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

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## ARTICLE INFO

## 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.

## 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; Duval & 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, Richter, & Silvia, 2008; Silvia & Duval, 2001b) or by making people feel novel and distinctive (Silvia & Eichstaedt, 2004; Snow, Duval, & Silvia, 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, Bohon, & Berrigan, 1996; Ben-Artzi, 2003; Chang, 1998; Creed & Funder, 1998; Ruipérez & 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, Teng, & Garbin, 1986; Britt, 1992; 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 & Bernstein, 1990; Silvia, 1999; 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 & Hoyle, 2008; Trapnell & 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

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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, 2003; 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; Sauter, Heyne, Blöte, van Widenfelt, & Westenberg, 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 in-

sight 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 item 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, $r = -.075$.

### 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.