

Mindful Partnering and Lesser Biological Stress

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Abstract

Mindful partnering is a newly conceptualized construct to measure interpersonal mindfulness in the relationship with one's intimate partner. Mindful partnering is characterized by mindful awareness toward one's partner as well as compassion and acceptance of one's partner. We hypothesized that higher levels of mindful partnering would be associated with lesser physiological reactivity to relationship conflict (i.e., less biological stress during relationship conflict). Seventeen couple pairs ($N= 34$) visited the laboratory to complete several tasks, including questionnaires and a conflict discussion in which they discussed the largest areas of conflict in their relationship. Participants had their Respiratory Sinus Arrhythmia (RSA), a measure of nervous system activation, measured during the baseline period and conflict discussion. Participants completed the Mindful Partnering Measure (MPM) to measure the extent to which one demonstrates mindful partnering in their relationship with their romantic partner, including the subscales of MPM- Mindful Awareness and MPM- Acceptance/Compassion. Regression analyses suggested that MPM-Mindful Awareness significantly predicted partner's greater RSA, indicating that 9% of the variance in RSA was accounted for by partner's MPM- mindful awareness (a small effect), suggesting greater relaxation and a less pronounced stress response. These results suggest that when one's partner is fully present and attentive, it may relieve the potential stress of marital disagreement. Being present with full attention in this way may soothe a partner's nervous system by creating a feeling of being fully listened to and understood in the context of conflict.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Marriage, Marital Conflict, Respiratory Sinus Arrhythmia, Physiological Reactivity