

The Clark Unitive Effect: Bridging the 'Valley of Death' from Research to Practice



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



The Educating Gossip™

This is the second in a series of editorials discussing mindfulness research and the Clark Unitive Effect (also known as Oppositional Cultural Practice Theory). The Clark Unitive Effect postulates a series of actions—analysis, acceptance, and awareness—that can lead to individual psychological growth, improve understanding of the systems and structures of society, reduce decision-errors, and focus life's energy into creative peaceful acts that promote healing. This acceptance of and commitment to helping others becomes a spiritual or contemplative praxis (Clark, K.E. 2016, 2018).

OWN IT!

When people from across academic fields and disciplines come together to understand a phenomena in its totality, they experience transdisciplinary research. They bring together their various lenses to take an up-close, fully illuminated examination of an event or phenomenon, identifying new areas for research and achieving deeper understanding. Cyrille Rigolot proposes that transdisciplinarity become a new discipline and considered as a *way of being* (Rigolot, 2022). His suggestion aligns with the Clark Unitive Effect (also called oppositional cultural practice theory), a transdisciplinary theory positing an explanation of events and phenomenon that can fulfill the need for self-transcendence and that becomes a *way of being* (Clark, 2016, 2018).

The growing recognition of transdisciplinarity's powerful nature offers researchers valuable opportunities for collaboration. Transdisciplinary examination of an issue, from many points of view, using many data sets, provides insight to dispel individual and discipline bias and to reduce thinking and decision-making errors. Our ability to decrease errors, especially those based on misinformation or unconscious bias, is called upon now more than ever, as Rigolot puts it, "to efficiently address the world's most pressing issues..."

The Clark Unitive Effect hypothesizes insights and understanding focused on the world's individual, group, and larger culture issues when transdisciplinarity critical analysis and positive critique are used to understand today's unprecedented perils. Additionally, the Clark Unitive Effect submits when this attempt for understanding includes the collaboration of researchers, findings often result that point to solutions that bring peace and lessen ill-being. Furthermore, the Clark Unitive Effect suggests a way of understanding how transdisciplinarity thinking becomes a mindfulness practice. In other words, becomes a new identity, a new way of *being*.

While reading the Truthdig re-post of Angelika Albaladerjo's article Are Police Helicopters Worth the Cost?, I was excited to learn of the several researchers trying to understand and solve the issues of the tax burden and the negative impacts of police helicopters on communities. The article suggests a transdisciplinary conversation is at work to understand the event and phenomenon. I own my belief in transdisciplinarity as a pathway to understanding how collaboration can address both local and global issues.

“The growing recognition of transdisciplinarity’s powerful nature offers researchers valuable opportunities for collaboration”

FEEL IT!

As I read the police helicopter article, the “*being cognition*”, emotions of glee, happiness, excitement and hope emanated from the core of my conscious mind. The feelings in my body of energy, a kind of vibrating, or soft oscillation, gently moved me from side to side. A faint ‘*Om*’ moved my lips as I practiced mindful reading.

Other sections of the article activated in me *deficiency cognition*, emotions of anger, helplessness, worry, and fear. I was reminded of my own experiences with police helicopters and their seemingly endless circling above my neighborhood, both day and night. The muscles in my shoulders began to tense. Yet, because I am a contemplative/spiritual practitioner, I know how and begin to take care of those emotions first. Using the energy of mindfulness, I found a place of calm and peace, tapping into the *being cognition* emotions to regulate this response. I remembered to take slow, deep breaths—to practice mindfulness breathing—recalling that I am here now in a relaxed frame of mind, and thus I read the article to completion. The article solidified my hope and faith in humanity, and my work on the Clark Unitive Effect.

If you have never experienced helicopter policing similar to Beni Benitez’s account in the article, the issue remains critical for the larger culture. The troubling impact of this policing strategy on mental, emotional and physical health, and arguably frivolous spending at all levels of government, has motivated individuals to act. The article interviewed the team amassing an array of data, across fields of knowledge and experience. As a result, the reader gains a deeper insight and understanding of what, why and how a transdisciplinary team can collaborate. It’s possible the individuals engage in mindfulness reflection as they collaborate with the author to inform the public about this growing local and nationwide issue. Additionally, the research study focus is suggestive of the propositions and hypotheses of the Clark Unitive Effect in many aspects. For example, the historical local and global positionality focus; the positive critique and critical analysis of an early study of the helicopter program to

uncover and understand any bias in the decision to create the program; exploring the society and social behavior that develop as a result of the program; and looking for alternative goals that might actually result in less crime and be more cost effective.

In our communities, we may not be responsible for the consequences of neocolonial capitalism, but we can step-up in any of our capacities, be accountable, and be engaged with other concerned individuals, groups, and the larger cultural system. Just as the aforementioned individuals have modeled for us, together we can create enduring positive change (Chomsky & Waterstone, 2020).



LIVE IT!

Researchers of contemplative practices, including of course mindfulness, will find that by teaming up with a transdisciplinary effort, adding their data gathering skills and inquiries, can add another element of consideration during the decision-making process that may lead to improved human health and community peace. They can direct their research to include the propositions of the Clark Unitive Effect for example, critical analysis of unhealthy social impacts, specifically in overcoming helplessness supported by mindfulness practices; practicing *being* by calming deficiency emotion like fear, anger and wrong mental formations while engaged in resolving conflict in the process of forming new peaceful solutions; practicing mindfulness and unitive mental formations, understanding there is no separateness,

no individuality, only oneness, to support emerging mutual understanding and equanimity; and so much more. Individuals can direct their research in this contemplative manner, avoiding the “valley of death,” where translating research advances into practical applications never fully realizes its potential in the larger culture from private funding to public funding (Murphy & Edwards, 2003) or from basic science discoveries to human trial studies (Coller & Califf, 2009).

The Clark Unitive Effect provides hypotheses and propositions for further focused research of contemplative practices. With this positional, up-close focus, researchers not only gain personal experiential contemplative practice but also actively show how mindfulness and other contemplative practices support conflict resolution, provide healing and peace, can help overcome fear, and find courage to engage in active compassion (Barclay, 2016). Now, the research has contextual importance and relevance. The Clark Unitive Effect supports bridging the gap between research and application.

Yes! Imagine what it would feel like to have your mindfulness research discussed as a major contribution in the context of a decision to change cultural behaviors that had caused suffering and ill-health. A Clark Unitive Effect focused mindfulness research inquiry has great potential. The transdisciplinary research team would encounter a *peak experience* (Clark, K.E. 2016, 2018). The participation would deepen one's own personal spiritual journey, while at the same time allow contemplative practice to fully realize its potential to the larger culture.

Further, because the Clark Unitive Effect proposes a transdisciplinary research approach including the individual, community, and larger society on its team, the effort is about real world impacts, the findings and suggested interventions are therefore more likely than not to result in decisions free of noise and bias. Purposeful, effective actions that reduce suffering and increase peace may very well come into being.

“The Clark Unitive Effect predicts that transdisciplinarity, along with community and larger culture engagement as part of the team, can traverse the ‘valley of death.’”

LOVE IT!

According to Dr. Attila A. Seyhan, “The crisis involving the “translation” of basic

scientific findings in a laboratory setting into human applications and potential treatments or biomarkers for a disease is widely recognized both in academia and industry” (Seyhan, 2019). Translating transdisciplinary research is also increasingly being recognized as difficult to accomplish (Meslin & Cambon-Thomsen, 2013). But I am not discouraged. In fact, I am elated. The Albaladejo article is an example of recognizing the importance of transdisciplinary research, translating the research design, and clearly communicating the potential for compassionate government and political decisions to result that can bring about improved human health and community and societal peace and well-being.

The Clark Unitive Effect predicts that transdisciplinarity, along with community and larger culture engagement as part of the team, can traverse the “valley of death.” We don’t know how Albaladerjo as a reporter came to be part of the conversation, yet here we get to witness journalists, researchers, and the community engage in contemplation, self-examination, fellowship, and reflection, forms of spiritual or contemplative practice. They are inviting us to participate with them in these practices. The vexing bond of power and its pernicious proclivity for the deployment of tools that cause suffering is meditated upon. So many individuals, communities, and the larger culture, by virtue of reading this article, can now understand, discuss, and be encouraged to take interest in this phenomenon.

I love it! Transdisciplinarity is gaining the attention of researchers. In concert with the Clark Unitive Effect hypotheses and propositions, transdisciplinary research holds the possibility of healing individuals, communities and the larger culture and restoring peace. I love that each day I practice connecting my research to action in the world; I traverse over the ‘valley of death’ and I experience confidence to act with courage, even in the face of uncertainty. Albaladejo’s article reminds us that we are not alone in this experience. We move as individuals, communities, and as a larger culture toward lasting social change that is sustaining physical and emotional health and reflecting the wonder and joy of creation that is all around us.



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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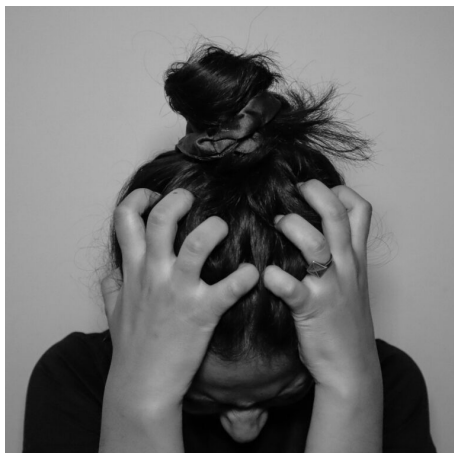
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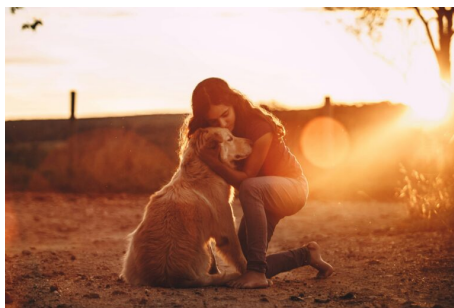
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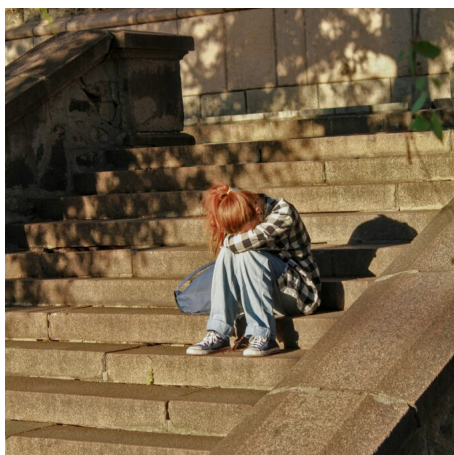
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The study also highlighted how emotional well-being and self-compassion act as mediators, bridging the gap between mental toughness and aggression to strengthen the protective impact of mental toughness against aggression.

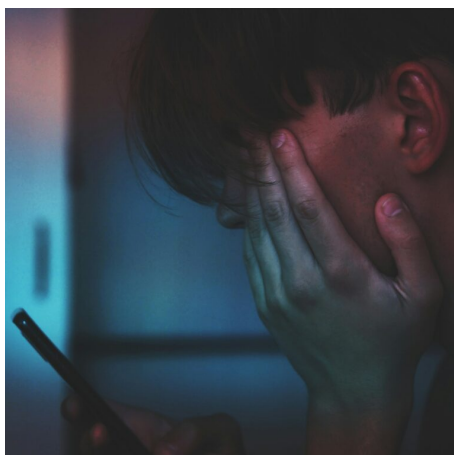
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Trait Mindfulness and Relationship Satisfaction: The Role of Forgiveness Among Couples (Roberts et al., 2020)

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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)

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Neurophysiological and behavioural markers of compassion (Kim et al., 2020)
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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)
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Intrapsychic Correlates of Professional Quality of Life: Mindfulness, Empathy, and Emotional Separation. (Thomas & Otis, 2010).

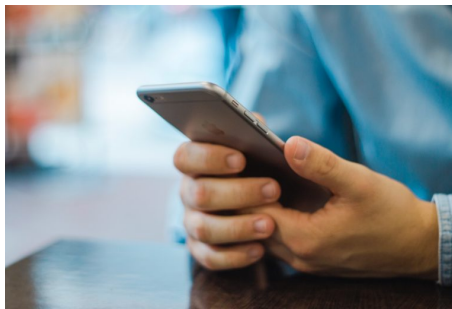
Mindfulness practices can enhance a therapist's ability to intentionally and flexibly regulate attention as well as emotional reactivity which has been demonstrated to influence burnout.



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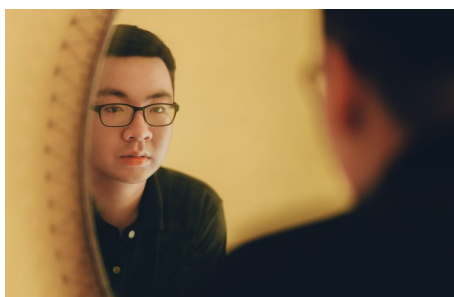
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The Differential Moderating Roles of Self-Compassion and Mindfulness in Self-Stigma and Well-Being Among People Living with Mental Illness or HIV (Yang et al., 2016)

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