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Abating Prejudice With Presence: Dispositional Mindfulness Increases Interracial Helping Behavior

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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 intergroup helping, and incremental validity over agreeableness and racial prejudice, two common predictors of intergroup 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 a 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 helper was also randomized (Black or White). Experimenter 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**

**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.

**References**


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![Diagram](attachment:abating-prejudice-with-presence.png)