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Justin Tubbs

Virginia Commonwealth University

Daniel R. Berry

Virginia Commonwealth University

Kirk Warren Brown

Virginia Commonwealth University

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VCU Abating Prejudice with Presence: Dispositional Mindfulness Increases Interracial Helping Behavior

Justin D. Tubbs, Daniel R. Berry, & Kirk Warren Brown

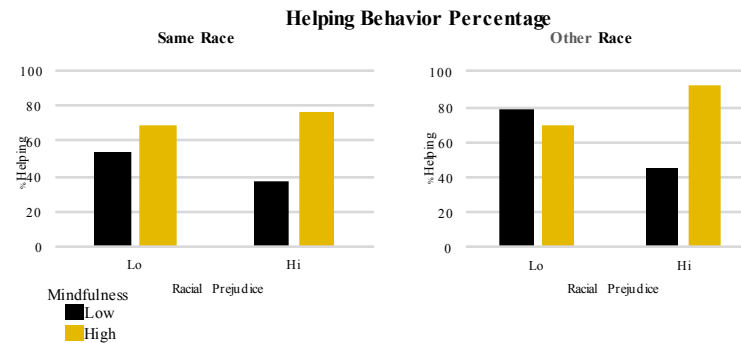
Introduction

Helping behavior is less frequently shown toward members of social out-groups (Cikra, Bruneau, & Saxe, 2011). One common social division in America and other countries is based on race, and although most condemn racial discrimination, helping is undermined in interracial interactions (Saucier, Miller, & Doucet, 2005). Recent theory suggests that *mindfulness*, a receptive attention to one's present experience, can attenuate the conceptual boundaries that typically separate and distance oneself from others (Trautwein, Schmidt, & Naranjo, 2014). In this experiment, we asked whether variation in the quality of attention, operationalized herein as dispositional mindfulness, predicted greater frequency of helping behavior across racial lines. Consistent with this literature, we hypothesized that dispositional mindfulness would show predictive validity in interracial helping, and incremental validity over agreeableness and racial prejudice, two common predictors of interracial helping behavior.

Methods

Self-identifying White, Caucasian, and European American undergraduate students ($N = 139$) participated in a lab-based study in exchange for course credit. Upon entering the lab, participants were greeted by an experimenter and seated next to two confederates in a waiting room while the experimenter prepared for the participant in another room. Then a planned scenario unfolded in which (a) the third confederate walked in the room on crutches, or (b) the experimenter ostensibly accidentally dropped a stack of papers in the waiting room (conditions randomized). The race of the helpee was also randomized (Black or White). Experimenters recorded whether or not the participant helped the confederate. After the experimenter returned to the waiting room, the participant was taken to another room where informed consent was collected and the participant was asked to take a survey online which included measures of trait mindfulness, using the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), agreeableness utilizing the NEO-FFI agreeableness subscale, and racial prejudice, measured with the Symbolic Racism 2000 Scale. Finally, participants were debriefed on the nature of the study.

Results



Helping Behavior Percentage. Two block hierarchical logistic regression was performed with cases split by helpee race, median-split racial prejudice levels, and median-split mindfulness to examine the effects of a mindfulness-racial prejudice interaction on helping behavior. Sex and agreeableness loaded in the first block, and mindfulness loaded in the second block. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Conclusions

- Dispositional mindfulness, agreeableness, participant sex, and mindfulness * racial prejudice interaction were significant predictors of helping behavior across both scenarios and helpee race conditions
- Dispositional mindfulness significantly predicted greater same race helping behavior
- Dispositional mindfulness moderated the help-reducing effects of racial prejudice; specifically, mindfulness tempered the role of high racial prejudice across both racial conditions but especially in the other race condition
- This study emphasizes the potential for mindfulness to diminish defensive attitudes and increase prosocial responsiveness across a common social division

(a) **Prediction of Overall Helping**

Block	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE(b)</i>	<i>OR</i>	[95% CI]
1	Participant Sex	-1.309*	.510	.270	[.099, .734]
	Agreeableness	1.026**	.371	2.791	[1.348, 5.777]
	Racial Prejudice	.14	.345	1.151	[.585, 2.263]
2	Mindfulness	1.167***	.316	3.213	[1.730, 5.965]
	Mindfulness * Racial Prejudice	1.497*	.639	4.467	[1.277, 15.630]

(b) **Prediction of Same-Race Helping**

Block	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE(b)</i>	<i>OR</i>	[95% CI]
1	Participant Sex	-8.98	.663	.407	[.111, 1.493]
	Agreeableness	.677	.474	1.967	[.777, 4.981]
	Racial Prejudice	.003	.506	1.003	[.372, 2.702]
2	Mindfulness	1.657***	.472	5.244	[2.080, 13.224]
	Mindfulness * Racial Prejudice	.944	.917	2.571	[.426, 15.510]

Prediction of Other-Race Helping

Block	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE(b)</i>	<i>OR</i>	[95% CI]
1	Participant Sex	-1.740*	.852	.175	[.033, .931]
	Agreeableness	1.579*	.616	4.848	[1.450, 16.208]
	Racial Prejudice	.156	.500	1.169	[.439, 3.112]
2	Mindfulness	.486	.460	1.627	[.660, 4.011]
	Mindfulness * Racial Prejudice	2.241*	6.501	9.402	[1.283, 68.922]

a) Three-block hierarchical logistic regressions were performed to examine the effects of mindfulness on helping behavior in all conditions. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

b) Two separate Three-block hierarchical logistic regression models were constructed to examine the effects of mindfulness on helping behavior by helpee race. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

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