

## BRIEF REPORTS

# Self-Monitoring and Age

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Two adult samples were surveyed to investigate the relation between individuals' levels of self-monitoring and age. A negative relation was predicted as older individuals were seen as most likely to exhibit the low self-monitoring tendency of behaving in accordance with one's own attitudes and feelings, whereas younger individuals appeared most likely to exhibit the high self-monitoring tendency of behaving according to social cues. A significant negative correlation between age and self-monitoring was found in both samples. The self-monitoring construct is discussed in relation to other social-cognitive life-span differences and to the idea of critical periods throughout the life span.

The study of self-monitoring processes (Snyder, 1974, 1987) has been prominent in personality and social psychology research for more than a decade. The construct represents the degree to which individuals monitor or control their behavior in order to create desired appearances and to respond to social cues of behavioral appropriateness (high self-monitors) as opposed to the degree to which they act in accordance with inner states such as attitudes, traits, and feelings (low self-monitors). In studies using mostly college students as subjects, self-monitoring has been linked to a wide variety of social behaviors, such as dating relationships and responses to advertising (for a review, see Snyder, 1987).

Although some developmental psychologists have given attention to self-monitoring (e.g., Graziano, Leone, Musser, & Lautenschlager, 1987; Taylor, 1987), their investigations have each focused on a particular age group; research taking a life-span perspective to self-monitoring is lacking. As a first step in this regard, we investigated the relation between level of self-monitoring and age in two samples. Consideration of the many established psychological differences between late adolescents (the youngest of our respondents) and older individuals leads relatively straightforwardly to the prediction of a negative correlation between self-monitoring and age. As reviewed by Sears (1986), compared with older individuals, late adolescents tend to have a relatively weakly formulated sense of self, less crystallized social and political attitudes, and a stronger need for peer

approval. Thus, the low self-monitoring pattern of behaving in accordance with one's own attitudes would appear to be most characteristic of older individuals, whereas the high self-monitoring pattern of regulating one's behavior on the basis of the cues of others would appear to be most characteristic of younger individuals.

Theoretical perspectives on aging, in relation to individuals' sense of self-consistency and social comparison processes, further buttress the prediction of a negative relation between self-monitoring and age. Perceptions of self-consistency are an integral part of the low self-monitoring profile, and some researchers have suggested grounds for expecting a greater sense of self-consistency in older individuals. According to Breyspraak (1984), Eriksonian and humanistic perspectives state that "at the end of life one is moved to find a sense of wholeness and a feeling that the life as it was lived made sense. This interpretation suggests an even greater tendency toward self-consistency with age" (p. 84). Also, Atchley (1982) noted that with age, individuals build up a "backlog of evidence" about their previous behaviors in various situations, which may also contribute to a sense of self-consistency.

Relatively heavy use of social comparison information (e.g., the behaviors and opinions of other people), on the other hand, is an important feature of the high self-monitoring behavior pattern (e.g., Graziano et al., 1987), and age-related differences in reliance on social comparison information may exist. Snyder (1987, p. 150), suggested that "in transitional periods that mark the passage from one role to another (such as from child to adult) or that require the adding of roles (such as becoming a parent), people may temporarily show more signs of the high self-monitoring orientation," because at these times individuals are often uncertain about how they should act and may thus follow the lead of others. Because these kinds of transitions appear to occur more frequently in the early years of adulthood than in the later years (Duncan & Morgan, 1980; Gurin & Brim, 1984), one would expect to find greater use of social comparison information among younger individuals. Also, Veroff

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(1983), in discussing the tendency of older women to score comparatively low on the affiliation motive, suggested the possibility of a reduced reliance on social comparison information with age: "Older women are usually released from nurturance responsibilities with families as they advance in age. In turn, concern with social comparison to test out their adequacy diminishes as their public duties are fulfilled" (p. 338).

In sum, research and theory exist to support the prediction of a negative correlation between self-monitoring and age.

### Method

Two adult samples filled out questionnaires to provide data for our analyses. Sample 1 consisted of 53 individuals who had just voted in the November 1986 elections at an off-campus precinct in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Respondents ranged in age from 20 to 67 years ( $M = 37.04$  years,  $SD = 11.52$ ). Voters were approached by a researcher upon leaving the polling place and were asked if they would be willing to fill out a questionnaire for an "election study." If they agreed, they were given a pen and clipboard to fill out the questionnaire on the spot. Respondents received \$2 remuneration. Approximately 50% of the individuals approached participated.

The questionnaire contained a wide range of measures concerning individuals' political thoughts and behaviors (for more details and a report of a study of self-monitoring and voter choice, see Reifman, Klein, & Murphy, 1987). Also part of the questionnaire, and of relevance for the present analyses, were the 18-item version of the Self-Monitoring Scale (Gangestad & Snyder, 1985; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986) and an item asking for the subject's age.

Sample 2 consisted of 64 individuals attending free outdoor entertainment events in Ann Arbor. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 73 years ( $M = 30.33$  years,  $SD = 10.54$ ). Potential respondents were approached while they were waiting for an event (film or concert) to begin and were asked if they would be willing to fill out a one-page questionnaire. This questionnaire contained only the 18-item Self-Monitoring Scale, an item asking for the subject's year of birth, and two political items (see Reifman et al., 1987). No compensation was given to participants in this sample. Response rate was 90%.

### Results and Discussion

Both samples yielded the predicted negative correlation between self-monitoring and age. In Sample 1 (with  $n = 50$  because of missing data),  $r(48) = -.30$ ,  $p < .05$ . In Sample 2,  $r(62) = -.32$ ,  $p < .01$ . Thus, replicating over two samples, the older the individual, the lower his or her score tended to be on the measure of self-monitoring.

This research intended to raise the issue of life-span differences in self-monitoring, and the results indicate a successful first step has been taken. Given the "convenience" nature of the samples, these findings must be regarded as somewhat tenuous. They do, however, allow for the possibility that meaningful re-

lations between age, self-monitoring, and mediating life circumstances can be obtained using standard, in-depth research methods.

In conclusion, self-monitoring appears to be a fruitful area for life-span research, as it encompasses many areas of interest to adult development, such as life transitions and self-concept development, and in our initial studies was also shown to vary with age.

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