

Self-Monitoring In Close Relationships

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Typically, it would be assumed that the closer two people become in a relationship, the less they try and hide their real selves from their partner. Everyone is accustomed to wearing a sort of “social mask” from time to time, as it is not an easy thing to completely expose oneself to others. This mask refers to the amount of self-presentation that people participate in while interacting with others, regardless of closeness (Day, 2002). Even if unaware, most people commit this act of performing their best self for others to see, including those who consider themselves to be extremely close and intimate. With this being said, in a close relationship, namely a romantic one, the amount of self-monitoring and disclosure should directly correlate with the respective healthiness of the relationship. One would not expose their most intimate self to another if they did not expect to be reciprocated in some way, as well as if they did not feel that they could trust their partner with the most sensitive of information. Interdependence plays a huge role in how close two people can feel when engaged in a formal relationship. In Knobloch’s 2004 paper regarding interdependence in romantic relationships, it is stated how the transition between being independent and becoming interdependent is one of the most crucial steps in forming a lasting, healthy partnership. For a couple to be considered interdependent by definition, they must be able to confide in their partner no matter how sensitive the information. (Knobloch, p. 115). If this level of comfort and reliability cannot be established between two individuals, then neither party would be entirely comfortable exposing their full selves and eliminating the need to self-monitor. Members of a budding relationship must have a base level of trust and comfort before they would feel ready to expose who they really are to their partner. In this literature review, the link between the amount of self-monitoring and the

closeness/healthiness of a romantic relationship will be analyzed in order to find how the two directly affect each other.

Before looking into the correlation between self-monitoring and closeness of individuals, exactly what self-monitoring is and what it entails must be understood first. Self-monitoring (SM), refers to the amount of self-disclosure and the willingness to expose intimate, personal information about oneself to others. Those who are high self-monitors might not be as willing to expose themselves personally as much as those who are low self-monitors. Those who are able to effectively self-monitor are more able to adjust themselves and adapt to different social settings, and are able to act appropriately in a variety of situations more effectively than those who do not possess the ability (Harnish & Bridges, 2016). SM does not only mean that one is unwilling or willing to share personal information with others, rather, it refers to the ability to change the way one acts and interacts to fit a particular social situation in either a positive or negative way. Someone who would be considered an extremely effective self-monitor would find it easy to fit into almost any social group, while someone who is not considered to be an effective self-monitor would have a more difficult time fitting in and adjusting themselves to appropriately communicate effectively with people who might be different. Aside from the social aspect, SM also heavily dictates the amount of focus and attention put into an intimate relationship (Büyükşahin, 2009). Those who are more able to adjust themselves and the ways that they appear to their partner might experience more success when attempting to alter the direction of an established relationship. Not being able to change the way that one appears or acts towards a partner could inhibit the relationship from developing any further than it might already be. Both parties must be willing and able to change themselves for the better (or worse) if the two desire

to establish a lasting, healthy partnership (Dunbar & Burgoon, 2005). Even if the relationship has yet to be established, the anticipation of future interaction with another can also dictate the amount of SM committed by the individuals involved (Shaffer, Ogden, & Wu, 1987). For an individual attempting to establish even a basic relationship, actively monitoring themselves and putting their best foot forward in the given social situation is extremely important. It was found that in a situation where one expects to continue contact with a possible future partner, only those who were considered high self-monitors would reciprocate the same amount of self disclosure, while those who were not very effective self-monitors would only share basic emotions and low levels of initial intimacy (Shaffer, p. 75). Desire to continue contact and the anticipation of a future relationship cause those with the ability to self disclose to open up more, while possibly instilling feelings of nervousness and isolation amongst those who are not confident self-monitors. Once this initial level of personal contact has been accepted and shared, a couple will have a much easier time opening up in future situations, now that a base level of trust has been established between them (Knobloch, 2004).

After understanding the aspects of self-monitoring and how it affects social and intimate relationships with others, it is extremely important to grasp the concept of what a healthy intimate relationship looks like. One of the keys ingredients in a healthy relationship is the decision to either reveal or conceal certain personal information about one's self (Anderson, Kunkel, & Dennis, 2011). It is important for those who are romantically involved with each other to have a full understanding of their counterpart, and the decision to withhold certain personal information can be extremely damaging to the levels of trust and closeness between the two individuals (Apostolou, 2016). For a relationship to continue to develop romantically, a strong

foundation of trust must first be formed. If information that was kept hidden for any reason happens to come to light, feelings of mistrust and even the termination of the relationship might occur. The best way to ensure that a relationship continues to develop and remain healthy is to remain honest and as open as possible about each other's pasts. It is extremely typical for couples to avoid discussing certain topics with each other, and this can be due to not wanting to hurt or offend the partner. One of the most avoided topics of discussion between couples in romantic relationships is previous sexual partners (Anderson, p.388). This is a topic that many might never want to discuss or even think about themselves, but even this can damage a relationship if it inhibits one from fully understanding their partner. Emotional stability amongst an individual is crucial when establishing a meaningful, healthy relationship. One must be able to fully understand themselves before they can attempt to understand a potential partner. Low emotional stability, amongst other personality traits, can be extremely inhibitive towards relational success (Apostolou, 2016). Damaging miscommunications can also occur when someone is unable to fully comprehend feelings of emotion. Being a member of a healthy romantic relationship means being fully aware of one's feelings, as well as being able to sympathize with the feelings of the partner. Before being able to interpret how a partner is feeling, the emotions of the self must be assessed and understood (Apostolou, 2016). Other, more basic qualities contribute to the success of a relationship just as much as the ability to understand and empathize with emotion. Certain traits such as "kindness and excitement," contribute directly to the success of those who express these emotions to new, potential partners (Apostolou, p.140). Expressing positive emotions greatly reduces the amount of uncertainty involved with meeting someone new. After uncertainty is reduced, then the individuals involved

will find it much easier to expose themselves more than they would have before. Emotional understanding and willingness to show proper interest all contribute to the stability and longevity of a healthy, romantic relationship.

While current research only examines romantic relationships and self-monitoring as two completely different topics, they can be found to build on each other in a way that can either strengthen or damage the chances of success at a romantic relationship. After examining research in both of these areas, it can be said that those who are efficient at self-monitoring and are able to adapt to better fit a social situation and are better at establishing new relationships. Having the ability to effectively establish connections is one of the first steps in forming a relationship of any kind. Once engaged in a relationship, being able to expose and sympathize with the emotions of both one's self and one's partner is key to maintaining stability. Lack thereof of appropriate emotion reduces the amount of both satisfaction and closeness between two individuals (Hesse & Mikkelsen, 2017). On the other hand, too much self-monitoring between a couple can inhibit the relationship from developing further, as withholding personal information can lead to feelings of mistrust. Not being able to trust the opposite member of relationship can only negatively impact the connection. Being comfortable with exposing a wide range of emotion and past experiences is not easy for everyone to do, especially for those who have been high self-monitors for an extended period of time. Emotions should not be hidden, rather shared and built upon. A middle ground in how much one exposes themselves must be achieved and then altered throughout the course of the relationship. If not willing to make these necessary adaptations for the sake of a potential romantic relationship, the chances of success reduces greatly (Apostolou, 2016). Conducting a survey consisting of both members of successful romantic relationships and those

who have failed at romantic relationships could prove beneficial in this area of study. Finding out how satisfied these individuals are based on their comfortability in emotional exposure would clarify much in terms of the relationship between SM and closeness.

**Hypothesis:** The amount of self-monitoring committed by both parties in a healthy romantic relationship directly impacts the amount of reported closeness.

**Research Question:** Do those who self-monitor themselves effectively experience more relational success than those who do not?

### **Conceptual Definitions**

**Dependent Variable:** The dependent variable in this scenario is the reported closeness in the romantic relationship being observed.

**Independent Variable:** The independent variable in this scenario is the amount of self-monitoring reported by the participant.

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