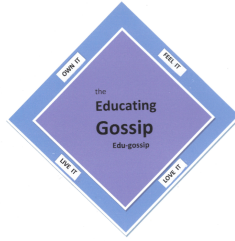


African American Mindfulness Researchers Make Vital Contributions



Written by [the Educating Gossip](#) in [Opinions](#)



The Educating Gossip™

Producing a Canon and Identifying Areas for Future Targeted Research Highlights Need for both Broader Mindfulness Practices to Study and Fund

In my most recent writing directed specifically for minoritized graduate students, I explore how spiritual mindfulness practices can lead to individual psychological self-transcendence, personal healing and courage to use the creativity of writing and research to bring about deeper personal and social healing (see Clark, 2024). My hope is to inspire graduate students to boldly take on groundbreaking research with spiritual practice at its center.

To foster this hope, I've selected two studies and one thesis paper written by African American researchers as a starting place to report the need for more research and funding for the investigation of mindfulness and the need to study other types of spiritual mindfulness practices, in addition to the Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) mindfulness practice most often studied. I celebrate these authors by reading them through the lens of the Clark Unitive Effect (CUE) theory: positive critique (opinion or judgment) and critical analysis (systematic, objective, and analytical), acceptance, and realized values that inform action that will more likely than not lead to healing and peace.

In *Nonreactivity and Resilience to Stress: Gauging the Mindfulness of African American College Students* (Freleigh & Debb, 2019), the study focuses exclusively on African American undergraduate students to understand how mindfulness is related to resilience. Results indicated that it might be useful if new mindfulness-based practices were created specifically with the intention of building the skill of *nonreactivity* in order to cultivate resilience.

According to the CUE theory, spiritual practices that affirm the perceived duality of this world yet accept that the true nature of this human experience is unity and diversity promotes healing and peace. Through this process, individuals can experience a sense of personal liberation of the mind. This revealing nurtures confidence and courage to foster individual beliefs, group ethics, and larger cultural systems and structures that lead to human psychological maturation and peaceful action in the world.

Joseph Campbell asserted that today's mythological or spiritual realization ought to address both the standard concerns and dealings with "the maturation of the individual, from dependency through adulthood, through maturity, and then to the exit," but most importantly also "to address concerns and dealings about global society (everybody on the planet, not separated by nativist or nationalistic identities), and how to relate this global society to the world of nature and the cosmos" (Campbell & Moyers, 1991). The world's wisdom traditions contain a myriad of spiritual practices including, songs, dances, mantras, hymns, prayers, lectio divina (praying with sacred texts), and more. I suggest investigating a wider array of such spiritual practices and their potency on not only

physical but also emotional associations. Admittedly, methodologies may need to be created that do not yet exist to measure the effects of specific spiritual practices, yet existing questionnaires and scales may be of some use and guidance.



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In *Promoting Mindfulness in African American Communities*, the researchers discuss how mindfulness interventions might be used to reduce high incidents of chronic diseases in African Americans due to, among other stressors, economic class, lack of access to healthy foods, and other societal factors. They note challenges to higher representation such as time, location of sessions and transportation. “We also provide additional strategies to guide future mindfulness research that target African Americans” (Biggers et al., 2020). My positive critique centers on the section “Cultural Adaptation of Mindfulness Programs Targeting African Americans.” In my judgment, this discussion is positive in opening the mind to structuring a broader array of mindfulness spiritual practices, including traditions from African American religions. For example, the singing of spirituals and gospel songs can soothe the mind-body. Cultural gatherings celebrating African American art and food are also practices that deepen the sense of connection and belonging. Critical analysis would suggest that research into these practices may reveal healing and lessening of stress, among other positive outcomes including a developed sense of a unitive identity with God or universal

oneness, although this study does not directly address this outcome. The challenge, as the authors note, is how to design a methodology to broadly study these and other spiritual practices.

“...it might be useful if new mindfulness-based practices were created specifically with the intention of building the skill of nonreactivity in order to cultivate resilience. “

“There seems to be an important distinction between implementing a mindfulness curriculum that specifically incorporates religion versus employing a more secular approach that is open to discussion of participants’ perceptions of how mindfulness practice may or may not integrate with their own spiritual or religious experiences” (Biggers et al., 2020). The authors suggest that mindfulness instructors consider discussing with participants how the mindfulness practice may or may not align with any religious or spiritual practices they may use. Again, as the previous study noted, is the call for additional research including African Americans. And I would add other social and religious groups as well. Additionally, I advocate methodology identifying, evaluating and quantifying the values that are identified in such spiritual practices.

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well. Additionally, I advocate methodology identifying, evaluating and quantifying the values that are identified in such spiritual practices.

Finally, in “Healing Racial Injustice with Mindfulness Research, Training, & Practice,” the author takes a big swing and gets a home run in compiling “The Canon,” that celebrates African American contemplative researchers and invites all contemplative researchers to “(1) come together in conversation about race and (2) have an ongoing, personal, body-based practice. In short, show up for conversations about race, and come prepared.” (Laura, 2022). The author notes that reparative contemplative practices are called for, including those that “combine contemplative science with social justice” (Laura, 2022). The paper provides a powerful positive critique and critical analysis of inclusive mindfulness research, methodology strategies and applications across individuals, groups and society. It is imperative that contemplative scientists experiment with a larger range of test designs to target overcoming the biases in existing social behaviors, thought, policy and decision-making. Additional interventions need to be explored that heal a troubled mind. CUE practice (also known as Oppositional Cultural Practice®) is a promising intervention worthy of testing and measuring. My experience has been that the practice opens pathways to creative and courageous integrity for the individual, the group, and society.

Picture of The Educating Gossip™

The Educating Gossip™

The Educating Gossip is a researcher and spiritual director. They write about how the Clark Unitive Effect bridges contemplative research to contemplative practices, rescuing mindfulness research from the valley of death. Staying positive and advancing the Clark Unitive Effect underscores their writing and life. The frame OWN IT, FEEL IT, LIVE IT, LOVE IT is used to provide a first person narrative, inviting the series reader to critically examine their own beliefs, feel the emotions and effects on the body, live practices that recognize and take care of body, speech and mind; and love generating the energy of mindfulness in every moment.

“That [mindfulness] energy allows us to be aware of what is going on; going on in our bodies, going on in our feelings, going on in our perceptions—in our mind and going on around us, in the world.” Thich Nhat Hanh

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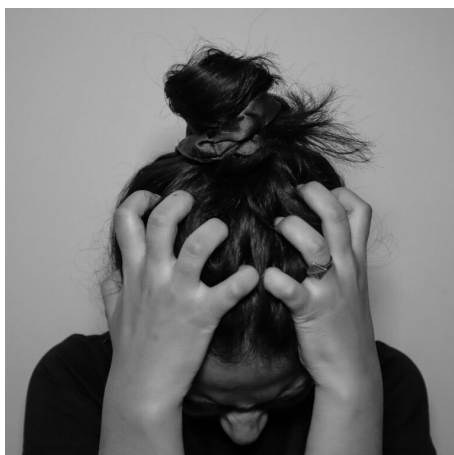
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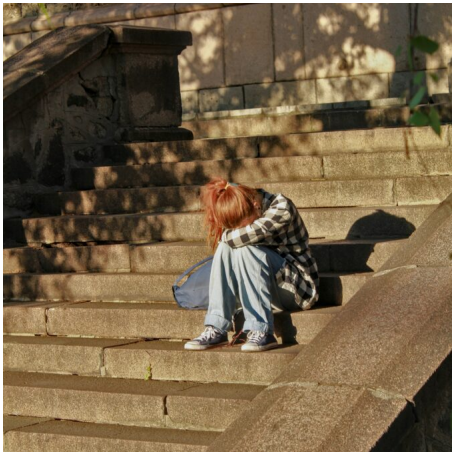
"Fostering self-compassion and building strong support systems empowers educators and counselors to guide students through mental distress, enhancing their well-being and resilience." This study investigated



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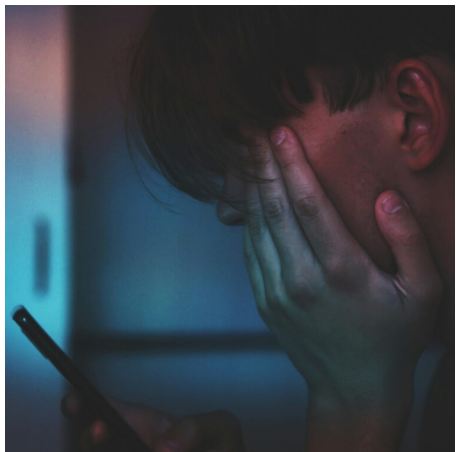
The predictive roles of self-compassion, mental toughness and emotional-psychological well-being on aggressive behaviors of adolescents at low socio-economic level
The study also highlighted how emotional well-being and self-compassion act as mediators, bridging the gap between mental toughness and aggression to strengthen the protective impact of mental toughness against aggression.

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Exploring the Connection Between Self-Compassion, Forgiveness, and Well-Being in Older Adults (Goel & Appachu, 2024)
The research highlights the importance to encourage self-compassion and forgiveness to improve older people's mental health

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The impact of loneliness on sleep quality in adolescents: a moderated chain mediation model (Yang et al., 2024)
Recent studies investigating the relationship between loneliness and poor sleep quality in teenagers discovered a significant correlation between higher loneliness and poorer sleep quality.

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Mediating Mindfulness-Based Interventions with Virtual Reality in Non-Clinical Populations: The State-of-the-Art (Failla et al., 2022)

By providing an immersive, engrossing, and controlled visual and auditory experience in which participants can practice mindfulness techniques, Virtual Reality (VR) systems can create immersive, ecologically valid, first-person experiences that can even tap into physiological reactions that align with real-world experiences.

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Trait Mindfulness and Relationship Satisfaction: The Role of Forgiveness Among Couples (Roberts et al., 2020)

Trait Mindfulness and Relationship Satisfaction: The Role of Forgiveness Among Couples (Roberts et al., 2020)

The researchers were interested in understanding if forgiveness acts as a mechanism by which mindfulness relates to relationship satisfaction. They speculated that being mindful would allow individuals to be aware of their own and their partners' emotions in a non-judgmental and non-reactive way. The increased awareness would make people more forgiving of partner transgressions, thereby enhancing relationship satisfaction.

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Exploring the Nexus between Mindfulness, Gratitude and Wellbeing Among Youth with the Mediating Role of Hopefulness: A South Asian Perspective (Ali et al., 2022)

Emerging studies are highlighting the effectiveness of mindfulness, gratitude and hopefulness as positive psychological tools in helping people cope with anxiety and stress. These practices have also been considered beneficial in enhancing psychological health and well-being.

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An electrophysiological investigation on the emotion regulatory mechanisms of brief open monitoring meditation in novice non-meditators (Lin et al., 2020)

Despite growing knowledge that mindfulness meditation can enhance emotional wellbeing, very little is known about how it all works. How exactly does the act of meditation help us deal with the emotional rollercoaster of everyday life? Is mindfulness training actually “transferrable” to real world situations? What’s going on in the brain? Can we even measure it?

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Self-compassion, quiet self, and the brain (Liu et al., 2020)

How does self-compassion protect depressed adolescents? Quieting the self may be the key.

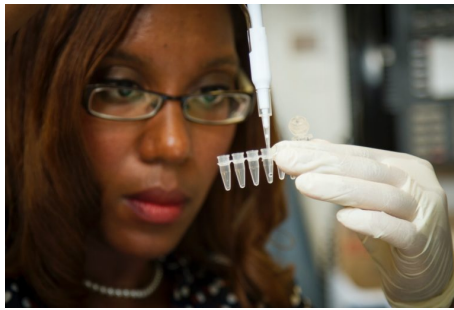
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When Less is More: Mindfulness Predicts Adaptive Affective Responding to Rejection via Reduced Prefrontal Recruitment (Martelli et al., 2018)

A study led by Alexandra Martelli investigated whether more mindful individuals (based on self-report measure scores) would respond to social rejection with less distress and if certain neurological mechanisms in the brain’s prefrontal cortex can potentially explain the role of mindfulness in reduced social distress.

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Brief mindfulness session improves mood and increases salivary oxytocin in psychology students (Bellosta-Batalla et al., 2020)

A research team from Valencia, Spain recently investigated the effects of a brief mindfulness-based intervention on both mood and biological markers on a sample of health professional students.

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Neurophysiological and behavioural markers of compassion (Kim et al., 2020)

A new study by Kim and colleagues explored how compassion-based training can affect two self-regulatory styles and its relationship to neural, physiological, and behavioral responses.

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Yoga and Mindfulness as a Tool for Influencing Affectivity, Anxiety, Mental Health, and Stress among Healthcare Workers: Results of a Single-Arm Clinical Trial (Torre et al., 2020)

Torre and colleagues recruited 70 HCWs from two hospitals in Rome, Italy for a 4-week course in yoga and mindfulness.

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Mindfulness Buffers the Impact of COVID-19 Outbreak Information on Sleep Duration (Zheng et al., 2020)

A team of researchers based in the perceived epicenter of the virus, Wuhan, China, recently tested whether a brief mindfulness intervention delivered through an app could be effective for reducing anxiety and protecting nightly sleep during the unfolding pandemic.

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Intrapsychic Correlates of Professional Quality of Life: Mindfulness, Empathy, and Emotional Separation. (Thomas & Otis, 2010).

Mindfulness practices can enhance a therapist's ability to intentionally and flexibly regulate attention as well as emotional reactivity which has been demonstrated to influence burnout.

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Physician Anxiety and Burnout: Symptom Correlates and a Prospective Pilot Study of App-Delivered Mindfulness Training (Roy et al., 2020)

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The current study reviewed the wider scientific literature for the role of yoga and mindfulness interventions in the treatment of severe mental illness.

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A Randomized Controlled Trial Examining the Effect of Mindfulness Meditation on Working Memory Capacity in Adolescents (Quach et al., 2015)

The amount of research involving mindfulness interventions has grown exponentially; however, only in the last decade has mindfulness research involving adolescents rapidly increased.

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The Differential Moderating Roles of Self-Compassion and Mindfulness in Self-Stigma and Well-Being Among People Living with Mental Illness or HIV (Yang et al., 2016)

Mindfulness and self-compassion are theorized to disrupt the maladaptive repetition of negative thoughts and emotions for patients with chronic or mental illnesses, who are particularly susceptible to psychosocial distress.

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Neural Stress Reactivity Relates to Smoking Outcomes and Differentiates Between Mindfulness and Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (Kober et al., 2016)

There is promising evidence that 70% of smokers would like to quit but less than 5% of unassisted attempts at quitting are actually successful.



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Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention for Stimulant Dependent Adults: A Pilot Randomized Clinical Trial (Glasner et al., 2016)

In a recent pilot study by Suzette Glasner, Ph.D. and her team at the Integrated Substance Abuse Programs at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, they evaluated the effects of Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) on reducing relapse susceptibility among stimulant-dependent adults receiving a contingency management (CM) intervention.



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Long-term Mindfulness Training is Associated with Reliable Differences in Resting Respiration Rate (Wielgosz et al., 2016)

A major implication of the study suggests the distal effects of intensive retreat practice on respiration rates, a benefit not necessarily conferred by a brief, but full-day meditation session.



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Examination of Broad Symptom Improvement Resulting From Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in Breast Cancer Survivors: A Randomized Controlled Trial (Lengacher et al., 2016)
Researchers are exploring mindfulness-based interventions as a long-term treatment options to address the multitude of symptoms after cancer has been treated.

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Epigenetic Clock Analysis in Long-term Meditators (Chaix et al., 2017)
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