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**INTROSPECTIVENESS DURING ADOLESCENCE:
AN INVESTIGATION OF A PERSONALITY TRAIT
AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**

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ABSTRACT

Historically, introspectiveness as a personality trait has been treated as a uni-dimensional and simplistic process that operates the same way for everyone. Consequently, the relationship between introspectiveness and psychological well-being has been treated as equally simplistic and universally uniform. This is in spite of research examining other self-focus processes suggesting that this relationship is likely to be considerably more complex. Therefore, the aim of this thesis was to explore introspectiveness more thoroughly and broadly than prior research has, in order to more adequately understand this complex phenomenon and its relationship with psychological well-being. An adolescent sample group was selected given the propensity for introspectiveness during this developmental period.

The first study investigated a 12-item introspection instrument (Hansell, Mechanic and Brondolo, 1986, Introspection Scale) to ascertain whether there are distinct types of introspection embedded within it, and whether they would be associated with different types and amounts of self-reported symptoms. A factor analysis revealed three reasonably distinct factors or ‘types’ of introspection, which were identified as Self Analysis, Egocentrism, and Psychological Awareness. These broad types of introspection, as well as individual items on the Introspection scale, were associated with differing types and amounts of self-reported problems, providing support for the hypothesis that introspectiveness is a multi-faceted process with varying implications. In particular, some aspects of Psychological Awareness were generally associated with adaptive attributes, and Self Analysis (or reflecting on the ‘whys’ of life) was associated with problematic attributes.

Investigating how these types of introspection relate to emotional symptoms in the context of three important psychological resources (mindfulness, cognitive flexibility and emotional clarity), was investigated in a second study. Path analysis techniques were used to examine these relationships. Support was found for an indirect relationship between introspection and emotional symptoms, through the three psychological resources. This suggested that the relationship between introspection and psychological well-being depends on other intrapersonal or contextual factors, and that therefore, adaptive levels of psychological resources may influence the relationship between introspection and psychological well-being.

The implications of this research for both empirical understanding of cognitive processes potentially specific to adolescence, as well as broader clinical and therapy contexts, are discussed.

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FOREWORD

During my work as an intern psychologist at a child and adolescent mental health setting, I was simultaneously but separately working with two teenagers. They were both admirable and talented young men, both aged 15 years, who incidentally both had the same first name, but that was where the similarities ended. Their difficulties were quite different, as well as their personalities. One would talk the proverbial leg off a donkey, and at times it was difficult to direct him, while the other was quite the opposite, and was extremely quiet. While the second young man never missed a session, always seemed grateful for the work I did with him, and made gradual progress over time, I often wondered where his mind went. Of course at times I asked him to reflect on things he'd thought about during the week, and had an idea of the nature of his anxious thoughts, but I never once thought to ask him about his inner dialogue in general. I didn't ask him about whether he thought a lot about himself and his life and reflected, or whether he daydreamed or ruminated or where his mind went when he was sitting in class, or in the long car ride home after our sessions. After finishing my work with him, and reflecting on the case, I thought about how much better I might have known him and the background to his emotional difficulties had I asked about these things. What role if any, did his quiet nature have to do with his anxiety? Was it just a 'normal' symptom of adolescence? Was he a young man whose tendency to be introspective lead him to ruminate and become unhealthy self-conscious? Or was he not particularly introspective at all and simply a person who preferred to stand back and observe those around him and therefore was externally rather than internally motivated?

This young man was someone I thought of often during the writing of this thesis, one of the many inspirations behind this work, and an example of where its findings have practical application for the many adolescent clients like him.