

Self-Monitoring and Conformity: A Comparison of Self-Report and Behavioral Measures

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This study investigated the role of self-monitoring in relation to self-reported and behavioral conformity. Ninety-three female undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory psychology course were administered a questionnaire packet consisting of the Lennox and Wolfe Revised Self-Monitoring Scale (RSMS), a self-reported measure of conformity, and a series of vignettes, both designed by the authors. A tertiary split based on the RSMS was performed to yield groups of high and low self-monitors, resulting in 31 participants (13 high and 18 low self-monitors) for a behavioral measure of conformity. For the behavioral measure, which took place approximately 6 weeks after the initial questionnaire, each participant and 3 confederates were given 6 decision-making vignettes, 3 of which were included in the initial questionnaire. The confederates answered uniformly on the previously seen vignettes, opposite of what the participant had originally answered. Confederates split their answers on the “new” vignettes in order to disguise the purpose of the study. The behavioral conformity score was determined by the number of times the participant answered uniformly with the confederates despite their original answers. Findings suggest that high self-monitors were more likely to conform than were low self-monitors in behavioral conformity situation. No significant relationship exists between self-monitoring and self-reported conformity. Additional studies should be conducted using larger, gender balanced, and more ethnically diverse samples.

The tendency to behave in ways that comply with social norms that are contrary to one’s private beliefs is known as conformity. The most widely known studies of conformity are Asch’s (1951, 1957) experiments involving line judgment tasks. Asch’s research involved a naïve participant choosing one of three lines to which the stimulus line was closest in length. In the classic condition, three confederates answered uniformly and incorrectly. Asch found that 76% of the participants conformed at least once to the situation and indicated later that they had actually believed the line to be a different length than the expressed answer. Asch’s findings highlighted the extent to which the desire to be liked by strangers overpowered the need to be right. Since that time, social psychologists have been trying empirically to understand the conditions that promote conformity and the reasons behind conforming behaviors.

Whether it is the role of citizens in promoting genocide or a college student succumbing to the peer pressure to drink too much at a party, the issue of conformity is important in understanding why people act

as they do. Conformity has traditionally been studied in relationship to situational variables; however, personality or dispositional factors also play a role. *Situational* factors, such as the presence of an authority figure, are those that can be predicted from characteristics of a given situation; whereas *dispositional* attributes are internal states which produce consistency across situations (Moos, 1969). Situational factors associated with higher conformity include reduced accountability for actions (Quinn & Schlenker, 2002), group size (Asch, 1955), and difficulty of task (Baron, Vandello & Brunsman, 1996). A variety of dispositional attributes have also been shown to be associated with high conformity including low self-esteem (Berkowitz & Lundy, 1957), high authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988; Feldman, 2003), low social class (Fontaine, 1991), and being a woman (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

A dispositional factor of interest to the study of conformity is self-monitoring. Self-monitoring is an internal state combining self-observation and self-con-

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trol. By processing certain self-related information, people try to control the attributions and impressions others form of them; therefore, self-monitoring is related to self-presentation (Renner, Laux, Schütz, & Tedeschi, 2004). Individuals use their perceptions of how others view them as guidelines for their behavior in certain situations. Snyder (1974) contended that self-monitoring is influenced by one's external cues as to what is socially appropriate. The level of self-monitoring a person displays has to do with how aware of a situation they are, and the extent to which they change their behavior in accordance to their awareness of certain situations. Traditionally, self-monitoring has been assessed by the use of self-report Likert-type scales that allow researchers to differentiate between high and low self-monitors.

Low self-monitors tend to guide their behavioral choices on the basis of relevant internal states such as values, feelings, and dispositions. They are concerned that their behaviors accurately reflect their internal states (DeBono, 1987). The self-presentation and expressive behavior of low self-monitors seems to be controlled from within, rather than monitored and altered to fit a given situation (Snyder, 1974). Low self-monitors react positively to situations in which they have the opportunity to express their underlying beliefs and values (Snyder & DeBono, 1985). The demands of social situations generally do not motivate them to change their behavior (Brown, White & Gerstein, 1989).

High self-monitors are more likely to control their self-presentation and expressive behavior (Snyder, 1974). Individuals who are considered to be high self-monitors may be more skillful at using the expression and self-presentation of others in social situations as guidelines for their own behavior. Snyder and Swann (1976) and Snyder and Tanke (1976) found data suggesting that people who are considered to be high self-monitors can tolerate greater inconsistency between their behaviors and their attitudes than people who are considered to be low self-monitors. Correspondingly, individuals with high concern for appropriateness would modify their behaviors to be in accordance with what they think are the social norms. High self-monitors are more likely to vary their behavior in response to situational changes than are low self-monitors (Ickes & Barnes, 1977). High self-monitors should be more likely to display a higher level of conformity than individuals who are considered to be low self-monitors. Although the relationship between self-monitoring and conformity behavior is plausible, very little empirical research on the topic exists. In the literature review for this study, the closest empirical examination of self-monitoring and "con-

formity" measured attitude change rather than conformity but did focus on the underlying motivation of impression management. Chen, Schechter, and Chaiken (1996) found that high self-monitors showed more attitude change motivated by impression management than did low self-monitors. The current study applies self-monitoring theory more directly to a behavioral conformity situation.

Measuring Conformity

There are two common ways conformity is measured: self-report and behavioral observations. Observational research involves the creation of a conformity situation where participants' actual behavior in the situation is observed and measured. The Asch studies (1951, 1957) are classic examples of laboratory based conformity situations. Measuring actual conformity is time consuming for researchers and involves the use of confederates. In more recent years, researchers have utilized computers to simulate conformity situations (Lee, 2006; Lee & Nass, 2002; Sassenberg & Boos, 2003). In Lee and Nass's study, participants were led to believe that they would be interacting with other participants via a computer. After reading hypothetical situations on a computer screen, they were asked to make a decision after they saw that the other "participants" all chose the same answer.

Given the demands of measuring conformity in the laboratory, researchers have also attempted to measure conformity via more traditional attitudinal or personality-type scales comprised of items to which participants indicate how much the item captures their beliefs or propensities (Goldsmith, et al., 2005; Levine, 2004; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Goldsmith, et al. used a 7-point semantic differential format to present bipolar adjectives such as compliant-defiant, inflexible-adapting, and differing-concurring to measure one's tendency to conform. Finally, another form of self-reported conformity prompts participants to reveal how they might react to the conformity situations as indicated in written scenario (e.g., Berndt, 1979). The predictive validity of these measures (scales or self-report) to behavioral conformity has not been determined.

Actual levels of conformity tend to be much higher in behavioral measures than in self-reports. Given the high premium placed on independence as a desired trait in the United States (Hsu, 1985), participants wishing to present themselves in a positive manner would be less likely to report that they would conform. In addition, both experts and laypeople underestimate the power of situational variables. One of the best known examples of how self-reports may be inac-

curate was noticed in Milgram's (1963) study of obedience. Participants were told to administer electrical shocks to confederates disguised as fellow participants. Despite demands from the confederates to stop the shocks, the participants were encouraged by the researcher to continue with the experiment. Milgram asked psychiatrists, college students, and middle class adults how they would behave in the situation and how they thought other people would behave in the same situation. Psychiatrists predicted that only 1 out of a 1,000 people would go all the way to 450 volts, which was past the "Danger: Severe" level. However, in Milgram's study, 65% of the participants actually went all the way (Milgram). The degree of conformity was greatly underestimated by those asked to predict the behavior of others because they relied on dispositional explanations rather than situational variables.

The current study explored the relationship between self-monitoring, self-reported conformity, and a behavioral measure of conformity. We expected to find a positive correlation between self-monitoring and self-reported conformity. We also expected to find only a moderate relationship between self-reported conformity and behavioral conformity. Finally, we expected to find that high self-monitors were more likely to conform than were low self-monitors in a behavioral conformity situation.

Method

Participants

Thirty one female, White undergraduate students (age 18–22, $M = 19$, $SD = 1.04$) enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a midsized public Midwestern university received extra-credit for their participation in this study. Given prior research indicating gender differences in conformity, we solicited only female participants. It would have been difficult to secure a sample large enough to have sufficient power to detect gender differences. Participants were selected on the basis of their scores on the Lennox and Wolfe (1984) Revised Self-Monitoring Scale (RSMS) administered in an initial testing of 93 female participants. We performed a tertiary split on the RSMS scores to yield groups of high and low self-monitors resulting in 37 participants, 31 of whom were able to complete the study. The 6 participants who did not complete the behavioral component of the study declined due to time pressures and did not differ in the basic demographic information from the 31 who did complete the study. Eighteen participants were classified as low self-monitors ($M = 35.83$, $SD = 3.00$, range 28–39); whereas 13 participants were clas-

sified as high self-monitors ($M = 50.00$, $SD = 2.45$, range 47–55).

Materials

At the initial testing, all participants completed a questionnaire that included several measures including the RSMS and two measures designed by the authors: a self-report measure of conformity and six behavioral vignettes. Several other measures were included to mask the purpose of the study. The RSMS consists of 13 items measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale. Seven of these items represent *Ability to Modify Self-Presentation*, which includes statements such as "I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them." The other six items represent *Sensitivity to the Expressive Behaviors of Others*. These items include statements such as "I can usually tell when I've said something inappropriate by reading it in the listener's eyes." In past research, the RSMS has been found to be reliable and valid (Bearden, 1999; Shuptrine, Bearden, & Teel, 1990). For the final sample of 31 participants in this study, $\alpha = .87$.

The self-report measure of conformity was a nine-item scale designed by the study's authors with the intent of measuring how likely the participants would be to conform in hypothetical situations. The nine scenarios included an even distribution of prosocial, neutral, and antisocial conformity situations (range 14–55; $M = 25$; $SD = 7.00$). Scores for each participant were added up to calculate a total self-report conformity score. Participants were asked to indicate what they would do in a given situation and how certain they were of their decision based on a 6-point Likert-type scale. The following are two examples from the self-report conformity scale.

You are with a group of your friends, and you are all trying to decide what to do this weekend. All of your friends really want to go and see the new horror movie that just came out. You do not like horror movies and would prefer to see something else. You tell your friends you want to see something else, but they tell you they really want to go see the horror movie. What do you do? Response choice was 1 (*Definitely go to the movie*) to 6 (*Definitely not go to the movie*.)

You are sitting in class on the first day with three other friends when a person in your cube of your dorm comes and sits next to you. Your friends do not like this person and start teasing this person right away. You kind of like this

person as a friend. What do you do? Response choice was 1 (*Definitely stick up for them*) to 6 (*Definitely join in the teasing*).

The final measures of interest in the questionnaire packet were six behavioral vignettes designed for this study. Each vignette described a situation in which the participant was asked to make a decision between two choices. In pilot work, three of the vignettes were found to yield uniform responses. These three vignettes are shown below.

For the past semester, Mark has been mentoring Jordan, a middle-school teenager who has a very poor family life. Mark has developed a really close relationship with Jordan, and he can tell how much Jordan looks up to him and looks forward to their time spent together. With all of the craziness that goes on at the end of the semester, Mark forgot that his last visit with Jordan is supposed to be the night before his biology final, a class that he has really been struggling with all semester. He needs at least a B on the final to pass the class, and if he does not pass the class, he will lose his scholarship and may not be able to afford returning to college next semester. Mark has to leave to go home for winter break immediately after the final and there would not be any other time to see Jordan. Should Mark call Jordan and tell him how important it is that he stay and study for this exam, or should he see Jordan and risk failing his biology class and possibly dropping out of school?

Participants were then asked if they would “*See Jordan*” or “*Study for the exam*” and all of the participants selected “*Study for the exam*.”

At the end of this semester, Ashley will be graduating with a degree in business administration. She has spent the past 8 weeks searching and applying for jobs. After several interviews, she finally got a job offer in Minneapolis. The company is prepared to offer her a competitive salary with excellent benefits and a month's worth of paid vacation. However, since Ashley is from the Milwaukee area, if she took the job it would mean moving away from family and friends. Her grandma is 91 years old, and has recently suffered a massive stroke. Her mom tells Ashley that her grandma might not be around for much longer. Although this news is upsetting, Ashley was never very close with her grandma. Ashley's mother can get her a job at her firm, but it is 60% of the pay of the

other job with little chance of advancement. Should Ashley take the job offer in Minneapolis, or should she move back home to Milwaukee in order to spend more time with her grandmother before she dies?

Participants were then asked if they would “*Take the Minneapolis job*” or “*Take the Milwaukee job*” and all of the participants selected “*Take the Minneapolis job*.”

Dan's birthday is next week. His friends and he have a tradition where they all go out to eat for each other's birthdays, and whoever has the birthday gets to pick the restaurant. Dan hasn't been to his favorite restaurant in a long time, and he has really been looking forward to it. However, it is not the cheapest place he could pick. One of his friends has been having a rough time this year financially, and he knows it would be a struggle for that friend to be able to come and pay for his meal. Dan would have no problem paying for his friend's meal, but he is afraid of embarrassing him by offering. Should Dan pick the more expensive restaurant and offer to pay for his friend's meal, but risk embarrassing him, or should he pick a different restaurant that he doesn't like as much?

Participants were then asked if they would “*Pick the expensive restaurant*” or “*Pick a less expensive restaurant*” and all of the participants selected “*Pick a less expensive restaurant*.”

Procedure

At the time they completed the questionnaire component of the study, participants were given a unique identifier and provided their contact information. Participants who were shown to be high or low self-monitors via the tertiary split were contacted 6 weeks after the initial screening and invited to earn additional extra-credit points by participating in an experiment studying “group decision-making processes.”

When each participant arrived for the second component of the study, they followed signs indicating where to wait for the decision-making processes experiment where three female undergraduate confederates playing the role of additional participants were already waiting. The researcher read the names of the confederates, who were trained to step forward in the order their names were called, and the name of the participant and led the group of four into a small room. The rooms consisted of one square table and four chairs. After everyone was seated, the researcher said the following:

Thank you for coming back to complete the second part of this study, which measures decision-making processes in group situations. We will have you read a series of vignettes. After each vignette, we would like to hear your decision about what you would do in the given situation. When stating your decision, please choose from one of the two options instead of giving your own alternative. At the end, we will ask you to rate this experience.

The vignettes were then handed out individually on notecards. After everyone finished reading the vignette, the researcher pointed to the first confederate and said "How about you start. Please tell us what you chose and we can just continue in a circle." The researchers always made sure that the participant would be the last to answer. The first vignette was new (the participant had not seen it in the previous questionnaire), and the three confederates split their responses such that two of them answered one way and one gave the opposite answer. The next three vignettes were those from the initial questionnaire that had yielded uniform responses and, for which, participant responses were known. On each of these three vignettes, the confederates all answered the opposite of what the participant had indicated in their questionnaire packet. To help disguise the purpose of the study, the last two vignettes were also new, and, once again, the confederates split their answers. At the end of the experiment, the researcher said "Thank you very much for your cooperation. The results and a debriefing statement will be emailed to you once all of our data has been collected. Thanks and have a good night!"

The researchers led each group out a back door so as not to meet any future participants who might be waiting.

Results

The level of conformity was computed in two ways. Any participant who conformed at least once in the three trials where the confederates answered uniformly in the direction opposite the participant's original answer was considered to have conformed. Secondly, the number of times a participant conformed was computed. Overall, 61% of participants conformed at least once, whereas 39% never conformed. Of those who conformed, 53% conformed once, 37% conformed twice, and 10% conformed three times.

Our hypothesis that self-monitoring would be positively related to self-reported conformity was not supported. For the initial larger sample $r(93) = .01$, *ns*, and for the final sample of high and low self-monitors $r(31) = .03$, *ns*. Our hypothesis that there would be a moderate positive relationship between actual con-

formity and self-reported conformity was also not supported $r(31) = .09$, *ns*. Finally, our hypothesis that self-monitoring would be related to behavioral conformity was supported. Self-monitoring was positively related to behavior conformity $r(31) = .45$, $p < .01$. Low self-monitors ($n = 18$) conformed an average of .61 times, $SD = .85$; whereas high self-monitors ($n = 13$) conformed an average of 1.46, $SD = .88$, $F(30, 1) = 7.36$, $p < .01$. In a related finding, a higher percentage of high self-monitors conformed than did low self-monitors (see Table 1), $X^2 = 5.13$; $p < .05$. Figure 1 displays the correlations among the three major variables.

Discussion

Our hypothesis that a positive relationship between self-monitoring and behavioral conformity exists was supported. High self-monitors were more likely to conform than were low self-monitors. This finding provides support for the theory that dispositional traits such as self-monitoring can affect conformity in actual situations. We presume that the behavior of the high self-monitors in our behavioral conformity was affected by a higher concern with what others would think of them than was the behavior of the low self-monitors. One aspect of self-monitoring relates to individuals using their perceptions of what others think of them as guidelines for their own behavior in certain situations (Snyder, 1974). Therefore, high self-monitors should be more likely to change their expressed beliefs in direct relation to the behavior of others. Because low self-monitors are not as willing to change their behavior in accordance with how others view them, they should not be as likely to go against their original views in order to agree with the group.

Our results did not support the hypothesis that there would be a positive correlation between self-monitoring and self-reported conformity. Perhaps the trait of self-monitoring is more evident in situations with an external cue, such as the physical presence of others, than in written scenarios where the presence of others is merely hypothetical. Another possible

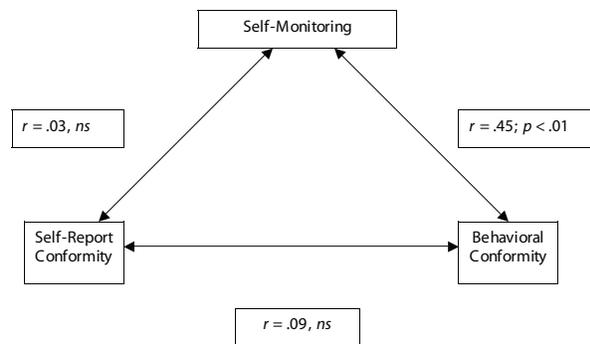
TABLE 1

Percentages of Self-Monitors
Who Conformed at Least Once

	Conformity	No Conformity
High Self-Monitors ($n = 13$)	85%	15%
Low Self-Monitors ($n = 18$)	44%	56%

FIGURE 1

Correlations among self-monitoring, self-reported conformity, and behavioral conformity.



explanation for the non-significant finding is that individuals may not be as aware of their self-monitoring behavior until they are in a situation involving others. If high self-monitors are not aware of their tendencies to monitor their own behavior, they would be unlikely to correctly determine their actions in a given situation. However, the authors have significant concerns regarding our scale's ability to reliably measure self-reported conformity. The reliability coefficient was very low (.14) and the correlation between self-reported and actual conformity was non-significant. Given the power of situational variables associated with conformity, it is possible that there is a very low probability of developing a valid and reliable self-report measure of conformity. Another factor that may play a role in the inaccurate self-report of conformity behavior is that independent behaviors are more desirable in an individualistic culture like the United States (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2005). Therefore, when self-reporting behaviors, high self-monitors may have opted for the more "socially desirable" choices of acting independent in the behavioral situation where the socially desirable outcome was to agree with the others. Overall, if it is possible, a reliable and valid measure of self-reported conformity would need to be developed in order to conduct further research on this topic.

This study includes some limitations that may have influenced the results. The major limitation is that our self-reported conformity scale was not proven to be reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha of .14. The relationships between self-monitoring and self-reported conformity, and behavioral conformity and self-reported conformity, might have been significant given a reliable self-report measure. Because a period of 6 weeks

lapsed between the initial questionnaire and the behavioral measure, it is possible that outside influences in the participants' lives caused them to actually change their decisions in the behavioral vignettes. In this case, agreeing with the confederates would not be considered as conformity. However, these chance events should have been evenly distributed between high and low self-monitors. Finally, in order to more accurately generalize the findings of this study, additional studies should be conducted using larger, gender balanced, and more ethnically diverse samples.

This study utilized a traditional behavioral situation in order to measure the relationship of self-monitoring and conformity. The extent to which situational circumstances influence levels of conformity have been well established (Quinn & Schlenker, 2002; Asch, 1955; Baron, et al., 1996). Dispositional factors influence conformity to a lesser extent than situational factors; but also play a role. Our study provides strong behavioral evidence for a relationship between self-monitoring and conformity for women. Additional research on this topic with larger more diverse samples in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and age across a wider variety of conformity situations should provide additional evidence that individuals who utilize perceptions of what others think of them as guidelines for their own behavior will be more likely to conform in many circumstances.

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