



Facets of emotional clarity and suspiciousness

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ABSTRACT

In a college student sample, we explored the relations between individual differences in facets of emotional clarity and suspiciousness. Previous theory and research has treated emotional clarity as a one-dimensional construct. Boden and Berenbaum (2011) proposed that a second facet of emotional clarity, *source awareness* (a general understanding of the cause of their emotions), could be distinguished from *type awareness* (a general understanding of the type of emotions [anger, fear] experienced). We found that source and type awareness were incrementally, inversely associated with suspiciousness when statistically accounting for the extent to which emotions are attended to, and gender. Additionally, source awareness significantly predicted suspiciousness after accounting for anger, anxious arousal, and social anxiety, whereas type awareness did not. Findings are consistent with the hypothesis that, among individuals with low source and type awareness, suspicious beliefs are formed to make sense of and explain emotional arousal.

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1. Facets of emotional clarity and suspiciousness

As described by affective forecasting theories (see Wilson & Gilbert, 2005), and affect-as-information theory (Schwarz, 1990), emotions serve as information and heuristics that people evaluate when making decisions, judgments, and attributions. One factor that influences how useful and adaptive emotions are in this regard is individual's understanding of their emotions, or emotional clarity. High emotional clarity is adaptive because it helps an individual to identify and respond in an appropriate and efficient manner to internal and environmental contingencies that elicit emotions (e.g., Barrett & Gross, 2001; Lazarus, 1991). Alternatively, a variety of maladaptive consequences may result from uncertainty regarding emotions (Barrett & Gross, 2001). In this study, we investigated whether a particular maladaptive consequence, suspiciousness, is associated with distinct facets of emotional clarity.

1.1. Emotional clarity

Emotional clarity is an individual differences construct defined as the extent to which individuals can identify, discriminate between, and understand their feelings (Coffey, Berenbaum, & Kerns, 2003; Gohm & Clore, 2000, 2002). Emotional clarity and the conceptually-related dimension of attention to emotions (i.e.,

the extent to which emotions are attended to) together comprise the construct of emotional awareness, and underlie related constructs such as alexithymia and self-reported emotional intelligence (Coffey et al., 2003; Gohm & Clore, 2000, 2002). Emotional clarity is distinct from valence and intensity of emotional experiences (Gohm & Clore, 2000, 2002).

Previous theory and research has typically treated emotional clarity as a one-dimensional construct (see Coffey et al., 2003; Gohm & Clore, 2000, 2002; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995). Boden and Berenbaum (2011) proposed that emotional clarity could be split into two, related facets: type awareness and source awareness. Type awareness represents the extent to which individuals can identify and discriminate between their emotions (e.g., anger versus fear). Existing measures of individual differences in emotional clarity (e.g., Trait Meta Mood Scale; Salovey et al., 1995) measure type awareness (Boden & Berenbaum, 2011). Thus, research finding links between individual differences in emotional clarity and psychological outcomes (e.g., well-being, adaptive coping; Gohm & Clore, 2002) have focused their investigations on type awareness.

Boden and Berenbaum (2011) proposed that a second facet of emotional clarity, source awareness, could be theoretically and empirically distinguished from type awareness. Source awareness represents the extent to which individuals understand the source of their emotions. This proposal was based on appraisal theories of emotions (e.g., Lazarus, 1991), which have specified that appraisal of the source of one's emotions is an important determinant of emotion reactivity, and on research demonstrating that the manipulation of source awareness has large effects on judgments and attributions (Gasper & Clore, 1998, 2000; Keltner, Locke, & Audrain,

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1993; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Boden and Berenbaum (2011) psychometrically distinguished self-report items of source and type awareness. Items measuring type awareness were obtained from traditional measures of emotional clarity, and items measuring source awareness were developed for this purpose.

1.2. Emotional clarity and suspiciousness

Paranoia commonly refers to beliefs regarding other people deliberately trying to cause physical, social or psychological harm to oneself, and at its extreme can be of delusional intensity and indicative of a psychotic mental disorder (e.g., paranoid schizophrenia; American Psychiatric Association., 2000; Freeman & Garety, 2000). We conceptualize sub-clinical paranoia, or suspiciousness, as a type of odd/peculiar belief (henceforth labeled “peculiar belief”). Peculiar beliefs are affect-laden beliefs that are typically unfalsifiable (as opposed to patently false), deviate from the ordinary, and have less evidence and/or less convincing evidence to support their existence (Berenbaum, Kerns, & Raghavan, 2000). There are clear theoretical links between emotional clarity and peculiar beliefs. Emotions directly influence belief formation and change (Boden & Berenbaum, 2010). Like heuristics (see Gilovich, Griffin, & Kahneman, 2002), emotions provide information that, when useful, contribute to adaptive and accurate beliefs. However, when emotions do not provide useful information they might lead to inaccurate beliefs, including peculiar beliefs (Berenbaum, Boden, & Baker, 2009), which help to make sense of emotional arousal that is difficult to understand because source and type awareness are diminished. Here, attributions of source of emotions may serve as a belief object (e.g., I may attribute the cause of my anxiety to the police officer walking past me, which serves as the basis for the belief, “Police officers are out to get me”). Furthermore, by providing information regarding the source of emotions, the belief will facilitate identification of the type of emotions (Lazarus, 1991), which may or may not correspond to the actual type. An individual may be motivated to accept such a belief as true, regardless of the extent to which it accurately reflects the true cause and type of the emotional arousal, to reduce distress that accompanies unexplained emotional arousal (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008; Zimbardo, LaBerge, & Butler, 1993). In other words, suspicious belief formation and maintenance may serve an emotion regulation function (Boden & Gross, *in press*; Newheiser, Farias, & Tausch, 2011).

Past research has demonstrated links between individual differences in emotional clarity and suspiciousness (Berenbaum et al., 2006). In two studies, Berenbaum et al. (2006) examined the relation between facets of emotion and dimensions of schizotypal personality disorder reported by college students and individuals from the community who were over-sampled for peculiar beliefs and perceptions (37.3% of the sample had clinically significant levels of peculiar beliefs). In both samples, it was found that participants who reported lower levels of emotional clarity tended to report more suspicious/paranoid beliefs, and these associations were not an artifact of variance shared with negative affect or emotional intensity/instability. Because these studies included traditional individual difference measures of emotional clarity, we interpret these findings as demonstrating links between suspiciousness and type, but not source, awareness.

Two experimental studies have found evidence that induced reductions in source awareness, specifically, are associated with elevated levels of suspiciousness (Boden & Berenbaum, 2007; Zimbardo, Andersen, & Kabat, 1981). Zimbardo et al. (1981) investigated the relation between hypnotically diminished source awareness and suspiciousness. Participants who were posthypnotically induced to experience emotional arousal (i.e., increased heart rate and respiration) and amnesia for the source of arousal had higher levels of pre- to post-induction suspiciousness than did

participants who were posthypnotically induced to experience: (a) partial deafness or an itch but no amnesia, and (b) partial deafness and amnesia. Boden and Berenbaum (2007) induced anger and then provided participants with either: (a) no information about their emotions; or (b) information that was expected to make them aware of the antecedents of these emotions. It was found that men who were not provided with information about their emotions were more suspicious than were men who were provided with this information, whereas there were no differences among women in either condition. Furthermore, this effect was attributable to the experimental manipulation and not to potential confounds (e.g., the affect induction). It was hypothesized that the gender effect was primarily driven by women being more attentive to their emotions than were men (as we found in an accompanying study), and thus, being less influenced by a manipulation intended to enhance their emotional understanding.

1.3. The present research

The results of the studies reviewed above provide preliminary evidence that suspiciousness is associated with type awareness (Berenbaum et al., 2006), and source awareness (Boden & Berenbaum, 2007; Zimbardo et al., 1981). However, none of these studies specifically investigated the relations between individual differences in both facets of emotional clarity and suspiciousness. This was our goal in the present study. We explored two hypotheses. First, source and type awareness would incrementally predict suspiciousness when statistically accounting for each other and a third dimension of emotional awareness, attention to emotions. As attention to emotions has been indirectly linked to suspiciousness and peculiar beliefs in several studies (Berenbaum et al., 2009; Boden & Berenbaum, 2004, 2007; Kerns, 2005), we attempted to demonstrate that the facets of emotional clarity, specifically, and not emotional awareness, broadly, predict suspiciousness. Our second hypothesis is based on previous research that has found that negative emotional arousal is positively associated with peculiar beliefs (Boden, Berenbaum, & Topper, 2012). We hypothesized that both source and type facets would predict suspiciousness when statistically accounting for specific types of negative emotional arousal (anger, anxious arousal, social anxiety) that have been found to be associated with suspiciousness (e.g., Chadwick, Trower, Juusti-Butler, & Maguire, 2005; Martin & Penn, 2001). Anger and anxiety may contribute to suspiciousness because interpersonal stimuli that generally contribute to anger and anxiety (i.e., other individuals blocking goals and threatening physical, social or psychological harm; Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 1999) are the objects of suspicious beliefs. As negative emotional arousal has been found to be inversely associated with emotional clarity in several studies (e.g., Berenbaum et al., 2006), we statistically accounted for anger, anxious arousal, and social anxiety to ensure that potential relations between facets of emotional clarity and suspiciousness were not artifacts of shared variance with these factors.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Participants ($n = 216$; 51% female) from a large Midwestern university took part in this study for course credit or monetary compensation. The mean age was 19.8 years ($SD = 1.5$), and the racial composition was primarily European-American (58.3%), followed by Asian/Asian-American (24.5%), Hispanic/Latino/a (9.3%), and African-American (5.1%). Groups of participants completed self-report measures of emotional arousal, emotional awareness, and peculiar beliefs in two study sessions occurring on separate days. The ordering of measures was counter-balanced across participants.

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