Mind & Life Podcast Transcript
Doris Chang – Critical Consciousness

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Opening Quote – Doris Chang (00:02): *Over time, I began to really see that we have to think beyond the individual mind and brain when we think about mental illness. Especially when we're talking about diverse, often marginalized, populations whose lives are shaped so much by larger structural forces. So the critical consciousness framework refers to this process of beginning to see the systems of oppression and privilege, and how they create structures that affect life chances for people in our community, and how we are complicit in upholding those structures of oppression without necessarily knowing that we are.*

Intro – Wendy Hasenkamp (00:45): Welcome to Mind & Life. I'm Wendy Hasenkamp. My guest today is clinical psychologist, Doris Chang. Doris is an associate professor at the New York University Silver School of Social Work, where she studies race, ethnicity, culture, and other dimensions of social identity, focusing on how they shape psychological experience and mental health treatment. Doris has spent her career developing inclusive, culturally-grounded interventions for clinical and educational contexts and, most recently, has worked to integrate mindfulness and other contemplative approaches into these interventions. Our interview was recorded at the 2019 Mind & Life Summer Research Institute, where Doris was on the faculty, and she shared about an intervention she's developed for her clinical trainees called Critical Consciousness Training.

(01:33) In our conversation, she describes how critical consciousness is the ability to recognize and analyze systems of inequality, and the commitment to take action against these systems. We discuss how she brings critical consciousness into the classroom and how it unfolds for different student populations. She describes how race is a social construct, not a biological fact, and outlines the impact of race on a multitude of measures of well-being and health. We also discuss the role of contemplative practice in becoming aware of systems of oppression, and being able to hold the unique stress and challenges that come with that awareness. We talk about her research on these training programs and she also shares her thoughts on where contemplative science needs to go next.

(02:20) If you're an educator looking to bring these ideas into your classroom, or if you're just interested in understanding more about race, ethnicity, and systems of inequality, I think you'll find Doris' insights particularly informative. It was a real pleasure to speak with Doris and I hope you enjoy the conversation as well. I'm happy to share with you Doris Chang.

Wendy Hasenkamp (02:43): So, Doris, thank you so much for being with us today.

Doris Chang (02:45): Thank you for having me.

Wendy Hasenkamp (02:47): I'd love to start just by hearing a little bit of your personal story, and some of the factors that led you to where you are now in your research.

Doris Chang (02:55): So I'm a clinical psychologist. And I think I started developing an interest in clinical psychology mostly because I was an undergraduate student and, I think like so many undergrads, you're trying to understand yourself and the world. And I remember taking a class and the first question I had was, how does this pertain, or help me understand my family and my community? I'm Chinese American. My parents are immigrants. And we never ever talked about mental health. I think it's a concept that a lot of Asian American communities see as only affecting a very small percentage of the population. So, to come from that kind of understanding and then to be in a class about abnormal psychology, and then just wondering, how does this square with my family's experience, my community's experience? Because these worlds just didn't seem to connect at all, and all of the readings that we were doing had to do with mostly European American samples and populations. So I just became really interested in how culture and ethnicity shapes experience of health and mental health, and started looking for other ways to expand the field of psychology towards more inclusion of diverse perspectives.

(04:19) So that process of thinking about how we can bridge worlds was part of my early educational thinking. And then when I entered graduate school, again this idea of bridging social worlds was also really present, because I'm a clinician. Most of my patients I worked with at the beginning were not Chinese American. So I had to think about what does it mean to be in this space, as someone who's not white or someone who's not Black. And then I ended up doing a lot of work with Asian immigrant communities, and did a year of my pre-doctoral training in an Asian specific clinic, where all my clients were Asian immigrants. So that was a really interesting experience to basically be treating people like my parents. Like my mother, who had internalized these ideas that we don't have mental illness in our community.

Wendy Hasenkamp (05:22): Right — that was going to be my question is then how is your experience of those people who were your patients, versus maybe your mother's views, or what you had come to think culturally?

Doris Chang (05:33): Well, some of the things I had learned in school didn't work. What I realized is a lot of the patients I worked with were coming in wanting something really different than what I felt like I had to offer. So my training in a pretty traditional clinical science program was... Even though there were definitely people there that were studying and interested in issues of culture, they weren't necessarily as involved in the clinical training side of things. And so the tools that I had were kind of mainstream. So I would go into... I went into these settings not quite equipped to adapt what I had learned to that population. And so, some of the things I learned had to do with just how I needed to be willing to offer something different. Sometimes it was psychoeducation. Just like, let me explain to you what it means to raise a child in the US context who is growing up with different ideas about independence, for example.

Wendy Hasenkamp (06:39): Did your experience also as the daughter of immigrants help you relate to some of the struggles that they maybe were experiencing, with their children?

Doris Chang (06:48): I think it made me naturally feel a kinship to them. I think that there was also some positive transference to me. Like, "Oh, you look like us! Your Mandarin isn't totally fluent, but you can communicate. You remind me of someone I know and I care about." And so I think that that kind of

already helped open some doors for me in terms of building the alliance. And I think it did give me a real empathic understanding of the challenges of being an immigrant, and navigating a very strange place.

Wendy Hasenkamp (07:27): And, so now you teach and train clinicians as part of your work, with a program you refer to as Critical Consciousness. Can you describe that?

Doris Chang (07:38): Yeah, so as you probably know, most clinicians have to take some sort of coursework in diversity-related areas. I think it's a really good move that a lot of licensure boards are requiring coursework to prepare clinicians to more effectively work with diverse populations. So I've been teaching that course in my program for many, many years. Over time, I began to really see that we have to think beyond the individual mind and brain and heart when we think about mental illness. Especially when we're talking about diverse, often marginalized, populations whose lives are shaped so much by larger structural forces — as all of our lives are shaped, but in terms of increasing vulnerability to stress and risks for mental health problems, these groups really are more vulnerable.

(08:37) And so, the Critical Consciousness framework refers to this process of beginning to see the systems of oppression and privilege, and how they create structures that affect life chances for people in our community, and how we are complicit in upholding those structures of oppression without necessarily knowing that we are. It's this process of unmasking, uncovering, of seeing the world differently. And also then mobilizing for action to be a change agent in that system.

(09:17) So it's not how we typically train clinicians at all. We focus on the things we can control within the 50-minute hour. But it just felt like we were asking our patients to do things, and change things, that were not necessarily within their control to change. And then the risk is that they blame themselves for not being resilient enough, or for making bad choices that these things keep happening to them, or they keep not getting that job and keep-

Wendy Hasenkamp (09:48): And that's another layer to their distress.

Doris Chang (09:50): Right. And I think clinicians were also feeling frustrated that the tools they had also weren't necessarily meeting the needs of those communities. So it felt like a shift in how I felt like we needed to train our students, to look at these systems, to be comfortable even talking to patients about these systems, so they can properly locate the causes of some of their problems.

Wendy Hasenkamp (10:14): Yeah, and so how does it look, this training? Does it unfold in a standard classroom setting, is there dialogue between races?

Doris Chang (10:23): It happens in a classroom setting. I think I pull on a mix of experiential learning and weaving in contemplative pedagogy as a way to help students process what they're experiencing. So it is kind of experience-heavy, I would say, because it's difficult to connect your experience to abstract theory. So I do try to create assignments, exercises, in-class simulations, to try to get people close to experiencing what it feels like. Because it's like you have to have an emotional awakening before you really become motivated to see. And so I try to make it emotional. I'll start off my classes by telling people it's going to be really uncomfortable. Just be prepared, and to think about, is this a good semester to engage deeply in this work? So, kind of a trigger warning. Like, okay, if you're going to be here together with me, this is what we're going to ask of you.

Wendy Hasenkamp (11:32): Did you say the courses are required?

Doris Chang (11:34): Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, one of them is required. So some students will say, "Not this time. Maybe next year." I think that's one thing. I do try to give students space to find a personal project that allows them to deepen learning in an area that they personally feel like they need it. So I think that's also part of a contemplative pedagogy approach, which is centering the individual learner, and helping them to deeply engage in a very personal way with the material. For some students, they might find that they need to work on some bias against a group that is getting in the way of them being open and effective with clients from that background. And so, they might define for themselves a learning project that maps out how they might dig into that work.

Wendy Hasenkamp (12:31): Do you have any examples that come to mind?

Doris Chang (12:33): Yeah, I think that oftentimes, over the years, one group that has prompted this kind of self-work for a lot of students is very, very religious people. That also speaks to, in the field of clinical work, how we don't deal with spirituality and we don't deal with religion. So we don't invite into the work... We don't train students how to ask about spiritual beliefs, or religious identity. We don't know what to do if they say they're really religious. We don't know how to integrate those perspectives about health and healing and well-being into what we have to offer. And so I think we kind of avoid the subject altogether. And then it perpetuates this kind of bias, that what we have to offer is better than what religion has to offer. So a number of students have tried to take this on around, like, "I feel myself questioning these beliefs that some patients have." Especially very evangelical, charismatic, Pentecostal, sometimes even orthodox communities, and just feeling like, "We don't get it. I don't get it. I don't get the appeal and, in fact, it seems harmful." So then they might define for themselves a project that really digs into unpacking that.

Wendy Hasenkamp (13:55): Yeah, wow. So one of the things that you teach, or you educate in these classes, is the various ways that race shapes our lives. Could you give some examples of the impact of social determinants of mental health and success?

Doris Chang (14:10): Yeah. So even though we know that race isn't real — it's not a biological fact — it has an incredible impact on our lives.

Wendy Hasenkamp (14:18): Let's just unpack that for one minute, in case that's a new idea for some people. Is what you mean that race is a construct?

Doris Chang (14:26): Yeah. So, any two people from two different ethnic groups may have more in common genetically than two people from the same... that look phenotypically similar. And so, it doesn't stand up as a scientific construct, concept, or fact. And yet we know that we look at each other, and we sort each other, and we impose racial categories on each other. And the whole point of race as a construct is to oppress groups. That's the function it serves in society, and has always served in society.

(15:01) So, on that basis, it is real in the world as something that shapes our lives, and it shapes every aspect of life. Every aspect of life. So it affects maternal and infant mortality rates. It affects the safety and funding of your schools. It shapes the likelihood that you'll graduate from high school, get into college, be on a pathway to have upward mobility, get good jobs. Quite a lot of research has shown that if your name is readily associated with a racial category — some of this work has focused on Black and white job applicants — that applicants with a white-sounding name are more likely to be interviewed, called in for a job interview, than people who have Black-sounding names. So it's hard to know how conscious it is all the time, but it is present. It's present in every aspect of our lives. And, obviously, likelihood of being stopped and frisked and pulled over and given a harsh jail sentence. All of those outcomes, to looking at the causes of death. African Americans, I think, have the highest risk for eight to

ten of the leading causes of death. So it affects your ability to be a healthy, functioning person in the world.

(16:27) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (16:39): What are some the lessons that you've learned and taken away from all your work in teaching this?

Doris Chang (16:44): So the first thing, I think I mentioned is, I prepare students that it's going to be a rocky ride. It's not going to be easy. It's not going to be holding hands and singing Bob Marley songs. It's going to be really, really painful and it can't not be painful. I've actually wondered, is it possible to not make it painful? Because it's distressing for me to witness, too. If I could figure out a way to help people really, really understand the effect of racism and other forms of oppression on all of us without the grief that comes with that seeing... I wish I could figure out how to do that, but I don't think it's possible.

Wendy Hasenkamp (17:27): Yeah. It seems necessary.

Doris Chang (17:28): It also raises questions about like, "Why haven't I suffered? You're telling me all of these people have suffered. How is that I'm where I am, and they're where they are? I don't want to see it." So it's really painful that I'm in a position to be asking students to open to suffering as a way of living in reality.

Wendy Hasenkamp (17:56): Can you describe in a little more detail what it might be like, and what some of the common experiences that come up, for white people versus people of color, and the different ways that this information hits them?

Doris Chang (18:11): Yeah. It's different and it's the same. I'll start with the students of color. So students of color, in my experience in the classes, find it incredibly painful to be reminded of the role that race plays in their lives. And partially that's because, I think for a lot of students of color, when they enter the academy... When they're in an educational institution, we essentially ask them to be white. So, we reward that. We reward assimilation. And so they come into the class and they're trying to hide those parts of themselves because we ask them to. Oftentimes, we implicitly ask them to, in institutions of higher education. And it's become a survival strategy — if they can downplay it, they often will. And yet I'm bombarding them with messages about their community that remind them of the risk factors, and of their race, and then bombard them with those messages of trauma. In the interest of learning. So that can be so, so painful.

(19:20) And also I'm getting students who are often undergraduates or graduate students, and so they're at the early or mid-stage of really unpacking their own racial and ethnic identity and what it means to them. So it's a really active process of figuring it out. And it's hard to do that in an interacially mixed classroom, when, let's say, half of the students are white or more, and they're, for the first time, beginning to awaken to the reality of racism. So I think that's really, really challenging for those students.

(19:56) And then, for the white students, I see a lot of guilt and shame. Especially if this is new material for them. And then rage — at parents, at educational institutions, at other people in their lives who've somehow let them believe something that isn't true about what it means to be white in this country. So there's a lot of denial. Like, "How could I be 21 and not know about this?" And then often a lot of shame about that. And then just kind of a little bit of falling apart. Some of it's developmental, and some of it is just meeting this content for the first time. And this is a very natural arising of sadness in response to something very, very sad.

Wendy Hasenkamp (20:51): Yeah, yeah. How do you handle that, as a teacher, every semester holding this? All of the students...

Doris Chang (20:58): It is really tough. It's gotten easier. At the very beginning of my teaching career, students would say things that were actually personally hurtful to me, as a person of color. Not intending to, but out of thoughtlessness, out of not necessarily seeing me as a person of color, or intentionally wanting to harm me because I was forcing them to feel things that they didn't want. And I was insecure about how well I was doing in teaching this difficult material. And then it just got easier and easier. I think I became more comfortable in understanding how to facilitate the process better. I think I became more part of a community of people who were doing this work, and the support of that was incredibly helpful and nurturing. And then I think I just became sort of on a mission about it. It felt very important. And so having your... engaging in (this is my clinician side) value congruent action. I was doing something that I really believed in. Even if it was hard, it was okay. Because I really believed in what I was doing. And that helped.

Wendy Hasenkamp (22:13): I can imagine one of the complexities is that it's also not each individual person changing, but then there's the community in the classroom that's interacting. How does that play out?

Doris Chang (22:25): Yeah, so that's the second thing that I learned. The researcher side of me wants this to be a nice, neat, linear process, in the way that we want to think about psychotherapy processes being this linear journey. So to think about each individual learner and their individual path is one way to think about learning, but the reality is that it's so messy with this material... and probably in all classrooms, but especially with this material. Because, let's say, I'm a student of color processing my own experience of race, and grieving the experience of my community, and then sitting with, what does that mean for me as a clinician in training, and I'm speaking about that experience. What happens when another student directly challenges my experience? And, in fact, with some aggression, argues that my experience actually is causing harm to them? So, it's a dyadic and also group process — that your own capacity to learn and grow kind of depends on the whole group nurturing that process. And what happens when some people are not facilitating that process, what do you do with that? It's really complicated. And that's the reality of being in a multicultural society.

(23:56) So I think the best thing I've thought to do with it, is to allow that process to play out within some constraints that try to minimize harm. And so we'll have agreements about how we want to communicate with one another, and the kind of culture we want to create in the classroom, so that we're monitoring impact. It can't just be a free-for-all. It can't be, you can say whatever you want, even though it's your truth. We have to be invested in everybody's collective learning. And so creating that norm gives a little bit of something to fall back on.

(24:34) But then there's so much to be learned in unpacking whatever it is that happens. Because it's not going to be the first and only time that something like that happens, for any of the people in the room. And so the opportunity is for us to be able to come and understand and analyze what happened, in a way that allows us to be more prepared for the next time it happens, and for us to be more skillful in how we negotiate that.

Wendy Hasenkamp (25:02): I'm just curious. What are some of those agreements that you have, or that the students have with each other about how they're going to treat each other?

Doris Chang (25:10): So again, with the contemplative stance, one thing is to create an environment that is open and curious and kind, with each other and with ourselves. Because I know that students come in

and feel a lot of worry and anxiety about the class, and worry about harming others. You know, we're inherently kind people, and we don't want to harm other people, but the reality is that sometimes we will unintentionally harm each other. And so to try to assume good intention, to take responsibility for the harm we might cause despite that, and to try to not participate in shame. Shaming each other, or holding shame in ourselves. So one is just that holding that mindful attitude.

(26:01) We will also try to monitor traditional power dynamics that get enacted all the time. Where, we see white students talking more than students of color. We see male students talking more than women. And people claiming authority to speak. And so, we do try to name that and make that conscious in the agreements about monitoring your participation. We want people to bring their full selves to the table, and to create space and make space for everybody else to do that also.

(26:37) One that a student added this year was, no tone policing. So, don't judge the way that I'm communicating about my experience, even if it makes you uncomfortable.

Wendy Hasenkamp (26:51): So if someone feels that you're communicating in an angry tone or...

Doris Chang (26:56): Yeah. It's like, they're angry. And also it's good training. I mean, we're clinicians in training, right? So if you can't tolerate somebody's authentic anger about something that's affecting them, you might be in the wrong profession.

Wendy Hasenkamp (27:08): It's a larger problem for your career, right. So how did contemplative practice and mindfulness come into this space for you?

Doris Chang (27:18): It came into this space probably about five years ago. Maybe six... yeah, about five years ago. I was doing a training at the Nalanda Institute in contemplative psychotherapy, and gravitated to it because I was feeling like I was needing more tools to show up with more resources for this work. I was getting really depleted. As we've talked about, it's pretty stressful. And there was more and more being published about the potential benefits of contemplative practice — for emotional regulation, and for centering and grounding, and coping, and all of those things. And so I actually first came to it for me, to support me in doing this work. And then as I learned more about it, I really started to open to the potential that it could actually... It could be a support to my students as well. And so I just started experimenting with weaving it in in different ways, and increasingly have made it more and more explicit, and more integral to my approach to teaching.

Wendy Hasenkamp (28:30): Cool. So do you do meditations in class? Do the students have to agree to meditate outside of class?

Doris Chang (28:36): We do do meditations in class. I do ask them, and it's in the syllabus that they're required to try a formal meditation practice. If they don't do it, they don't do it. But it is the expectation that they try it. And I explain to them the science behind... the current state of knowledge about meditation and its effects, and how it's been studied in a variety of different ways, and try to make the case for why I think it could be helpful to them personally, separately from its ability to help them maybe sit with the difficult emotions they might experience in class. So I give them some resources. There's some structured apps that I suggest for them. And then we check in about it throughout the course. And then, at various times in the course, we will do formal sits. Especially at the very beginning of the course, we meditate almost every class period for at least some period of time. I want to expose them to different kinds of meditation, because I'm hoping that there will be something that resonates for them.

(29:41) I've also been trying to increasingly expose them to different teachers. So, playing guided meditations for them so they see... especially exposure to teachers of color, Dharma teachers of color. Or teachers who are modifying how it is that they're working, to make it a better fit for communities of color. I also try to support and troubleshoot them as they're developing the practice. Because I feel like as a first-time meditator-

Wendy Hasenkamp (30:12): There's a lot that comes up.

Doris Chang (30:13): There's a lot of questions. It's really hard. You feel like you're doing everything wrong. So I'm not formally trained as a meditation teacher, so I can only go so far in terms of how much I can support that process, but we do spend time discussing barriers to practice.

(30:33) – *music interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (30:56): So you were recently awarded a PEACE Grant from Mind & Life to study the effects of including this kind of mindfulness or contemplative component in the training that you do. Can you describe a little bit about your study and what you're hoping to look at?

Doris Chang (31:14): Sure. So, this is a collaboration with several wonderful colleagues at NYU Steinhardt in the School of Ed, Fabienne Doucet and Natalie Zwerger. She and her team have been rolling out a critical consciousness curriculum for, I think, K-12 teachers, actually, for a few years now. And it's really grown, and it's been transformative for the teachers who do it. And so they have this packaged curriculum that they've adapted to be as long or short, in some ways, as schools can accommodate. So I'm partnering with them to see if we can boost the effects of that curriculum by infusing mindfulness and other contemplative components into that work. Because, in conversations with Natalie, it's clear that the dynamics and processes that I see, in the work I do, shows up in the trainings that she does as well. And the goal with any of these critical consciousness programs, I think, is to help teachers — in her case, she's focusing on teachers — to help them think differently, to be able to be culturally responsive in the classroom, and to help them dismantle these deeply embedded structures of oppression that show up in those classrooms, too. So, it's a way of seeing, it's a way of being in the classroom. And then it should... the consciousness should trickle into their pedagogy and into their curriculum.

(32:44) So we're trying to test this infused mindfulness-based critical consciousness curriculum against two different control groups. One is just the pure critical consciousness program. The thing they do. And then a standalone mindfulness intervention for teachers. And that comes from a basic question that other researchers are starting to look at, or have been looking at — which is, can cultivating mindful awareness or compassion, can that, in itself, reduce implicit bias and increase compassion and prosociality? So is there a way that, even without explicit training and teaching in critical consciousness, without having those frameworks, do we still see some positive effects just with mindfulness training alone?

Wendy Hasenkamp (33:39): Which some research is starting to show in other groups, right?

Doris Chang (33:42): Right. Some research is starting to show that even with very brief mindfulness inductions, we can see some temporary decreases in implicit bias. So the question for me is kind of like — for people who, let's say, do not want to take a critical consciousness class, is having them take a mindfulness class paired with good intention... Like, what happens with paired good intentions... Does mindfulness training lead to similar prosocial outcomes, in terms of the teachers being able to relate with less bias to, say, students of color in their classes, even without the pedagogical framework set that we're trying to infuse into the other curriculum? What are the ways in which doing standalone critical

consciousness training elicits so much dysregulation and distress in teachers, that they can't even... It cannot translate into action.

Wendy Hasenkamp (34:41): Could be inhibiting.

Doris Chang (34:42): It could be inhibiting their ability to manifest that awareness and knowledge and behavior. And then seeing if those two groups differ from the hybrid curriculum, to where we can hopefully draw on the benefits of both of those practices in a single, standalone intervention.

Wendy Hasenkamp (35:02): And so how will you measure the outcomes? What are you hoping to be able to observe?

Doris Chang (35:07): We're starting with self-report, and also implicit measures of racial bias. Self-report of things like multicultural teaching competency, mindfulness in teaching. There's a new relational mindfulness measure that's looking at teacher practice. We're looking at attitudinal barriers, such as... We have some measures for the white teachers in particular. Lisa Spanierman has a scale looking at the perceived costs of racism for whites — how they deal with the reality of racism, in terms of defenses and denial, and how it affects their engagement with people of color. We also are looking at typical measures that are often studied in mindfulness studies like compassion, burnout, stress, and things like that. So that's where we're starting, and if the data look good, our goal... What we would like to do is look at classroom behavior and classroom dynamics.

Wendy Hasenkamp (36:14): And how's it going so far?

Doris Chang (36:16): So we finished our first year. We ran our two control groups. It was challenging. Some of the challenges we encountered were retention. So teachers are very, very busy. And we were doing a 10-week training that met every week throughout the fall, because we wanted to look at its effects over the course of the academic year. So we had baseline measures, they did the training, they wrapped it up before winter break. And then we tracked them... our "Time 3" data collection is currently happening.

(36:52) So the first problem was that we had difficulty retaining teachers in the study. We ended up with about a 40% dropout rate, which is not what we predicted. But it turns out, it's not that atypical. It's a very busy, stressed population to work with, and we were asking that they come to our campus to receive the training. So people were coming from all over. But one thing that was troubling, that we need to figure out, is we saw different rates of dropout by ethnicity for the two different groups. So we saw better retention of white participants in the mindfulness group. Like, much better retention. It was something like 85% of the whites that started the mindfulness group stayed, whereas over 60% of the people of color who started in the mindfulness group dropped out. Then, we saw the reverse pattern happen for the critical consciousness control group. Where more than half of the white participants dropped out of the group, and almost all of the participants of color stayed.

Wendy Hasenkamp (38:08): Wow... Do you have initial thoughts about why that might be the case?

Doris Chang (38:14): So one question I think has to do with how we recruit... the messaging in recruitment. And we did hear from some of the folks in the mindfulness group that they thought they were going to get pedagogy. We were recruiting teachers for a study on effectiveness in the classroom... effectiveness in diverse classroom spaces, broadly defined. Because we did expect that mindful awareness would improve teaching, and other studies have found that it improves teaching practice. So it felt like we were accurately reporting on what we think and believe, but I think what they were

expecting is more strategies for engaging diverse learners in their classroom... They wanted the other curriculum. And so, I feel like if we had given them a choice, they would have chosen the critical consciousness.

Wendy Hasenkamp (39:11): Because they're randomized to the groups...

Doris Chang (39:13): Yeah, exactly. They didn't get to choose. We stratified assignment on the basis of race and ethnicity, so that we could have equal numbers of white and people of color teachers in both groups, but then it was randomized. So, I think that was a real challenge. But it's interesting that, even not getting what they wanted, more of the white teachers stayed in the mindfulness group than the teachers of color. And then for the other group, I don't know why the white teachers didn't stay. Because they ended up getting what they more expected, which is a regular diversity training for teachers. But they didn't... We didn't retain them at the same rate. The other factor is the race and ethnicity of the trainer, who was facilitating the groups. So the mindfulness group was facilitated by a white man, an expert in mindfulness. Very experienced teacher. And the critical consciousness group was facilitated by a Black woman.

Wendy Hasenkamp (40:16): Oh... that could be a major factor.

Doris Chang (40:18): It could be a major factor. So we know from mental health studies that ethnic matching can sometimes improve retention in mental health treatment, and oftentimes clients do have preferences. They feel naturally more comfortable, there's more credibility sometimes, with a clinician that's of your same background. I don't know how this might have played out in this situation. I don't really know the research on that for this context, but that might have also contributed to it.

Wendy Hasenkamp (40:51): Right, and that's really tough. It's hard to match either way. It's almost like you want to co-teach them both, with a person of color and a white person.

Doris Chang (40:58): Yes. Well, for the hybrid curriculum, we are actually going to have a co-teaching model. Because it felt like we needed to really see what it would look like to have both of those components delivered with fidelity. And right now, we don't have anybody who can. And so we are going to have a co-teach model for the hybrid trial for the fall.

(41:21) – *music interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (41:36): So, from all of your experience doing this work, where do you think the field should go from here? What are the most needed directions or changes?

Doris Chang (41:48): One of the things I have liked about the studies I've read is that there is an elegance to their experimental designs... that it's easy to draw some causal interpretations from the data. But given how I'm trying to pull from that science base, the reality is that the work that I do is dyadic, it's group-based. And so I'd like to see more studies that are looking at relational factors. Relational mindfulness, relational outcomes. How people with different levels of mindfulness or critical consciousness, when they interact, what happens? If you stratify these two different dimensions of critical consciousness and mindfulness across different groups of people, what kinds of group-based outcomes do you see? And how can we measure those processes? The messiness of that network. Doing this work together.

(42:48) I think another question is also looking at this question of, who are our samples? Just in my study, seeing the difficulty retaining people of color in a mindfulness group... I wonder how much that is

happening across the board in this field. And Is this knowledge base being built on mostly white undergraduates or white practitioners? And what are the implications of that for our field?

Wendy Hasenkamp (43:14): I imagine it is so far, unfortunately, for the most part. One of the things we're trying to do with our grants programs is now require all of our grantees for their studies to include what's called "constraints on generality" statements. So, being very clear in your methods, and even in your discussion, what your sample population was and how this can or cannot be generalized to other populations. That's something that you would think would be already automatic in all research protocols, but it hasn't been in many fields. So we're hoping to at least for our community, help people be aware of that, and start to either recruit more diverse samples or at least just raise awareness about the people that they are studying.

Doris Chang (44:02): Yeah, that's really important.

Wendy Hasenkamp (44:05): So, any other thoughts on issues for the field to be considering?

Doris Chang (44:10): I mean, I also think maybe... I know the field is grappling with how we've secularized these traditional spiritual traditions. And one of the things that's struck me in reading the mindfulness literature is — and especially the therapy literature — is how few of those studies looking at mindfulness-based clinical interventions have included Asian Americans. Many of them are Buddhist. Many of them come from these traditions. I'm like, why hasn't this taken off within the Asian immigrant community, who you'd think would be the target population?

Wendy Hasenkamp (44:52): Yeah. That's a very interesting question.

Doris Chang (44:55): My colleague Gordy Hall has written about this question of why — where are the Asian Americans in mindfulness research? And one of the points that he's written about and that I've written about, is that I think it has to do with the focus on the individual and individual flourishing, versus collective flourishing. The Asian model of self is more interdependent by culture. Our cultural socialization is more interdependent. So I think the way that modern mindfulness is being packaged, which is about a self flourishing, often doesn't really resonate very much with Asian communities often, who do not reify the self in that way. Or, it's not a personal goal to be personally happy.

Wendy Hasenkamp (45:50): Right, that's not as valuable... And it's also interesting because now you hear of Asian cultures, in Asia, taking back up these practices from the Western, secularized versions, back into the cultures in which they originated. But now in this new form-

Doris Chang (46:08): Yeah, that's unrecognizable.

Wendy Hasenkamp (46:10): Right. Which is a whole other question of what is attracting them to this, and what the impacts will be.

Well, thank you so much for joining us today. It's been great to talk to you.

Doris Chang (46:22): It's been great to talk to you, Wendy.

Outro – Wendy Hasenkamp (46:30): *This episode was edited and produced by me and Phil Walker. Music on the show is from Blue Dot Sessions and Universal. Show notes and resources for this and other*

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