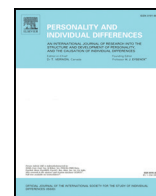




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Private self-consciousness in daily life: Relationships between rumination and reflection and well-being, and meaning in daily life

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ABSTRACT

The present study moved beyond trait reports of rumination, reflection, and meaning in life (presence and search) by examining within-person relationships between daily states of these constructs and well-being. Participants ($N = 130$) completed reports at the end of the day for 14 days. When analyzed together, daily rumination was negatively related to daily well-being whereas daily reflection was not (with one exception). In contrast, daily reflection was positively related to daily search for meaning in life, whereas rumination was not related to daily search for meaning in life. Reflection moderated the within-person relationships between rumination and well-being such that negative relationships between rumination and well-being were stronger at higher levels of reflection. In contrast, rumination had virtually no effect on search for meaning in life at higher levels of reflection. Lagged analyses found that daily reflection led to increases in daily positive deactivated affect (e.g., relaxation) and searching for meaning in life, and daily rumination led to increased presence of meaning in life the following day. These results highlight the importance of considering both reflection and rumination in studies of within-person variation and the value of considering within-person variability in understanding presence of and search for meaning in life.

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1. Introduction

The present study concerned within-person (daily) variability in private self-consciousness, also referred to as self-focused attention. Much of the research on private self-consciousness has focused on this construct as a trait, and although such research is valuable, we believe private self-consciousness can also be understood as a state, an entity that varies within individuals. We based our conceptualization of private self-consciousness on the distinction between rumination and reflection introduced by Trapnell and Campbell (1999).

Trapnell and Campbell were motivated by what had come to be known as the “self-absorption paradox”: the incompatibility of research indicating that private self-consciousness is positively related to well-being and research indicating that it is negatively related. Trapnell and Campbell argued this could be due to the fact that private self-consciousness had separable components that could stem from different motives and have different outcomes. They proposed that private self-consciousness had two components: rumination, a neurotic self-attentiveness, and reflection, an intellectual self-attentiveness. They found

that rumination was positively related to neuroticism, negative affect, and depression, whereas reflection was positively related to openness, need for cognition, and need for self-knowledge. Furthermore, they found that their measures of dispositional rumination and reflection were uncorrelated.

The present study assumed that the distinction between rumination and reflection is important not only at the between-person level but also at the within-person level. Such an assumption was based on the possibility that within-person relationships between constructs might be different from, and represent different processes than, between-person relationships between the same constructs (Affleck, Zautra, Tennen, & Armeli, 1999). We were also motivated by the possibility that daily measures might be less influenced than trait level measure by various types of bias (e.g. Nezlek, 2012, pp. 3–4). In the present study, participants provided measures describing their daily rumination, reflection, well-being, and meaning in life. Our analyses focused on relationships between daily rumination and reflection and daily well-being and meaning in life.

1.1. Existing research on state private self-consciousness

Previous studies about naturally occurring within-person variability in private self-consciousness have examined rumination but not

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reflection (e.g., Kashdan, Young, & McKnight, 2012; Puterman, DeLongis, & Pomaki, 2010) or have not distinguished the two (e.g., Nezlek, 2002). Nevertheless, this research has consistently found positive, same-day relationships between rumination and negative affect or negative events (e.g., Dickson, Ciesla, & Reilly, 2012; Genet & Siemer, 2012; Jose & Lim, 2015; Kashdan et al., 2012; Moberly & Watkins, 2008). Moreover, similar to research at the trait level, much of the research on daily rumination has examined relationships between rumination and negative predictors and outcomes. To our knowledge, only two studies have examined within-person relationships between rumination and positive outcomes, and each found a negative relationship between rumination and positive affect (Pe et al., 2013; Ruscio et al., 2015).

The present study complemented previous research by expanding well-being outcomes measures to include self-esteem, life satisfaction, and meaning in life, and by including a measure of daily reflection. Such an extension can be informative because affectively and non-affectively based measures of well-being, although related, assess different constructs (e.g., Nezlek, 2005). Drawing on trait level studies, we hypothesized that reflection would not be related to well-being as uniformly and negatively as rumination would be.

1.2. Meaning in life and private self-consciousness

To our knowledge, the present study is the first to examine within-person relationships between private self-consciousness and meaning in life. Given the nature of both of these constructs, we thought such an examination would be fruitful. Meaning in life has generally been considered in terms of two distinct components, presence and search (Frankl, 1963; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). Presence has been defined as the extent to which one finds meaning, purpose, and coherence in life (Martela & Steger, 2016). Search has been defined as the “strength, intensity, and activity of people’s desire and efforts to establish and/or augment their understanding of the meaning, significance, and purpose of their lives” (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008).

Implicit in both of these constructs is a sense that people examine, contemplate, and evaluate their lives, and such processes require thinking about the self. Consistent with this, Steger et al. (2008) found positive between-person relationships between search and rumination and reflection, and a negative between-person relationship between presence and rumination. The present study was designed to complement such research by examining within-person relationships between these constructs.

1.3. The present study

Participants in the present study answered a series of questions at the end of the day for two weeks. These questions consisted of measures of rumination and reflection, of presence and search for meaning in life, and of well-being, which included self-esteem, affect, and life satisfaction. Our analyses examined relationships between reflection/rumination and meaning in life and well-being. Based on previous research on within-person relationships, we expected daily rumination to be negatively related to daily well-being (i.e., positively related to daily negative affect and negatively related to positive affect, self-esteem, and life satisfaction). Based on trait level research we expected that reflection would not be strongly related to well-being if it would be related at all.

In terms of relationships with meaning in life, we expected rumination to be negatively related to presence of meaning in life. According to Park (2010), to feel that one’s life has meaning (presence), requires that some type of meaning making process has occurred. Such meaning making processes are probably in progress (or halted) as people ruminate which means that people are less likely to find meaning in life when they are ruminating compared to when they are not. Given that Trapnell and Campbell (1999) explicitly mentioned that reflection

partially consisted of “a desire for self-knowledge” we expected that daily reflection would be positively related to daily search for meaning in life. Such a prediction is also consistent with the results of Steger et al. (2008).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 130 ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.66$, $SD = 0.99$, 63.8% female) undergraduate students who received course credit for their participation. For 14 consecutive days, participants were asked to complete a survey at the end of the day before going to sleep. Emails were sent to participants periodically throughout the study to remind them to complete surveys at the end of each day.

Daily reports were included in the final analyses if they were completed between 9 pm and noon of the following day. Entries that were completed after noon of the following day or had incorrect responses to instructed response items were deleted (Meade & Craig, 2012). Of the initial 1710 entries, 61 were dropped. The final sample consisted of 130 individuals who provided 1649 valid diary entries ($M = 12.7$, $SD = 1.66$, minimum = 5). A series of simulation analyses reported by Maas and Hox (2005) suggested that this sample provided adequate power to estimate level-1 covariances, the focus of our analyses.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Rumination and reflection

Items assessing daily states of rumination and reflection were adapted from the trait Rumination-Reflection Questionnaire (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). We selected items that had high loadings and reworded each item to make sense in the context of a daily diary study. Participants indicated how often they had each of the following thoughts using a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 4 = *a moderate amount*, 7 = *very much*). Each question began with, “How much today, did you...” Rumination was measured with the items, “...ruminate or dwell on things that happened to you?”; “...play back in my mind how you acted in a past situation?”; and “...spend times rethinking things that are over and done with?” Reflection was measured with the items, “...think about your attitudes and feelings?”; “...think about the nature and meaning of things?”; and “...think introspectively or self-reflectively, i.e., about yourself and what you are like?”

2.2.2. Meaning in life

Daily presence of and searching for meaning in life were measured using items adopted from Steger et al. (2006) that have been used successfully in previous studies (e.g., Kashdan & Nezlek, 2012). Items were worded to reflect a focus on daily experience. The presence items were “How meaningful did you feel your life was today?” and “How much did you feel life had purpose today?” The search items were “How much were you searching for meaning in your life today”, and “How much were you looking to find your life’s purpose today?” Participants responded to these items on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

2.2.3. Well-being

Daily positive and negative affect were measured using a circumplex model of emotions (e.g., Feldman Barrett & Russell, 1998). Each day, for each of 20 emotions, participants indicated how strongly they felt that way using a 7-point scale, (1 = *Did not feel this way at all*, 4 = *Felt this way moderately*, 7 = *Felt this way very strongly*). Participants indicated how enthusiastic, alert, happy, proud, and excited they were (positive activated emotions – PA), how calm, peaceful, relaxed, contented, and satisfied they were (positive deactivated emotions – PD), how stressed, embarrassed, upset, tense, and nervous they were (negative activated

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