Presentation Abstract

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Mind wandering during sustained attention induces different psychophysiological patterns in experienced meditators and naïve participants: implications for Transactional Analysis

Abstract
Mind-wandering, defined as the spontaneous disengagement of attention from the immediate external environment toward task-unrelated thoughts, has been inversely associated with mindfulness, a nonjudgmental awareness of present-moment experience. From a Transactional Analysis (TA) perspective, mind-wandering may also be understood as a moment in which archaic Child experiences or internalized Parent dialogues intrude into present awareness, potentially contaminating Adult functioning. Conversely, mindfulness may support Adult functioning, through sustained attention and the capacity to remain in contact with the here and now, observing internal experience without automatic identification or judgment. The present study investigated whether mindfulness meditation experience modulates behavioral, phenomenological, and physiological responses during mind-wandering. 28 meditators and 28 controls performed a Sustained Attention to Response Task (SART), which requires participants to respond to a random series of digits except for a no-go digit. At random intervals, following thought probes, participants indicated whether their attention was on-task or mind wandering. In the case of mind-wandering, participants were asked after the task about its phenomenology. Results showed that mind-wandering was associated with poorer performance (longer reaction times) and increased eye movements (number of blinks) in both groups. However, critical differences emerged: only meditators exhibited a reduction in heart rate during mind-wandering episodes compared to on-task periods. This reduction was predicted by higher levels of experiential acceptance and was accompanied by a more concrete and realistic phenomenology of mind-wandering. In TA terms, the more realistic and concrete mind-wandering

suggests that mindfulness practice may strengthen Adult functioning. The reduced HR suggests that mindfulness practice could facilitate the autonomic regulation of mind-wandering, possibly reflecting a process of decontamination from reactive Parent and Child intrusions. These findings encourage the integration of mindfulness-based techniques within TA practice to promote conscious, physiologically regulated responses to mind-wandering, rather than script-driven reactions.

Professional Picture

