

# Empathy and Anti-racism

*Perspective-taking influences compassion and, in turn, anti-racist beliefs*

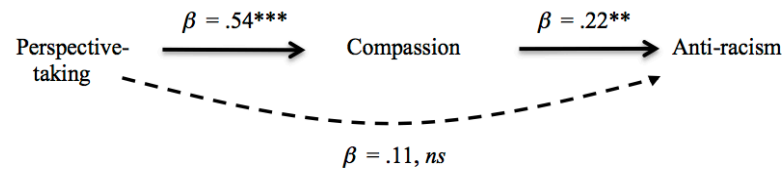
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## SUMMARY/ABSTRACT

Can empathy increase anti-racism? How might this happen, given empathy’s multidimensional nature (Davis, 1983; Smith, 1759; Zaki, 2020)? We develop a conceptual model whereby perspective-taking (cognitive empathy) influences compassion (emotional empathy) and thereby promotes anti-racist beliefs. Analysis of a cross-sectional dataset ( $N = 311$ ) provides evidence for this conceptualization.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS



Test of Indirect Effect (Sobel's  $z$ ) = 3.29,  $p < .01$

### Correlates of Emotional Empathy (Trait/Dispositional Compassion)

Variable	Emotional Empathy (Compassion)	
	Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ )	Interpretation
Income	.09	income and compassion are unrelated
Education	-.18**	as level of education increases, compassion decreases
Conservatism	-.34***	as political conservatism increases, compassion decreases
Age (in years)	.19**	older age is associated with increased compassion
Gender (male =1)	-.16**	(on average) females show greater compassion than males

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## METHOD

Data on adults were collected from an online crowd-sourcing platform (Amazon’s Mechanical Turk).

Three psychological constructs were measured:

**Perspective-taking** (Davis, 1983)

**Compassion** or empathic concern (Davis, 1983)

and

**Beliefs in Anti-racism** (a novel face valid self-report measure developed by this lab)

Given its intentional brevity (four items), this measure showed acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .67$ ). Also, factor analysis showed that items loaded on a single factor.

(Items are available upon request.)

## DISCUSSION

This study provides initial evidence that perspective-taking (cognitive empathy) begets compassion (emotional empathy) that, in turn, fosters anti-racist beliefs and action tendencies.

We recommend that future research build on this work in at least two ways.

- 1) Manipulate perspective-taking (versus a control condition) to determine if these relations still hold.
- 2) Measure behavioral (rather than self-report) outcome variables. Anti-racism, a new construct for psychology, might be operationalized in interesting and informative ways.