2014

Mindfulness Buffers Exclusion-Related Social Distress

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Mindfulness Buffers Exclusion-Related Social Distress

Ami A. Kumar, Daniel R. Berry, Jordan T. Quaglia

Introduction

Social rejection is one of the more “painful” experiences humans can endure, affecting long term physical and emotional health.1 Experiencing social rejection can create psychological and social distress.2 A number of studies have sought to understand for whom and under what conditions social rejection would be more, or less impactful. Building on this research, the present study targeted mindfulness—a psychological state that entails receptive attention to one’s present experience3—as a potential buffer to rejection-induced social distress. We hypothesized that mindfulness would alleviate social distress because ample previous research suggests that mindfulness is a psychological resiliency factor that protects against personal and social distress.

Method

Study 1: Undergraduates (N = 87) received course credit in exchange for participation. Participants responded to survey questions and then played one round of Cyberball. During the game, participants believe that they are playing a simple ball-tossing game over the internet with real people. However, the game is a computer program with no other participants, and it is designed to exclude the participant. After the game, participants reported levels of social distress.

Study 2: Undergraduates (N = 119) received course credit in exchange for participation. As in Study 1, participants completed survey questions, but prior to playing Cyberball, participants were randomly assigned to listen to a mindfulness (MI) or control (CI) audio track. The purpose of the audio track is to induce a state of mindfulness; this allows for causal conclusions to be made from this study. After the induction, participants were excluded via Cyberball. Then, participants reported levels of social distress.

Social Distress Results Study 1

(a) Correlations Among Traits and Social Distress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait variable</th>
<th>Need Threat Scale Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belongingness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAAS</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAw</td>
<td>0.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACS</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSE</td>
<td>0.18</td>
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</table>

MIAAS = Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, AAw = Acting with Awareness subscale of the Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, ACS = Attentional Control Scale, RSE = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. *p<0.05, **p<0.01. Those higher in mindfulness showed reduced social distress (positive correlations indicate reduced social distress). Attentional control was also associated with reduced distress, whereas self-esteem was not.

(b) Mindfulness’ Relation to Exclusion Distress After Controlling for Attentional Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait variable</th>
<th>Need Threat Scale Domain</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AAw</td>
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A two-block hierarchical regression was run to examine the effects of mindfulness on social distress over and above attentional control. Thus, we statistically controlled for attentional control by adding it into block one. Statistics are standardized coefficients of mindfulness’ effect on social distress from block two. Mindfulness as measured by the MAAS remained a stable predictor of the domains of social distress, indicating that mindfulness may buffer negative effects of exclusion.

Conclusion

• Mindfulness reduces exclusion-related social distress.
• Mindfulness may afford psychological resiliency when confronting social stressors.
• Importantly, mindfulness’ relation with reduced social distress was stable even after controlling for attentional control.
• Results are consistent with a growing body of research on mindfulness as a resiliency factor that protects against social threat.

References


Acknowledgements

I would like to give a special thanks to Daniel Berry for allowing me to conduct and present a poster on his study. I would also like to thank Jordan Quaglia, my mentor from the Graduate Student Mentorship Program, for introducing this idea and opportunity to present a research poster.