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## **WATCHING THE ILLUSION OF FREE WILL DISSOLVE: THE INFLUENCE OF INTENSIVE MEDITATION ON BELIEF IN COMPLETE FREE WILL**

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**Background:** Meditation positively influences both prosocial behavior and cognitive functions that facilitate self-regulation, such as working memory and executive attention. Self-regulation and prosocial behavior are also associated with the philosophical concept of free will. Experiments within cognitive, social, and developmental psychology have explored how one's belief in free will (FWb) is related to behavior.

**Aims:** Informed by the evidence that meditation increases self-regulation and prosocial behavior, the current study examined the influence of an 8-week intensive meditation retreat on FWb using the free will inventory (FWI).

**Method:** FWb was measured both at the beginning and end of the retreat. We predicted that participants who engaged in the retreat ( $N = 14$ ) would experience increased FWb, as compared to a podcast group that did not engage in intensive meditation ( $N = 42$ ).

**Preliminary results:** There was a significant interaction between group and time for FWb ( $F(1,48) = 4.374, p = .042$ ). However, contrary to our predictions, the retreat group experienced a decrease in FWb after the retreat ( $M = -3.57, SD = 5.9$ ), while FWb in the podcast group remained unchanged ( $M = -.17, SD = 4.87$ ). Interestingly, there was also a negative correlation between FWb and years meditating ( $r(51) = -.379, p = .007$ ). Based on these surprising results, we propose that FWb may be experience-dependent, such that experiencing a failure of free will (e.g. inability to regulate mind wandering) may modify FWb. Interestingly, these results also suggest that intensive meditation may facilitate a first-person account of free will more in line with neuroscientific findings.

**Keywords:** Intensive meditation, Free will

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