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Mirror Meditation Reduces Stress, Increases Self-Compassion

Hundreds of studies now show the positive effects of meditation on mental and physical well-being (APA, 2015). Meditation involves bringing one's attention into the present moment and letting go of distracting thoughts that can create negative affective states and put stress on the body. Mirrors are commonly used to manage self-presentation concerns (Cologero, 2011). We hypothesized that mirrors can also be used to regulate attention and emotional states during meditation.

In mirror meditation, participants gaze at their own reflection for an extended period (10-15 min) while maintaining a calm meditative state with no specific goal. They are therefore able to see how their thoughts impact their emotional state via changes in their facial expression. Three studies were designed to investigate the effects of mirror meditation on participants' reported levels of stress, depression, anxiety, and self-compassion.

The first study was a 10-day longitudinal experiment. Participants (n = 44) did 10 min of silent mirror gazing 8 times over a 10 days period. Measures of Stress and Anxiety for the DASS (Henry & Crawford, 2005) and Self-Compassion (12-item scale) from Neff (2003) were taken before and after the mirror gazing intervention. Participants reported significant decreases in stress, anxiety and depression and an increase in self-compassion. The second study was a one-time mirror meditation replication, results showed significant decreases in anxiety and stress. The third study showed that those scoring low in narcissism showed greater reduction in stress and anxiety. Narcissism scores did not change as a result of mirror meditation.

Ongoing studies are examining the long-term effects of mirror meditation on emotion regulation, self-objectification, and narcissism. For more information visit: www.mirrormeditation.com