

Evaluating self-reflection and insight as self-conscious traits.

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Abstract:

Recent years have seen several new models of individual-differences in self-consciousness. The present research evaluated self-reflection and insight as types of self-focused attention. In the self-reflection and insight model, both traits represent metacognitive individual differences that aid self-regulation. In a sample of 233 young adults, both self-reflection and insight covaried with many different self-conscious traits (public and private self-consciousness, rumination, reflection), which suggests that they crosscut past typologies. Insight, but not self-reflection, covaried with many markers of affect and well-being: people high in insight had lower depression and anxiety symptoms, lower NA, higher PA, and higher self-esteem. On the whole, the evidence is consistent with the self-reflection and insight model, and the findings suggest that self-reflection and insight are distinct from each other and from other self-conscious traits.

Keywords: self-reflection | insight | rumination | reflection | self-awareness | self-focused attention | personality | psychology

Article:

1. Introduction

The capacity to reflect on one's thoughts, emotions, and actions is central to self-regulation, self-evaluation, and self-criticism (Carver, 2003 and Duval and Silvia, 2001). Social and personality psychology thus have a long interest in the causes and consequences of self-reflection. This large literature sorts into studies that manipulate self-awareness (see Silvia & Duval, 2001a) and studies that examine individual-differences relevant to self-awareness. Early on, research began referring to situational variation as self-awareness and dispositional variation as self-consciousness (e.g., Buss, 1980). The experimental self-awareness tradition evoked self-reflection by directing people's attention to themselves, usually by showing people their images with mirrors (e.g., Phillips & Silvia, 2005) and video cameras (e.g., Gendolla et al., 2008 and Silvia and Duval, 2001b) or by making people feel novel and distinctive (Silvia and Eichstaedt,

2004 and Snow et al., 2004). In contrast, the dispositional self-consciousness tradition primarily used self-report scales to assess stable variability in tendencies to self-reflect.

The study of individual-differences dates back to the model of private and public self-consciousness (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975), which assumed that people differed in their tendency to reflect on public or private aspects of the self (see Smári, Ólason, & Ólafsson, 2008, for a review). Many studies have criticized the psychometric qualities of the original scales, suggesting that the private self-consciousness scale should be split into two subfactors (Anderson et al., 1996, Ben-Artzi, 2003, Chang, 1998, Creed and Funder, 1998 and Ruipérez and Belloch, 2003). One subfactor, known as self-reflection, reflects a maladaptive self-consciousness; the other, known as internal-state awareness, reflects an adaptive self-consciousness. This proposal remains controversial. First, few firm conclusions can be drawn from ad hoc 4-item scales with low internal consistencies (Bernstein et al., 1986, Britt, 1992 and Silvia, 1999). Second, large-sample confirmatory analyses of the private self-consciousness scale disagree over whether a one or two factor solution is superior. Some studies find that two factors are superior (Cramer, 2000); others find that both one and two-factors models fit poorly (e.g., Nystedt & Ljungberg, 2002). Finally, it is unclear if the subscales are conceptually meaningful (see Bissonnette and Bernstein, 1990, Silvia, 1999 and Wicklund, 1990).

Because of the thorny issues with private self-consciousness, several groups of researchers have developed new models of dispositional self-consciousness and new self-report scales (McKenzie and Hoyle, 2008 and Trapnell and Campbell, 1999). One of these new models posits two components to dispositional self-consciousness: self-reflection and insight (Grant, Franklin, & Langford, 2002). These traits are measured with the self-reflection and insight scale (Grant et al., 2002), a 20-item self-report scale. Self-reflection refers to “the inspection and evaluation of one’s thoughts, feelings and behavior” (Grant et al., 2002, p. 821), whereas insight refers to “the clarity of understanding of one’s thoughts, feelings and behavior” (p. 821). Both are viewed as metacognitive traits that are central to self-regulation, but they differ in whether they are primarily evaluative (self-reflection) vs. mindful (insight). Both exploratory (Grant et al., 2002) and confirmatory (Roberts & Stark, 2008) factor analyses have provided support for the factor structure.

The present research sought to evaluate the distinction between self-reflection and insight as assessed by Grant et al.’s (2002) self-reflection and insight scale. First, little is known about how self-reflection and insight relate to other measures of self-consciousness. The scales were developed in response to deficiencies in the original private self-consciousness scale, but their relations with private self-consciousness and other self-conscious traits have not received much attention apart from one study (Grant et al., 2002, Study 3) that correlated the scales with private

self-consciousness. Furthermore, their relations with other individual differences – such as Trapnell and Campbell’s (1999) measures of rumination and reflection – have not yet been examined. One goal of the present work was thus to explore how self-reflection and insight covaried with prior models of individual differences related to self-consciousness.

Second, we sought to expand the nomological net of self-reflection and insight by assessing their relationships with a range of affective and self-evaluative traits. Grant’s (Grant, 2001, Grant, 2003 and Grant et al., 2002) writings about self-reflection and insight suggest that self-reflection and insight should have diverging relations with markers of emotional well-being, and recent work (Lyke, 2009) suggests that this is the case. Lyke (2009) found that insight positively covaried with several markers of well-being, whereas self-reflection did not. To expand upon past work, we emphasized markers of poor functioning, such as anxiety and depression symptoms. Much of the interest in self-reflection and insight comes from clinical, counseling, and coaching domains, particularly areas interested in how introspective abilities may aid or hinder change (e.g., Grant, 2003 and Sauter et al., 2010), so it is worth examining how these traits relate to markers of affect and well-being.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A total of 223 undergraduate students – 162 women, 61 men – volunteered to participate and received credit toward a research option in a psychology class. The racial and ethnic composition of the sample was approximately 68% Caucasian, 18% African–American, 3% Asian, and 2% Hispanic, with the remainder declining to provide self-reported racial and ethnic information. 95% of the sample spoke English as a native language.

2.2. Procedure

People completed a battery of questionnaires in large group sessions. The following measures were included.

2.2.1. Measures of self-conscious traits

The self-reflection and insight scale (Grant et al., 2002) is a 20-item self-report scale that assesses two factors. The self-reflection factor has 12 items that assess a tendency to think about and evaluate thoughts, actions, and feelings; examples include “I frequently examine my

feelings” and “It is important for me to evaluate the things that I do”. This factor has two highly-correlated facets – need for self-reflection and engagement in self-reflection. The insight factor has eight items that assess the clarity of experience and self-knowledge; examples include “I usually know why I feel the way I do” and “I’m usually aware of my thoughts.” The items were completed on 7-point scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).

The 24-item Rumination–Reflection Questionnaire (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999) measures two motives for self-focused attention: rumination (12 items) is “self-attentiveness motivated by perceived threats, losses, or injustices to the self”; reflection (12 items) is “self-attentiveness motivated by curiosity or epistemic interest in the self” (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999, p. 297). Public self-consciousness (seven items) and private self-consciousness (10 items) were measured with the self-consciousness scales (Fenigstein et al., 1975). All items were completed on 7-point scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).

2.2.2. Measures of emotion and self-evaluation

To assess aspects of trait affectivity, we administered the revised Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck & Steer, 1987), the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck, Epstein, Brown, & Steer, 1988), and the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CESD; Radloff, 1977), all of which are widely-used measures of depression and anxiety symptoms that offer relatively sharp discriminations between depression and anxiety (Beuke, Fischer, & McDowall, 2003). We additionally administered the trait version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), which yields positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA) scores, and the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale, a common measure of global self-esteem (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Data reduction and descriptive statistics

Analyses were conducted with Mplus 6 using maximum likelihood with robust standard errors; standardized coefficients are reported. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics and correlations. All of the scales had strong internal consistency except for private self-consciousness, which has been commonly found in past research (e.g., Smári et al., 2008). Notably, self-reflection and insight were essentially unrelated, $r = -.075$.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Self-reflection	4.62	.98	.878	1											
2. Insight	4.68	.95	.793	-.075	1										
3. Private SC	4.51	.72	.589	.652	-.198	1									
4. Public SC	4.58	.98	.707	.247	-.329	.490	1								
5. Rumination	4.30	1.14	.898	.468	-.381	.569	.503	1							
6. Reflection	4.04	1.06	.879	.673	-.072	.492	.170	.350	1						
7. BDI	7.45	7.27	.899	.147	-.378	.217	.250	.451	.159	1					
8. BAI	9.38	9.59	.928	.182	-.354	.248	.303	.403	.112	.585	1				
9. CSED	1.75	.47	.884	.103	-.383	.237	.247	.344	.132	.694	.536	1			
10. PA	3.50	.54	.788	.026	.230	-.035	-.061	-.218	-.059	-.448	-.272	-.333	1		
11. NA	2.15	.72	.870	.138	-.356	.238	.251	.365	.058	.539	.520	.657	-.209	1	
12. Self-esteem	5.52	1.10	.897	-.132	.447	-.262	-.336	-.477	-.173	-.702	-.553	-.610	.481	-.578	1

Note: sample $n = 223$. α = Cronbach's alpha.

3.2. Predicting self-conscious traits

How do self-reflection and insight relate to other self-conscious traits? We estimated a multivariate regression model that had two predictors – self-reflection and insight – and four outcomes: public and private self-consciousness (Fenigstein et al., 1975) as well as rumination and reflection (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). This multivariate model allows us to model the influence of the predictors in light of the covariance of the outcomes.

Self-reflection had significant positive relationships with private self-consciousness ($\beta = .64, p < .001$), public self-consciousness ($\beta = .22, p = .003$), rumination ($\beta = .44, p < .001$), and reflection ($\beta = .67, p < .001$). Insight, in contrast, had significant (but smaller) negative relationships with private self-consciousness ($\beta = -.15, p = .009$), public self-consciousness ($\beta = -.31, p < .001$), and rumination ($\beta = -.35, p < .001$); insight did not significantly predict reflection ($\beta = -.02, p = .67$). The model R^2 values were 44.2% for private

self-consciousness, 15.8% for public self-consciousness, 33.9% for rumination, and 45.4% for reflection.

3.3. Predicting affective traits

A second multivariate regression model examined how self-reflection and insight predicted affective and self-evaluative traits. Self-reflection and insight were predictors, and BDI, BAI, CESD, PA, NA, and self-esteem scores were the outcomes. This model indicated that self-reflection and insight had diverging effects on these outcomes. Overall, self-reflection had small positive effects on markers of negative affectivity: it significantly predicted BDI scores ($\beta = .12$, marginal at $p = .054$), BAI scores ($\beta = .16$, $p = .005$), and NA ($\beta = .12$, marginal at $p = .054$); it did not significantly predict CESD scores ($\beta = .07$, $p = .216$), PA ($\beta = .04$, $p = .543$), or self-esteem ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .10$). Insight, in contrast, generally had larger effects in the other direction. Higher insight predicted lower BDI ($\beta = -.37$, $p < .001$), BAI ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .001$), and CESD ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .001$) scores, higher PA ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$), lower NA ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$), and higher self-esteem ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$). The model R^2 values were 15.7% for BDI scores, 15.0% for BAI scores, 15.2% for the CESD, 5.6% for PA, 13.9% for NA, and 20.9% for self-esteem.

3.4. Discussion

The present research found supportive evidence for the self-reflection and insight model, an emerging perspective on individual differences in self-focused attention (Grant, 2003, Grant et al., 2002 and Lyke, 2009). First, self-reflection and insight were essentially uncorrelated, which is consistent with past research and with the model's view of the traits as distinct kinds of metacognitive awareness. Second, both self-reflection and insight broadly predicted several different kinds of self-conscious traits; the effects were stronger for self-reflection. These broad relationships appeared despite the fact that the four outcome traits – private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, rumination, and reflection – represent diverse kinds of individual differences. As a result, the distinction between self-reflection and insight seems different from the distinction between public and private self-consciousness and the distinction between rumination and reflection.

Finally, the findings offer support for Grant et al.'s (2002) conception of self-reflection and insight. Insight significantly predicted a broad range of markers of affect and self-evaluation: people high in insight had better functioning on these measures. Self-reflection's effects were in the other direction but were generally small. This pattern indicates that the self-reflection and insight scales are not merely "maladaptive vs. adaptive" kinds of self-focused attention, and it suggests that the scales are not simply measuring negative rumination and self-criticism.

Moreover, these effects extend recent work by Lyke (2009), who found that insight, but not self-reflection, significantly predicted markers of positive well-being.

Future work should examine the attentional aspects of self-reflection and insight. Many studies found that private self-consciousness predicted implicit measures of self-directed thought, such as recognizing self-relevant words more quickly (Eichstaedt & Silvia, 2003) and using first-person singular pronouns to complete ambiguous sentences (Carver & Scheier, 1978). Despite the scale's shortcomings, it did capture individual differences in self-focused attention. Other scales, such as the rumination and reflection scales (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999), seem not to capture self-focused attention because they do not covary with measures of self-focus (Silvia, Eichstaedt, & Phillips, 2005). Given the success of the self-reflection and insight scales in the present work and other recent research (Lyke, 2009 and Roberts and Stark, 2008), it is worth examining the attentional underpinnings of the constructs using cognitive and implicit methods.

One reason for the emerging interest in the self-reflection and insight scales is their potential value in applied practice, particularly contexts in which introspective traits and abilities could predict the likelihood of success or difficulties. Grant (2003), for example, has examined how coaching influences self-reflection and insight, and other researchers have considered the traits' relevance for readiness for professional development (Roberts & Stark, 2008) and for adolescent populations (Sauter et al., 2010). This applied interest is not surprising in light of the large literature on the clinical relevance of self-conscious traits, particularly private self-consciousness (Ingram, 1990). Although the present findings have no direct implications for applied and clinical practice, they do add to the body of work supporting the validity and value of the measure, and they should encourage future work interested in applied aspects of introspective abilities. At the same time, it is worth pointing out that the present findings are based on a cross-sectional study, so causal, longitudinal, and lifespan aspects of self-reflection and insight await future work. Moreover, the sample consisted almost entirely of young adults who were early in their college careers, and introspective abilities may be less stable during this stage of lifespan development.

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