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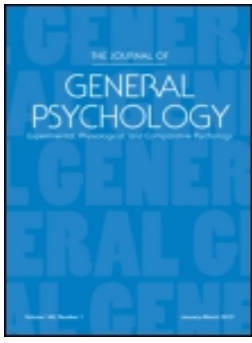
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# The Need for Absolute Truth and Self-Rumination as Basic Suppressors in the Relationship Between Private Self-Consciousness and Mental Health

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**ABSTRACT.** Self-reflection has not so far been shown to have any specific benefits for mental health except for self-knowledge. Recent research showed that the controversy concerning the relationship between self-reflection and mental health could completely be eliminated if self-rumination and the need for absolute truth, especially the need for absolute truth, were considered as suppressor variables. This research replicated these findings in a different sample and expanded these findings by showing that the same is true for private self-consciousness. The need for absolute truth as a new variable was shown to be highly important in understanding the effects of self-consciousness on mental health.

**Keywords:** mental health, need for absolute truth, self-consciousness, self-absorption paradox

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**SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT** topic since antiquity. There is a considerable controversy, however, on the usefulness or healthiness of this important phenomenon. It is known that “private self-conscious people regularly inspect their bodily processes and moods, reflect about their motives and goals, and fantasize a lot about themselves” (Buss, 1980, p. 20). Research pointed out that heightened private self-consciousness has been linked to better self-knowledge (Nasby, 1989) and more effective self-regulation (Mullen & Suls, 1982; Grant, Franklin, & Langford, 2002). However, higher private self-consciousness

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has also been consistently associated with higher levels of psychological distress, chronic negative affect and depression (Ingram, 1990). Thus, higher private self-consciousness is associated with both higher self-knowledge and psychological distress, which leads to a paradox called self-absorption.

Trapnell and Campbell (1999) tried to solve this controversy by focusing on individual differences in the motives behind private self-consciousness. They proposed that there was motivational confounding in the Private Self-consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). The items in this scale such as "I reflect about myself a lot," "I am constantly examining my motives," and "I am always trying to figure myself out" were not clear about what motive, need, or value they pointed out. Trapnell and Campbell (1999) asserted that people might engage in self-focus for different reasons and, thus, have different motives behind their efforts of self-consciousness. Self-focus can either be ruminative or reflective and, consequently, linked to negative or positive mental health. According to their conceptualization, self-reflection, motivated by openness to experience, is a healthy aspect of self-consciousness, based on, or motivated by curiosity and epistemic interest. In contrast, self-rumination is unhealthy and refers to a neurotic type of self-attentiveness consisting of recurrent thinking or ruminations about the self.

Self-rumination (SRU) has been shown to be harmful for mental health by research findings. Kasch, Klein, and Lara (2001) found that recovering from the depressive episode showed significant reductions in rumination. Experimental studies have also found that rumination takes a causal part in the exacerbation of negative affect and negative cognition (Moberly & Watkins, 2008).

However, the controversy remains for the self-reflection (SRF): It is still unclear whether SRF is motivated by epistemic needs or composed of pure curiosity about self as Trapnell and Campbell asserted (1999). Although thought to be positive motive behind self-consciousness and beneficial to well-being, SRF remains controversial because it has had unexpected relationships with mental health variables. Heightened private self-consciousness has been theoretically linked to better self-knowledge (Nasby, 1989) and SRF is considered an important determinant of self-knowledge (Sedikides & Skowronsky, 1995). According to Higgins (1996), given that self-knowledge contributes to mental health, it is also expected to be positively and strongly correlated with well-being. Engagement in SRF, however, is not significantly associated, either positively or negatively with happiness or life satisfaction and the act of SRF neither facilitates nor detracts from well-being (Lyke, 2009). Research showed that self-reflectiveness was associated with shame, guilt, other directedness and social anxiety (Watson et al, 1996). Moreover, SRF was positively correlated with anxiety (Grant et al., 2002). A growing body of literature showed that SRF has positive relationship with distress (Takano & Tanno, 2009). The expectation of high SRF would increase insight was not supported by the findings of Lyke (2009), who found that insightful people are most likely to be happy and satisfied with their lives, regardless of the duration they spend in SRF.

Although Trapnell and Campbell (1999) expected that psychological distress in the engagement of self-absorption could be the result of unhealthy motives,

which confounds the benefits of SRF, Şimşek (2013a) indicated that the same might also be true for SRF. His research showed that two suppressor variables should be taken into consideration in order to illuminate the beneficial effects of SRF. The first variable was already a dimension of self-consciousness model of Trapnell and Campbell (1999), namely SRU. Research indeed showed that in the absence of SRU, SRF might be an adaptive cognitive style which enables solving current problems or regulating negative mood (Takano & Tanno, 2009). Joormann, Dkane, and Gotlib (2006) similarly indicated that in the nonexistence of ruminative component, reflection may be adaptive, and they claimed that reflective and ruminative component might have a perpetuation cycle, which is blurring the discrimination between adaptive and maladaptive cognitive styles.

Şimşek (2013a) introduced a new suppressor variable, the “Need for Absolute Truth” (NAT), and showed it to be important in the context of self-absorption paradox. According to Şimşek, the SRF items in the RRQ such as “I love exploring my ‘inner’ self,” “I love analyzing why I do things,” “I am very self-inquisitive by nature,” and “I care much for self-analysis” refer to higher levels or abstract ways of thinking about self. Recent studies showed that the abstract form of SRF concerning the higher-level representation of personal experiences or the self has some detrimental effects, compared to concrete forms. This negative effect can be seen in the study of Hixon and Swann (1993), who showed that reflection on “why” one is as one is has detrimental consequences on self-insight. They have found that SRF promotes self-insight only when one reflects on “what” one is (focusing on the self in a concrete form). These findings provide further support that reduced concreteness is exhibited in both worry and depressive rumination (Stoeber & Borkovec, 2002; Watkins & Moulds, 2007). According to Takano and Tanno (2009), concreteness of thinking determines the consequences of self-focus; focusing on the self in a concrete form eliminates the increase in negative affect by processing self-related information. In the study by Watkins, Baeyens, and Read (2009), induced concrete form of self-focus which captures “how” or “what” questions was found to be related to less negative emotion reactivity than an abstract form of self-focus which focuses on “why.”

Based on these findings, Watkins (2008) indicates that self-focus is detrimental for mental health if it consists of abstract conceptualizations of events and actions. By concreteness, Watkins means general, superordinate, and decontextualized evaluations of psychological experiences. Such representations are supposed to refer to the essence and meaning of self-relevant events and actions. In contrast, low-level representations (focusing on “how”), concrete, contextual and subordinate, are more constructive and contributes to mental health. Similarly, Stöber, Tepperwien, and Staak (2000) differentiate concreteness from abstractness in the following way. In their study, abstractness was defined as indistinct, cross-situational, equivocal, unclear, and aggregated while concreteness as distinct, situationally specific, unequivocal, clear and singular. These indications support the importance of NAT, an abstract and higher-level representation, probably having detrimental consequences for mental health.

As Şimşek (2013a) stated clearly, NAT refers to one of the highest-level representations concerning the self: the truth beyond the self or personal experiences, a truth which is overgeneralized, superordinate and valid in all contexts. Thus, the three main negative consequences of high-level representations proposed by Watkins (2008) could easily apply to NAT. First, a higher-level of NAT would increase the tendency to overgeneralize, since the basic aim is to find general, superordinate, and decontextualized rules for behavior or meaning. It would also be more difficult for those who have higher levels of NAT to self-regulate since, as Watkins indicated, self-regulation benefits from concrete thinking and focusing on the immediate demands of the present situation. Finally and most importantly, in every instant of self-reflection, a higher level of NAT would obstruct problem solving on interpersonal and intrapersonal levels, through the counter-productive need to find a fundamental explanation or “meaning” for each specific situation.

Şimşek’s (2013a) study showed that controlling for the effects of NAT, indeed, dramatically changed the relationship of SRF with mental health variables in the expected direction. SRU also acted as suppressor, but not as strong as NAT. If both variables are controlled, the correlation of SRF with self-concept clarity, self-esteem, insight, depression and anxiety changed dramatically. Self-concept clarity was negatively correlated with SRF before the NAT was taken as a suppressor variable into consideration. If both SRU and NAT were controlled, the negative relationship between SRF and self-concept clarity turned to be positive (regression weight changed from  $-.16$  to  $.44$  for self-concept clarity). The same case was also reported for self-esteem (regression weight changed from  $-.01$  to  $.54$  for self-esteem). Earlier research (Lyke, 2009) found that there were a positive weak correlation between insight and SRF. However, Şimşek showed a strong correlation between SRF and insight could be obtained if both suppressor variables are considered (cumulative effect of two suppressors changed the regression weight from  $.17$  to  $.67$ ). On the other hand, the suppressor effects of NAT and SRU changed the regression weight from positive to negative for depression and anxiety (Regression weight changed from  $.30$  to  $-.18$  for depression and from  $.29$  to  $-.18$  for anxiety).

His findings, thus, showed that the controversy for the relationship of SRF with mental health could completely be resolved if these suppressor variables, “Rumination” and the NAT, were taken into account. Şimşek’s research (2013a, 2013b) focused on the reflection and rumination dimensions of self-focus defined by Trapnell and Campbell (1999). However, it is unclear whether the same results could be obtained for the original private self-consciousness model as operationalized by Private Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein et al., 1975). That is, the suppressor effects of SRU and the NAT could be crucial for not only SRF but also for private self-consciousness in general. Moreover, the results obtained in Şimşek’s (2013a) study needs to be replicated. In the current study, thus, we expect that the self-absorption paradox could also be resolved in the context of private self-consciousness construct when the NAT and SRU are considered basic

suppressors. In other words, we expected that the relationship between private self-consciousness and mental health indicators would be dramatically change when the effects of the NAT are eliminated from the regression models. Moreover, it is expected that the results from Şimşek's (2013a) study, where RRQ (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999) was used, could be replicated using the data in the present sample.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

The participants were 241 graduate and undergraduate students (131 female, 102 male, mean age 18.93 years) from three universities. The university students in nominated classes were provided with an explanatory research statement and their consent was sought. The instruments were completed in a quiet room during a class hour. The voluntary nature of the participation was clearly stated prior to distributing the scale.

### Measures

#### Need for Absolute Truth Scale—NATS

The NATS developed by Şimşek (2013a) was used in order to measure participants' level of the need to find absolute knowledge about their selves. Şimşek reported one factor with five items accounting for 51% of the variance: "I always try to find "the facts" about me," "I try to understand what my experiences actually mean," "I hope I will find myself as I really am one day." Responses are specified on a 5-point Likert-type scale (from "not at all true" to "very true"), in which higher scores reflect a greater level of NAT. The NATS scores were correlated moderately and positively with depression, anxiety, and SRU, while negatively with self-esteem, insight, and self-concept clarity. Internal consistency was found to be  $\alpha = .74$ , while it is  $.71$  in the current study.

#### Reflection and Rumination

The RRQ (1999) was used in order to measure participants' levels of reflection and rumination. The scale consists of 24 items, 12 items for each dimension. Ratings are indicated on a scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly) for each item. The scale was adapted into Turkish using back-translation procedure. The coefficients of Alpha were  $.82$  for SRU and  $.72$  for SRF in the present study.

#### Self-Concept Clarity

The Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS) was developed by Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, and Katz (1996) as a measure of the internally consistent and temporally stable definitions of personal attributes, or of the contents of one's self-concept.

The response format of the SCCS is a 5-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Thus, higher scores indicate a more consistent and stable self-concept. The average alpha reliability coefficient with regard to the three studies of the research was .86. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Sümer and Güngör (1999). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be  $\alpha = .89$  in the study. In the present study the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be .83.

### **Self-Esteem**

This study used the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSEI) (Rosenberg, 1965), a commonly used measure of global self-esteem. The respondents' levels of agreement with 10 self-evaluative statements were averaged to produce an index of self-esteem. Responses were specified on a 5-point Likert-type scale, in which higher scores reflect more positive self-evaluations. RSEI was first translated into Turkish by Tuğrul (1994) who reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .86. In the present study, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .83 was found.

### **Insight**

The Balanced Index of Psychological Mindedness (BIPM) Insight sub-scale of the BIPM (Nyklicek & Denollet, 2009) was used to measure participants' level of self-rated insight. The insight sub-scale consists of seven items, including "I am often not aware of my feelings," "I don't know what's going on inside me." This sub-scale alone was back-translated and used in this study. Responses were specified on a 5-point Likert-type scale, in which higher scores reflect high levels of self-reported insight. The Alpha coefficient for the subscale was found to be .74 in the present study.

### **Anxiety**

Beck Anxiety Scale (BAS) was developed by Beck, Epstein, Brown, and Ster (1988) in order to measure self-reported anxiety levels of individuals. The scale consists of 21 items rated on a four-point, Likert-type scale, anchored by 0 = *not at all distressed* to 3 = *extremely distressed*. The BAS was adapted to Turkish by Ulusoy, Şahin, and Erkmen (1998) and was found to have a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, .93. The Alpha coefficient for The BAS was found to be .89 in the present study.

### **Private Self-Consciousness**

Self Consciousness Scale (SCS) was developed by Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975). The scale is a self-report questionnaire designed to measure three different kinds of dispositional self-consciousness. The first of these is private self-consciousness, the tendency to pay attention to private, internal aspects of the self. The second is public self-consciousness, the tendency to be aware of and concerned about aspects of the self that others can perceive. The third is social



**TABLE 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Study Variables**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. NAT	—						
2. SRF	0.52**	—					
3. SRU	0.40**	0.52**	—				
4. SCC	-0.46**	-0.15	-0.48**	—			
5. Self-Esteem	-0.08	0.02	-0.39**	0.65**	—		
6. Insight	-0.10	0.08	-0.21**	0.49**	0.44**	—	
7. Anxiety	0.25**	0.26**	0.67**	-0.62**	-0.72**	-0.37**	—
<i>M</i>	15.84	41.23	39.97	41.34	35.12	23.74	57.46
<i>SD</i>	5.97	7.42	8.14	9.1	7.66	6.54	14.1

Note.  $N = 241$ .  $\chi^2 = 466.89$ ;  $df = 231$ ; RMSEA = 0.065 (%90 CI: .057-.074); CFI = 0.96; SRMR = 0.069; GFI = 0.86; IFI = 0.96.

\*\* $p < .01$ .

anxiety, the tendency to be anxious and ill at ease in social settings. It consists of 23 items using 5-point ratings (0 = *extremely uncharacteristic* to 4 = *extremely characteristic*). Adequate or good internal consistencies were obtained for these sub-scales: Cronbach's alphas were .75 for private self-consciousness, .84 for public self-consciousness, and .79 for social anxiety. Only private self-consciousness sub-scale was translated into Turkish using back-translation procedure and used in the present study. It was found to have an adequate internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was 0.69.

## Results

### Suppression Analyses for SRF

Prior to suppression analyses, a measurement model was tested using Lisrel 8.5 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 2001) in order to calculate intercorrelations of latent variables. Means, standard deviations were also calculated using composite scores from the scales (Table 1). As can be seen in the note to Table 1, an acceptable fit to the data was accomplished using Maximum Likelihood estimation method. The NATS scores were positively and moderately correlated with SRF and SRU while negatively and moderately with self-concept clarity. It was weakly and positively correlated with anxiety while its correlations with self-esteem and insight were insignificant.

To test whether NAT and SRU suppressed variance in SRF, a set of multiple regression analyses were conducted for each criterion variable. SRU and NAT were included in different equations, in combination, and as separate items. This was

to allow the clear distinction between the suppressor effects of each variable. For each criterion variable, three separate regression equations were tested (Figure 1). Each criterion variable (self-concept clarity, self-esteem, insight, and anxiety) was regressed on SRF and NAT in Model 1, and on SRF and SRU in Model 2 in the same equation. In Model 3, each criterion variable was regressed on SRF, NAT, and SRU in order to reveal cumulative suppressor effects of both NAT and SRU. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2.

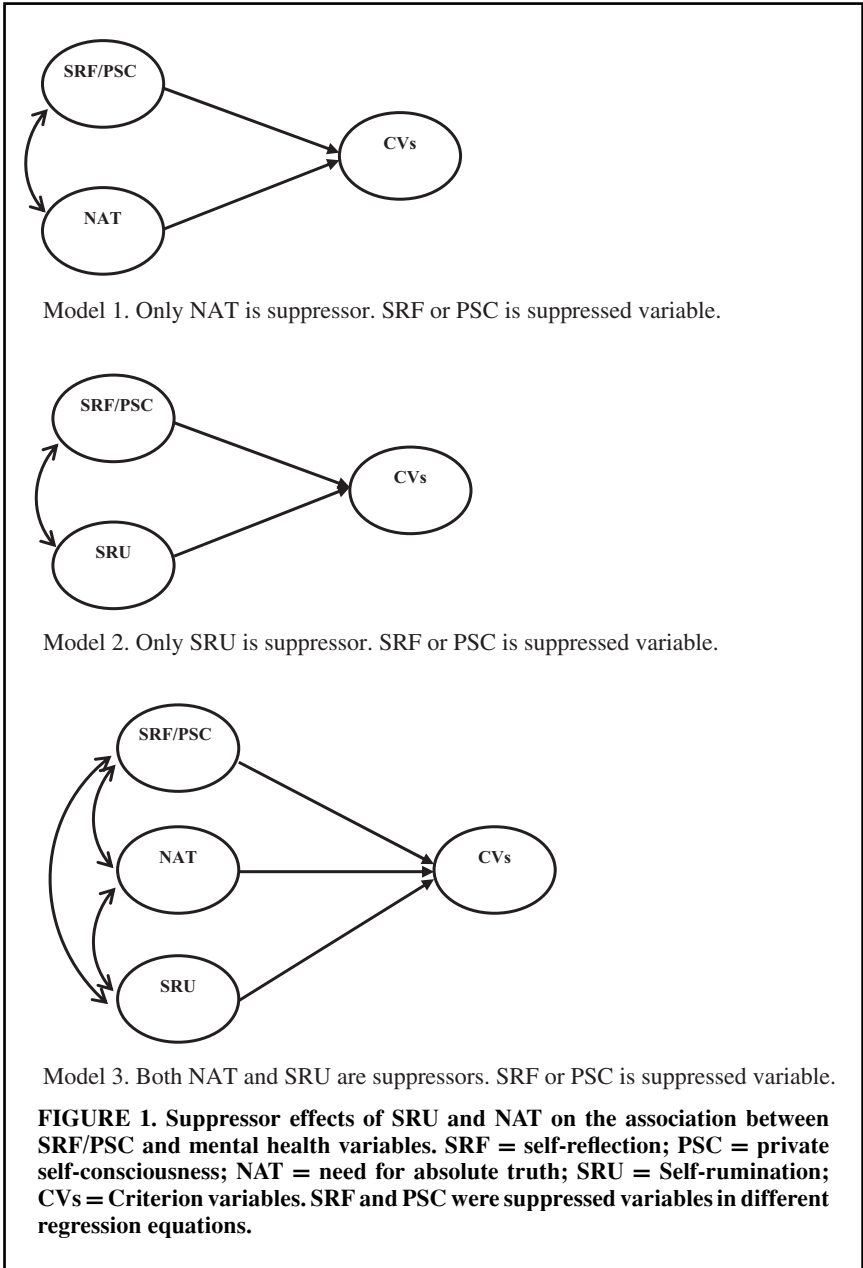
Suppressor effects of NAT were found on self-concept clarity. For this criterion, SRF received a positive regression weight (i.e., the sign changed from negative to positive) although it reached significance only both suppressor variables were added to the equation; when both NAT and SRU were included into the equation, the regression weight changed from  $-.15$  to  $.32$  for self-concept clarity. Suppressor effects of NAT on self-esteem, however, were found to be very weak, while those of SRU were relatively strong; the regression weight changed from  $-.02$  to  $.29$  when SRU was included into the equation. The cumulative suppressor effects of both variables resulted in a regression weight of  $.30$ . When it comes to insight, both NAT and SRU had been shown to act as suppressors because of the clear increment in the regression weight in all equations. The inclusion of the two suppressors into the regression equation resulted in an increase in the regression weight from  $.08$  to  $.19$  and  $.25$  for NAT and SRU respectively, while the cumulative effect of these two suppressors increased the weight to  $.33$ .

The suppressor effects of NAT and SRU on the relationship between SRF and anxiety was also noticeable. The suppressor effect of NAT on this relationship was very weak and the regression weight became weaker. For this criterion, SRF received a negative regression weight (i.e., the sign changed from positive to negative) although it failed to reach significance when only SRU was included into the equation. The cumulative effect of these two suppressors changed the regression weight of SRF from  $.26$  to  $-.12$  for the criteria of anxiety, with the regression weight reaching significance.

### **Suppression Analyses for Private Self-Consciousness**

A measurement model was again tested using latent variables for each variable before suppression analyses with regard to private self-consciousness. The model fitted to the data as can be seen from the note in Table 3 that also represents intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations of the study variables. As can be seen from Table 3, the NAT scores were strongly and positively correlated with private self-consciousness. Private self-consciousness, on the other hand, was positively and moderately correlated with SRU, while having weak, statistically significant, and positive relationships with self-esteem and insight. Its correlations with self-concept clarity and anxiety were insignificant.

To test whether NAT and SRU suppressed variance in PSC, the same set of multiple regression analyses were conducted for each criterion variable. Each



**TABLE 2. Latent Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Concept Clarity, Self-Esteem, Insight, and Anxiety by NAT, SRU, and SRF: Suppressor Effects of NAT and SRU**

Criterion/ Model/Predictor	Goodness of Fit Statistics							Regression $\beta$	Latent Correlation $r$
	$\chi^2$	df	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	SRMR	IFI		
<b>SCC</b>									
Model 1	90.03	41	.071	.94	.95	.074	.95		
SRF								.11	-.15*
NAT								-.52**	-.46**
Model 2	52.33	24	.070	.95	.97	.053	.97		
SRF								.14*	-.15*
SRU								-.54**	-.48**
Model 3	133.82	71	.061	.93	.96	.068	.96		
SRF								.32**	-.15*
NAT								-.44**	-.46**
SRU								-.46**	-.48**
<b>SE</b>									
Model 1	54.89	41	.038	.96	.98	.062	.98		
SRF								.07	.02
NAT								-.10	-.08
Model 2	32.14	24	.038	.97	.99	.046	.99		
SRF								.29**	.02
SRU								-.53**	-.39**
Model 3	103.20	71	.043	.94	.97	.063	.97		
SRF								.30**	.02
NAT								-.02	-.08
SRU								-.53**	-.39**
<b>Insight</b>									
Model 1	44.41	32	.040	.96	.97	.050	.98		
SRF								.19*	.08
NAT								-.20*	-.10**
Model 2	32.27	17	.061	.97	.98	.051	.98		
SRF								.25**	.08
SRU								-.33**	-.21*
Model 3	96.86	59	.052	.94	.95	.055	.95		
SRF								.33**	.08
NAT								-.15*	-.10
SRU								-.31**	-.21*
<b>Anxiety</b>									
Model 1	124.63	62	.065	.93	.96	.067	.96		
SRF								.18*	.26**
NAT								.14*	.25**
Model 2	118.29	41	.089	.92	.96	.058	.96		
SRF								-.10	.26**
SRU								.72**	.67**
Model 3	203.63	98	.067	.90	.92	.067	.92		
SRF								-.12*	.26**
NAT								.02	.25**
SRU								.72**	.67**

*Note.*  $N = 241$ . SRF = self-reflection; NAT = need for absolute truth; SRU = self-rumination; SCC = self-concept clarity; SE = self-esteem; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; CFI = comparative fit-index; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual; IFI = incremental fit index;  $\beta$  = latent standardized multiple regression weight;  $r$  = latent bivariate correlation coefficient with criteria.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ .

**TABLE 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Study Variables**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. NAT							
2. PSC	0.71**						
3. SRU	0.40**	0.46**					
4. SCC	-0.46**	-0.01	-0.47**				
5. Self Esteem	-0.08	0.18*	-0.39**	0.66**			
6. Insight	-0.10	0.21*	-0.21*	0.49**	0.44		
7. Anxiety	0.24**	0.08	0.66**	-0.62**	-0.72**	-0.37**	
<i>M</i>	15.84	35.41	39.97	41.34	35.12	23.74	57.46
<i>SD</i>	4.61	5.97	8.14	9.11	7.66	6.54	14.10

Note.  $N = 241$ .  $\chi^2 = 493.94$ ;  $df = 231$ .  $p < .01$ ; RMSEA = 0.069 (%90 CI: .060-.077); CFI = 0.95; SRMR = 0.073; GFI = 0.85; IFI = 0.95;

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ .

criterion variable (self-concept clarity, self-esteem, insight, and anxiety) was regressed on PSC and NAT in Model 1, and on PSC and SRU in Model 2 in the same equation. In Model 3, each criterion variable was regressed on PSC, NAT and SRU in order to reveal cumulative suppressor effects of both NAT and SRU (Figure 1). The results of these analyses are presented in Table 4.

Impressive suppressor effects of NAT and SRU were found on all criteria. When self-concept clarity was the criterion, PSC received a positive and strong regression weight (i.e., the sign changed from negative to positive) when NAT suppressed the variance. The same suppression effect was also evident for SRU, although with a relatively weaker effect. When both NAT and SRU were included into the equation, the regression weight changed from  $-.01$  to  $.81$  for self-concept clarity. The suppressor effects were also impressive for self-esteem. Although the zero-order correlation between self-esteem and PSC was positive, inclusion of the NAT into the regression analysis substantially increased the correlation (from  $.18$  to  $.47$ ). The same suppressor effect was evident for SRU, which increased the correlation between PSC and self-esteem from  $.18$  to  $.44$ . The cumulative effects of SRU and NAT increased the correlation coefficient up to  $.67$ .

In regard to insight, its zero-order correlation with PSC was already positive and significant. Although it is not consistent with the classical definition of suppression, both NAT and SRU had been shown to act as suppressors because of the clear increment in the regression weight in all equations. The inclusion of the two suppressors into the regression equation resulted in an increase in the regression

**TABLE 4. Latent Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Concept Clarity, Self-Esteem, Insight, and Anxiety by NAT, SRU and PSC: Suppressor Effects of NAT and SRU**

Criterion/ Model/Predictor	Goodness of Fit Statistics							Regression $\beta$	Latent Correlation $r$
	$\chi^2$	df	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	SRMR	IFI		
<b>SCC</b>									
Model 1	103.92	41	.080	.93	.93	.079	.93		
PSC								.61**	-.01
NAT								-.88**	-.46**
Model 2	46.14	24	.062	.96	.98	.050	.98		
PSC								.27**	-.01
SRU								-.60**	-.47**
Model 3	157.04	71	.071	.91	.95	.075	.95		
PSC								.81**	-.01
NAT								-.82**	-.46**
SRU								-.53**	-.47**
<b>SE</b>									
Model 1	101.11	41	.078	.93	.93	.074	.93		
PSC								.47**	.18*
NAT								-.39**	-.08
Model 2	53.56	24	.072	.95	.97	.063	.97		
PSC								.44**	.18*
SRU								-.59**	-.39**
Model 3	159.54	71	.072	.91	.94	.075	.94		
PSC								.67**	.18*
NAT								-.33**	-.08
SRU								-.56**	-.39**
<b>Insight</b>									
Model 1	67.11	32	.068	.95	.95	.061	.95		
PSC								.58**	.21*
NAT								-.51**	-.10
Model 2	37.18	17	.070	.96	.97	.057	.97		
PSC								.43**	.23**
SRU								-.41**	-.21*
Model 3	132.34	59	.072	.92	.94	.067	.94		
PSC								.76**	.21*
NAT								-.50**	-.10
SRU								-.37**	-.21*
<b>Anxiety</b>									
Model 1	141.97	62	.073	.92	.94	.074	.94		
PSC								-.19*	.08
NAT								.36**	-.24**
Model 2	110.22	41	.084	.92	.96	.064	.96		
PSC								-.28**	.08
SRU								.80**	.66**
Model 3	224.84	98	.073	.90	.95	.075	.95		
PSC								-.45**	.08
NAT								.25**	-.24**
SRU								.77**	.66**

*Note.*  $N = 241$ ; PSC = private self-consciousness; NAT = need for absolute truth; SRU = self-rumination; SCC = self-concept clarity; SE = self-esteem; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; CFI = comparative fit-index; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual; IFI = incremental fit index;  $\beta$  = latent standardized multiple regression weight;  $r$  = latent bivariate correlation coefficient with criteria.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .

weight from .23 to .58 and .43 for NAT and SRU respectively, while the cumulative effect of these two suppressors increased the weight to .76.

Finally, the suppressor effects of NAT and SRU on the relationship between PSC and psychopathology were also considerable. When anxiety was the criteria, SRF received a negative regression weight (i.e., the sign changed from positive to negative) when only one suppressor was included into the equation. The cumulative effect of these two suppressors changed the regression weight of PSC from .07 to  $-.45$ .

## Discussion

The self-absorption paradox refers to controversial findings concerning the effects of self-consciousness on mental health. Past research tried to solve this paradox by illuminating the motives behind private self-consciousness. Trapnell and Campbell's (1999) two-dimensional conceptualization of self-consciousness was an attempt to solve this paradox by showing that the beneficial effects of SRF on mental health. However, research (Grant et al., 2002; Ingram, 1990; Lyke, 2009; Takano & Tanno, 2009) showed that it is still problematic with regard to the associations with mental health variables. Şimşek (2013a) showed that the paradox of self-absorption disappeared when two suppressor variables, NAT and SRU, are taken into consideration. NAT, thus, has been shown to be an important variable, in addition to SRU, in solving the paradox.

The findings of the present research replicated and expanded the findings of Şimşek (2013a) by showing that the earlier findings concerning the suppressor effects of NAT and SRU could be retained in a different sample and that these suppressor effect are also evident for private self-consciousness model proposed by Fenigstein and colleagues (1975). It means that self-focus, whether defined as general self-consciousness or conceptualized as a self-directed epistemic motivation (e.g., SRF), could be problematic for mental health if it consists of SRU and NAT. Past research already provided important material that SRU could be an important suppressor for SRF (Joormann et al., 2006; Takano & Tanno, 2009). The present research showed that it is also an important suppressor variable for private self-consciousness. The unique contribution of the present research is to show that another suppressor variable, the NAT, is an important variable in solving the paradox of self-absorption when self-absorption refers to private self-consciousness not differentiated by epistemic or neurotic motives as done by Trapnell and Campbell (1999).

The findings of the present research indicated that both epistemic self-focus (SRF) and private self-consciousness are not correlated significantly with self-concept clarity although the direction of the association was reversed. That is, self-absorption is not associated with having a clear, internally consistent, and temporally stable self-knowledge. This picture dramatically changed, however, when the two suppressors had been added to the regression equations separately

and the association between self-concept clarity and SRF increased. The increase was very considerable when the suppressor effects of these two variables were taken into consideration at the same time. These effects were shown to be impressive when the private self-consciousness was the suppressed variable. These results, consistent with the findings of Şimşek (2013a), showed that, in addition to SRU, the need to find absolute truths about self suppress the beneficial effects of self-absorption whether it is motivated by an epistemic curiosity (e.g., SRF) or not (private self-consciousness). The same results were evident for all criteria (i.e., self-esteem, insight, and anxiety).

Recent studies have operationalized concrete thought about self as distinct, situationally specific, unequivocal, clear, and singular; abstract thought, on the other hand, has been operationalized as indistinct, cross-situational, equivocal, unclear and aggregated (Stöber et al., 2000). The tendency to find the 'facts' about self (NAT) is clearly a higher-level representation of the self which is an abstract form of self-focus and valid in all contexts. It is much probable that having such a need to find "the facts of self," which is general, superordinate, and decontextualized makes it hard for individuals to adjust the self system to the environment. As Şimşek (2013a) indicated, a higher-level of NAT would increase the tendency to overgeneralize, since the basic aim is to find general, superordinate, and decontextualized rules for behavior or meaning. It would also be more difficult to self-regulate for those who have higher levels of NAT since, self-regulation benefits from concrete thinking and focusing on the immediate demands of the present situation (Watkins, 2008). Finally and most importantly, in every instant of SRF, a higher level of NAT would make it more difficult to solve problems, whether interpersonal or intrapersonal, since the basic aim would be finding the fundamental explanation or 'meaning' of a specific situation.

These results have implications for mental health profession given that introspection is the main tool for providing meaningful content in every instant of psychotherapy. It is clear that almost all patients come to therapy with higher levels of NAT since their basic aim is to illuminate the problems experienced inside. Consistent with the earlier research (Şimşek, 2013a), the present study showed that this motive to find absolute truth about self is a kind of counterproductive attempt or has contaminating effects in gaining insight, having a clear picture about self, and reducing anxiety or depression. Psychotherapy processes, thus, should reconsider the scope and content of introspection by taking these results into consideration. The motivation in every instant of self-absorption could be the motive to find high-level, superordinate and overgeneralizable construals concerning self. Introspection or self-absorption, however, should be a kind of self-focus which is contextual, subordinate, and based on concrete construals of events and actions.

Although the results of the present study provided important material concerning the importance of NAT and SRU in the general model of private self-consciousness and SRF, some limitations should be underlined. First, the cross-sectional data used in this study precludes understanding the causal link between



variables related to self-absorption (e.g., SRF, SRU, NAT) and the criteria. Although this link has already been supported by the earlier research (Watkins & Moulds, 2007; Watkins et al., 2009), future research should focus on illuminating the suppressor effects, especially the suppressor effects of NAT, using longitudinal and experimental research design. Second, the participants represented a relatively well-educated and young segment of the population, which necessitates the replication of the study with more diverse samples. We recommend that future research makes use of examining larger and more representative samples, as well as integrating multiple assessment methods besides self-reports (i.e., experience sampling methods) to provide further evidence for the findings of this study. Finally, the accuracy of the present findings should be tested in clinical populations given that all the issues discussed in this paper are especially related to psychopathology and mental health.

#### AUTHOR NOTES

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