



# Alone With Your Thoughts: Lifespan Differences in Enjoyment of Intentional Reverie

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## Do People Enjoy Thinking?

- Intentional reverie is the experience of intended enjoyable internal thought in the absence of external stimulation.
- Although potentially beneficial, it appears to be surprisingly difficult. Experimental studies (Wilson et al., 2014) suggest that many people do not enjoy intentional thinking and may prefer even negative external stimulation (e.g., electric shock) to being alone with their thoughts.
- Most of these studies have used young adult college samples. Young children, to whom fantasy appears to come naturally, or older adults, who may have had more practice or reduced technology use, might enjoy thinking more.
- The present poster compares results across seven separate studies, including samples with older adults and children, to examine possible effects of age.

### Questions

- **Overall, are there age differences in how much people enjoy intentional thinking?**
- **Do children find it more enjoyable?**
- **Do older adults find it more enjoyable?**

## Studies

### The Seven Studies

- **College Students.** Local college undergraduates, 18-22 years old ( $M = 19.07$ ,  $SD = .82$ ),  $n = 73$
- **Children and Parents**
  - Children: 4-, 5-, and 6-year-olds ( $M = 66.6$  months,  $SD = 9.9$ ),  $n = 59$
  - Parents: Parents of subset of above children,  $n = 33$
- **Community Sample.** Recruited from local church and farmer's market, 18-77 years old ( $M = 47.25$ ,  $SD = 22.21$ ),  $n = 28$
- **Adult mTurk Studies**
  - mTurk #1: 20-65 years old ( $M = 34.77$ ,  $SD = 12.30$ ),  $n = 65$
  - mTurk #2: 19-69 years old ( $M = 36.38$ ,  $SD = 12.63$ ),  $n = 156$
  - mTurk #3: 19-67 years old ( $M = 34.19$ ,  $SD = 11.60$ ),  $n = 48$
  - mTurk #4: 18-57 years old ( $M = 33.80$ ,  $SD = 10.44$ ),  $n = 101$

### Procedure: The Thinking Period

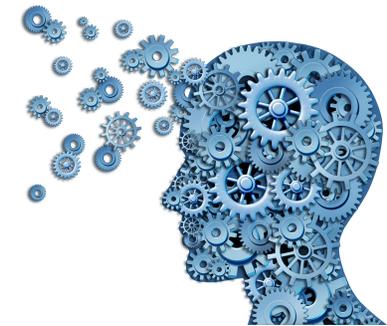
- Participants were asked to sit alone in a room without any distractions.
- Participants were told to entertain themselves with their own thoughts for a designated period of time ranging from 3-12 minutes. The exact duration and wording varied slightly across studies.

## Results

### Relative Ranking of Thinking across Children, Parents, and College Students

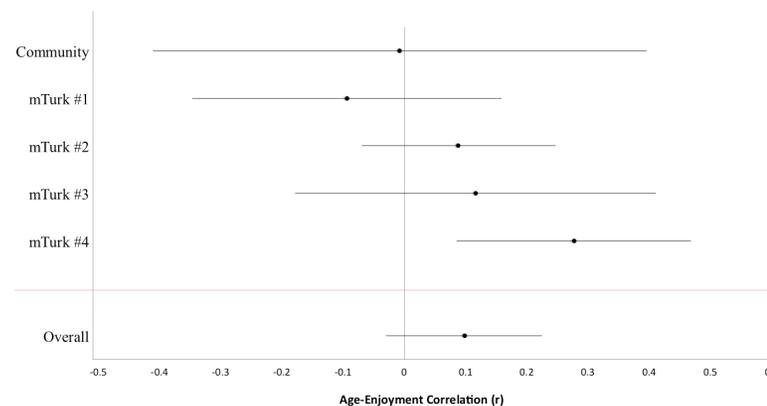
In two separate studies, children, their parents, and college students ranked how much they enjoyed the thinking period relative to 9 other activities selected to be relatively positive, neutral, and negative. Overall, children and college students did not find the thinking period particularly enjoyable. Parents enjoyed it slightly more.

Children ENJOYMENT OF THINKING			College Students ENJOYMENT OF THINKING			Parents ENJOYMENT OF THINKING		
Rank	Activity	Mean	Rank	Activity	Mean	Rank	Activity	Mean
1	Eating a favorite dessert	.69	1	Eating a favorite dessert	2.45	1	Eating a favorite dessert	1.42
2	Playing with a favorite pet	1.95	2	Playing with a favorite pet	2.68	2	Reading a book	1.55
3	Drawing	3.12	3	Going to bed	2.80	3	Going to bed	2.52
4	Reading a book	3.14	4	Reading a book	4.04	4	Playing with a favorite pet	2.82
5	Going to bed	4.19	5	Drawing	4.66	5	Thinking Period	3.33
6	Thinking Period	4.42	6	Thinking Period	5.05	6	Drawing	4.09
7	Brushing your teeth	4.83	7	Brushing your teeth	6.41	7	Brushing your teeth	5.48
8	Breaking a favorite item	7.14	8	Scraping your knee	8.38	8	Scraping your knee	7.48
9	Scraping your knee	7.41	9	Breaking a favorite item	9.15	9	Breaking a favorite item	7.67
10	Getting sick	8.10	10	Getting sick	9.37	10	Getting sick	8.70



### Age and Enjoyment of Thinking in Community and mTurk Samples

In five cross-sectional samples with a wide age range, there was no compelling evidence for an effect of age in four out of the five samples. Overall, there was little support for increased enjoyment of intentional reverie in older adults compared to younger ones.



## Conclusions

### Relative Ratings

- Overall, children did not differ from young adults in their enjoyment of intentional thinking. Parents appeared to enjoy it slightly more.

### Effect of Age

- Four out of five cross-sectional samples showed no effect of age on enjoyment of thinking.
- Aggregating across studies, there appeared to be little robust evidence for an effect of age on enjoyment.

Overall, we found little evidence for differences in enjoyment of thinking across the lifespan. Intentional enjoyable thought may require considerable mental control. It may be particularly challenging to initiate and sustain thoughts with the goal of entertaining yourself with your own mind, and successful enjoyable thought may rely on both situational and individual factors.

## References

1. Wilson, T.D., Reinhard, D., Westgate, E., Gilbert, D., Ellerbeck, N., Hahn, C., Brown, C., & Shaked, A. (2014). Just Think: The Challenges of the Mind at Play. *Science*, 345, 75-77.