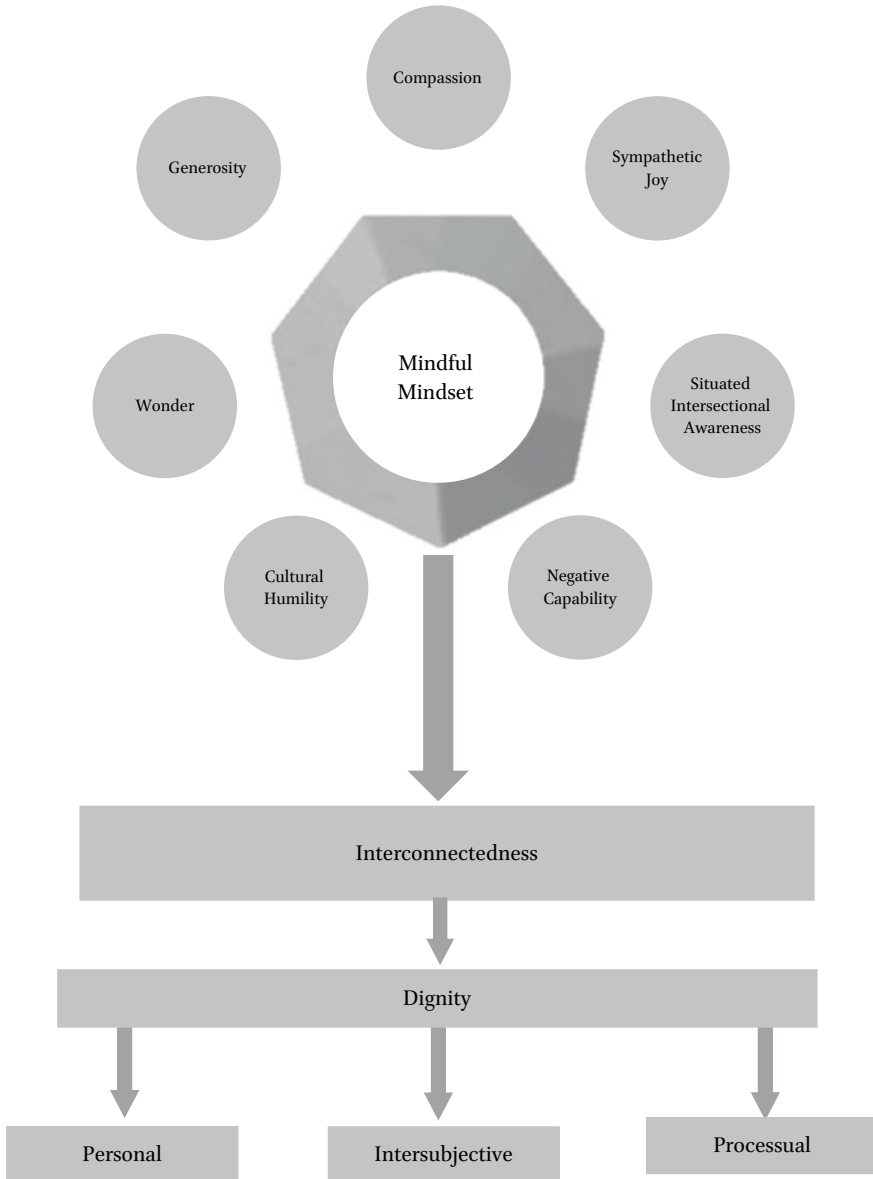


FIGURE 1 Mindful Mindset, Interconnectedness and Dignity

commitment to personal and social change. Mindful mindset will also foster connectedness at three levels: (a) intrasectional level; (b) intersectional level; (c) ecological level. At the *intrasectional* level, mindfulness meditation practices and negative capability help us to become aware of the transient nature of our thoughts, emotions and sensations. Negative capability helps us to stay

with difficult emotions and our own shortcomings. At the intersectional level, mindful mindset provides us tools to engage with those who embody different identities from our own. Cultivating situated intersectional awareness, such as rooting and shifting, compassion, wonder, generosity and cultural humility will strengthen our social connections. At the ecological level, cultivating wonder and situated intersectional awareness will expand our commitment to nature a commitment for sustainable living. Ecological connectedness will also make become aware of the ecological disparities that disproportionately affect marginalized communities undermining their right for a dignified life. Wenders and Zounazi (2013) call for an ecological state of mind where the self is viewed as the extension of nature which is central to Japanese cultural sensibilities.

One of the major philosophical and aesthetic concerns among Japanese intellectuals has been the phenomenal world and ontological experience of nature (Nakamura, 1997; Shaner, 1989). Since nature is considered to be ontologically equal to human beings, humans are not set apart in any other way from the processes of nature. Nature is thus a site or source of spiritual experience, and aesthetic expression is considered to be a manifestation of one's encounter with, immersion in and experience of nature.

5.1 *Cultivating Mindful Mindset: a Holistic Approach*

Mindfulness interventions include a variety of techniques that range from meditation to narratives and a wide range of contemplative practices. I suggest a holistic approach integrating a variety of mindfulness meditations and contemplative practices. For example, Mahalingam & Rabelo (2018) studied the impact of a holistic mindfulness curriculum in a group of college students. The participants learned six different meditation techniques: (a) breath meditation; (b) emotion meditation; (c) eating meditation; (d) walking meditation; (e) body scan and (f) loving kindness. They practiced one meditation for 15 minutes for two days a week in class for six weeks. The participants' creativity scores significantly improved and their emotional suppression scores were significantly lower after the intervention. Students learned about negative capability and the transient nature of their emotional states.

Meditation practices, such as loving kindness meditation, foster compassion and interconnectedness. Contemplative journaling reflecting on various features of mindful mindset can also help students to increase their awareness. In my own teaching, students learn about the relationship between mindfulness and dignity. Understanding this relationship allows them to develop a vision for all three kinds of dignity, and to commit themselves to cultivating them. In addition to having discussions with their fellow classmates, students

journal their thoughts on developing their understandings of the seven features of mindful mindset.

Contemplative practices, such as painting and writing poetry, also help students to expand their ways of engaging with the present. When I use contemplative painting in my mindfulness course, students often were surprised how different modalities of being in the present (e.g., journaling vs. painting) shape their expressiveness. I also assign students to monitor different kinds of generousities around them. Such monitoring not only increased their awareness and gratitude to various generousities they receive and witness, but also motivated them to be more generous. A holistic approach combined with meditation practices, journaling, painting, poetry writing and taking nature walks all improved a sense of connection at the intrasectional, intersectional and ecological levels.

5.2 *Mindful Mindset, Dignity and Youth*

Mindful mindset may be beneficial to mitigate the adverse effects of hyper-connectivity. For example, mindful mindset and dignity will help young students to use their cell phones more mindfully. While mobile phones have improved social connections and facilitated newer forms of belonging to digital communities, excessive use of mobile phones also distracts students from being in the present. Mobile phones have become another portal to gratify various addictions ranging from pornography to gambling (Billieux, 2012). Mindfulness interventions are effective to treat various addictions. Mindful mindset will help students to expand their sense of connectedness by strengthening their connections to the present and to their immediate communities. Deepened interconnectedness will promote a meaningful engagement with mobile technology.

Mindful mindset integrated with dignity as an embodied praxis will also help youth who are facing more uncertainties in a globalized neoliberal workplace. Precarious working conditions, such as involuntary part-time or fixed-term contractual jobs without any benefits leave youth who enter the labor market with lots of uncertainties (Kalleberg, 2009; Mills & Blossfeld, 2005). Such uncertainties affect youth engagement and goal setting (Tomasik & Silbereisen, 2012). Based on their study comparing youths from Poland and Germany who are coping with occupational uncertainties, Lechner, Tomasik & Silbereisen (2016) suggest interventions for increasing youth's capacity for goal engagement, such as providing information about labor markets and assisting youth with setting realistic goals. Mindful mindset will help students to enhance their capacity for goal engagement because mindful mindset will

improve their resilience and self-regulation. One situation in which engaged mindfulness may play an effective role in youth culture is in confronting inequalities in the workplace; youths who have cultivated mindful mindset with dignity as an embodied practice will combat indignities in a precarious workplace by demanding better working conditions that promote dignity for them and for their fellow employees. Dignity as an embodied praxis at the personal, intersubjective and processual levels will make youth accountable to treat their fellow employees, especially immigrants, refugees and people with disabilities and other minorities, with dignity. It will also raise their consciousness to work in solidarity with labor and social movements that demand dignity in workplace to improve the lives of workers and for a sustainable world in our globalized neoliberal times (Chun, 2012).

6 Conclusions

Paradoxically, one of the major challenges for young people is a growing sense of disconnect from the present because of their hyper-connected world. Cultivating mindful awareness will help them to strengthen connection to the present with an increased awareness of the transient nature of their emotions, thoughts and sensations. My proposed mindful mindset framework has seven features. Compassion and sympathetic joy will help them empathize with others' sufferings as well as happiness. Situated awareness will help them to become aware of their own privileges and marginalities with a goal to understand and act in solidarity with those who are underprivileged due social, political or ecological disparities. Dignity as an embodied praxis demands the mindful engagement with the world by promoting dignity at the personal, intersubjective and processual levels. My holistic framework on mindfulness addresses many criticisms of using mindfulness just as a self-enhancement tool. While my framework retains the usefulness of mindfulness practices that improves self-awareness and cultivate compassion, it also integrates critical mindfulness perspectives foregrounding intersectionality and dignity to ground mindfulness practices with a commitment to combat exploitation and systemic inequalities and to improve personal *and* collective well-being.

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