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Are rumination and reflection types of self-focused attention?

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Abstract

The study of self-focused attention explores both state self-focus (objective self-awareness) and individual-differences in trait self-focus (self-consciousness). Trapnell and Campbell (1999) proposed a motivational model of individual-differences in self-focused attention, based on *rumination* and *reflection* as types of self-focus. Two studies, with Internet-based (Study 1, $n = 101$) and college student samples (Study 2, $n = 115$), assessed the construct validity of rumination and reflection. Self-focus was measured by recognition latencies for self-relevant words (Study 1) and the completion of ambiguous sentences with first-person pronouns (Study 2). Neither rumination nor reflection predicted self-focused attention in either study. Rumination and reflection seem to be types of self-relevant motivation, not types of self-focused attention. © 2004 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Rumination; Reflection; Self-awareness; Self-focus; Self-evaluation; Attention; Personality assessment; Construct validity

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1. Introduction

The study of self-focused attention has two research traditions. The first tradition, the study of *self-awareness*, explores the consequences of momentary awareness of the self (Carver, 2003; Duval & Silvia, 2001; Duval & Wicklund, 1972). This research manipulates self-focused attention with conditions that make the self salient, such as mirrors, video cameras, and reminders of novel aspects of the self. The second tradition, the study of *self-consciousness*, explores individual-differences in self-focused attention (Buss, 1980). The traditional view of self-consciousness proposes public and private dimensions, commonly measured by the self-consciousness scales (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975).

The character of self-awareness research has not changed much. Although objective self-awareness theory has expanded, recent research on self-awareness addresses the same concerns that motivated the original theory (see Silvia & Duval, 2001a)—the relationship between self-awareness and consistency motivation (Silvia & Duval, 2004; Wicklund & Duval, 1971), how people respond to discrepancies between self and standards (Duval & Lalwani, 1999; Ickes, Wicklund, & Ferris, 1973), and how causal attributions affect self-regulation (Duval & Wicklund, 1973; Duval & Silvia, 2002; Silvia & Duval, 2001b). Recent individual-differences research, however, has changed since the early days of public–private self-consciousness research. Public self-consciousness seems to have faded in popularity, perhaps due to critical reviews of its construct validity (Gibbons, 1990; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1987). Private self-consciousness remains popular, although its psychometric properties have been criticized. Many studies find that the private self-consciousness scale forms two subscales: internal-state awareness and self-reflection (e.g., Cramer, 2000; Creed & Funder, 1998; Nystedt & Ljungberg, 2002; Ruipérez & Belloch, 2003). The meaning of this finding is controversial, because the items forming the subscales and the correlations between the subscales vary (Bernstein, Teng, & Garbin, 1986; Britt, 1992; Duval & Silvia, 2001; Silvia, 1999).

In response to limitations in the public–private approach, a second generation of individual-differences research has emerged. Several new models have appeared in recent years (Grant, Franklin, & Langford, 2002; McKenzie & Hoyle, 1999; Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). Of these, Trapnell and Campbell's (1999) model of rumination and reflection has received the most attention (Carver, 2003; Joireman, Parrott, & Hammersla, 2002; Teasdale & Green, 2004). Rumination and reflection have been shown to predict other variables, but the critical tests of construct validity—relations with measures of self-directed attention—have not yet been conducted. In this article, we review the rumination–reflection model and present two studies that directly assessed whether rumination and reflection involve self-focused attention.

2. Rumination and reflection

Trapnell and Campbell's (1999) rumination–reflection model was motivated by what they called “the self-absorption paradox.” Private self-consciousness correlates with many factors. Some factors seem adaptive and beneficial, such as greater articulation of the self-schema and a greater desire for self-understanding (e.g., Nasby, 1985). Other factors, however, seem maladaptive, such as psychopathology (Ingram, 1990). Several authors have viewed this mix of positive and negative

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