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Sukayna Moosavi
smoosav3@uwo.ca

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Self-Monitoring in Individualist and Collectivist Cultures

Sukayna Moosavi

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Department of Psychology
Brescia University College
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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Leslie Janes
Abstract

The current study investigated the influence of cultural orientation on self-monitoring. Participants were 40 female undergraduate students from Brescia University College who completed four questionnaires including a demographic questionnaire, Snyder’s (1974) Self-Monitoring scale, the Individualism and Collectivism Scale (Triandis & Gelfland, 1998), and the Self-Consciousness Scale (Scheier, M.F., & Carver, C. S. 2013). It was predicted that cultures that were more collectivist in orientation would score higher on the self-monitoring scale and that public self-conscious would facilitate these results. The results indicated that cultural orientation did not significantly relate to self-monitoring, however, public self-consciousness was found to have a positive significant relation to self-monitoring.
Self-Monitoring in Individualist and Collectivist Cultures

Culture has been referred to as “the software of the mind” (Hofstede, 1994). In fact, its importance to society is almost as memory is to an individual (Triandis, 2001) — a kaleidoscope of experiences that shape them. Therefore, culture is seen to be a key factor when defining an individual's identity and, to some extent, their personality. Although there is no question that individuals differ in personality characteristics, it is argued that these characteristics are influenced and motivated by the surrounding culture (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Triandis, 2001). However, the extent to which culture influences personality characteristics and thereby behaviour is a topic of interest for many researchers today. Therefore, much research has been done to investigate various personality and behavioral differences across cultures in an attempt to illustrate the influence that culture has on personality and behaviour. For example, research has indicated that individuals from individualistic cultures such as Western Europe and North America tend to explain social behaviour through personal attributions and emphasize uniqueness and independence. In contrast, the identity of individuals from collectivist cultures such as East Asia, stem from their social groups with values pertaining to homogeneity and community. Furthermore, past literature has revealed that the psychological processes of individuals from different cultural orientations appear to vary (Fiske et al., 1998).

One such psychological process that individuals from different cultures tend to differ on is the frequency of engaging in and responding to social comparisons. Social comparison refers to the tendency of individuals to use comparisons to others as a means of judging the self (White & Lehman, 2005). Individuals can either participate in upwards social comparison or downwards social comparisons. Upwards social comparisons occur when comparisons are made with those who are better off or more highly skilled than the individual. In contrast, downward social
comparisons refer to when individuals compare themselves to those who are in a less positive situation than they are. Both forms of social comparisons may be useful to the individual, either inspiring the individual to do better through self-improvement or motivating them to avoid the fate of those who are less fortunate (Lockwood, Marshall, & Sadler, 2005).

White and Lehman (2005) examined the effect of cultural background on seeking social comparison information using European Canadians, who held individualist predispositions and Asian Canadians who held collectivist perspectives. The authors hypothesized that those individuals from cultures that are more interdependent (i.e., collectivist cultures) would seek more social comparisons, arguing that interdependence exists through creating social comparisons. Twenty-Three European Canadians and twenty-eight Asian Canadians took part in a spatial reasoning task after which their responses were graded and then recorded. All participants received a score that was average and told that they could then compare their scores with 0 to 7 others from a list of eighty-eight rankings which consisted of scores that were either better or worse than theirs. Results indicated that individuals from collectivist cultures tended to seek more social comparisons than those from individualist cultures due to a heightened desire for self-improvement (White & Lehman, 2005). Similarly, another study conducted by Lockwood et al. (2005) investigated cultural differences in responding to social comparison information by examining European and Asian Canadians. The findings indicated that Asian Canadians were more motivated by downward social comparisons (i.e., a student who failed). In contrast, European Canadians were found to be more responsive to upwards social comparisons (i.e., a student who succeeded).

These findings suggest that people from individualist cultures tend to be motivated by success whereas those from collectivist cultures have stronger prevention orientations; they are
motivated by other people’s failures (Lockwood et al., 2005). Therefore, this may explain why individuals from collectivist cultures seek and attend to social comparison information more (White & Lehman, 2005) than individualists, as fear tends to be a greater motivational factor for them (Lockwood et al., 2005).

Furthermore, the tendency to engage in social comparisons can also help explain conformity difference across cultures. Conformity is defined as a change in behaviour due to the influence of another person or group (Barrett, Wosinska, Butner, Petrova, Gornik-Durose, & Cialdini, 2004). As with social comparisons, in order for conformity to occur, the individual must be open and attentive to social cues in scenarios where the instruction or request is not explicitly provided (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

Bond and Smith (1956) reported in their meta-analysis that collectivists in general conform more than individualists. In fact, collectivists also tend to emphasize conformity in their child rearing practices (Triandis, 2001). Cialdini, Wosinska, Barrett, and Gornik-Durose (1999) investigated whether individuals from collectivist or individualist cultures conformed more in response to self-comparisons (commitment/consistency factor) or in response to social comparisons (social proof factor). That is, they were examining whether an individual’s decision to comply with the task (completing a 40-minute survey) was based on information from their own individual compliance history or from their peers. The findings indicated that American participants conformed more in response to commitment/consistency factors. In contrast, Polish individuals, who are more collectively oriented, conformed more in response to social proof factors (Cialdini et al., 1999). This finding is further supported by Barrett et al.’s (2004) study in which collectivist participants were more likely to report that their motivation to comply was other-oriented whereas individualists described their motivation as self-oriented.
Furthermore, an extensive Cialdini et al. (1999) study found that in a situation where no conformity factors (commitment/consistency or social proof) were used, collectivist participants were still more likely than individualistic participants to comply with the researchers’ request. Based on those research findings, the authors of the research reported that not only dispositional factors affect compliance but also situational factors such as whether the individual asking for help appeared to be dependent on them for aid. This suggests that individuals from collectivist cultures may be more sensitive to situational factors and thereby are more attuned to the social environment than those people from individualist cultures.

Triandis (2001) found the attributes of collectivists and individualists to be corresponding to the attributes of allocentric and idiocentric individuals. The term allocentrism refers to the personality attribute in which individuals focus more attention on others rather than themselves (usually a collectivist trait). On the contrary, idiocentrism describes when individuals focus more on themselves than others and are usually attributed to members of individualistic cultures (Yamaguchi, Kuhlman, & Sugimori, 1995). Therefore, allocentric individuals are described as internalizing the norms of their in-group more than idiocentric individuals and thus do what their in-group expects them to do, bringing back the idea of homogeneity amongst collectivists (Triandis, 2001). Moreover, Triandis (2001) describes allocentric individuals as viewing the environment as stable and therefore, the self as willing to change (i.e. fit in to the environment) whereas idiocentric individuals see the self as stable and the environment as changeable.

Moreover, these cultures also seemed to vary in public and private self-consciousness. Those who are high in private self-consciousness attend to their inner thoughts frequently, whereas those who are low in this trait do so less often. Those who are high in public self-consciousness are very attuned to the social environment, whereas those who are low in this trait
frequently fail to attend to other peoples’ perspectives and are less sensitive to the reactions of others (Lalwani, Shrum, and Chiu, 2009). Moreover, not only can individuals who are high in public self-conscious imagine others’ reactions by adopting other people’s perspective, but they are also able to shape their own behaviour to appeal to other people. In a study examining how several variables, including public and private self-consciousness, were related to individualistic or collectivistic orientation, it was found that public self-consciousness significantly predicted collectivism, whereas private self-consciousness significantly predicted individualist cultural orientation. Another key finding of this study was that both individualist and collectivist are susceptible to social desirability when responding to their environment but in different ways.

Whereas individualists seem to engage in a behaviour known as self-deceptive enhancement, the ability of collectivists to conform to the social environment is often referred to as impression management. Self-deceptive enhancement differs from impression management in that it attempts to put the self forth in an inflated, highly positive manner, because individuals are motivated to see themselves as competent, as opposed to others seeing them as competent. Therefore, those possessing this trait seek to accentuate positive features while moderating, or downplaying the negatives. In their research, Lalwani et al. (2009) found that members of individualist cultures participated more in self-deceptive enhancement than those from collectivist cultures.

In contrast, impression management is the ability to portray a certain image or attitude that is desired and is often regarded as maintaining a favourable image in the eyes of other people. However, impression management is often driven by the desire to be normatively appropriate (Lalwani et al., 2009). Riemer and Shavitt (2010) hypothesized in their study that
because inconsistencies in personal attitudes are more likely among collectivist cultures, the ability to impression manage would be easier in these cultures than more individualist ones who put more weight on their own attitudes when engaging in behavior. Therefore, the ability of individuals from these cultures to impression manage on a survey was investigated. Findings demonstrated that unlike individualists, collectivists were better able to impression manage regardless of cognitive restraints (i.e. cognitive loads) such as distractions which in the past literature were found to reduce the ease with which individuals impression managed. This suggests that individualists need to apply more cognitive resources to engage in impression management whereas collectivists can do so mechanically with minimal cognitive attention (Riemer & Shavitt, 2010). Theoretically at least, impression management seems to overlap with the concept of self-monitoring.

Many researchers have observed that the ability to manage and control expressive behaviours is important for social and interpersonal performance (Snyder, 1974). Based on this observation, Snyder (1974) proposed the theory of self-monitoring, in which individuals vary in the extent to which they monitor or control their self-presentation and expressive behaviours in response to their social situation. Snyder (1974) categorized those individuals who seem to show an acute sensitivity to social cues out of concern for social appropriateness, and adapt their behavior to suit the social environment as high self-monitors. Low self-monitoring individuals are those who have less concern for social appropriateness, are inattentive to these cues and, therefore, do not adapt their behaviour to suit the social context. A key explanation as to why some individuals self-monitor more than others is the desire for approval by one’s peers (Snyder, 1974). Although culture has been mentioned as a possible explanation for self-monitoring
(Carpenter, 2000), little research has explicitly investigated cultural orientation and self-monitoring.

Past literature has demonstrated that individuals from collectivist cultures tend to be more perceptive to social cues (Carpenter, 2000, White & Lehman, 2005; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Based on this, it is suggested that these individuals may engage in self-monitoring tactics more often than people from individualist cultures, who rely on internal cues, rather than external factors to respond to a situation. Therefore, the research question of this study is whether individuals who culturally orientate towards collectivism engage in higher levels of self-monitoring behaviour than individualists. It is hypothesized that participants who are collectivist in orientation will score higher on a Self-Monitoring Scale than individualists. It is predicted that this may be because collectivists are more likely to have high levels of public self-consciousness compared to those from individualistic cultures, due to the necessity of “fitting in” with their friends, family, and coworkers. Therefore, high levels of public self-consciousness may serve as an explanation, or mediating factor, regarding self-monitoring behaviour. A secondary hypothesis of this research is that participants who score high on Self-Monitoring will also score high on Public Self-Consciousness.

Method

Participants

Participants were 40 female undergraduate students enrolled in Psychology 1000 from Brescia University College. Students were recruited through the Brescia Psychology Participation System, SONA, and received 1 credit towards the course for participation.

Materials
The study evaluated participants using four different questionnaires. A demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) was used to provide general information on age, sex, and where the participants and their parents were born. Based on their responses, participants were categorized as being either Canadian, first generation Canadians, second generation Canadians, or immigrants.

**Individualism and Collectivism Scale** (Triandis & Gelfland, 1998). This questionnaire was used to categorize participants as either individualist or collectivist (Triandis & Gelfland, 1998). This 16-item scale breaks down individualism and collectivism into two dimensions, vertical and horizontal; whereby vertical emphasizes either hierarchy or being better than others, and horizontal emphasizes either inequality or being the same as others (Triandis & Gelfland, 1998). Items were answered on a 9-point scale (1 = never or definitely no and 9 = always or definitely yes) and consisted of questions such as “I rather depend on myself than others” to measure individualism and “Parents and children must stay together as much as possible” to gauge collectivism.

**Self-monitoring scale** (Snyder, 1974). This 25-item scale measured the extent to which an individual modifies their behavior to adapt to the social environment, responding with either “true” or “false” to statements such as “I find it hard to imitate the behaviour of other people” (Snyder, 1974). Low self-monitors were represented by low scores in the possible range of 0 to 25, with 14 representing moderate self-monitoring.

**Self-Consciousness Scale** (Scheier, M.F., & Carver, C. S. 2013). This scale is a 22-item scale, broken down into 3 subscales measuring private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and social anxiety. An example of one of the 10 items measuring private self-consciousness would be “I think about myself a lot” and with scores ranging from 0-30. Public
self-consciousness is measured through 7 items such as “I’m concerned about what other people think of me”, with scores ranging from 0 to 28. An example of an item measuring social anxiety include “Large groups make me nervous” with possible scores ranging from 0-18.

**Procedure**

Participants were tested in groups of four for convenience. Once consent was obtained, participants completed the demographic questionnaire, the cultural orientation scale, self-monitoring scale, and self-consciousness scales respectively. After completing all four questionnaires participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation in the study. The responses were then scored and the results were recorded.

**Results**

Cultural orientation scores were added up individually for collectivist and individualist orientations before being subtracted from one another to give more power to the statistics. Similarly, for the background variable, participants were categorized as being either Canadian, first generation Canadians, second generation Canadians, or immigrants and were coded as “0”, “1”, “2”, and “3” in SPSS respectively. However, in order to increase power, all the immigration groups (first and second-generation Canadians and immigrants) were collapsed into a single category.

A forced entry multiple regression analysis was conducted in order to analyze what predictor variables out of cultural orientation ($M = 8.58$, $SD = 11.12$), private self-consciousness ($M = 17.58$, $SD = 4.24$), public self-consciousness ($M = 16.35$, $SD = 3.66$), social anxiety ($M = 11.48$, $SD = 3.84$) and background ($M = 1.30$, $SD = .46$) contributed to the explanation of self-monitoring ($M = 13.93$, $SD = 3.99$) as no previous research indicated known predictors. Tests for multicollinearity indicated a very low level of multicollinearity ($VIF = 1.10$ for cultural
orientation, 1.07 for private self-consciousness, 1.20 for public self-consciousness, 1.07 for social anxiety, and 1.18 for background). According to the interests of this study, cultural orientation was entered first followed by all three components of self-consciousness (private, public, and social anxiety respectively) and then background. Results indicated that the regression analysis was statistically significant and 33.4% of variance in self-monitoring was explained by the full set of predictor variables, $R^2 = .33$, $F(5,34) = 3.42$, $p < .05$.

When comparing variables, it was found that cultural orientation was not a significant predictor of self-monitoring, $t(34) = 0.41$, $p > .05$, $b = .02$. However, public self-consciousness significantly predicted self-monitoring, $t(34) = 2.38$, $p < .05$, $b = .40$, as did social anxiety, $t(34) = -2.15$, $p < .05$, $b = -.32$. Unstandardized beta values indicated as public self-consciousness increased by 1 unit, there was an increase of .36 in self-monitoring scores, $\beta = .36$, $p < .05$, and as social anxiety increased by 1 unit, self-monitoring decreased by a score of .31, $\beta = -.31$, $p < .05$.

To further explore the data, a Pearson correlational analysis was conducted. A two-tailed Pearson correlation coefficient was completed to assess the relationship between cultural orientation, background, and the three components of self-consciousness (private, public, and social anxiety). Cultural orientation, measured using the Individualism and Collectivism Scale, was not found to be significantly correlated to self-monitoring, $r(40) = -.03$, $p = .84$ (see Figure 1) nor was private self-consciousness, $r(40) = .21$, $p = .19$ or background, $r(40) = -.28$, $p = .08$. However, public self-consciousness was found to be significantly positively correlated with self-monitoring, $r(40) = .46$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 2). This suggests that higher levels of public self-consciousness are associated with greater self-monitoring levels. Additionally, social anxiety was found to have a significantly
Figure 1. Scatterplot showing no relationship between self-monitoring and cultural orientation.
Figure 2. Scatterplot showing a significant positive relationship between self-monitoring and public self-consciousness.

\[ y = 0.51x + 5.64 \]
\[ R^2 = 0.212 \]
negative correlation with self-monitoring, $r(40) = -.34, p < .05$ (see Figure 3), indicating that low levels of social anxiety were related to high self-monitoring scores.
Figure 3. Scatterplot showing the significant negative relationship between self-monitoring and social anxiety.

\[
y = -0.36x + 18.01 \\
R^2 = 0.117
\]
Discussion

The current study sought to examine the influence of cultural orientation on self-monitoring. It was predicted that individuals who are more collectivist in orientation would engage in higher levels of self-monitoring than those who were more individualist. The results, however, did not support this prediction and there was no statistically significant relationship between self-monitoring and cultural orientation. Although the primary hypothesis was refuted by the data, the secondary prediction that higher levels of self-monitoring may be attributed to increased levels of public self-consciousness, was supported by the data. It was found that there was a significant positive relationship between self-monitoring and public self-consciousness. Moreover, a third construct of self-consciousness, social anxiety, was found to have a significant negative relationship to self-monitoring, although no hypotheses were made regarding this variable. Interestingly, cultural background was not found to be significantly related to self-monitoring in this study.

Previous literature relating self-monitoring to various cultures and backgrounds suggest that self-monitoring seems to be a personality construct more fitted to cultures that are less individualistic (Synder, 1987, as cited in Gudykunst, Nishida, Kwok, Ge, Bond, Wang, & Barraclough, 1989). Moreover, Kosic, Mannetti, and Sam (2006) suggests that immigrants who are higher in self-monitoring are more successful adjusting to their new environment and therefore, self-monitoring can be seen as an acculturation strategy. However, the current research found no relationship between culture and self-monitoring.

However, the finding of a significant relationship between self-monitoring and public self-consciousness has mixed support in the literature. Paidas (2002) studied the effects various constructs such as focus of attention and self-monitoring have on Social Anxiety Disorder and
found self-monitoring and public self-conscious to have a significant relationship. However, Paidas (2002), reports this relationship as being inverse, that is as public self-consciousness increases, self-monitoring decreases, unlike the present study which found there to be a positive relationship between the two variables. Paidas (2002) states this seems to make sense as self-monitoring relies on external cues and public self-consciousness relies on internal cues of the self. However, it is possible that while these two variables react to opposite cues, they can be experienced simultaneously or even as a reaction to one another. That is, feelings of public self-consciousness can facilitate self-monitoring, as found in the present study.

Moreover, it is noted that woman generally tend to orientate more towards collectivists (Kim, 2009). These finding are supported in the present study with more participants being collectivist ($n = 28$) than individualist ($n = 11$). This is because individualist societies, Kim (2009) argues, run under a patriarchal spirit. That is, independence and autonomy, the two major distinctions in individualists both are attributes that are culturally implied as being “male”. Kim (2009) also states that it takes a certain amount of social power for individuals to assert their true self and women, who still typically possess less power than men may find it difficult to align themselves with a more individualist orientation. The current study, therefore, would benefit from the inclusion of males to yield more thorough results and mitigate this ceiling effect. Furthermore, individualism can often be thought of having a narcissist underlying to it, and therefore have negative undertones associated with it, thus mitigating a more favourable attitude towards collectivism (Kim, 2009). Another variable that more often than not is associated with negative connotations is self-monitoring itself.

To many people, high-self monitors are often thought to be like social chameleons who change colours in response to the situation. While this may be true to an extent, this metaphor
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itself invokes feelings of distrust and manipulation, suggesting that these individuals are not who they really say they are. Even in research involving self-monitoring, high self-monitors are regarded as untrustworthy or hiding ulterior motives. Barbuto and Moss (2006) in their meta-analysis examined various influence tactics, citing self-monitoring as one of them. The idea of self-monitoring being an effective influence tactic was highlighted, indicating that individuals who were higher in self-monitoring were more likely to use flattery and compliments in an attempt to influence others (Barbuto & Moss, 2006). Moreover, low self-monitoring is viewed in a positive light, and seen as presenting oneself authentically, whereas high self-monitoring is seen as using emotional manipulation to influence others (Hall, Park, Song, & Cody, 2010). In Hall et al.’s (2010) study examining misrepresentations in dating, self-monitoring was a factor linked to self-presentation styles and dating strategies. Individuals who were high self-monitors were considered to be more sensitive to others’ desires in dating partners and, therefore, were able to modify their self-presentation in order to attract a partner (Hall et al, 2010). However, despite high levels of self-monitoring sometimes carrying negative connotations, the present study regards self-monitoring to actually be a positive characteristic under certain circumstances. Not only does higher self-monitoring alleviate social anxiety by shifting the focus from inward to outward, but coupled with public self-consciousness it facilitates increased not only self-awareness but also group-awareness.

Therefore, self-monitoring is regarded differently by many based on Snyder’s (1974) conceptualization and measurement of the concept. Although cultural orientation was not found to have a significant relationship to self-monitoring it is argued that collectivists do engage in a substantial amount of self-monitoring, just not in the way it is described in Snyder’s measure. That is, Snyder focuses on aspects of the self that pertain more to individualist cultures rather
than collectivist cultures and thus is not a measurement that can be used cross-culturally (Gundykunst et al., 1989). Therefore, it is suggested to create self-monitoring measures that are applicable across cultures in order to alleviate these inconsistent results such as including items that deal with the self with respect to in-groups and roles in reference to relationships.
References


Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

Age: ____________

Gender: ____________

Where were you born?

__________________________________________________________

Where were your parents born?

__________________________________________________________