

ACT's Effect on Cooperative and Altruistic Choices Among College Students

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Background

- Behavioral Scientists have long-sought a method of scaling their principles to the cultural level
- Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT)
 - may help group member relationships through augmenting the appetitive functions of cooperative behavior and diminishing aversive functions
- Social discounting quantitatively describes altruistic choice
 - Cooperation* is a form of *altruism*
 - Group members behave to benefit others
- The present study examines these questions:**
 - Will students choose to work with others more after an experiential ACT intervention?**
 - Will altruism (as measured by social discounting) increase after receiving an experiential ACT intervention?**

Methods

- 34 students enrolled in a 200-level Behavior Science class
- 3 groups
 - ACT Experiential Workshop (1 hr) – 14 students
 - ACT Education Lecture (1 hr) – 14 students
 - Control (No Intervention) – 6 students

Social Discounting

- Participants read a prompt...
 - Imagine a list of people from 1 – 100
 - #1 is a close friend or relative
 - #100 is an acquaintance or someone you do know well
- Choose between money for *you* and money for another person
 - Persons 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, & 100
- Administered...
 - Beginning of the course
 - End of the course

ACT Workshop

- ACT trainer led all exercises
- Engaged in exercises such as...
 - “Wind in the willows” trust fall activity
 - Learning about each other’s hobbies and values
- Led through a talk about building trust in the group
 - Goal was to decrease Psychological Fusion with regards to rules such as “people will take advantage of me”
- Participants committed to supporting one another during course

ACT Lecture

- Participants in this group were given a lecture on...
 - The Psychological Flexibility model
 - Using ACT to increase social behavior in children with ASD

Results

- Social Discounting (Fig. 1)**
 - Average value for each social distance across groups attained
 - Area-under-the curve measure of discounting attained
 - All groups *decreased* altruism
 - ACT Experiential demonstrate the *lowest decrease*
- Cooperative Choices (Fig. 2)**
 - All participants chose to work alone or cooperatively (with 1-2 others) on a quiz each class period
 - % Cooperative Choice = $(\text{Cooperative choices} / \text{All choice opportunities}) * 100$
 - No significant effect was seen across groups in terms of their cooperative choices pre- versus post-intervention

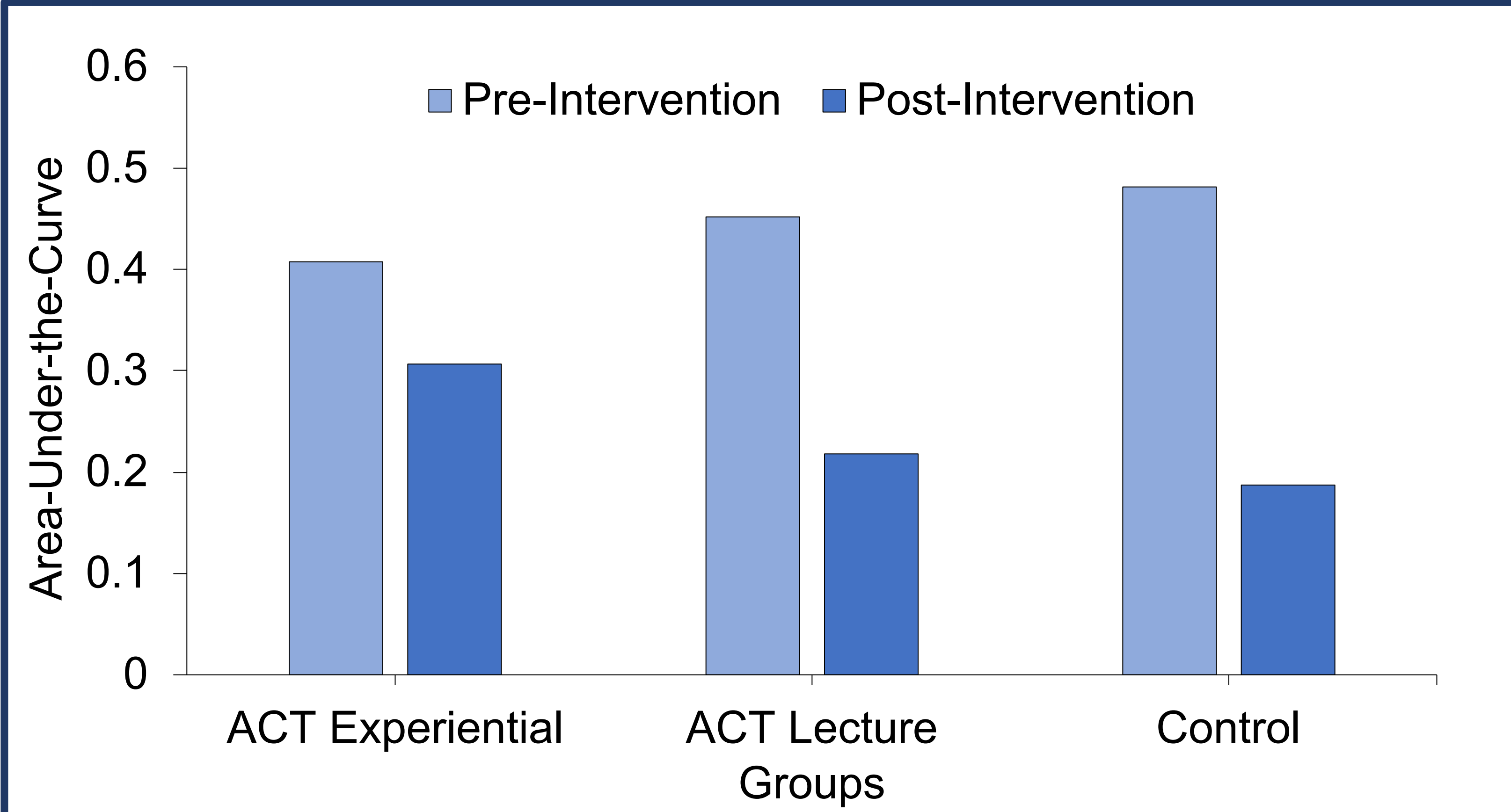


Figure 1. Social Discounting AUC pre- and post-intervention across groups

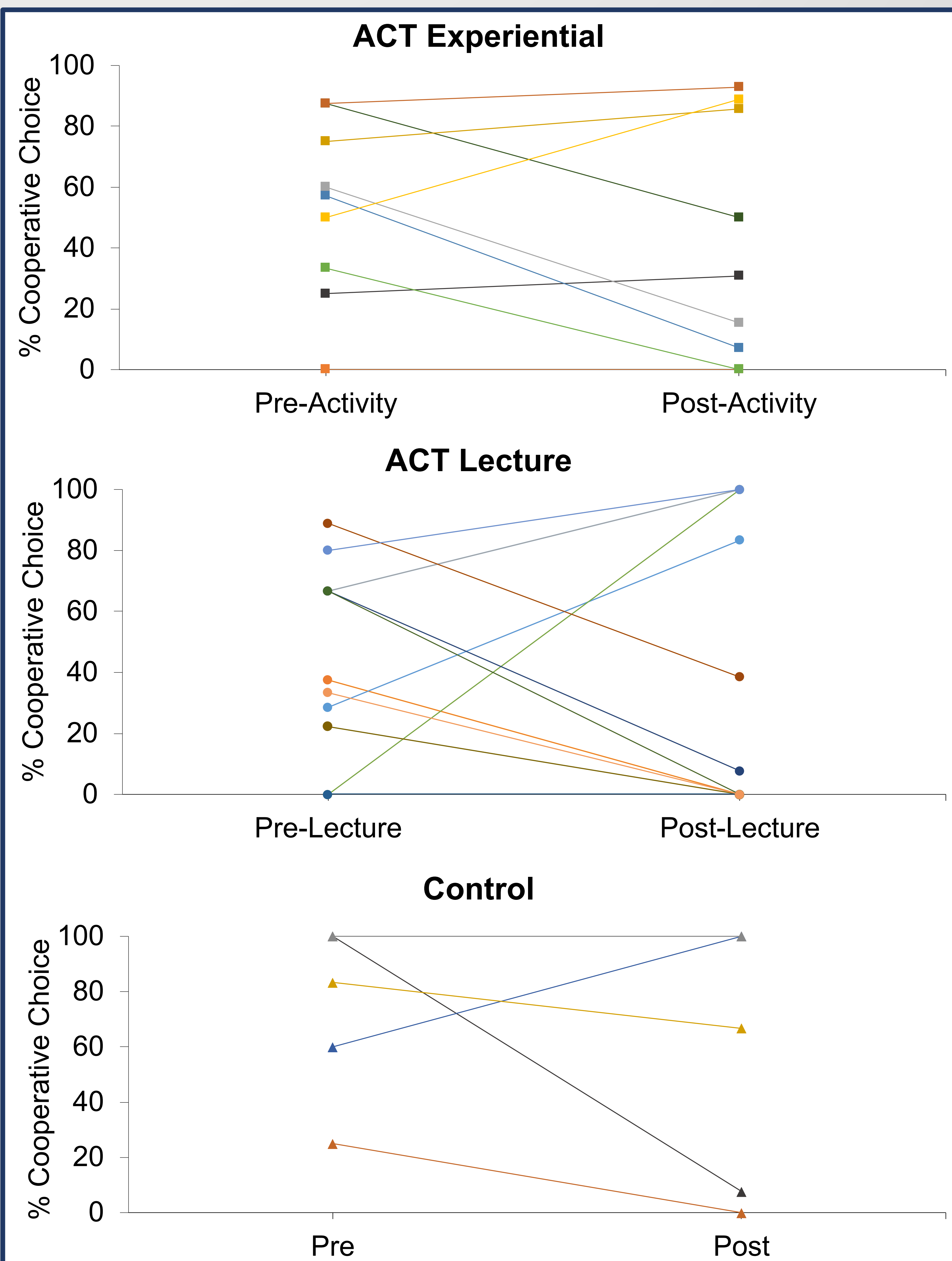


Figure 2. % Cooperative choices across all groups

Limitations

- ACT dosage may have been too brief
- An extra credit point was awarded for solo quiz choices
 - This may have been too great a reinforcer for working alone

Future Directions

- Longer workshop/training (more than 1h)
- Incorporate Prosocial training with ACT to target cooperation
- Evaluate other behavioral measures
 - Time participating in a group
 - Length of a group discussion

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