Self-monitoring as an aggregate construct: Relationships with personality and values

Laura Parks-Leduc *, Marshall W. Pattie, Fernando Pargas, Robert G. Eliason

Department of Management, James Madison University, 800 S. Main St., MSC 0205, Harrisonburg, VA 22807, USA

ABSTRACT

In this study we explore the conceptualization of self-monitoring as an aggregate construct and expand its nomological net by considering its relationships with values. Self-monitoring (SM) is typically considered to be a personality trait, though it does not fit neatly within the Five Factor Model (FFM). We argue that this is because self-monitoring is an aggregate construct that represents a combination of skill and motivation to adjust behavior, and that these different components of self-monitoring have different relationships with other individual difference constructs. Specifically, we propose that Extraversion relates to SM-Skill, and Power values relate to SM-Motivation. Evidence from two samples (74 employees; 419 students) supports our hypotheses.

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1. Introduction

Self-monitoring is defined as the extent to which individuals monitor and adjust their behavior for appropriateness, based upon how it is perceived by others in social situations (Snyder, 1974). Although the construct is commonly described as a personality trait (e.g., Snyder, 1974), some researchers contend that it is more likely a hybrid, or aggregate, trait representing a combination of both skill and motivation (Barrick, Parks, & Mount, 2005; Warech, Smither, Reilly, Millsap, & Reilly, 1998). One consistent finding that supports the hybrid argument is that self-monitoring does not fit neatly within the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality (Barrick et al., 2005), which is widely (though not universally) accepted as a meaningful way in which to group personality traits (Digman, 1990). We propose that this is because self-monitoring is not just a personality trait; it is a bigger, more complex, aggregate construct. In this study we extend prior research (Barrick et al., 2005; Warech et al., 1998) proposing that self-monitoring is an aggregate construct consisting of both skill (capability to adjust one's behavior) and of motivation (motivation to adjust one's behavior in order to get ahead), by examining divergent validity of self-monitoring skill and motivation.

2. Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring describes whether individuals are "social chameleons" – the extent to which they monitor and adjust their behavior to fit the situation. High self-monitors (HSMs) are sensitive to social cues and are socially adept. They can adapt to the situation because they are attentive to how others perceive them and strive to ensure that their behavior will be favorably received. In contrast, low self-monitors behave in a fashion that is consistent and authentic, regardless of appropriateness (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). There are both positive and negative outcomes associated with self-monitoring; HSMs are seen as more flexible and accommodating (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002), are more likely to emerge as leaders (Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991), have larger social networks (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001), and generally have higher performance evaluations when subjectively measured (Day et al., 2002). However, they can also be seen as disingenuous (Bedeian & Day, 2004), they exhibit lower levels of organizational commitment (Day et al., 2002), engage in fewer citizenship behaviors (Caligiuri & Day, 2000), engage in more self-serving impression management tactics to achieve status (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000; Turnley & Bolino, 2001) and they may be less ethical than low self-monitors (Wahn, 2003). As noted by Day and Schleicher, high self-monitors "will pretty much do whatever it takes to enhance their social appearance in a given situation" (Day & Schleicher, 2006, p. 699).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 540 568 5171; fax: +1 540 568 2754.
E-mail addresses: parksll@jmu.edu (L. Parks-Leduc), pattiemw@jmu.edu (M.W. Pattie), pargasfa@jmu.edu (F. Pargas), eliasorg@jmu.edu (R.G. Eliason).

Self-monitoring is typically described as being fundamentally related to a desire for status (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). That is, there is an inherently motivational component to the self-monitoring construct. Yet there is clearly a skill component as well. In Snyder's original (1974) conception of the construct, he noted that a scale to measure self-monitoring needed to discriminate both concern for social appropriateness (desire to self-monitor) and the management of expressive behavior (skill at self-monitoring). In spite of this original conception, different measures of self-monitoring have tended to focus on different aspects of the construct. Briggs and Cheek note that the construct is "embroiled in a controversy" about what is actually being (or should be) measured (Briggs & Cheek, 1988, p. 663).

Although Snyder conceptualized his original scale as unidimensional, numerous researchers have factor-analyzed the scale and identified three factors: Extraversion (the tendency to be comfortable in social settings and as the center of attention), Acting (ability to act), and Other-directedness (tendency to self-present in a fashion dictated by others in the social situation) (Briggs, Cheek, & Buss, 1980; Gangestad & Snyder, 1985, 2000). Other measures have placed more (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000) or less (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984) emphasis on extraversion and acting as compared to the original scale. Furthermore, there is controversy regarding whether the motivation to adjust behavior should be based strictly on the original concept of motivation to get ahead, or whether it should also include the motivation to fit in and be accepted by peers (Wolfe, Lennox, & Cutler, 1986) – distinctions referred to by Lennox (1988) as acquisitive (getting ahead) versus protective (getting along) self-monitoring. In this study we focus on the original conceptualization of the construct: the motivation to obtain status as the primary motivation for engaging in self-monitoring behaviors. One scale accurately represents the theoretical underpinnings of Snyder conception of self-monitoring by including both skill and motivation (Warech et al., 1998).

We examine the proposition that self-monitoring is actually an aggregate construct (c.f. Edwards, 2001) that may be thought of as a combination of skill (related to personality) and motivation (related to values). Personality and values are different types of individual difference constructs; personality describes how individuals tend to naturally behave, while values express how individuals have been taught they ought to behave (Parks & Guay, 2009). Both are components of human character that drive decision-making and behavior (Parks & Guay, 2009). We propose that Extraversion relates to one's skill in adjusting behavior appropriately, while Power values relate to one's motivation to adjust behavior in order to obtain status. This is not to say that Extraversion is synonymous with self-monitoring skill, or Power values synonymous with self-monitoring motivation – but rather that these individual differences are related to the tendency to self-monitor in distinctly different ways. We additionally propose that SM-Skill and SM-Motivation have different patterns of relationships with other individual difference characteristics. In particular, we expect that Extraversion will be related to the ability to adjust behavior (SM-Skill) and Power values will be related to the motivation to get ahead (SM-Motivation).

3. Hypotheses

Personality describes relatively innate, enduring dispositions of the individual, which become stable relatively early in life and lead to characteristic patterns of behavior in interactions with one's environment (Goldberg, 1993; Olver & Mooradian, 2003). The majority of personality research today relies on the taxonomy of the FFM to group and organize traits. Of particular interest to this study is the factor Extraversion, which is defined as the tendency

to be gregarious, outgoing, talkative, sociable, active, assertive, and the center of attention. Of the five factors, this trait has consistently correlated with the overall construct of self-monitoring (Day et al., 2002) and has a meta-analytic rho of .44 (mean $r = .37$; Schleicher & Day, 2002). Lucas and colleagues (Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000) note that the fundamental attribute of extraverts is that they are sensitive to rewards. Acting, or being the center of attention, is rewarding. Because extraverts are reward sensitive, they seek out social settings and become adept in behaving appropriately in order to obtain the positive affect that comes from being accepted and well-liked.

In studies that break the self-monitoring construct into facets, Extraversion is the strongest personality correlate of skill at adjusting behavior, though Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness have shown moderate correlations to SM-Skill in some studies (Warech et al., 1998; Wolf, Spinath, Riemann, & Angleitner, 2009). Measures of self-monitoring that include a protective motivation (getting along) find that Neuroticism, Conscientiousness (−), and sometimes Agreeableness (−) and relate to the protective facet of the scale (Avia, Sanchez-Bernardos, Sanz, Carrillo, & Rojo, 1998; Wolf et al., 2009). Measures of self-monitoring that include an acquisitive motivation (getting ahead) have shown a modest correlation with Conscientiousness (Warech et al., 1998). It is important to note that personality traits are often considered as antecedents to motivation (see, for example, Judge & Ilies, 2002); we do not intend to suggest that personality traits should be considered as skills rather than being motivational in general. In this case, however, self-monitoring requires "can do" skills associated with Extraversion. It requires that individuals have sufficient social skills to attend to what behaviors would be deemed appropriate (Snyder, 1974). It additionally requires acting skill (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Both social skill and acting skill are traits associated with Extraversion (Riggio & Friedman, 1999). Thus, the capability to adjust one's behavior requires skills that are related to Extraversion. Although previous research has also identified Openness to Experience as a correlate of SM-Skill (Wolf et al., 2009), we focus on Extraversion as this was the strongest FFM correlate and the one with the strongest theoretical rationale.

While we expect that Extraversion will relate to skill in appropriately adjusting behavior, we do not expect Extraversion to relate to the motivation to self-monitor. Although a facet of Extraversion relates to being assertive and the center of attention, this is primarily about the positive social rewards associated with receiving attention, rather than developing a certain public image or being seen as powerful (Lucas & Diener, 2001).

Hypothesis 1. Extraversion will be related to self-monitoring skill but not self-monitoring motivation.

We expect that the motivation to self-monitor will be related to values. Personal values are defined as "learned beliefs that serve as guiding principles about how individuals ought to behave" (Parks & Guay, 2009, p. 676). Personal values are inherently motivational, and are even described as higher-order goals (Schwartz, 1992). Of particular interest in this study is the domain of Power values, which includes such values as social power, authority, wealth, social recognition, and public image. Individuals who value power seem to have a strong desire for prestige as well as for control/dominance over people and resources (Schwartz, Sagiv, & Boehnke, 2000); the construct of Power values therefore seems likely to relate to the motivation component of self-monitoring in order to obtain status.

According to its original conceptualization, self-monitoring is fundamentally related to a motive for status enhancement (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Values are inherently motivational (Sch-