SELF-MONITORING AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES
2006 NES PILOT STUDY REPORT*

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Social scientists have long appreciated the influence of social context on the public expression of attitudes (Aquilino 1994; Tourangeau et al. 2000). In a climate governed by tolerant beliefs, analysts of public opinion confront a series of troubling questions about the accuracy with which attitudes and beliefs in sensitive domains (e.g., race, sexuality) are measured. Specifically, what social conditions render it more or less likely that survey respondents will provide a faithful account of their racial attitudes in an interviewer-mediated setting? To what extent are the political effects of prejudice currently obscured by researchers' inability to obtain definitive information about Americans' racial views?

In recent years there has been a movement among scholars of public opinion to consider more fully the effect of the social forces at work in the survey interview. The survey interview can be viewed as a "conversation at random" (Converse and Schuman 1974), governed by many of the same dynamics as everyday conversations, such as social desirability concerns. In some cases, the desire to present an admirable public impression may play a large role behind the answers individuals give to survey questions. For example, some scholars of racial politics are concerned that white Americans do not always give truthful statements about their racial attitudes, leading to widespread underestimation of white opposition to racial policies and black political candidates (e.g., Berinsky 1999; Krysan 1998; Kuklinski and Cobb 1998; Kuklinski et al. 1997; Reeves 1997). By controlling for the presentational component of survey responses on sensitive political topics, researchers can obtain more accurate preferences, and perhaps more importantly, better gauge their political relevance.

Although it is clear that the expression of attitudes is often affected by social desirability concerns, not all individuals are affected equally, a point that has often been overlooked in past research. We propose a question battery to account for how the personality characteristics of

individuals affect the answers they give to questions involving politically controversial topics. There is a large – and largely untapped – literature in psychology that seeks to measure the personality characteristics which lead to preference misrepresentation. Though a number of scales have been developed by psychologists to measure tendencies toward socially desirable responding (SDR), the Self-Monitoring (SM) scale, created by Snyder and his colleagues (1986), has achieved great prominence in psychology.[1]

Self-Monitoring: Theory and Evidence

The SM scale (Snyder 1974; Snyder and Gangestad 1986) is based on the assumption that individuals differ in the degree to which they actively monitor and regulate their interpersonal behavior in response to social context (for a recent review of the self-monitoring literature, see Gangestad and Snyder 2000). According to theory, people who score high on the SM scale are chronically concerned with the appropriateness of their interpersonal behavior. They carefully regulate their self-presentation with regard to social norms and contexts, and thus are highly responsive to social and interpersonal cues. Gangestad and Snyder (2000) liken high self-monitors to "consummate social pragmatists, willing and able to project images designed to impress others" (p. 531). By contrast, people who score low on the SM scale are relatively less concerned with – and less capable of managing – how well their behavior fits a situation. They are guided, instead, by their inner attitudes, emotions, and dispositions; as a consequence, low (but not high) self-monitors manifest consistency between their private attitudes and public actions across a range of social domains (see Snyder 1987). Gangestad and Snyder (2000) argue that low self-monitors are "motivated to establish and protect reputations of being earnest and sincere, with no desire (or perhaps even ability) to construct false images of themselves" (p. 533).

[1] For a review of SDR scales, see Paulhus (1991).

Since the SM scale first appeared in 1974, several hundred studies attest to its broad impact in distinguishing between people who are least and most obeisant to social norms.[2] In behavioral domains as diverse as friendships and romantic relationships, advertising, persuasion, and organizational behavior, socialization and developmental processes, as well as *political* behavior, research consistently indicates that high self-monitors are more likely than low self-monitors to accurately perceive and respond to social cues, and to tailor their attitudes and behavior to fit prevailing social expectations (for a review, see Gangestad and Snyder 2000). For example, compared to low self-monitors, high self-monitors (a) respond more to situational contingencies and are more likely to make situational attributions (Snyder and Monson 1975); (b) find physical attractiveness important in a romantic partner, and place less emphasis on substance and shared values and interests (Glick, DeMorest, and Hotze 1988; Joslyn 1996; Petty and Wegener 1998); (c) are more facile speakers (Dabbs et al. 1980) and more likely to deceive to get a date (Rowatt, Cunningham, and Druen 1998); (d) exhibit less consistency between dispositions (i.e., traits and attitudes) and overt behavior (Snyder and Monson 1975; Snyder and Swann 1976); (e) have less accessible attitudes and self-knowledge (Kardes et al. 1986; Snyder & Cantor 1980), and (f) respond more to persuasive messages that emphasize the display of social images and less to those that emphasize personal values (DeBono 1987; Lavine and Snyder 1996).

Individual differences in SM have also begun to appear in the political science literature. Terkildsen (1993) found that low self-monitors with high racial prejudice scores evaluated dark skinned candidates more negatively than an identical light-skinned black counterpart. In contrast, realizing that a negative evaluation of a dark-skinned candidate would violate norms regarding

[2] Gangestad and Snyder (2000) report over 200 empirical journal articles that used the SM scale. Though some controversy remains regarding what exactly the SM scale measures (see Briggs and Cheek 1988 and Gangestad and Snyder 2000 for the most recent volley in this exchange), it appears to tap general self-presentation concerns.

racial equality, high self-monitors with high racial prejudice scores expressed a remarkable degree of support for the dark skinned candidate. Berinsky (2004) employed a subset of the SM scale – similar to the items we propose below – on a random-digit-dial survey of 511 Americans, conducted in the continental United States from April through May 2000. Berinsky found that each of the items had good variance and that a scale formed from five items was reasonably reliable. Specifically, the Cronbach's alpha statistic of the scale formed was 0.65, a figure that compares favorably to that of scales commonly used on the NES, such as the NES egalitarian scale.[3] Berinsky used the SM sub-scale to predict attitudes in three issue areas where socially desirable reporting might exist: racial issues, spending on socially popular programs (notably schools and the environment), and feelings towards homosexuals. There were no statistically significant effects on respondent attitudes on the spending items. However, as expected, the SM scale was a significant predictor of racial liberalism and expressed tolerance towards homosexuals.

Finally, using a subset of SM items in a statewide survey of New York residents, Huddy and her colleagues (Feldman and Huddy 2005; Huddy and Lavine 2004) have shown that SM conditions both the expression of racial attitudes as well as their political relevance. Feldman and Huddy (2005) found that high self-monitors disguise their negative racial views, and Huddy and Lavine (2004) found that racial stereotypes predicted a broad range of race-related policy attitudes among low but not high self-monitors (presumably because the endorsement of racial stereotypes among high self-monitors is a poor indication of their true position). Moreover, in the context of a laboratory experiment, Huddy and Lavine (2004) demonstrated that high but not low self-monitors are susceptible to a persuasive message emphasizing intolerant social norms (i.e., a

[3] An exploratory factor analysis of the items confirmed that the SM items tap a single dimension; only the first factor yielded an eigenvalue greater than one.

message deriding political correctness). By determining the degree to which social desirability pressures mask the link between racial prejudice on one hand and opposition to racial policies and candidates on the other, these studies of SM contribute to a heated debate over the political impact of racial prejudice.

Adapting the SM scale

Although the SM scale is a well-validated measure of individual differences in sensitivity to social situations and social norms, it is not appropriate for direct use in attitude surveys. First, the scale is too long for inclusion in a normal survey; even the shorter, revised SM scale (Snyder and Gangestad 1986) contains 18 items. This scale is clearly too long for use on a national survey. Several factor analyses of the revised 18-item SM scale yield two factors, referred to as "Public Performing," and "Other-Directedness," respectively (see Gangestad and Snyder 2000). When a single unrotated general SM factor (used by Snyder and Gangestad 1986) is projected onto the two dimensional space comprised of these two factors, it is nearly identical to the Public Performing factor; in fact, it owes nearly 70% of its variance (nearly all the reliable variance) to this factor, and just 2% to the Other-Directedness factor. Moreover, in their review and re-analysis of some two hundred published SM studies, Gangestad and Snyder (2000) found that a broad range of criterion variables conceptually related to SM are best captured by this single SM axis. We believe that a shorter scale drawn from the Public Performing items could constitute a reliable measure of self-monitoring.

A second potential problem with the SM scale is that its true/false response format used in face-to-face administration is not necessarily appropriate for the shorter question battery we propose. In previous work, Berinsky (2004) used a four-point Likert agree-disagree scale (strongly agree/somewhat agree/somewhat disagree/strongly disagree) in an effort to obtain more

detailed information (i.e., more variance) concerning the respondent's reactions to the SM statements. We believe that additional question wording changes to avoid the problems inherent in Likert scales would further improve the scale.

SM in the 2006 NES Pilot Study

In the 2006 NES Pilot Study, we included a three-item SM scale, drawn from the 18-item SM scale. We tested two alternative response formats. Half of the respondents were asked the items using the tradition true/false response format.[4] The other half of respondents were given response options specifically tailored to the particular items. The specific items in these scales are presented in Table 1.

We conducted an analysis of these scale items using the Advance Release version of the Pilot Study. Given the split-sample design of the SM module, the samples for these analyses are rather small – 338 respondents completed the three Form A items and 327 respondents completed the Form B items. The preliminary nature of our data combined with the small sample size precludes us from drawing definitive conclusions. However, this initial analysis yielded a number of suggestive results.

Both response formats yielded high completion rates. On Form A, 337 of the 338 surveyed gave responses to all three items. On Form B, 325 of 327 respondents answered all the items. Moreover, the items were all positively correlated, though the correlations were higher for the Form A items than the Form B items (see Table 2). We computed Cronbach's alpha statistic for the scales formed from the SM items.[5] Neither of the scale reliabilities was particularly high, but the reliability of the Self-Monitoring scale was higher for Form A than Form B (Form A α =

[4] Though, based on pre-testing, we slightly modified the wording of some of Snyder's SM items to make them readily intelligible to the general population.

[5] An exploratory factor analysis of the items confirms that the SM items each tap a single dimension. In both cases, only the first factor yields an eigenvalue greater than zero.

.60; Form B α = .39). While the performance of scales was not outstanding, it does compare favorably to that of scales commonly used in political science research, such as the NES egalitarian scale. Moreover, the internal consistency of the full (18 or 25 item) SM scale is typically in the low .60s (e.g., Gangestad and Synder 2000). We therefore created simple additive scales from the respective scale items (scaled from 0 to 1, where 1 is the maximum score on the scale).[6] The scales showed reasonable variance, and the Form A scale appears to be normally distributed (see Figure 1).

We next examined how the scales related to a series of political and demographic criterion variables. The results of these multivariate regressions are presented in Table 3. Moderate relationships exist between the criterion variables and the Form A scale; blacks and older respondents score lower on the SM scale. Moreover, there appears to be a slight relationship with ideology; more conservative respondents may score lower on the SM measure. It will be necessary to examine the full Pilot Study release before we can draw definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, these analyses point to the importance of controlling for the demographic characteristics of respondents when using the Form A scale. By contrast, the Form B scale is unrelated to all of the background variables.

These analyses indicate that the short form of the SM scale tested in the Pilot Study holds some promise for future data collection, though the modified version on the scale (Form A) appears to have better measurement properties.

Finally, we examined the performance of the two forms of the SM scale by examining whether they directly predicted variables in which socially desirable reporting might exist, and whether they moderated the strength of other relationships in ways consistent with theories of the

[6] Using factor scales in place of the additive scale yields similar results

question-answering process. First, to examine the *direct* effect of SM, we examined the following item from the 2006 Pilot Study (Mod23_4):

> Do you think that most men candidates who run for political office are better suited emotionally to work in government than are most women candidates, that most women candidates are better suited emotionally to work in government than are most men candidates, or do you think men and women candidates are equally suited emotionally to work in government?

Adherence to social desirability dictates responding that men and women are equally suited to work in government or perhaps even that women are better suited than men to work in government. Therefore, we created an ordinal scale such that 1=men better suited, 2=men and women equally suited, and 3=women better suited. Using ordered logit, we analyzed whether high self-monitors were more likely than low self-monitors to provide either of the two latter responses (i.e., equally suited or women better suited). We controlled for party identification and political ideology (7-pt. scales), race, gender, age, education, political knowledge, and the importance of religion in one's life. The results are presented in Table 4. They indicate that the effect of SM was nearly significant for Form A (but not Form B) of the scale. Table 5 provides the predicted probabilities for the three responses (men better, equal, women better) for low and high self-monitors (using the 5^{th} and 95^{th} percentile values of the Form A SM scale). As can be seen, a large proportion of both low and high self-monitors chose the "equally suited" response. Nevertheless, our expectations were borne out. First, low SMs were more likely than high SMs to report that men were more suited than women to government work. Second, high SMs were more likely than low SMs to report that women were more suited than men to government work. And third, highs were more likely than lows to report that the two sexes were equally suited. Each of these differences in predicted probability (across levels of SM) is significant (using Stata's "prvalue" command) at the .10 level of significance.

Second, to examine the *moderating* effects of SM, we examined whether the effect of stereotypes on race-related policy attitudes was stronger among low than high SMs. To the extent that high self-monitors are reluctant to report their beliefs about whites and blacks on a variety of socially desirable and undesirable traits, the effect of stereotype endorsement should be stronger among low than high SMs (Feldman and Huddy 2005; Huddy and Lavine 2004). Table 6 reports a test of this hypothesis in the context of attitudes toward affirmative action.[7] The stereotype endorsement item was composed of the relative ratings of blacks and whites on 3 trait scales: hardworking vs. lazy, intelligent vs. unintelligent, and trustworthy vs. untrustworthy (all rated on 7-point scales based on items contained in the 2004 NES). For each trait, high ratings represented the positive pole of the dimension (e.g., hardworking). To create a measure of stereotyping (i.e., the extent to which the traits were ascribed to one race more than the other), we subtracted the average rating on the three dimensions toward blacks from the average rating toward whites. Thus, high scores on this scale indicated the belief that whites were more hardworking, intelligent, and trustworthy than blacks. Ordered logit analyses are presented in Table 6. The key prediction is that the effect of stereotype endorsement should be stronger among low than high SMs. This is captured by a negatively signed interaction between stereotype endorsement and SM. As can be seen in the table, this interaction is significant and negatively signed for Form A of the scale. By contrast, for Form B, the interaction is nonsignificant and incorrectly signed. Predicated probabilities (based on the Form A analysis) indicated that for low SMs, the likelihood of opposing affirmative action (either strongly or not strongly) was .76 when stereotype endorsement was low (1^{th} percentile of the scale), and increased to .98 when stereotype endorsement was high (99^{th} percentile of the scale; $p<.05$).

[7] Attitudes toward affirmative action in employment were asked in the 2004 NES on a four point scale (V045207a): Do you favor/oppose preference in hiring and promotion strongly or not strongly. We recoded the responses to the following 4-point scale: strongly favor=0; favor=.33; oppose=.67 strongly oppose=1.0.

However, as in previous work (e.g., Feldman and Huddy 2005; Huddy and Lavine 2004), this effect was reversed among high SMs, such that the probability of opposing affirmative action was actually higher among high SMs who strongly endorsed racial stereotypes than among those who rejected them (.97 vs. .79).

CONCLUSION

Gauging the political relevance of attitudes on socially sensitive topics is not a straightforward task, as obtaining accurate measures of such attitudes has proven difficult. Considering the domain of race, overt prejudice has declined to the point where it barely registers in national studies, measures of "new racism" are challenged as valid indicators of prejudice, and racial stereotypes suffer from social desirability concerns. Previous strategies to combat this problem have encompassed subtle measures of racial attitudes, as well as non-reactive response latency techniques such as the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz 1998) and automatic evaluative priming (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton and Williams, 1995). Yet none of these strategies has provided a satisfactory answer to the question of the extent to which racial attitudes underlie attitudes toward racially-tinged policies.

We offer a new approach to this problem based on the identification of individuals who are most and least susceptible to tolerant social norms, that is, high and low self-monitors. The work reviewed above – along with our preliminary analyses of two reduced forms of the SM scale – indicates potentially promising directions of research, both within and beyond the domain of race. Of the two approaches two measuring SM, the modified response format appears to show more promise than the traditional true/false format, at least within the context of a national survey. The former provided a more reliable SM scale than the true/false format, and behaved consistent with theory. We should note, however, that our results are preliminary, as they are

based on a small subset of the 2006 Pilot Study. We expect the results to be stronger when the entire dataset becomes available. Incorporating items from this format of the SM scale into the NES will better allow us to study attitudes concerning a variety of socially sensitive political topics, such as attitudes towards homosexuals, the poor, and members of racial and ethnic minority groups. SM provides a thoroughly validated measure of individual differences in responsiveness to social norms, and promises to allow survey researchers to identify which individuals are motivated to "dissemble" in their responses to socially sensitive questions. We believe this approach promises to provide an important step forward in gauging the social forces at work in the survey interview, as well as providing more accurate assessments of a variety of intergroup attitudes and their political relevance.

Table 1: Self-Monitoring Item Wordings

Form A (Modified Response Format)

Item 1: When you're with other people, how often do you put on a show to impress or entertain them? [Always, most of the time, about half the time, once in a while, or never? / Never, once in a while, about half the time, most of the time, or always?]

Item 2: How good or bad of an actor would you be? [Excellent, good, fair, poor, or very poor? / Very poor, poor, fair, good, or excellent?]

Item 3: When you're in a group of people, how often are you the center of attention? [Always, most of the time, about half the time, once in a while, or never? / Never, once in a while, about half the time, most of the time, or always?]

Form B (True/False Format):

The following statements concern your personal reactions to a number of different situations. No two statements are exactly alike, so please consider each statement carefully before answering. If a statement is true or mostly true as applied to you, answer true. If a statement is false or not usually true as applied to you, answer false.

Item 1. I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain people.

Item 2: I would probably make a good actor.

Item 3: In groups of people, I am rarely the center of attention.

Table 2: Self-Monitoring Item Correlations

Form A (Modified Response Format)

N=337	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3
Item 1	1.0000		
Item 2	0.2091	1.0000	
Item 3	0.4088	0.4147	1.0000

Form B (True/False Format):

N=325	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3
Item 1	1.0000		
Item 2	0.3268	1.0000	
Item 3	0.0640	0.1731	1.0000

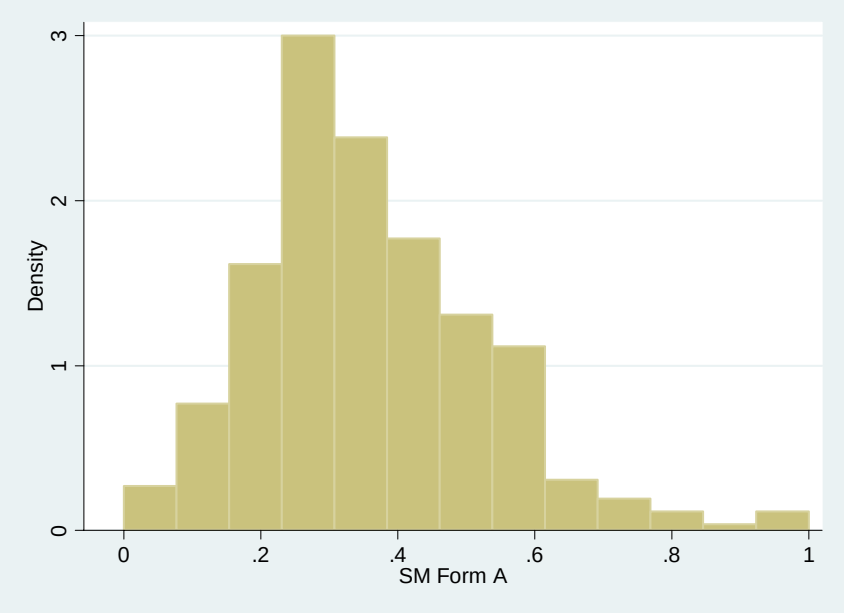
Table 3: Self-Monitoring Background Correlates

	Form A	Form B
Constant	.52**	0.42**
	(.06)	(.12)
Party ID	.01	-.03
(High=Strong Republican)	(.02)	(.08)
Ideology	-.07	-.08
(High=Conservative)	(.06)	(.07)
Female	-.01	-.01
	(.02)	(.04)
Age/100	-.21**	-.02
	(.07)	(.12)
Education	-.00	-.00
	(.01)	(.01)
Black	-.07	.08
	(.04)	(.08)
N	278	264
Adjusted R^2	.05	-.01

Note: * = $p < .10$; ** = $p < .05$ (two-tailed test)

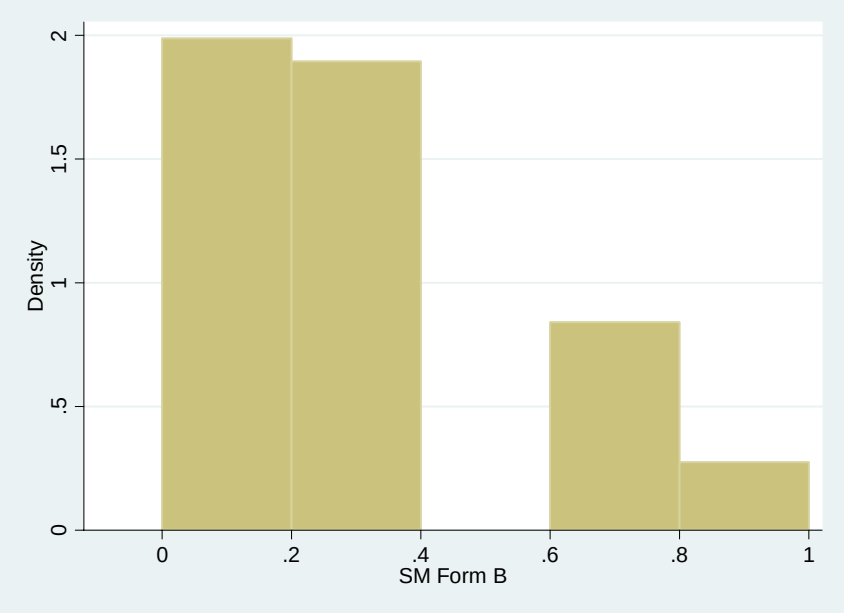
Figure 1: Self Monitoring Scale Distributions

Form A (Modified Response Format)



Mean= 0.347 S.D. =0.180

Form B (True/False Format):



Mean=0.294 Variance = 0.294

Table 4. Effect of SM on Gender-Related Political Beliefs

	Form A	Form B
Party ID (High=Strong Republican)	.85 (.64)	-.14 (.64)
Ideology (High=Conservative)	-1.60* (.91)	-1.99** (.99)
Black	.79 (.71)	.07 (.66)
Female	.52 (.35)	.08 (.32)
Age	-1.04 (.87)	1.56** (.79)
Education	.37 (.74)	.85 (.71)
Political Information	.83 (.76)	-.96 (.73)
Importance of Religion	-.26 (.45)	.08 (.46)
Self-Monitoring	1.46 (.99)	-1.04 (.47)
/cut1	-1.71 (.96)	-5.27 (1.99)
/cut2	3.98 (1.02)	-3.89 (1.96)
N	274	262
Pseudo-R^2	.09	.07

Note: * = $p < .10$; ** = $p < .05$ *** = $p<.01$ (two-tailed test)

Table 5. Predicted Probabilities of Gender-Related Political Beliefs, by SM

SM	Men Better	Equal	Women Better
Low	.15	.83	.01
High	.07	.89	.04

Table 6. Effects of Racial Stereotype Endorsement and SM on Attitudes toward Affirmative Action.

	Form A	Form B
Party ID (High=Strong Republican)	-1.15** (.58)	-1.25** (.63)
Ideology (High=Conservative)	1.48* (.85)	1.43 (.99)
Female	.22 (.23)	-.34 (.33)
Age	.42 (.75)	.12 (.72)
Education	-1.11* (.63)	-1.68*** (.67)
Importance of Religion	.41 (.41)	.08 (.46)
Self-Monitoring	8.92** (4.41)	-3.55 (3.63)
Stereotype Endorsement	6.67* (3.57)	-.97 (2.78)
Self-Monitoring x Stereotype Endorsement	-15.60** (8.00)	5.72 (6.89)
/cut1	.19 (2.04)	-5.27 (1.99)
/cut2	1.45 (2.02)	-3.89 (1.96)
/cut3	3.20 (2.02)	-2.48 (1.95)
N	203	204
Pseudo-R^2	.10	.09

Coefficients are based on ordered logit. * = $p < .10$; ** = $p < .05$ *** = $p<.01$ (two-tailed test)

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