

The Relationship between the Content of Inner Human Experience and Well-Being: An Experience Sampling Study

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Abstract : Background and Objectives: Humans are probably the only animals whose minds are constantly filled with thoughts, feelings and emotions. Previous studies have investigated human minds from different dimensions, including its proportion of time for not being present, its representative format, its personal relevance, its temporal locus, and affect valence. The current study aims at characterizing human mind by employing Experience Sampling Methods (ESM), a self-report research procedure for studying daily experience. This study emphasis on answering the following questions: 1) How does the contents of the inner experience vary across demographics, 2) Are certain types of inner experiences correlated with level of mindfulness and mental well-being (e.g., are people who spend more time being present happier, and are more mindful people more at-present?), 3) Will being prompted to report one's inner experience increase mindfulness and mental well-being? Methods: Participants were recruited from the subject pool of UC San Diego or from the social media. They began by filling out two questionnaires: 1) Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire-Short Form, and 2) Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale, and demographic information. Then they participated in the ESM part by responding to the prompts which contained questions about their real-time inner experience: if they were 'at-present', 'mind-wandering', or 'zoned-out'. The temporal locus, the clarity, and the affect valence, and the personal importance of the thought they had the moment before the prompt were also assessed. A mobile app 'RealLife Exp' randomly delivered these prompts 3 times/day for 6 days during wake-time. After the 6 days, participants completed questionnaire (1) and (2) again. Their changes of score were compared to a control group who did not participate in the ESM procedure (yet completed (1) and (2) one week apart). Results: Results are currently preliminary as we continue to collect data. So far, there is a trend that participants are present, mind-wandering and zoned-out, about 53%, 23% and 24% during wake-time, respectively. The thoughts of participants are ranked to be clearer and more neutral if they are present vs. mind-wandering. Mind-wandering thoughts are 66% about the past, consisting 80% of inner speech. Discussion and Conclusion: This study investigated the subjective account of human mind by a tool with high ecological validity. And it broadens the understanding of the relationship between contents of mind and well-being.

Keywords : experience sampling method, meta-memory, mindfulness, mind-wandering

Conference Title : ICSCN 2018 : International Conference on Social Cognition and Neuroscience

Conference Location : Kyoto, Japan

Conference Dates : November 15-16, 2018