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I AM! THEREFORE, I VOTE! SELF-MONITORING AND 1996 PRESIDENTIAL VOTING CHOICES

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ABSTRACT: Two studies were conducted to examine the impact of the self-monitoring tendency on information processing and social choices. In study 1, high and low self-monitors were provided with "nonsense" words and asked to define each of them. High self-monitors defined more of the nonsense words as physical and social role descriptors, whereas low self-monitors defined significantly more of the words as trait descriptors. In Study 2, voters leaving polling centers during the 1996 Presidential Election were given the self-monitoring scale and asked to identify the Presidential candidate for whom they voted. High self-monitors overwhelmingly voted for Bill Clinton, while low self-monitors overwhelmingly endorsed Bob Dole. The rationale for these differences and suggestions for future research are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Information processing, person perception, self-monitoring, voting choices.

INTRODUCTION

The self-monitoring literature provides ample evidence of the fact that an individual's self-monitoring tendency influences how that individual will process social information and the choices he or she will make. Clearly, self-monitoring plays a role in determining how the individual will process and utilize social information as it pertains to self and others.

Self-monitoring level has been shown to predict the effects that self-monitoring propensities have on the processing of self-relevant information (Snyder and Cantor, 1980), choosing friends as activity partners (Snyder, Gangestad, and Simpson, 1983), orientations toward personnel selection (Snyder, Berscheid, and Matwychuk, 1988), and initiation of personal relationships (Snyder, Berscheid, and Glick, 1985). High self-monitors seem to pay particular attention to situational cues that suggest what behaviors are appropriate; they are aware of the social roles that are salient in a situation and are concerned with appearances (*e.g.,* Berscheid, Graziano, Monson, and Dermer, 1976; Snyder, Berscheid, and Glick, 1985; Snyder, Gangestad, and Simpson, 1983). Low self-monitors, on the other hand, monitor internal aspects of self and seem concerned with modulating behavior to fit with some internal standard. Low self-monitors also seem particularly interested in the internal characteristics of others, such as attitudes, values, and beliefs (*e.g.,* Snyder, Berscheid, and Glick, 1985; Snyder and Cantor, 1980; Snyder, 1987).

In social situations where choices are not obvious, implicit personality theories are commonly used to process information and make behavior choices (Bruner and Tagiuri, 1954; Cantor and Kihlstrom, 1986; Cantor and Mischel, 1979; Schneider, 1973). High self-monitors seem to have readily accessible stores of information about situations and appropriate behaviors (*e.g.,* Snyder and Cantor, 1980), whereas low self-monitors usually process information in trait terms. This difference in their mode of processing information coupled with the fact that individuals tend to process information in a self-relevant fashion (*e.g.,* Fong and Markus, 1982; Kuiper and Rogers, 1979; Lemon and Warren, 1974; Lewicki, 1983, 1984) strongly suggests that individuals may use their self-monitoring tendency for the processing of social information and for making social choices.

Ickes, Layden, and Barnes (1978) discovered that high self-monitors were particularly likely to use role relationship descriptors when asked to answer the question, "Who am I?" Sampson (1978) provided further evidence for the notion that high self-monitors differ in the categories they consider to be important in defining self. High self-monitors were found to rate externally located descriptors as being more important for their sense of self than internally located descriptors. Snyder (1995) goes on to show us that high self-monitors typically strive for behaviors that are appropriate to the social setting.

High self-monitors should pay particular attention to the outward, behavior-oriented aspects of the individual because they assume that the situation is most predictive of one's behavior. Low self-monitors, on the other hand, seem to believe that trait or character information is more informative as to what kind of person they are observing. As such, low self-monitors should pay particular attention to information about the internal traits of the person they are observing (Snyder and Cantor, 1980; Snyder, Gangestad, and Simpson, 1983; Snyder and Monson, 1975). Snyder (1995) suggests that low self-monitors characteristically seek, either through words or deeds, to faithfully express their attitudes, feelings, and personalities (*i.e.,* their inner selves). Based on this literature, Osborne, *et al.* (1996) argued that the self-monitoring tendency may become a heuristic individuals use to make sense of information in their social worlds.

This brief review of the findings in the self-monitoring literature indicates that high and low self-monitors have very different ideas as to what is informative about other people and the world around them. Thus, the construct of self-monitoring may be useful in determining the categories of information individuals will use to evaluate others, even if those others are not well known (Snyder, Berscheid, and Matwychuk, 1988; Young, Osborne, and Snyder, 1994).

STUDY 1

Introduction. Osborne, *et al.* (1996) showed that high and low self-monitors, when presented with social stimuli, will process those stimuli according to their self-monitoring tendency. High self-monitors recalled significantly more physical and social role descriptors from a target audiotape, while low self-mon-

itors recalled significantly more personality trait descriptors. If, as Osborne, *et al.* (1996) suggest, self-monitoring is automatically used by individuals to process information, self-monitoring should occur even with information that is novel. In previous studies, the information presented to the subjects was all social in nature. The very descriptors that were presented may have activated the self-monitoring tendency. However, if the self-monitoring tendency is utilized as a basic information processing strategy, this tendency should be utilized by participants even when the information being presented has no obvious meaning.

Study 1 represents an attempt to replicate the findings of Osborne, *et al.* (1996) and to provide stronger support for their contention that the self-monitoring tendency is utilized by individuals to make sense of incoming information. Participants were given an ostensible target description of twenty coded (nonsense) words. We predicted that high self-monitors would define more of the nonsense words as relating to physical and social role descriptions, whereas low self-monitors would define more of the nonsense words as relating to the target's personality traits.

Methods. Thirty-eight students at a small Midwestern university participated in this study to earn assignment points in their General Psychology course. Thirty-four of the participants were female, and four were male. Previous studies by Osborne and his colleagues suggest that no consistent gender findings characterize this line of research; therefore, gender analyses were not conducted (*e.g.,* Osborne, *et al.,* 1996; Young, *et al.,* 1994).

Participants were presented with a written version of the target description used by Osborne, *et al.* (1996). The written description was reformatted using a symbol coding program on a word processor. The result was twenty-one coded and underlined words within the text. The participants were told that the text was a description of another person and that the experimenters were interested in how different individuals interpret information with which they are not familiar. Participants were provided with a data sheet that listed the "nonsense" words in numerical order along with the following simple instructions:

> Read each of the following coded words carefully. After you have looked at the word, write down a definition for what you think that word might mean. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Do not leave any item blank.

After completing the "decoding" task, the participants were administered an 18-item self-monitoring scale (Snyder and Gangestad, 1986). After completion of this scale, the participants were probed for suspicion, debriefed, thanked for their participation, and dismissed. None of the participants reported understanding the coded words beyond chance levels of certainty.

Results. The participants' self-monitoring scales were scored and placed into a frequency distribution. From this distribution, the mode was calculated. The modal score on the 18-item measure was eleven with five participants scoring at that level. In order to determine those scoring high or low on the self-mon-

Table 1. The mean number of "nonsense" words defined by category based on a subject's self-monitoring level.

	Descriptor Type		
Group	Physical	Social Roles	Traits
Low self-monitors	2.556[1]	2.944[2]	12.056[3]
High self-monitors	9.733[1]	5.267[2]	2.200[3]

[1] $t_{(1,31)} = -7.648, p < 0.01$.
[2] $t_{(1,31)} = -2.805, p < 0.01$.
[3] $t_{(1,31)} = 10.146, p < 0.01$.

itoring scale, the participants scoring at the modal level were removed from future analyses. Individuals scoring above the mode were labeled as high self-monitors, whereas those scoring below the mode were labeled as low self-monitors. This method of constructing low and high self-monitor groupings is consistent with the self-monitoring literature (*e.g.,* Snyder, 1987; Snyder, Gangestad, and Simpson, 1983). These categorical scores were used to determine groupings for the *t*-test.

The participants' written definitions of the coded words were scored by naive judges into four categories: physical descriptors, social role descriptors, personality trait descriptors, and other. The two judges agreed on 94% of the categorizations, and a third naive judge was used to decide any disagreements. These categorizations were analyzed using the *t*-test.

In previous studies, high self-monitors tended to utilize more physical and social role descriptors to describe self and others and also remembered more of these descriptors when asked to recall what they could remember about someone they had just met. Low self-monitors, on the other hand, consistently utilized trait-oriented descriptors to describe self and others and remembered more trait descriptors about someone they had just met (see Osborne, *et al.,* 1996). We predicted that the same pattern of results would emerge when high and low self-monitors defined "nonsense" words they believed were social in nature. *T*-test analyses of the raters' categorization of the participants' responses support this prediction (Table 1). High self-monitors categorized more of the nonsense words to be physical and social role descriptors than their self-monitoring counterparts. Low self-monitors defined more of the nonsense words as describing personality traits than their high self-monitoring counterparts.

Discussion. The findings from Study 1 support the contention of Osborne, *et al.* (1996) that high and low self-monitoring tendencies are utilized in basic information processing. Previous studies by Osborne and his colleagues either presented social information to high and low self-monitors and tested the patterns of recall or asked participants to generate descriptions of self or well-known others. These researchers argued that the consistent differences in recall or descriptors generated supported their assumption that the self-monitoring tendency is an automatically utilized information processing strategy.

In order to qualify as an "automatic information processing strategy," the self-monitoring tendency should be utilized by participants to process information that is not well known. Although the participants in the current study were informed that the nonsense descriptors were taken from a target description, no other clues were provided, and a priming effect seems significantly less likely than in the previous studies. Despite the participants' admissions that they

were just "guessing" as to what the words meant, the same differential pattern was found as was revealed in previous studies. Low and high self-monitors differed significantly on what they defined these nonsense words to be. This finding is consistent with the prediction of Osborne, *et al.* (1996) that high and low self-monitors would utilize their self-monitoring tendencies to make sense of their social world. The fact that the predicted pattern was replicated using "nonsense" information further supports the notion that high and low self-monitors will automatically utilize self-monitoring as an information processing strategy.

Given what Lewicki and others (*e.g.,* Carpenter, 1988; Fong and Markus, 1982; Lewicki, 1983, 1984) have discovered about the self-referent effect, these predictions make perfect sense. Since self is often salient in social interactions, the salient aspects of self are most likely be utilized as a reference point for processing information in a social setting. The current study replicates the earlier findings of Osborne and his colleagues (*e.g.,* Osborne, Penticuff, and Weadick, 1996) but extends those findings to information that is novel or unknown.

STUDY 2

Given the importance of social information processing, an understanding of the role of self-monitoring and other personality characteristics in the process is imperative. High and low self-monitors differ in the types of partners they choose for activities (Snyder, Gangestad, and Simpson, 1983), the political choices they make (Young, Osborne, and Snyder, 1994), and the types of advertisements they find convincing (*e.g.,* Snyder, 1979; Snyder and Cantor, 1980).

Young, Osborne, and Snyder (1994) provided high and low self-monitors with candidate portfolios. In pretest data collection, the experimenters gathered information from participants about what issues they felt were the most important in their political choices and what their stances were on those issues. When these participants were later provided with candidate portfolios, the self-monitoring tendency clearly influenced voting choice. High self-monitors consistently voted for the candidate that was rated by pilot test participants as "looking the most presidential" regardless of where that candidate stood on the issues. Low self-monitors, on the other hand, consistently voted for the candidate that matched them most closely on the issues regardless of how "presidential looking" that candidate had been rated by pilot test participants. Although this result is compelling evidence for the use of the self-monitoring tendency, few attempts have been made to apply such findings in situations where choices have clear, real-world implications.

In an attempt to replicate the findings of Young, Osborne, and Snyder (1994) and to generalize those findings to actual voting choices, voters leaving the polls during the 1996 Presidential Election were given the self-monitoring scale and asked to indicate the candidate for whom they had voted. We predicted that high self-monitors would be significantly more likely to vote for Bill Clinton because he was the current President and was clearly ahead in the polls. Who could fit the image of "President" more in the eyes of a high self-monitor than the incum-

Table 2. The influence of the self-monitoring tendency on voters' presidential choices. The numbers outside the parentheses are the observed frequencies. The numbers in parentheses are the expected frequencies based on the null hypothesis (chi-square = 52.84, $df = 1$, and $p < 0.01$)

	Presidential Choices	
Group	Clinton	Dole
High self-monitors	47 (31.5)	13 (28.5)
Low self-monitors	7 (22.5)	36 (20.5)

bent President and the candidate being touted by the media as the obvious winner? Our prediction was consistent with the findings that high self-monitors assess the situation and tend to adjust their behaviors to what is expected (*e.g.,* Berscheid, Graziano, and Dermer, 1976; Snyder, Berscheid, and Glick, 1985; Snyder, Gangestad, and Simpson, 1983).

We also predicted that low self-monitors would be significantly more likely to vote for Bob Dole. The media paid a lot of attention to Dole's years in office and his consistent stance on issues. Given the value that low self-monitors place on consistency, they should be more likely to vote for Dole because of his length of service. This prediction is consistent with previous findings in which low self-monitors make their choices based more on internally based information and not on what is situationally appropriate or more popular (*e.g.,* Snyder and Cantor, 1980; Snyder, Gangestad, and Simpson, 1983; Snyder and Monson, 1975).

Methods. The participants were 135 voters leaving the polls in a moderate-sized Midwestern city. Participation was strictly voluntary. Of the 135 voters approached, 114 agreed to participate. Of these 114 participants, 65 were male, and 49 were female. Their ages and other demographic information were not collected. Participants were asked to volunteer for a study on "voter characteristics and voter choices." If a participant agreed to participate, he or she was given the 18-item self-monitoring scale and then asked to identify the presidential candidate for whom he/she had voted.

Results. Of the 114 participants, eleven voted for Ross Perot. Given a relatively equal split between those participants on self-monitoring (six were high self-monitors, and five were low) and the small number of Perot voters, these participants were not used in the final analyses. The 103 participants who voted for either Clinton or Dole were categorized as either "high" (scores of nine or higher) or "low" (scores of eight or lower) self-monitors based on their scores on the 18-item self-monitoring scale.

A chi square analysis was conducted on the frequencies of the high and low self-monitors voting for each candidate. If the self-monitoring score is not related to voting choice, then we would expect a relatively equal number of both high and low self-monitors to vote for each candidate. A clear indication exists that high and low self-monitors differ in their voting choices (Table 2). The observed frequencies were analyzed using a chi-square test. The calculated value of chi-square was 52.84, a value that was significantly greater than the critical value of chi-square (6.64). The null hypothesis, which predicted that high and low self-monitors would not differ in their choice of a presidential candidate, can be rejected at the 0.01 level.

Discussion. These findings lend significant support to the argument that the self-monitoring tendency may be utilized by individuals as a basic information processing strategy. The fact that these findings have been replicated in several studies and illustrated in actual voting behavior is quite compelling. Given what we know about the preferences of high and low self-monitoring individuals, the reasons that these voters may make differential political choices makes sense. To the extent that one candidate fits the "image" of being President (either by virtue of physical looks or actually being the incumbent President), one can safely assume that high self-monitors will be more inclined to vote for that candidate. These individuals have been shown to utilize image in choosing the products they buy (Snyder, 1995), the individuals they choose as activity partners (Snyder, Gangestad, and Simpson, 1983), and the individuals whom they date (Snyder, Berscheid, and Glick, 1985). Their choice of a political candidate seems subject to the same tendencies.

Perhaps these differential effects are more a function of the individual's apparent tendency to utilize the self-monitoring tendency as a basic information processing strategy than any specific, conscious, decision-making process. Very few individuals make a conscious decision to vote for a presidential candidate because he "looks like a President," yet the differential voting choices of high and low self-monitors were striking.

Low self-monitors have been shown to be more internally focused in making choices. They choose activity partners based on their feelings toward that person and not on how the person looks or on how good he/she might be at some required skill (Snyder, Gangestad, and Simpson, 1983); they date individuals who are similar to themselves in terms of their attitudes and beliefs (Snyder, Berscheid, and Glick, 1985); and they show preferences for products that stress quality and not image (Snyder, 1995). These same tendencies also influence the political choices that low self-monitors make.

When more detailed questions were asked of high and low self-monitors (Young, Osborne, and Snyder, 1994), even more interesting patterns emerged. High and low self-monitors were asked the following question, "If you were given $100 to donate to these candidates, how would you donate the money and why?" High self-monitors donated 100% of the money to their preferred candidate (shown in these studies to be the candidate pilot test participants rated as "looking the most presidential"). Low self-monitors divided their money equally between the candidates. When asked why they donated in this fashion, their answers were compelling. Many of the low self-monitoring participants indicated that they "donated money to the person I voted for because I like his position on the issues." In addition, many of these people went on to state that they "donated money to the other candidate because he will probably win."

Too little information was available to determine if equal giving was an attempt by low self-monitors to "hedge their bets" or whether they understood that the candidate that "looks presidential" is probably more likely to win. The degree to which these individuals were cognizant of why they made the choic-

es they did is certainly worth investigating. Future research should be directed toward this very phenomenon. If low and high self-monitors do make differential dating partner, activity partner, political, and product choices because of an automatic tendency to "filter" information through their self-monitoring tendency, the implications for how to approach, communicate, and present information to these individuals are profound.

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