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**The Influence of Positive Appearance and Personality Feedback on Self-Esteem
As a Function of Self-Monitoring**

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Abstract

Various psychological research has examined self-esteem formation and the importance of positive feedback from others in determining one's self-worth. Additionally, contingencies of self-worth, or aspects of the self in which people deem important to their self-concept, play an important role in self-esteem formation. The current study expands upon this research by examining how personality traits, specifically the self-monitoring personality characteristic, may moderate fluctuations in self-esteem after receiving positive personality or appearance-based feedback. Participants in the current study completed a self-monitoring questionnaire, and were assigned to one of the following conditions: positive personality-based feedback, positive appearance-based feedback, or no feedback. Self-esteem levels were measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale after the feedback condition. Results revealed a significant interaction between feedback condition and self-monitoring for women, but not men. The findings of the current study have various implications across clinical and social settings, and shed light on potential gender differences in contingencies of self-worth and self-esteem formation, which should be further explored.

The Influence of Positive Appearance and Personality Feedback on Self-Esteem As a Function of Self-Monitoring

Social psychologists examine how others can influence one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. One of the main areas of influence concerns self-esteem: people's self-evaluations depend, in large part, on feedback from others (Hermann, Lucas, & Friedrich, 2008). It is a common preconception that, in general, positive feedback will positively influence one's self-esteem whereas negative feedback will negatively influence one's self-esteem. However, the influence of feedback from others may not always be so straightforward. First, the *kind* of positive or negative feedback may matter. For instance, feedback about a highly valued aspect of oneself may have a larger influence than feedback about a less valued aspect (Tesser, 1999). Second, *personality* may matter. Certain individuals may be more sensitive to specific forms of feedback, such as appearance-based feedback, whereas others may be more sensitive to other forms, such as personality-based feedback. There are varying types of both positive and negative feedback that may influence the self-esteem levels of individuals differently. Feedback can have a strong influence in increasing one's self-esteem levels, however certain individuals may be more sensitive to specific forms of feedback.

The personality trait of *self-monitoring* influences the way individuals act in various social situations. This tendency to either monitor behavior in order to seem more attractive or socially appropriate (high self-monitoring), or the tendency to act similar in all situations based on internal predispositions (low self-monitoring), may be an underlying reason for why certain individuals prefer, or react more strongly to, a particular form of feedback. The current study builds upon this notion and examines whether self-monitoring moderates the influence of appearance-based versus personality-based feedback on self-esteem levels.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem, a term coined by William James in 1980, is often defined as the overall evaluation (positive or negative) of one's own worth or value (Rosenberg, 1986). Frequently, self-esteem is derived from the evaluations of others and serves as a form of internal index of social acceptance or rejection (Hermann, Lucas, & Friedrich, 2008).

Self-esteem is often viewed in terms of high or low, good or bad, and follows the rule that, in general, more is better. Although self-esteem is a relatively stable personality trait, research has shown that it is also a "state": people display short-term fluctuations in their self-esteem, especially if it is contextually based (e.g., on performance outcomes). Thus, depending on what is happening in a person's life, self-esteem levels are subject to shift, or change, on a regular basis (Kernis, Grennemann, & Mathis, 1991). Research with regard to the self-enhancement approach has demonstrated that individuals who received favorable feedback experience greater positive emotion and less negative emotion than did those who received negative feedback (Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, & Harlow, 1993). Positive feedback, therefore, could enhance self-esteem levels causing a positive fluctuation on reported self-esteem measures. Although these fluctuations may occur regardless of the type of positive feedback received, there are certain types that may be more influential than others.

Contingencies of self-worth. People differ in terms of where they get their self-esteem, partly as a function of their beliefs about who they want to be or what they need to do to be a person of worth (Park & Crocker, 2007). These individual differences in susceptibility to different feedback domains are referred to as contingencies of self-worth (Park & Crocker). Research on contingencies of self-worth has supported the notion that self-esteem fluctuates when people experience either success or failure, but that the more related events are to

contingencies of self-worth, the more self-esteem fluctuations are observed (Crocker, Brook, Niiya, & Villacorta, 2006). When self-esteem is contingent, for example, on performance, then success feels particularly good because it validates one's self-worth, whereas if self-esteem is contingent on other factors, then success may not be as influential. Thus, highly contingent people invest more time and effort in domains in which their self-esteem seems contingent (Crocker et al.). People often are motivated to prove to themselves and others that they satisfy their contingencies of self-worth and therefore prioritize boosting their self-esteem by proving that they satisfy their self-worth criteria (Crocker et al.).

Positive feedback can play a vital role in self-esteem enhancement when the feedback is relative to an individual's contingencies of self-worth, but additionally, the importance of this feedback type may be related to the amount of contact individuals have with specific forms of feedback (Snyder & Cowles, 1979). Intellectual feedback, for example, is readily available in both academic and professional settings, which provide people with constant feedback pertaining to their capacity to perform cognitive tasks (Snyder & Cowles). When exploring various forms of feedback, research has shown that on average, personality feedback is a rarer phenomenon than intellectual feedback, and therefore people are less certain of their personality makeup (Snyder & Cowles). Thus, personality feedback may have a stronger influence on people, especially on their self-esteem, as it provides a unique opportunity for self-validation (Snyder & Cowles). If one is unfamiliar with where he or she stands in comparison to others as a result of minimal experience with that particular feedback, such as personality, receiving such feedback provides the opportunity to self-validate both internally and externally that they are someone of worth.

Where else do self-esteem contingencies come from? The sociometer theory proposes that normatively self-esteem comes from others. Specifically, the sociometer theory states that self-esteem reflects, in large part, one's perceptions of how others feel about them (Kavanagh, Robins & Ellis, 2010). Self-esteem can be seen as a marker of one's relational value to other people, or the degree to which a person is seen as a valuable relationship partner (Leary, 2005). There are, however, still expected to be some differences in degree of influence that other's opinions have on self-esteem, especially with regard to what domain of self is being evaluated. One possibility to explain these differences may reside in core personality traits. A previously unexamined personality factor likely to influence the contingencies of self-esteem, especially in feedback from others, is self-monitoring level.

Self-Monitoring

Psychologist Mark Snyder proposed the concept of self-monitoring in 1974. This concept is built upon the notion that there are two distinct orientations that individuals can take as they make behavioral choices in given social contexts (Snyder, Berscheid, & Glick, 1985). Some individuals, categorized as high self-monitors, typically strive to be the type of person called for by each situation in which they find themselves, and therefore are particularly sensitive and responsive to social and interpersonal cues of social appropriateness (Snyder et al.). In contrast, low self-monitors are typically less responsive to situational and interpersonal specifications of social appropriateness and thus choose their behavior based on their internal dispositions and attitudes (Snyder et al.). According to Snyder (1974), a high self-monitor is a skilled impression manager who observes and controls his or her behavior and self-presentation, and is also sensitive to social cues to act in line with situationally appropriate behavior. These individuals appear to be engaged in monitoring or controlling the images of self that they project

in various social interactions. Low self-monitors, on the other hand, are believed to lack the motivation and/or ability to control self-presentation and therefore act in response to internal predispositions as opposed to a concern for public appearance of their behavior (Snyder). The importance of this self-monitoring personality construct has been explored across a variety of behavioral and social settings.

Relationship formation. Research on self-monitoring has investigated how self-monitoring levels affect other aspects of social behavior such as interpersonal relationships and relationship formation. High self-monitors' skilled interpersonal communication and self-presentation management (Larkin, 1991) results in their being generally very well-liked by others, manifested in having better reputations and higher social status (Lim, 2008). Research has also demonstrated that high self-monitors acquire friendship in a different manner than low self-monitors. Experiments conducted on the relationships of high and low self-monitors found that, although high self-monitors typically establish a degree of intimacy sooner than low self-monitors, they tend to acquire friendships on the basis that these friends are specialists in their respective activities (Lim). Thus, high self-monitors are categorized as persons who may like their companions not as individuals, but rather as people who are good at the activity they are engaged in, thus placing an increased value on the extrinsic rewards associated with each friendship (Lim). Low self-monitors, on the other hand, prefer undifferentiated connections between their friends and specific activities (Lim) and therefore find more intrinsic reward in genuinely liking companions (Larkin).

Social psychologists have also examined the impact self-monitoring has on attraction to romantic partners. The 1985 study by Snyder, Berscheid, & Glick indicated that individuals differ in how they attend to and weigh various types of information about each of their

perspective relationships. Specifically, video-dating studies have shown that there may, in fact, be systematic differences between individuals in how they make their selections when confronted with an array of possibilities of a potential partner (Snyder et al.). Across various settings both physical attractiveness and other personal characteristics, such as attitudes, dispositions, and other inner attributes, are potent determinants of attraction (Berscheid & Walster, 1978). Additionally, individuals, in general, have a tendency to be more attracted to a physically attractive person rather than a physically unattractive person when selecting romantic partners (Ilies, De Pater, & Judge, 2007). In this 1985 experiment, Snyder et al. predicted that high self-monitors would be particularly attentive to the images conveyed by potential partners with whom they may be associated, especially in the eyes of others, as they are particularly concerned with the image of self they project to others. Indeed, they found that high self-monitors were more concerned with a potential partner's appearance as compared to low self-monitors.

Importance of appearance and personality information. Individuals characterized as low self-monitors are predicted to be especially attentive to information about the interior personal attributes of potential partners, as these individuals strive for congruence between their personal characteristics and behavior. Choosing to associate with others whose attributes facilitate their own, for instance, may serve as a form of self-validation. By contrast, high self-monitors are predicted to be attentive to appearance-related cues.

In the 1985 Snyder et al. study, participants believed that they would be going on a coffee date with another undergraduate student in which they were only provided background information and a photograph of the potential date. Results demonstrated that low self-monitoring individuals spent more time than high self-monitors when examining the background

information, suggesting that they focused on the personal attribute information (Snyder et al.). After questioning the participants, 75% of low self-monitors claimed that the interior attribute information was the most important factor in their partner selection, whereas 77% of high self-monitors cited information in the photographs as being the most important in making their decision (Snyder et al.).

In pretesting conditions the majority of potential partners met or exceeded a certain threshold of attractiveness (Snyder et al., 1985), therefore it was theorized that low self-monitors may have felt free to focus on the personal attributes of potential partners in order to find the best fit based on personal tastes, whereas high self-monitors were determined to find a person whose physical appearance matched their preference (Snyder et al.). High self-monitors seemed particularly concerned with selecting physically attractive partners and results demonstrated that they tended to choose partners who were, on average, more attractive than those chosen by low self-monitoring participants.

Such partner selection studies have demonstrated a systematic difference between the attributes high and low self-monitors look for in potential romantic partners. Snyder suggests that one reason for this difference may be that low self-monitors, who appear to strive for congruence between their characteristics and their behavior, are likely to actively choose to associate with those whose internal attributes are similar to their own as a method of social validation (Snyder, 1974). A proposed explanation for the importance that high self-monitors place on the physical attractiveness of potential partners is the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype, in which more physically attractive people are perceived to be happier, more intelligent, more sociable, more successful, and less socially deviant (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973). This research further explores the implications that self-monitoring personality

levels have for relationships as well as for the magnitude of physical appearance versus personality traits on attraction. These self-monitoring differences, however, may not just apply to behavior towards others but also processes affecting attitudes towards oneself – that is, self-esteem formation.

Self-Esteem and Self-Monitoring

Where do high and low self-monitors get their self-esteem? There are several reasons to believe that self-monitoring personality type, in addition to influencing the kinds of information people focus on in forming impressions of others, also influences contingencies of self-worth, or the specific domains that contribute to self-esteem. First, self-monitoring would seem to overlap with a construct known as “self-construals,” which is known to be important in determining what certain individuals believe are important to their self-concept.

Individuals define “the self” based on two construals, an interdependent self-construal and an independent self-construal (Foels & Tomochō, 2005). An interdependent self-construal involves various interpersonal aspects of the self-concept such as group membership, whereas independent self-construals involve personal aspects of the individual, such as traits or characteristics (Foels & Tomochō). These construals not only make up a person’s self-concept, but also are often used in self-esteem formation (Foels & Tomochō). Those with a strong interdependent self-construal would likely view gaining social approval as important as it increases perceived esteem, and therefore overall self-esteem.

One reason to believe that self-monitoring level would influence contingencies of self-worth is because high self-monitors act as if they rely on interdependent self-construals, whereas low self-monitors seem to rely more on independent self-construals. Individuals with interdependent self-construals find social cues particularly important in determining their

behavior in order to maximize social approval, much like high self-monitors. These individuals are very concerned with social approval due to the positive effects on their self-esteem levels (Hermann, Lucas & Friedrich, 2007). Those who have a strong independent self-construal, however, hold individual traits and characteristics more important and are less likely to be motivated to achieve such social approval (Foels & Tomocho, 2005). These individuals are therefore less concerned with such social cues; in other words, act similarly to low self-monitors. This may influence contingencies of self-worth in that certain contingencies represent interpersonal qualities whereas others are personal and independent qualities. Appearance, for example, is an interpersonal quality in that others evaluate it and determine a subsequent level of attractiveness. Thus, those who act as if they rely on interpersonal self-construals, high self-monitors, should place a higher contingency on interpersonal qualities like appearance when determining their self-worth. Low self-monitors, however, who likely rely on independent self-construals, should find personal qualities more contingent to their self-worth. Such qualities include personality traits, as these traits are individual and specific to each person.

A second reason to think self-monitoring would affect self-esteem contingencies is that research has demonstrated a difference in self-validation tendencies between high and low self-monitors. Specifically, research has shown that low self-monitors are particularly motivated to validate their beliefs and attitudes, whereas high self-monitors are likely to be validated in terms of their physical appearance. Research on self-monitoring has demonstrated that low self-monitors are particularly concerned with self-validation techniques (Snyder, 1987), especially when related to their own beliefs and attitudes. For example, low self-monitors are more likely to participate in discussions if the attitudes and beliefs of other participants are in line with their own (Snyder). Individuals low in self-monitoring consistently gravitate toward situations that

encourage them to act on their attitudes, and avoid situations in which they must betray these attitudes and beliefs (Snyder). Thus, when low self-monitors interact with those who have similar beliefs and attitudes as their own it may act as a form of self-validation. When faced with the decision to engage in discussion, high self-monitors' tendency to accept or decline the invitation in no way reflects their general attitudes towards the issue up for discussion (Snyder) and therefore this desire for self-validation in terms of attitudes and beliefs may not be as essential to high self-monitors.

Individuals high in self-monitoring, by contrast, have a strong need to be validated in terms of body image and physical appearance. High self-monitors are more aware of themselves in social situations in order to appropriately regulate or control themselves (Fisher, 1986). Therefore, body image may be particularly important for high self-monitors because it is made salient during high levels of self-awareness. A study conducted by Sullivan and Harnish in 1990 examined the relationship between self-monitoring and body image and found that high self-monitors rated their physical appearance as being more important to them than low self-monitors. Additionally, high self-monitors reported engaging in more behaviors directed toward their physical appearance than did those lower in self-monitoring, suggesting that high self-monitors have a heightened concern of physical appearance both in the eyes of others and themselves (Sullivan & Harnish).

In all, the tendency for low self-monitors to place a stronger emphasis on acting in line with their own attitudes and beliefs, and the tendency for high self-monitors to place great importance on their physical appearance, seems likely to stem from fundamental differences in contingencies of self-worth. High and low self-monitors systematically differ in what attributes they hold important and therefore their contingencies of self-worth will also differ.

The Current Study

The current study looks to continue the research regarding self-monitoring personality types and self-esteem fluctuations. Specifically, the current study is interested in the effects that various types of positive feedback have on the self-esteem levels of both high and low self-monitors.

Previous research has demonstrated that, in general, self-esteem is important to individuals and that much of this self-esteem assessment is derived through social feedback. People differ, however, in terms of what they base their self-esteem on (i.e., contingencies of self-worth). People tend to prefer positive feedback, in general, regardless of the specific form. However, certain individuals may prefer specific *forms* of positive feedback over other forms based on their *personality traits*, or more specifically, based on whether they are a high or low *self-monitor*. The research described above has demonstrated that high self-monitors are more concerned with physical appearance, especially in friendship formation and mate selection, as it may increase their own perceived attractiveness. Low self-monitors, however, have demonstrated an inclination for personality information and similar characteristics in friends and romantic partners as this may provide self-validation. Based on this I hypothesize that positive feedback regarding an individual's personality will influence the self-esteem of low self-monitors more than positive feedback on physical appearance, and that the opposite would be true for high self-monitoring individuals. This examination will allow for further understanding of the self-esteem processes, and specifically the reasons why positive feedback may have different effects on self-esteem fluctuations depending on the kind of feedback (appearance vs. personality) and the kind of person (high vs. low self-monitor).

Method

Participants

Data was collected over the period of nine weeks in a psychology laboratory at Union College. The participants were 149 Union College students (64 males and 85 females), and were recruited through a college-wide online research signup system, where they received either course credit or compensation for their participation.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. In one condition, participants received positive appearance-based feedback, ostensibly on the basis of a photograph taken earlier in the study. In another condition, participants received positive personality-based feedback, ostensibly on the basis of earlier personality questionnaires. Finally, in the control condition, participants received neither form of feedback. Participants were seated individually in identical private cubicles for the entirety of the study. Each participant signed a consent form before beginning in which they were told the purpose of the study was to examine personality factors and life habits.

Participants were informed that they would be asked to complete various questionnaires on the computer, using a MediaLab program, and that their picture would be taken. The participant was told, however, that the current study was only concerned with the personality and life habit questionnaires and that the computer science department was testing a pilot program in which a picture would be taken and facial features were analyzed. (This cover story was used to mask the relation between the feedback procedures and the subsequent self-esteem questionnaire.) Participants were also informed that the picture would be destroyed after analysis and that no person would view the picture.

Participants began the study by completing The Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991) in which they were asked 44 questions beginning with “I see myself as someone who is...” and ending with a personality trait, such as talkative, and were instructed to choose the answer most applicable to themselves. Possible answers ranged from ‘disagree strongly’ to “agree strongly”. This measure was used to support the cover story in the personality feedback condition (i.e., as a basis on which personality feedback could be generated).

Next, a self-monitoring scale developed by Snyder (1974) was administered. This questionnaire gave the participants 25 true/false statements in which they were asked to select “true” or “false” based on which option most applied to the participant. An example statement is “I can only argue for ideas that I already believe in” (Snyder, 1974). We computed self-monitoring scores as a mean of responses to the 25 items (coded 1 and 2; so possible scores ranged from 1 to 2, with higher scores corresponding to higher self-monitoring).

After the self-monitoring scale was completed participants were informed of the “pilot program” and picture-taking procedure through a set of instructions. All participants were given the same instructions with regard to the picture:

“As part of a separate study we are testing a pilot program from the computer science department that analyzes facial features and structure. Your picture will never be seen by a person, but only analyzed by the computer program and then destroyed. Please sit up as straight as possible and look directly into the camera with a straight face (no smile). When you click "Take Picture," your picture will be taken. DO NOT click "Take Picture" until you are ready to have your picture taken!”

An external webcam had been placed on top of the computer before the start of the experiment. The participant clicked the “next” button on the screen after the instructions were presented. No picture was actually taken in any condition; however, participants were not told this. They were told that the computer was analyzing their facial features and that they should click the available “continue” button on the bottom of the screen. In the appearance feedback condition participants

were then administered feedback 4 sec after clicking “continue,” which they were told was based on their facial structure analysis. In the appearance based feedback and control conditions the participants did not received feedback from the picture at this time. There were then two follow-up questions to the “pilot program” (again, to support the cover story) which asked participants how likely it was that they would recommend the program to a friend or family member, and if they believed the program would be successful in the market (if it was available commercially).

Participants in the personality-based feedback condition were then informed that the computer analyzed their personality structure based on their responses to the first two questionnaires, and again participants were asked to click “continue” to view the feedback which appeared after 4 sec. The feedback these participants received was the same as the appearance-based feedback except that the words “personality structure” replaced “facial features.” See below for the appearance-based feedback and altered personality-based feedback.

Recent research shows that it is possible to determine facial attractiveness (*personality profiles*) based on measurements of certain facial structures (*personality features based on the questionnaires you just completed*). The measurements of these facial (*personality*) features, in relation to other features, predicts how likely one is to be viewed as physically attractive (*having an attractive personality*). Our results show that based on your facial (*personality*) structure you are likely to be perceived by others as having "high physical attractiveness" (*a highly desirable personality*). Specifically, the analysis of your facial (*personality*) features indicated that you measure within the range of what was pretested as being very physically attractive (*having very desirable personality characteristics*) relative to other college students.

Participants were then asked 20 open-ended questions regarding their life habits in which they were able to type in their answer in their own words. Such questions included “Do you smoke?” and “How often do you watch television?” This questionnaire was used as part of the cover story, as participants believed the purpose of the study was to examine personality factors and life habits, and also served as a delay/distraction to mask the relation between the feedback

and the self-esteem questionnaire. (Answers to the life habits questionnaire were never examined.)

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1989) was then administered. Ten statements were presented in which the participant was asked to select an answer out of the possible choices based on their opinion of the statement: “strongly agree” (7), “agree slightly” (6), “agree” (5), “neutral/mixed” (4), “slightly disagree” (3), “disagree” (2), “or strongly disagree” (1). In the current study the phrase “right now” was added to each statement in order to emphasize the participant’s current state when selecting his or her answer. An example statement is “Right now, I feel that I have a number of good qualities” (Rosenberg, 1989). The highest possible score (the mean of responses to the 10 items, with some items reverse coded) one could receive on the scale was 7, and the lowest possible score was 1.

Participants were then asked to answer numerous demographic questions including their age, gender, and ethnicity. Finally, each participant was asked two probe questions. The first question asked the participant, “In your own words, what do you think the study was about?” and the second asked, “We are interested in your thoughts about the part of the study in which your picture was taken. Did you find anything unusual about that part of the study? If it was followed by feedback, did you find anything unusual about the feedback?” In both cases participants were able to type in their answer in an open-answer format. The purpose of these probe questions was to determine who did not believe the cover story, or guessed the hypothesis, in order to eliminate them from the analyzed data set. Responses from the two probe questions were analyzed and revealed 8 participants who indicated that they either did not believe the cover story (3 participants), believed the feedback to be generic or was administered to all (2 participants),

guessed the hypothesis (1 participant), or did not wait the 4 sec for feedback to appear (2 participants). Thus, these 8 participants were excluded from further analysis.

Finally, participants were given a debriefing form electronically, in which they were informed of the cover story and deception used in the current study, regardless of the condition they were in. At the end of the study participants exited the individual cubicles and were compensated for their time.

Results

The current study hypothesized that self-esteem would increase more for high self-monitors when given positive appearance-based feedback relative to personality-based feedback and that self-esteem levels for low self-monitors would increase more after receiving positive personality-based feedback than appearance-based feedback. Previous research regarding concern for appearance, however, has indicated that women are significantly more concerned with social aspects of body image and compare their appearance to others more frequently than men (Davison & McCabe, 2005). Women are also significantly more concerned with others negatively evaluating their appearance compared to men (Davison & McCabe). Thus, because women have shown to be more concerned with appearance feedback than men the data was split by gender.

Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was performed using a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the main effect of condition (appearance, personality, or no feedback) on Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSE) levels for both men and women. If the manipulation was successful, RSE scores for both appearance-based and personality-based feedback conditions should be higher than RSE scores in the no feedback condition. The ANOVA revealed that there was no significant effect

for either males or females, $F(2, 55) = .42, p = .65$, and $F(2, 78) = .74, p = .48$, respectively.

Although results showed no significant difference between conditions and RSE scores, there was a trend in which the no feedback condition had the *highest* level of mean reported self-esteem for both men and women. (The mean self-esteem scores for women in the appearance, personality, and no feedback conditions were $X = 5.75$, $X = 5.59$, and $X = 5.91$, respectively. The mean self-esteem score for men in the appearance, personality, and no feedback conditions were $X = 5.72$, $X = 5.45$, and $X = 5.75$, respectively.) Thus, the manipulation check showed a strong ceiling effect in the no feedback condition for both males and females. Nevertheless, it remains possible that there would be differences between the self-esteem levels reported in the appearance versus personality feedback conditions as a function of self-monitoring, so the no feedback condition was excluded from further analysis in order to simply compare the appearance and personality-based feedback conditions.

Primary Analyses

A dummy variable for experimental condition was created where personality-based feedback was equal to 0 and appearance-based feedback was equal to 1. The dummy variable was entered into the first step of a multiple regression analysis along with standardized self-monitoring scores. An appearance by self-monitoring interaction was entered in the second step of the regression to predict self-esteem scores. The regression analysis revealed a marginally significant interaction between feedback condition and self-monitoring among women, $t(53) = 1.65, \beta = .46, p = .10$, and no effects for men.

Inspection of the interaction between feedback condition and self-monitoring among women, according to the guidelines of Aiken & West (1991), is depicted in Figure 1, and revealed that among high self-monitors, self-esteem levels were higher in the appearance-based

feedback condition relative to the personality-based feedback condition. Among low self-monitors, self-esteem levels were higher in the personality-based feedback condition relative to the appearance-based feedback condition, consistent with the hypothesis for both self-monitoring conditions.

Discussion

The current study examined self-esteem fluctuation in high and low self-monitors after receiving either positive personality or appearance-based feedback. The hypothesis that high self-monitors would have greater levels of self-esteem after receiving appearance-based feedback when compared to personality-based feedback and that the opposite would be true for low self-monitors was supported in the current study, although this trend only was evident among women.

These findings suggest that there are differences in contingencies of self-worth between high and low self-monitors as well as between males and females. For women, the differences in self-esteem levels for high self-monitors depending of the form of feedback suggests that their self-concept is more concerned with body image and appearance, and that positive feedback pertaining to these domains results in a more positive self-evaluation. For low self-monitoring women, however, positive feedback pertaining to personality traits and characteristics is more beneficial to self-esteem suggesting that low self-monitors' self-worth is more contingent on personality domains.

The gender difference in the influence of feedback as a function of self-monitoring was unexpected. Specifically, there was a significant interaction between the two variables for women, but not men. One reason for this gender difference may relate to gender differences in contingencies of self-worth. As previously stated, women tend to be more concerned with issues related to appearance and attractiveness relative to men. Thus, although the positive appearance-

based feedback may be more important to high (versus low) self-monitors in both genders, this feedback may be particularly important for high self-monitoring *females*. This could explain why a moderately significant interaction between feedback condition and self-monitoring was found for women but not men.

Another explanation for the gender difference is that men are simply not as influenced by feedback of any kind compared to women. This would explain why there was no interaction between either form of feedback and self-monitoring for men. If men's self-esteem is not as influenced by feedback, in general, as women's self-esteem, then it seems fitting that women would have a moderately significant interaction between self-monitoring and feedback condition when an interaction did not exist among men.

One alternative explanation for the effects seen in the current study is that general sociability and orientation toward social interaction could be manifesting in similar tendencies as self-monitoring. In other words, it is possible that the effects shown in women in the current study were not a result of self-monitoring personality type, but instead something related or very similar to it. Future research should explore this possibility.

Limitations

One limitation in the current study is that the baseline condition was excluded in data analysis due to a strong ceiling effect in the control, or no feedback, condition. Thus, I was unable to directly measure the difference in self-esteem levels between high and low self-monitors who did not receive feedback and those who received personality or appearance-based feedback. Instead, the data examined the difference in self-esteem between high and low self-monitors who received personality-based feedback and high and low self-monitors who received appearance-based feedback.

One explanation for the relatively high self-esteem scores in the control condition may be that some participants in the feedback conditions had exceedingly high (or even low) opinions of themselves, so the feedback was either disappointing to them or else did not ring true. For example, people with extremely high self-esteem who were given positive feedback may have rejected the feedback in that it was not considered good enough for them. The feedback was purposely relatively vague so that it was nearly identical between the two conditions. Thus, when feedback was given to these individuals with extremely high self-views and was not up to their standards their self-esteem levels may have decreased.

By contrast, when positive feedback was administered to individuals with very low opinions of themselves it may have functioned as a reminder of these low opinions therefore lowering reported levels of self-esteem. If this were the case for either group of individuals, self-esteem levels would have decreased, regardless of the condition, thus offering an explanation for why the self-esteem means for both males and females were highest in the no feedback condition.

Another explanation for the ceiling effect observed in the current findings may relate to the order in which questionnaires were administered, and the content of the questionnaires. Participants completed the life habits questionnaire immediately before the RSE scale. In the life habits questionnaire participants recalled various aspects of their everyday lives such as the amount of time engaged in various activities (i.e. watching television). Thus, participants in the no feedback condition, who were not told anything regarding their appearance or personality features, may have been monitoring their own perceived attractiveness based solely on their responses to the administered questionnaires. Thus, completing the life habits questionnaire may have served as a form of self-affirmation in that participants were able to reflect on their life

habits, some of which are presumably important to their self-integrity (Steele, 1988); in other words, self-esteem could have significantly increased in the “no feedback” condition relative to a true baseline.

A final limitation in the current study is that 8 participants were excluded from analysis. Although many participants indicated in their responses to both probe questions that they believed the cover story as well as the administered feedback, there were some individuals who did not. It is additionally possible that other participants had suspicions about the procedure that they did not articulate. Future research along the lines of this study should find ways to maximize the believability of the cover story.

Implications

The findings of the current study have important implications for both clinical and social settings. Knowing that different forms of feedback are more or less influential as a function of self-monitoring and gender helps us explain, predict, and possibly even manage self-esteem fluctuations. One important implication in the findings, for example, is that clinicians may be able to determine the most beneficial way in which to increase their patients’ self-esteem levels, and therefore tailor feedback based on what would be most valuable to that individual. If patients suffer from chronic low self-esteem, or even depression symptoms, clinicians, family members, and friends can attempt to alleviate some symptoms by providing positive feedback on the patient’s contingent domain.

These findings may also help to explain differences between high and low self-monitors as well as males and females in social situations and activities. High self-monitoring females, for example, may be the most likely to engage in activities in which positive feedback about their appearance is readily available and frequently distributed. Low self-monitoring females,

inversely, may engage in activities or social interactions in which personality traits and attitudes are frequently and positively recognized.

Lastly, the findings may have important implications for current psychological research related to contingencies of self-worth and self-monitoring. Results reveal that these two variables may be related in that high and low self-monitors differ in their contingencies of self-worth. This interaction is important to research in both domains. Research regarding contingencies of self-worth has determined that people differ in their contingencies, but without much evidence as to why. The present findings suggest that self-monitoring may explain differences in contingencies of self-worth.

Future Directions and Conclusion

Future directions for research regarding the interaction between positive feedback and self-monitoring personality type and its effects on self-esteem should focus on other feedback domains that may be more important to the male gender. Not only would this give insight into the gender differences observed in the current findings, it would also shed light on the gender differences in contingencies of self-worth and self-esteem formation as a function of self-monitoring.

Additionally, it may be useful to expand on the methodology of the current study by having a confederate actually administer the positive feedback to participants. Doing this may increase the importance that positive feedback has on self-esteem, as it is may be more related to social evaluation. In the current study, participants were told through computer analysis that they had highly attractive facial or personality features *compared* to other college students. It would be important to investigate if there is a stronger interaction between feedback condition

and self-monitoring if feedback is administered by a person or peer, as self-esteem is constructed in some part by others.

In conclusion, the current study sheds light on self-esteem formation – namely, that there may be an important personality component related to self-esteem formation. The study's results support the notion that self-monitoring is a dimension of personality that may predict differing contingencies of self-worth, and that there is a gender component to this phenomenon. Further investigations along similar lines may provide additional insight into self-esteem formation as well as implications about the self-monitoring personality trait.

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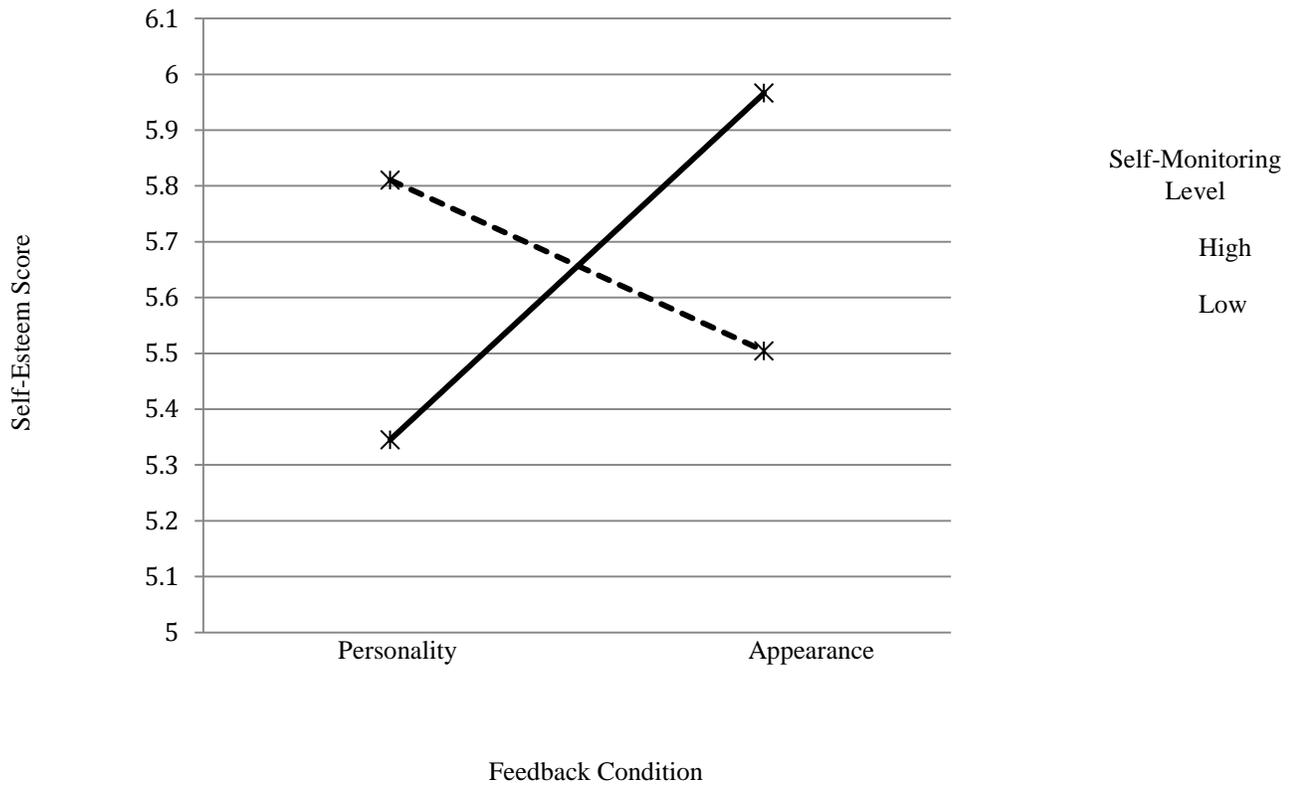


Figure 1: Self Esteem as a Function of Self-Monitoring and Feedback for Women