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Promoting Prosocial Responsiveness across Racial Divides through Mindfulness

Chris J. Wall, Paul E. Plonski, Daniel R. Berry, Kirk Warren Brown

Introduction

In interracial and other intergroup interactions, prosocial emotions and actions are often undermined (Cikara & van Bavel, 2014). Perceiving psychological separateness between “us” and “them” – which is often an automatic, unintentional process – is psychological kindling for lower prosocial responsiveness that leads to prejudice, discrimination, aggressive conflict (Cikara, 2015). Recent research has shown that mindfulness, an open and unconditional attention to one’s present experiences, is associated with decreased automaticity and racial bias (Kang, Gruber, & Gray, 2013; Lueke & Gibson, 2014), barriers that hinder prosocial responsiveness (Trautwien, Schmidt, & Naranjo, 2014). Two experiments investigated whether brief mindfulness training promoted prosocial responsiveness toward an ostracized person of another race.

Method

Study 1: Undergraduate participants (N = 124), self-identifying as White or Caucasian, following having their picture taken and loaded into the Cyberball software, were randomized to listen to brief mindfulness training instructions (MT, n = 48), attention-based control training instructions (CT, n = 36), or no instructions (NT, n = 40) prior to witnessing a person of color being excluded in Cyberball. Participants reported state empathic concern (EC) and were offered the opportunity to write emails to the exclusion victims, which were coded for prosociality. After listening to brief booster training instructions, participants were offered a chance to demonstrate affiliation by helping the victim in an all-play Cyberball game, coded as throws to victim / total throws.

Study 2: Undergraduates (N = 131), self-identifying as White or Caucasian, were informed that all of the participants’ names would be loaded into the Cyberball game and were randomized to either MT (n = 48) or CT (n = 49) or NT (n = 34) conditions prior to witnessing a person of color being excluded. Participants reported state EC, and were offered opportunity to write emails to the exclusion victims, coded for prosociality. Affiliation was measured during the all-play game.

Measures.

Empathic concern (Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987; sample α s = .85, .91)
 Email helping (Maten et al., 2011; sample ICCs = .85, .92),
 Affiliation (Riem et al., 2013).

Study 1: Prosocial Responsiveness Toward Ostracized Racial Outgroup Member (Photographs)

(1)

Study 1: Mindfulness Training Prediction of Prosocial Responsiveness (Interracial Photographs)			
	Empathic Concern	Affiliation	Email Helping
One-Way ANOVA	F(2,120) = 2.8, p = .065	F(2,111) = 3.96, p < .05	F(2, 121) = 9.526, p < .01
Planned Contrasts			
CT - NT	t(120) = -.108, p > .05	t(66.575) = -2.521, p < .05	t(73.944) = -1.285, p > .05
MT - CT&NT	t(120) = 2.366, p < .05	t(108.132) = .667, p > .05	t(99.253) = 4.224, p < .01

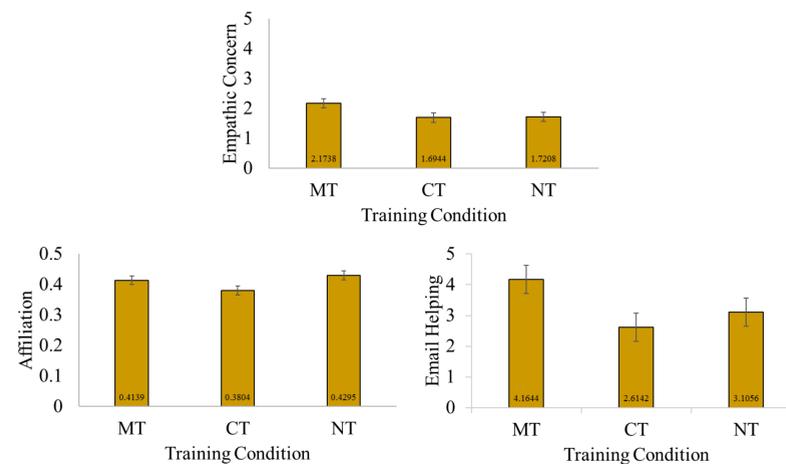


Figure 1. Training Condition mean differences among empathy and prosocial responsiveness study outcomes in the photograph condition. Included are contrast tests between the CT and NT (CT=1, NT=-1, MT = 0), as well as between combined control conditions and MT (CT=-1, NT=-1, MT=2). In the case of Affiliation and Email Helping, equal variance could not be assumed.

Study 1: Prosocial Responsiveness Toward Ostracized Racial Outgroup Member (Names)

(2)

Study 2: Mindfulness Training Prediction of Prosocial Responsiveness (Interracial Names)			
	Empathic Concern	Affiliation	Email Helping
One-Way ANOVA	F(2, 128) = 5.383, p < .01	F(2, 121) = 5.095, p < .05	F(2,121) = 4.569, p < .05
Planned Contrasts			
CT - NT	t(61.952) = -1.321, p > .05	t(71.138) = -0.288, p > .05	t(64.615) = 0.303, p > .05
MT - CT&NT	t(89.879) = 2.738, p < .01	t(80.382) = 3.002, P < .01	t(98.011) = 3.058, p < .01

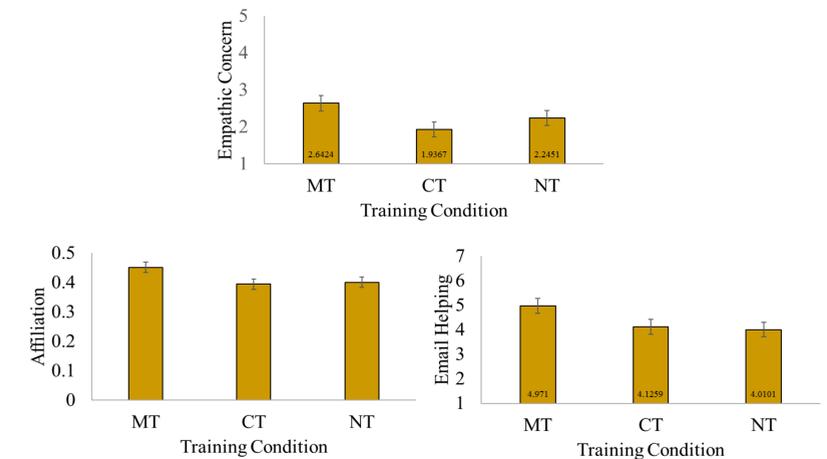


Figure 2. Training Condition mean differences among empathy and prosocial responsiveness study outcomes in the name condition. Included are contrast tests between the CT and NT (CT=1, NT=-1, MT = 0), as well as between combined control conditions and MT (CT=-1, NT=-1, MT=2). In all cases, equal variance could not be assumed.

Conclusions

- Brief mindfulness training increased empathic concern for ostracized strangers relative to both controls, in the Photograph and Name (trending) Studies.
- Brief mindfulness training increased email helping toward ostracism victims, relative to both controls, in the Photograph and Name Studies.
- Brief mindfulness training increased affiliation, relative to both controls, in the Name Study but not the Photograph Study

- Mindfulness training in online contexts may be limited to contexts in which individuals are more anonymous (i.e., first-name basis vs photographs)
- These studies show that mindfulness increases prosociality in interracial contexts, which builds on previous research showing that mindfulness conduces to prosociality

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