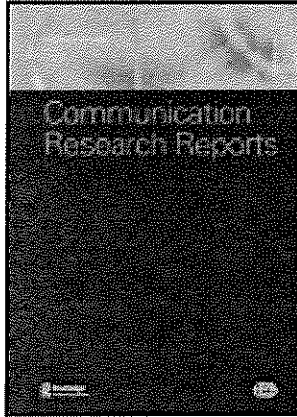


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The Relationships Between Cognitive Flexibility with Dogmatism, Intellectual Flexibility, Preference for Consistency, and Self-Compassion

Matthew M. Martin ^a Matthew M. Martin (PhD, Kent State University, 1992) is a professor in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University. , Sydney M. Staggers ^b Sydney M. Staggers (MA, Emerson College, 2006) is a doctoral student at West Virginia University. & Carolyn M. Anderson ^c Carolyn M. Anderson (PhD, Kent State University, 1992) is a professor in the School of Communication at the University of Akron.

^a Department of Communication Studies, West Virginia University

^b West Virginia University

^c School of Communication, University of Akron

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BRIEF REPORT

The Relationships Between Cognitive Flexibility with Dogmatism, Intellectual Flexibility, Preference for Consistency, and Self-Compassion

Matthew M. Martin, Sydney M. Staggers, & Carolyn M. Anderson

This report is a validity study involving the Cognitive Flexibility Scale (Martin & Rubin, 1995). Participants completed an online questionnaire. As predicted, cognitive flexibility was positively related to measures of intellectual flexibility and self-compassion, and negatively related to a measure of dogmatism. The prediction that cognitive flexibility would be negatively related to preference for consistency was not supported.

Keywords: Cognitive Flexibility; Communication Traits; Dogmatism; Intellectual Flexibility; Self-Compassion

In 1995, Martin and Rubin published the Cognitive Flexibility Scale. This study presents another validity study for this measure. This scale measures a person's (a) awareness that in any given situation there are options and alternatives available, (b) willingness to be flexible and adapt to the situation, and (c) self-efficacy in being flexible. As Shearman and Levine (2006) noted, validity, even for established measures, is an ongoing process and worthy of continued investigation.

Matthew M. Martin (PhD, Kent State University, 1992) is a professor in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University. Sydney M. Staggers (MA, Emerson College, 2006) is a doctoral student at West Virginia University. Carolyn M. Anderson (PhD, Kent State University, 1992) is a professor in the School of Communication at the University of Akron. *Correspondence:* Matthew M. Martin, Department of Communication Studies, West Virginia University, P.O. Box 6293, Morgantown, WV 26506; E-mail: mmartin@wvu.edu

Numerous studies have studied cognitive flexibility with communication traits and behaviors. Cognitive flexibility is positively related to argumentativeness and tolerance for disagreement (Martin, Anderson, & Thweatt, 1998); interpersonal communication competence (Rubin & Martin, 1994); assertiveness, responsiveness, and communication self-efficacy (Martin & Anderson, 1998); willingness to collaborate (Dunleavy & Martin, 2006); adaptability (Hullman, 2007); and conversational sensitivity (Chesebro & Martin, 2003). Cognitive flexibility is negatively related to verbal aggressiveness (Martin et al., 1998), indirect interpersonal aggression (Chesebro & Martin, 2003), communication apprehension (Madlock, Martin, Bogdan, & Ervin, 2007), and the interpersonal and borderline pathological dimensions of celebrity worship (Maltby, Day, McCutcheon, Martin, & Cayanus, 2004; Martin, Cayanus, McCutcheon, & Maltby, 2003). Cognitive flexibility is positively related with the use of affinity-seeking strategies (Martin & Anderson, 2001), positive attributes of group work (Myers et al., 2009), quality of communication with one's supervisor (Madlock et al., 2007), and out-of-class communication between students and teachers (Martin & Myers, 2006). In this study, we investigated the relationships between cognitive flexibility with dogmatism, intellectual flexibility, preference for consistency, and self-compassion.

Dogmatism is a trait that involves the lack of open-mindedness. People that are high in dogmatism reject arguments, persuasive attempts, and evidence that contradict or does not coexist with their already-held beliefs (Crowson, 2009; Crowson, DeBacker, & Davis, 2008; Shearman & Levine, 2006). People high in dogmatism are also less willing to listen to others (Roberts & Vinson, 1998). Given that those high in dogmatism hold strongly to one viewpoint and readily reject alternatives, we pose the following hypothesis:

H1: Individuals' cognitive flexibility would be negatively related to their dogmatism.

Intellectual flexibility is a component of informational receiver apprehension. People that are intellectually inflexible would listen to others' viewpoints and arguments through their own information filters (e.g., they would hear what they wanted to hear). These individuals would avoid information that contradicts their viewpoints (Wheeless, Preiss, & Gayle, 1997). People who are intellectually inflexible would not enjoy listening to opposing viewpoints and would avoid new and different ideas, situations, and individuals (Schrodt & Wheeless, 2001; Wheeless & Schrodt, 2001). Given these findings, we pose the following hypothesis:

H2: Individuals' cognitive flexibility will be positively related to their intellectual flexibility.

Preference for consistency "asserts itself in the desire to be consistent within one's own responses (internal consistency), in the desire to appear consistent to others (public consistency), and in the desire that others be consistent (others' consistency)" (Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom, 1995, p. 319). Cialdini et al. reported that preference for consistency was positively related to self-consciousness, rigidity,

and personal need for structure, and negatively related to extraversion and openness. Brown, Asher, and Cialdini (2005) found support for their proposition that older adults would have a greater preference for consistency because they also have a higher need for harmony in their relationships. Therefore, we pose the following hypothesis:

H3: Individuals' cognitive flexibility will be negatively related to preference for consistency.

Self-compassion involves three fundamental components: (a) kindness toward oneself, as opposed to callous self-criticism and disapproval; (b) viewing one's experience as part of the larger human experience; and (c) mindfulness or awareness of one's painful feelings (Neff, 2003a, 2003b). Students higher in self-compassion do not engage in self-criticism, self-doubt, isolation, and over-identification (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejithirat, 2005), and are less likely to procrastinate (Williams, Stark, & Foster, 2008). Higher self-compassion scores have been linked to better adaptive and psychological functioning and well-being (Neff, 2003a; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007) not only in adults, but in adolescents as well (Neff & McGehee, 2010). Thus, we pose a fourth hypothesis:

H4: Individual's cognitive flexibility will be positively related to their self-compassion.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants ($N=164$: 102 women, 47 men, & 15 who did not identify sex; mean age = 34.29, $SD=16.23$) were recruited from a departmental alumni newsletter. Individuals were asked to complete an online questionnaire. Besides the Cognitive Flexibility Scale, the questionnaire included measures for dogmatism, intellectual inflexibility, preference for consistency, and self-compassion.

Measures

The Cognitive Flexibility Scale (Martin & Rubin, 1995) consists of 12 items that participants rate on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The reliability for this scale was .83 ($M=58.93$, $SD=6.45$).

Shearman and Levine's (2006) New Dogmatism Scale has 11 items that participants rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability for this scale was .80 ($M=21.24$, $SD=4.61$).

Wheless et al.'s (1997) Intellectual Flexibility Scale has seven items that participants rate on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability for this scale was .84 ($M=27.24$, $SD=4.61$).

Cialdini et al.'s (1995) Preference for Consistency measure has nine items that participants rate on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability for this scale was .82 ($M=29.47$, $SD=5.26$).

Neff's (2003a) 26-item Self-Compassion Scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*). The reliability for this scale was .91 ($M = 80.51$, $SD = 15.05$).

Results

H1 predicted that cognitive flexibility would be negatively related to dogmatism. This hypothesis was supported ($r = -.60$, $p < .01$). *H2* predicted that cognitive flexibility would be positively related to intellectual flexibility. This hypothesis was supported ($r = .50$, $p < .01$). *H3* predicted that cognitive flexibility would be negatively related to preference for consistency. This hypothesis was not supported ($r = .02$, $p > .05$). *H4* predicted that cognitive flexibility would be positively related to self-compassion. This hypothesis was supported ($r = .35$, $p < .01$). We conducted *post hoc* partial correlation analyses controlling for biological gender. These results are reported in Table 1.

Discussion

Results from this study provide additional validity support for the Cognitive Flexibility Scale (Martin & Rubin, 1995). As noted by Shearman and Levine (2006), "validation is an ongoing process, validity is best viewed along a continuum" (p. 288). As expected, people higher in cognitive flexibility were lower in dogmatism. The items in the revised dogmatism measure involve close-mindedness and holding on to a single viewpoint while rejecting all other views. The relationship between these two variables indicates that those high in dogmatism not only would not consider other options, but might not believe there are other options.

People higher in cognitive flexibility were higher in their intellectual flexibility. When people are apprehensive about receiving information, they do not enjoy the act of listening, especially to complex arguments or controversial viewpoints. In contrast, people who are high in cognitive flexibility, who are open to other ideas, would have less anxiety and would have a greater need for cognition (Helton-Fauth, 2003). As expected, people higher in cognitive flexibility were higher in their

Table 1 Correlations (Bottom, Left) and Partial Correlations Controlling for Biological Sex (Top, Right)

Measures	1	2	3	4	5
1. Cognitive flexibility	.83	-.57*	.45*	.07	.33*
2. Dogmatism	-.61*	.80	-.44*	.18	-.43*
3. Intellectual flexibility	.50*	-.48*	.84	.08	.15
4. Preference for consistency	-.02	.13	.06	.82	-.04
5. Self-compassion	.35*	-.41*	.16	-.05	.91

Note. Reliabilities for the measures are in the diagonal.

* $p < .01$.

self-compassion. Those that are willing to believe that there are options available are also willing to believe that one deserves forgiveness. The results here do support previous findings in that those who are self-compassionate are more likely to be adaptable (Neff et al., 2005).

The correlation between cognitive flexibility and preference for consistency was not significant ($r = .02$). In fact, preference for consistency was not significantly related to any of the other measures. The Preference for Consistency Scale includes items involving predictability and consistency. It might be the case that people's need for consistency differs from their willingness to recognize and consider alternatives.

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