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Review

Self-awareness and negotiations

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How does directing attention toward oneself, or self-awareness, affect one's performance in a negotiation? This article reviews recent research on self-awareness and discusses the implications of these findings for a negotiator's actions before, during, and after a negotiation. Before a negotiation, self-awareness may affect one's choice to negotiate in the first place, one's planned strategy, and one's preparedness to manage difficulties. During a negotiation, self-awareness may affect one's ability to adapt one's tactics and make ethical choices, and outward expressions of self-awareness may affect one's counterpart's perceptions of oneself. After a negotiation, self-awareness may affect one's self-reflection and ability to improve. Altogether, these findings shed light on a variety of possible effects of self-awareness on negotiations, and point to directions for future research.

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There are many things that negotiators can direct attention to in a negotiation, ranging from the concrete aspects of the negotiation (e.g., the issues and payoffs) to their counterpart (e.g., their counterpart's demeanor) to the negotiation environment (e.g., the physical setting or third-party observers). What happens when negotiators intentionally direct attention toward *themselves*, such as their own internal experiences or the way they are presenting themselves to their counterpart? This kind of self-focused attention, or *self-awareness*, has been studied in numerous contexts, such as leadership [1–3], prosocial behavior [4], task performance [5], and trust decisions [6], among others. In this article, I review some of the most recent research on various forms of self-awareness and discuss how these findings may apply to a negotiation context. Specifically, this article will highlight ways that self-awareness may affect the planning stage *before* a negotiation, one's actions *during* a negotiation, and one's reflection and learning *after* a negotiation. Given that limited research has studied self-awareness specifically within the context of negotiations, I will review both relevant negotiations research and research that has examined self-awareness in other interpersonal or conflictual contexts that may be applicable to negotiations as well. While more research on this topic is needed to paint a fuller picture, the findings reviewed here provide some initial insights into how different forms of self-focused attention may affect negotiation performance.

Defining self-awareness

Broadly, self-awareness has been defined as the directing of attention toward oneself [7]. More specifically, recent research suggests that there are three main types of self-awareness: internal self-awareness (awareness of inner experiences like thoughts and emotions), external self-awareness (awareness of outward appearance and behaviors), and social self-awareness (awareness of how others perceive oneself) [8]. Self-awareness can also refer to both a trait- and state-level characteristic. These different types of self-awareness all have the potential to be relevant for negotiators, and will thus be discussed throughout this article.

Self-awareness in three negotiation stages

Table 1 provides a summary of the ways that self-awareness may impact each stage of the negotiation.

Before the negotiation

Prior to a negotiation, a negotiator's self-awareness may influence factors such as their choice to negotiate in the first place, the exact strategies they plan to adopt, and how prepared they are to manage potential difficulties.

The first step of a negotiation is the decision to enter the negotiation in the first place, which requires—among other things—knowing how one might be viewed by potential counterparts (e.g., how likely they are to want to negotiate with you and give you a fair deal); in other words, this step requires social self-awareness. However, research on meta-

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Table 1

Summary of how self-awareness may impact each stage of the negotiation.

Before the negotiation	During the negotiation	After the negotiation
• **Choice of whom to enter a negotiation with:** *Social self-awareness may affect accuracy and/or biases in beliefs about what potential counterparts think of oneself* • **Strategy planning:** *Mindfulness (non-judgmental attention toward present experiences) can prompt a more cooperative approach* • **Emotion regulation & interpersonal management:** *Mindfulness, distanced self-reflection, and emotion source awareness may improve preparedness for emotional and interpersonal difficulties* • **Cross-cultural preparation:** *Cultural self-awareness may improve one's ability to identify and prepare for potential cultural differences*	• **Adaptation of behavior in the moment:** *Social self-awareness may affect accuracy and/or biases in beliefs about how one's counterpart is perceiving oneself, affecting one's ability to adapt in the moment* • **Ethical** behavior**:** *Directing (certain kinds of) attention toward the self may reduce one's tendency toward ethical transgressions* • **Expressions to counterpart:** *Explicitly expressing self-awareness about traits/behaviors that negatively impact others may harm trust; expressing amusement, embarrassment and/or shame in response to one's own actions may also affect others' perceptions in varying ways*	• **Self-reflection:** *Distanced self-reflection may facilitate learning from the experience while mitigating unhelpful rumination (*e.g.*, if a negotiation went poorly)* • **Feedback:** *Soliciting feedback from one's counterpart or observers of the negotiation may lead to greater self-awareness for future negotiations, but there are common ways that people tend to distort or disregard feedback, which may impair its efficacy*

accuracy—which I use here interchangeably with accurate social self-awareness—suggests that people may have systematic blind spots in knowing how they are perceived by others, which could in turn lead to suboptimal selection of counterparts. For instance, people are relatively inaccurate at judging who wants to compete with them (compared to judging who likes them) [9]. People may also have especially inaccurate social self-awareness when negotiating with an outgroup member (e.g., a Democrat versus a Republican), as research suggests that people tend to believe outgroup members judge them more negatively than they actually do [10,11]. Belief-correcting interventions show initial promise in improving this latter type of social self-awareness [10].

When it comes to planning one's strategy and overall approach prior to a negotiation, a particular kind of self-focused attention—mindfulness—may influence whether one takes a more cooperative or competitive approach. Mindfulness can be defined as directing non-judgmental attention toward one's present moment experiences [12]. Recent research has found that having negotiators partake in a brief mindfulness meditation (e.g., paying attention to their breathing) can lead to greater joint gains in their negotiation outcomes [13], and more generally, that mindfulness can increase prosocial behavior [14]. On the other hand, if one's only goal in the negotiation is to claim value for oneself, then engaging in mindfulness meditation prior to negotiating may not be useful, as evidence for its effects on value-claiming is mixed or even slightly negative [15,16].[1]

Anticipating a negotiation can induce a variety of emotions, including negative ones like anxiety or anger [17]. Although there is some evidence that inducing self-awareness can increase emotional reactivity [18], certain types of self-awareness may be able to assist in emotion regulation. Specifically, mindfulness, once again, is associated with greater emotion regulation [19–21], and *distanced* self-reflection (e.g., referring to oneself in the third person rather than the first person) can reduce emotional arousal [22,23] and lead to wiser reasoning about interpersonal conflicts [24]. Other recent research suggests that having awareness of the *source* of one's emotions—beyond just the emotions themselves—correlates with certain kinds of regulation strategies (e.g., cognitive reappraisal) [25].

Finally, a certain type of self-awareness may be especially useful when preparing for a negotiation across cultural lines. Given that perceptions of various negotiation behaviors, such as communication style and speed of trust, have been shown to differ across cultures [26], negotiators may benefit from developing cultural self-awareness, which is defined as an awareness of how culture has influenced oneself [27]. By recognizing the role of culture in one's beliefs and behaviors, negotiators may come to recognize that some of their typical negotiating tactics are not, in fact, considered

[1] The set of studies in Ref. [15] also found a null effect of mindfulness on value creation, but note that the studies where value creation was measured in that paper had substantially lower power than those in Ref. [13].

universally acceptable—and may instead be perceived as rude or unclear by cross-cultural counterparts.

During the negotiation

Once a negotiation has begun, a negotiator's self-awareness may affect their ability to adapt tactics in the moment, the ethicality of the choices they make, and the signals they send to their counterpart.

Successful negotiators need to be flexible in adapting their strategy according to how the negotiation is unfolding, which requires self-awareness of how one is acting and how one's counterpart is perceiving one's actions. Several areas of research, however, suggest that people have biased beliefs in some of these types of self-awareness. For instance, negotiators are prone to thinking that their counterparts perceive them as too assertive even when their counterparts see them as appropriately assertive [28]. More generally, people tend to underestimate how much they are liked by others after a conversation [29,30], and seem to be less aware of moment-to-moment changes in how they exhibit agreeableness compared to other personality traits like extraversion and conscientiousness [31]. On the other hand, people seem to underestimate how *negatively* others may view their deceptive actions during a negotiation, such as paltering [32]. These findings suggest that negotiators' social self-awareness may systematically err in important ways—in some cases, being overly negative, and in others, overly positive—which may inhibit them from appropriately adapting their strategy according to their counterpart's perceptions as the negotiation unfolds.

Self-awareness may also affect the ethicality of the choices one makes in a negotiation, given research in other contexts showing its effects on moral behaviors. For instance, inducing self-awareness in those who have low trait empathy can lead them to communicate more respectfully [33], and inducing a particular kind of self-perception—a more interconnected sense of self—leads people to behave more morally [34]. Self-awareness is also a necessary component of self-conscious emotions, such as guilt [35], which in turn lead people to avoid moral transgressions or to engage in repair if a transgression has occurred [36,37]. Given that negotiators may often feel tempted to engage in unethical bargaining tactics while in the heat of the moment, these findings suggest that intentionally engaging in certain types of self-awareness while negotiating may help to mitigate unethical behaviors that a negotiator may otherwise later regret. On the other hand, other types of self-awareness may actually *reduce* cooperative behaviors: There is some evidence suggesting that distanced self-reflection (despite its benefits for emotion regulation) may lead to more self-interested choices [38].

Beyond a negotiator's *actual* self-awareness, negotiators can also choose whether or not to *express* their self-awareness (or lack thereof) to their counterpart during the negotiation. Recent research in other areas of communication suggests that such expressions may have mixed effects: While expressing self-awareness about certain types of negative qualities (prior to self-promoting) can increase positive perceptions of oneself [39], expressing self-awareness of other types of negative qualities—namely, those that are harmful to others, such as having a rude demeanor—may in fact decrease others' trust [6]. Similarly, expressing different types of self-awareness after committing an embarrassing faux pas affects others' perceptions of oneself in different ways: Expressing amusement (rather than embarrassment) tends to positively impact others' perceptions, but only when the faux pas has not harmed others [40]. Finally, expressing the self-conscious emotion of shame signals to others that one's actions have violated a social norm [41]; thus, perhaps exhibiting shame after an (accidental) transgression could help to discourage one's counterpart from engaging in those same tactics.

After the negotiation

After the conclusion of a negotiation, self-awareness may affect a negotiator's ability to reflect on their performance and learn for future negotiations.

Engaging in self-reflection—such as by journaling about one's experiences at the end of the day—has been show to increase subsequent performance in various professional contexts [42,43], and it stands to reason that negotiators could similarly benefit from merely setting aside time to write about or reflect on their experiences in the negotiation after its conclusion. However, there are also some types of self-reflection—such as rumination on negative experiences—that are correlated with *worse* job performance [44], and even with poorer health outcomes [45]. In order to reap the benefits of self-reflection, then, research suggests that negotiators may want to engage specifically in *distanced* self-reflection [42,46] (e.g., referring to themselves in the third person, just as they might want to prior to the negotiation), which could be particularly helpful if a negotiation has gone poorly and reflecting on it would bring a negotiator significant negative emotions.

Another crucial way to cultivate self-awareness about one's performance is to solicit feedback, whether from one's counterpart or from observers of the negotiation. However, recent research across a variety of domains documents many ways that people tend to disregard or distort feedback, thus potentially missing opportunities to develop greater self-awareness. These distortions include the tendency to learn less from feedback about failures than feedback about successes [47]; to develop

overly positive memories of past performance even despite direct feedback [48]; to believe that feedback that is incongruent with one's existing self-views is less accurate[2] [49,50]; and to neglect feedback about low emotional intelligence (among those who are particularly low in emotional intelligence) [51]. While feedback from others is not always completely accurate, systematically disregarding certain aspects of it could lead negotiators to maintain persistent gaps in self-awareness and thus miss out on opportunities to improve their performance. On a related note, if negotiators want more concrete steps for self-improvement, they may want to avoid the word "feedback" altogether and instead ask others for "advice," which has been shown to lead to more concrete and actionable responses in other professional settings [52]. All told, these findings suggest that—despite the potential of feedback (or advice) to improve self-awareness—negotiators may also need to have self-awareness of the common blind spots or pitfalls that can occur *in the process of receiving it* in order to fully benefit.

Directions for future research

A number of unanswered questions provide future directions for research on self-awareness in the context of negotiations. For example, could too much self-awareness increase a negotiator's anxiety before, or during, a negotiation, such as by increasing attention to the weaknesses in one's position or abilities? Given that anxiety can harm negotiation performance [17], this could be a potential downside of self-awareness. Perhaps excessive self-awareness could also inhibit one from thinking through one's counterpart's point of view, which has been shown to yield relational benefits in negotiations [53]. Future research should continue to examine these and other possible downsides of self-awareness, along with potential remedies. Questions also remain regarding the effects of self-awareness in team negotiations: Does cultivating individual self-awareness benefit team members by prompting each team member to become more aware of their role in the team and how they are coming across to their teammates, or could it also draw attention away from team-level coordination and other teammates' needs? Finally, another intriguing direction might be the role of artificial intelligence/large language models (LLMs) in the development of a negotiator's self-awareness. Might negotiators be able to simulate negotiations with LLMs and receive direct, personalized feedback—without many of the concerns that could come from soliciting feedback from a human counterpart? Perhaps such a method could serve to greatly accelerate and optimize the cultivation of negotiators' self-awareness.

[2] While Ref. [49] argues that this belief "may be motivated by rational epistemic concerns about source credibility" (p. 2436) and offers an illustration through Bayesian modeling, this tendency nevertheless suggests that whenever a person does have inaccurate self-views, it is especially hard to overcome them.

Conclusion

A negotiator's self-awareness has the potential to affect every stage of a negotiation, from choosing potential counterparts and preparing one's strategy and mindset prior to the negotiation, to adapting one's behavior during the negotiation, to reflecting on one's performance after the negotiation. While more research is needed to study the effects of self-awareness within the context of negotiations, existing work provides initial insights into the varied ways that self-awareness may impact the negotiation process, and points to compelling directions for future work.

Declaration of Competing Interest statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Credit author statement

Kristina A. Wald: Conceptualization; Writing − original draft; Writing − review & editing.

Declaration of competing interests

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Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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* of special interest
** of outstanding interest

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Further information on references of particular interest

[6]. * This paper examines the causal impact of outwardly exhibiting self-awareness on observers' perceptions by manipulating a target person's exhibited (rather than actual) self-awareness, along with the type of behavior they are exhibiting self-awareness about, and measuring observers' trust toward that target. The studies find that exhibiting high (vs. low) self-awareness about one's positive qualities increases others' trust, but that exhibiting high (vs. low) self-awareness about one's negative qualities decreases others' trust if those negative qualities have a negative impact on other people. While not tested directly in the context of negotiations, these findings provide suggestive evidence of when negotiators may or may not benefit from expressing self-awareness to others.

15. ** This paper reports ten studies examining the effects of a mindfulness intervention prior to several different negotiation tasks. One experiment found a negative effect of mindfulness on value claiming, while the other nine studies found a null effect of mindfulness on value claiming. Four of the studies used integrative negotiations, which allowed the authors to also analyze the effect of mindfulness on value creating in those studies; a null effect of mindfulness was found, but as noted in footnote 1, these studies had relatively low power for the value creation analyses (*N*s = 20–82) due to the exclusion of mixed-condition dyads (thus, the value claiming analyses may be more informative here than the value creating analyses). Altogether, these studies suggest that mindfulness does not seem to benefit, and might possibly even reduce, value-claiming in a negotiation.

21. ** This paper provides a meta-analysis of 110 studies that examine the efficacy of mindfulness for emotion regulation, finding an overall significant and positive effect. The analysis further examines how the different components of mindfulness (equanimity vs. monitoring) separately affect emotion regulation, finding that both have a positive effect but that monitoring has a relatively smaller one. The analyses also look for evidence of publication bias (e.g., *p*-curve and other analyses), as well as the degree of influence from studies with small sample sizes. They find some evidence that there could be publication bias, but nevertheless find evidence for a significant effect even taking those considerations into account.

40. * This paper examines how different expressions of self-awareness about committing a faux pas—namely, amusement versus embarrassment—are perceived by observers. Six online experiments presented participants with scenarios in which a target person committed a faux pas (e.g., tripping and falling) and manipulated whether the target was described as expressing amusement (e.g., smiling and laughing) or embarrassment (e.g., looking downward). One of the experiments also manipulated whether the faux pas caused harm to the target themselves (tripping and hurting themselves) or to another person (tripping and hurting another person). Altogether, the studies find that expressing amusement is generally perceived more positively than embarrassment, but that this effect attenuates or even reverses when the faux pas causes harm to others. While studied outside the context of negotiations, these findings provide insight into how different types of outward expressions of self-awareness can affect observers' perceptions.

42. ** This paper reviews much of the recent literature on self-reflection, discussing both its upsides (e.g., increased learning and self-improvement, reduced exhaustion and burnout, improved leadership) and downsides (e.g., draining of cognitive resources, increased distress, relational harm). The authors then highlight the evidence for *distanced* self-reflection, which they define as "the process of mentally moving away from what is experientially available in the here and now" (p. 446), as a way to capture the benefits of self-reflection while mitigating the costs. They review the evidence for a variety of different distancing tools (such as referring to oneself in the third-person, imagining how one will feel in the future, and broadening one's perspective).

[52]. * This paper tests whether prompting people to provide advice versus feedback leads them to provide more concrete and specific input (which, in turn, ought to aid in the recipient's cultivation of self-awareness). The first study is a field experiment in which employees were randomly assigned to review their colleagues with question prompts that asked them to provide advice or feedback. The authors used text analysis to test for differences in the concreteness of the responses between conditions, finding that responses were more concrete in the advice condition than in the feedback condition. While this study did not find a difference in recipient ratings of the quality of the responses at a one-month follow-up, two additional experiments were conducted online and replicated the concreteness finding, also finding that independent raters perceived the responses in those studies as more actionable, developmental, and useful in the advice (vs. feedback) conditions. These studies thus suggest one way that people may be able to receive more helpful input for future improvement.