Self-monitoring reading of implicit contents and moral of self

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December, 2006

Abstract. The research concerns self-monitoring psychological processes and aims to verify two hypotheses: that there is difference in the theories on Self in HSM and LSM, and that the HSMs are more able implicit readers than the LSMs. The 18 item SMS was administered to 86 people, who had also undergone the implicit reading test. HSM and LSM were then thoroughly studied with further implicit reading trials and by means of dilemmas intended to explore their implicit theories of self. The HSMs read more implicits, in a livelier way, and with less fatigue. The dilemmas show differences in the structure of the self and above all in the moral conviction of self.

Keywords: Self-monitoring, implicit messages, implicit theory of self, moral of self, perception of situation, self-expression, self-presentation.
1. Introduction
Since Snyder’s proposal (1974) of the self-monitoring construct and of a scale to measure the differences among individuals in this sector, many research studies have been published on this subject. Some of them have been useful in order to clarify the meaning and value of the differences of individuals, revealing other correlated differences (regarding friendship relationships, sensitivity to advertisements, flexibility in leadership styles). Moreover, they contributed to explain differences and to trace what happens in the mind of individuals any time they are faced with the problem of regulating the behaviours linked to their selves in the different situations of their social lives. Self-monitoring psychological processes appears to be a stimulating field of investigation, leading to an intense and fruitful exchange of ideas and results. The following study is based on the idea that self-monitoring differences in individuals and the underlying psychological processes may be better understood by investigating social cognition styles, communication understanding and common beliefs on the self, in particular moral views.

2. Suppositions and research matters

2.1 Assumptions regarding the implicit theories of self
By means of what mental processes do individuals choose their self-monitoring behaviours? Snyder’s convincing analysis (1979) reveals that individuals in their social experiences ask themselves how to match their behaviours linked to the self with the situation they are experiencing, though expressing the question in different ways. The high self-monitoring individuals (HSM) ask themselves “who does this situation want me to be and how can I be that person?”, whereas low self-monitoring individuals” (LSM) question is “Who am I and how can be me in this situation?”. Hence two different strategies: self-presentation (imagining and acting the part of a suitable self) on the one hand and self-expression (letting a suitable behaviour out of the self one believes to have) on the other.

However, why are there individuals asking themselves the first question and others choosing the second one? This appears to be crucial in order to understand self-monitoring individual differences. It may be inferred that the kind of question depends
on the aim to adopt the consequent strategy. However, it seems certain that the urge for
self-presentation (i.e. the need to positively exert an influence on other people, in order
to obtain approval or to avoid disapproval (Arkin, 1981) as well as the need to reinforce
self-esteem (Leary & Kowalski, 1990)), and the desire to find confirmation of the self
one believes to have urging for self-expression (Snyder & Gangestad 1982; Swan &
Hill, 1982; Swan & Ely, 1984; Swan, 1985, 1987,1992) are very strong. Therefore,
there must be something that breaks the balance of motivations.

It appears reasonable to suppose that there is a cognitive element, a piece of knowledge
urging to ask either the first question or the second one. Self-conception certainly plays
a very important role. As anticipated by their behaviours and as shown by research
studies on the matter (Snyder, 1976, 1979; Sampson, 1978), HSM individuals have a
more flexible self-conception, which is more linked to situations and social
involvement, whereas the self-conception of LSM individuals appears more rigid, less
dependent on social context but linked to principles and mental dispositions. This is the
reason why HSM individuals prefer self-presentation, while LSM individuals feel at
ease with self-expression.

However, there is a second hypothesis. Everyone has got a certain knowledge of
themselves and a certain number of ideas on the self in general, as an object in the
world. Though being an ignorant philosopher and psychologist, each individual works
out an implicit theory of self, answering in a more or less precise way to the following
questions: What is self?, how is it made? what is it made of? etc. Implicit theories of
self may be crucial in breaking the balance of motivations and urging individuals either
for the first or the second question. For example, LSM individuals may think that self is
indivisible; therefore, if in one situation they present themselves in a different way from
usual, they believe they alter their selves. Conversely, HSM individuals could think that
self is divisible and if they present a different self on one occasion they believe they
always have another self, in the background, which is always coherent with what they
are. Moreover, LSM individuals might consider morally blameworthy the presentation
of a self other than the one they think to have, while HSM individuals may find it licit.

2.2 Hypothesis concerning the contingent perception of situations
Since it was first expressed, the self-monitoring concept has always implied a difference in signals perception providing information about the right thing to do in a certain situation (Snyder, 1974; Snyder & Monson, 1975). It is possible to extend this idea to the perception in self-monitoring: do individuals with different self-monitoring levels have different perceptions of the same situation? Can this explain behavioural differences?

We may suppose that before asking the questions Snyder indicated in his study, all individuals, no matter what their self-monitoring levels are, ask themselves another question: “Shall I care in this situation to adopt an adequate social behaviour?” In this case, there would be two different choices. First of all individuals choose whether and to which extent in that situation it is worth caring for behaviour control. Secondly, they decide how to rule their behaviours, i.e. whether they should adopt a self-presentation or a self-expression strategy.

Also the first choice may exert an influence on the self-monitoring differences. Individuals evaluate the situation they are living in relation to their objectives and decide whether it is worth caring for a careful control of behaviour. In case of a situation with peculiar characteristics (i.e., a meaningful, unusual, ambiguous situation) individuals go straight to the second stage and make a strategic choice. It is possible to think that self-monitoring differences are partly due to a different evaluation of social life situations. LSM individuals could have a more selective filter (i.e., they believe that very few situations are worth caring for a behaviour control) than HSM ones (in a large number of situations behaviour shall be controlled). Ostensibly, LSM individuals may maintain constant selves in various social situations just because they do not believe that in those situations there is a need for a higher control of their social behaviours.

What makes the filter more or less selective? Seemingly, it may be a different degree of importance attached to the objectives, as well as a different perception of situation. The second hypothesis appears more interesting. Indeed, social life situations may be perceived as more necessary or more contingent. The more they are taken for granted, since they come from pre-existing social rules and frames, the more we find them necessary. The more we perceive them as “open”, since they are defined on the spot by means of interaction and communication, the more they appear contingent. This means,
for example, that students may consider a conversation with a teacher nothing more than
an examination with its established rules or, on the other hand, they may believe that it
is a situation they may control, with mostly unpredictable developments. In the first
case cultural and social conditioning is stressed, while in the second emphasis is placed
on the possibility for an interaction of developing autonomously, thus creating social
and cultural events.

Situations easily appear peculiar, important and worth of a careful control of behaviour
to those who have a contingent perception. It is impossible to define from the beginning
whether a situation is relevant to one is own ends, therefore it is necessary to follow
carefully its developments. Conversely, if a situation is perceived as necessary,
individuals tend to underestimate the possibility that it may become important.
Therefore, many situations are not considered worth caring for a careful control of
behaviour. HSM individuals may tend to have a contingent perception, whereas LSM
individuals appear to have a necessary perception.

2.3 Hypothesis on the reading of implicit contents

Implicit contents exert a decisive influence on contingent developments of a social
situation, on the way it evolves during interaction and communication. Interlocutors
negotiate, exert pressure or manipulate their relations mainly by means of implicit
contents: this is their way of establishing exactly what kind of interaction or
communication they want to create, what subject they prefer to deal with, what
knowledge they consider as shared, etc. Everything appears important: presuppositions
or semantic implicits, which are relatively independent from the context, pragmatic
implicits which are strongly linked to context (Grice, 1975), indirect linguistic acts
(Searle, 1975), conversation implicits (Grice, 1975) and all other hidden messages
given by those communication activities which have been less investigated up to now,
such as for example the athematic (Di Giovanni, 1983).

There are many reasons why implicit messages appear more suitable than explicit ones
in order to define a situation immediately. In case the intention of transmitting a certain
content is hidden (as in the major part of pragmatic implicits), implicit meanings are a
useful tool to exert pressure, since nobody may be considered responsible for something
which has not been said. Therefore, we act in a smooth way, with no risk of reprimand,
and if everything is all right, it will appear that things have gone as they should do (Ducrot, 1972). Even when intention is stated openly (as normally happens in presuppositions), the implicit meaning is still protected by discussion: it is difficult that the partner in the conversation challenges it (Ducrot, 1972). Therefore, it is stronger and safer than the explicit meaning. Since the interlocutor can understand it only after an inferential activity, implicit meanings are an ideal tool to negotiate interaction and conversation developments: I can introduce an implicit meaning, wait and see whether my partner in the conversation notices it or not, without the risk of dangerous reactions. That’s how a good negotiator acts (Ghiglione, 1988).

Given the role of implicits in interactions and in communication, it is possible that those who are urged for an immediate perception of the situation are also good readers of implicits. In order to understand a situation immediately one has to be trained in inferring meanings. After a long training one may become a good reader of implicits. Hence, it seems possible to assume that HSM individuals are better reader of implicits than LSM individuals. Moreover, there could even be differences in the way implicit contents are inferred.

In order to understand an implicit content sometimes we simply use deductive reasoning: from one rule, normally regarding social life or communication, we deduce the content we believe valid in that specific case. More often we use abduction: we match a rule and a piece of information taken from the context or from the ongoing communication and reach our conclusions. Let us take an example from a comic film.

Householder: Where have you been?

Housemaid: In Las Vegas.

Householder: And my two dollars?

Housemaid: I bet them on the 25, as you told me to do.

The householder (wrongly) infers the implicit meaning that the housemaid has not won. He may have deduced it (it is very difficult to win betting only on one number/ she bet only on one number/ it is very difficult that she has won) or abducted it either from the context (normally if a person has won a lot of money, he/she is exultant/ she is not
exultant/she has not won) or from communication signals (if she had won, she would have not said “as you told me to do”/she said it/She has lost).

It is interesting to observe that the reasoning may be based either on background elements, thus resulting more fixed and predictable, or on foreground elements and become more variable and contingent. Rules may be taken from a background knowledge (you cannot win betting only on one number) or from a foreground one (if she had won, she would have not said “as you told me to do”). Information used in abduction, on the other hand, may concern the context (she is not exultant) or foreground communication signals (she said “as you told me to do”).

Those who tend to have a contingent perception of situations should tend to use foreground rules and information. This could be what leads them to consider situations contingent, thus creating a sort of loop of self-amplification. Therefore, the opposite should be true for those who tend to perceive necessary situations. Hence we come to another hypothesis: HSM individuals while reading implicit contents adopt procedures which imply mainly foreground information.

2.5 Research Questions

There are three questions: 1) Are there differences in the implicit theories of self between LSM and HSM individuals which may explain why they choose either self-expression or self-presentation? 2) Are HSM individuals better than LSM ones at reading implicit contents? 3) Do HSM individuals read implicit contents by adopting inferential procedures which involve mainly foreground information? These are only preliminary questions, which do not answer the questions we posed previously, but just start the investigation of the matter.

The question regarding the implicit theories of self is fairly generic. It is essential to specify the differences dealt with, which means that one must have an idea of the implicit theories of self and how to deal with them. It is possible to start from some questions concerning the self in philosophy and psychology. Such approach, however, wrongly presumes that common sense problems are similar to questions regarding critical thought, though offering a practical and clear pattern. This study, therefore, shall deal with the following question: as far as the above mentioned questions are concerned, what is the position of the individuals studied? We borrowed four questions
from the critical tradition: 1) Has self any substance or is it the synthesis of various experiences? Is it a person within a person or simply knowledge of self? 2) is self rigid or fluid? Is it stable or does it change easily? 3) is it unique or multiple? Do we have only one self or many selves depending on life experiences and circumstances? 4) Has self private or social origins? Do we know ourselves examining our state of mind or through information we gather participating in social life?

3. Our research study

3.1 Investigated sample

The Self-Monitoring Scale with 18 items (Snyder, 1986) has been applied to a sample made up of 86 persons (students of Communication Science at the University of Teramo, who had not followed psychology courses yet). The Italian version adopted is slightly different from others (Scilligo, 1990; Delle Grazie, 2003) and has been already used in studies similar to Snyder’s original one (1974).

Having filled in a form, all students were tested on the reading of implicit meanings. They only had few context elements and had to find out the largest number possible of implicit contents in a sentence.

* A couple are going out. The husband asks his wife "Did you forget the light on?" – What does it mean? Express all implicit meanings that cross your head.

3.2 Thorough comparison between LSM and HSM individuals

Later the students with the lowest scores (7 individuals who scored less than 5) and those with the highest ones (11 persons who scored more than 13) in the Self-Monitoring Scale were asked to be thoroughly examined for almost one hour. Everybody was happy to co-operate, some of them were curious (researchers had told them that the study dealt with a personality aspect relevant to social relationships and had agreed an appointment in order to examine the results), others were motivated by the credits the test granted for the psychology course (and this appeared legitimate, since they were actively involved in a research study and analysed its results).

Conversations were recorded. The interviewer had two assistants who did not take part in the conversation, but observed and took notice of the behaviours of interviewed
people and their interactions with the interviewer. The way individuals answered and participated in the conversation could give useful information, therefore it was necessary to check interference of the interviewer who could unintentionally suggest answers or put the students on the wrong track, even though he did not know the score of the person under examination.

In the first part of the conversation the examined individuals were asked again to read implicit contents. This time they were given “naked” statements, with no context elements and were to follow a different procedure. First of all they had to venture hypothesis on hidden meanings. Then, once they could not find any new meaning, they were required to ask questions in order to get useful information to verify their hypotheses. In the first part the test revealed the ability of the individuals to imagine hidden meanings. In the second part, examining the way they tried to explore the matter, it was possible to understand what they inferred and what knowledge they used. In case of doubt the interviewer could ask the examined person to explain his/her way of reasoning. Every student received four cards, each one with an explicit statement. Each card was handed out only after the conclusion of the previous task.

1) A asks : “Would you like a coffee?”
B answers “Coffee doesn’t make one sleep”
2) A says: “John is a machine”
3) A says: “Marc is on time”
4) A says: “The cellar is flooded”

The second part of the conversation was a thorough interview on implicit theory of self. One after the other four dilemmas were introduced. In each case the subject was asked to take position and encouraged to freely express opinions and ideas.

The partner’s dilemma

In order to make a love affair last, is it more important to choose carefully the partner, evaluating what kind of person he/she is, or try to create a harmonious and satisfactory relationship once you have chosen the partner?

Anna’s dilemma
Anna works in the advertisement sector and is a creative person. She receives the offer to become account executive in the same agency. She would earn more, but she is confused: she wonders whether she is cut out for public relations. Her boss insists, being convinced that she could succeed. Anna is afraid of yielding to pressure and of regretting it in the future. Is it better for her to take a rest and try to solve her problem alone or to start a brief trial period in the new task?

Luca’s dilemma

Luca starts thinking about the fact that when he goes to work he attaches great importance to the way he dresses and to the care of his body, while when he is at home he is very shabby. What is your opinion about Luca?

Antonio’s dilemma

Antonio is a commercial traveller. He goes and sees one of his clients, to whom he wants to sell absolutely one of his products. The client has got racist ideas, while Antonio is firmly anti-racist. The client starts talking against Islamic and non-EU people. What shall Antonio do?

As can be seen the above mentioned dilemmas are based on fundamental questions of self and give the possibility to understand what the individual under examination thinks about it. After the examination of the dilemmas, Anna’s dilemma (whether self may be understood in private or in the social life) is approached more directly:

- Describe a characteristic of yours.
- (answer)
- How can you say that it is so?

Then the interviewer asked the individual openly about the other questions posed by the dilemmas:

- Who are we? What we do in our lives or something that is inside ourselves?
- How can you best know yourself by retiring to private life or staying with other people?
- Are we always the same or do we change?
- Is being true to oneself the most important thing, even though it costs you dear?
4. Results

4.1 Self-monitoring and reading of implicit meanings

The scores of the sample under examination appear similar to those usually obtained by means of the Self-Monitoring Scale: a Gaussian distribution with the largest number of individuals in the central part (Fig. 1).

![Figure 1](image)

The performances during the test of reading of implicit contents were evaluated counting the number of new implicit meanings identified by each individual. In some cases there was the risk of mistakes due to the subjective judgement of those who processed data: indeed, it is not always easy to decide if two implicit meanings, expressed with different words, shall be considered identical or if there is a different shade of meaning implying another hidden meaning. Even though there were few doubts, in order to obtain the most objective evaluation, answers were examined by various independent evaluators, who did not know the Self-Monitoring Scale scores.

As appears in the scatter diagram there is a certain correlation between the Self-Monitoring Scale score and the number of implicit meanings found. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient is equal to .527. Comparing the performance of LSM and HSM individuals a difference appears evident (Fig. 2): the former are able to read an average of 0.6 implicit meanings (those found by this group ranged from 0 to 1),
whereas the latter are able to read an average of 3.2 (in the worst performances 2 implicit meanings were found, in the best ones 8). At a thorough examination HSM individuals appeared better at doing this task. Indeed, while LSM individuals proposed just 1 or 2 implicit meanings, HSM individuals were able to find even 8-10 implicit contents. Moreover, they appeared to be extremely livelier reader of implicit meanings. They were able to make suppositions more rapidly and gave the impression they used less mental resources. Conversely, LSM individuals appeared totally absorbed by their task. HSM individuals, on the other hand, were able to evaluate themselves while making suppositions: they played the part of an ideal critical interlocutor, managing the relation with the interviewer and his assistants and processing their own self-presentation. While the speeches of LSM individuals were full of hesitations and pauses, the HSM individuals’ ones were fluent and, in case of hesitations, these appeared to express an unrestrainable flow of thoughts which obliged them to rewordings.
There was also a great difference as for imagination between the two groups. LSM individuals appeared subservient, i.e. they tended not to go far from the most obvious hypothesis. HSM individuals, on the other hand, made the most original, sometimes imaginative and funny suppositions. They adopted the following strategy: they draw up scenarios and made up stories in which characters said the sentences they had been given.

The comparison of the performances of the two groups highlighted also a different degree of curiosity and fun in carrying out the task. LSM individuals, once they had made one supposition, were satisfied with it and there was little likelihood that they would make a second one, unless they were strongly encouraged by the interviewer. Some of them clearly showed to be bored. HSM individuals, on the contrary, were not able to stop making suppositions and had troubles complying with the rules of the interview: they went on making supposition about the implicit meanings of one statement even when they were verifying the hypotheses already expressed, prolonging the interview, sometimes until the interviewer stopped them.

In order to understand these differences let us compare the hypotheses about one sentence expressed by an individual who scored 17 and by a student whose SMS score was 4.

A ask: “Would you like a coffee?”. B answers: “Coffee doesn’t make one sleep”.

The individual who scored 17
“It depends. It isn’t necessarily so. Perhaps he/she could or could not want to have a coffee. I mean, it may be that B says that coffee does not make one sleep, but nevertheless he/she wants a coffee. [...] Well, I don’t know... It could be a suggestion that B makes to A, maybe A takes too many cups of coffee, so B suggests A that coffee doesn’t make one sleep, or that it is late, therefore it is better for A to take no coffee [...]. There is also the possibility that B says “Coffee doesn’t make one sleep” because he/she wants to refuse the offer. Maybe he/she means “It’s no use trying to convince me: I will resist”. Hence the answer “Coffee doesn’t make one sleep”, in order to stress that... that there is no use, he/she will never accept [...] Perhaps B’s answer is due to the fact that the evening before he/she had had a coffee too late [...] and therefore he/she did not sleep. So B means he/she does not want to make the same mistake. Maybe A has some economic difficulties [...] therefore he/she cannot afford to offer repeatedly a coffee to B [...] who says “coffee doesn’t make one sleep” in order to refuse A’s offer, fearing he/she would spend more than he/she can afford [...] If they are in a café downtown, where coffee is very expensive B says “coffee doesn’t make one sleep” meaning “do not waste so much money for a coffee in this café, let us go to another one”, he/she means “let’s go somewhere else”, or “forget it”. If coffee is bad for B, he/she may say it to make a good impression with someone he/she knows, maybe A knows B well, they are relatives [...]. Yes, maybe B likes coffee and drinks coffee even at night, but on that occasion, in order to make a good impression .... In order to prevent A from thinking that B is causing harm to himself/herself, the latter says “Coffee doesn’t make one sleep”

[The interviewer hands out another sentence]

Individual with SMS score 4

No, he/she wouldn’t

[After 5 seconds of silence the interviewer asks “Are there any other hypotheses that come into your mind?”]. Again, 13 seconds of silence, then the individual firmly answers: “No”].

It is interesting to point out that individuals performed better in the interviews than in the written task. This is more evident with HSM individuals: the number of implicit meanings found raised considerably and, in comparison with the interviews, there was
not the same lively imagination underlying the answers given in the written test. It seems that for HSM individuals the social task makes things easier.

In the following part of the test regarding the reading of implicit contents, i.e. when students were encouraged to ask information in order to verify the suppositions made, further differences were highlighted. Individuals with low scores in the SMS were almost always concerned with the context (What is the job of the speaker? What is his/her personality like? Is the situation taking place at his/her workplace? etc.). Only rarely did they ask questions about communication signals (what is the expression on his/her face? Is he/she joking? Is he/she disdainful? etc.). Individuals with a high score were more balanced in making their questions both about context and communication. While investigating about the context, they asked questions involving a less stereotyped view of the context itself, more linked to circumstances and to social relationships. For example, they did not ask simply “Is Marco usually on time?”, they asked also “Did A and Marco bet on Marco’s punctuality?” or “Did they have an appointment on that day? And why?”.

There is another striking difference. Individuals with a low score often showed they had no need to gather information in order to confirm their hypotheses: the interviewer had to encourage them to ask questions. Such indolence, if it is not due to other reasons (e.g. lack of understanding of the task, shyness, etc.) indicates that the individual used an inferential deduction. Unlike abduction, deduction does not need empirical proof. For example, the individual perhaps has concluded that “Coffee does not make one sleep” means “I don’t want any coffee” since if you say that “Coffee does not make one sleep” almost certainly you don’t want any coffee/ B said “Coffee does not make one sleep” / almost certainly B doesn’t want any coffee. Given certain conditions, there can only be one conclusion and there is no need to look for empirical proof. The interviewer can easily find out if indolence is due to deduction, by asking for example “How can you be so sure of your supposition?”. Individuals with low scores in the SMS often used deduction, while individuals with high scores always used abduction.

It is interesting to observe that in order to use deduction in cases similar to the above mentioned one, you have to force your knowledge of the situation and assume a vision of the world in which necessity predominates on contingency. The introductory terms in
the reasoning have been inverted. If we follow a correct description of the experience, the preliminary condition shall be: if you don’t want any coffee you often say “Coffee does not make one sleep”. Given this condition inference would be abductive, rather than deductive, and the individual would need information to confirm the hypothesis.

4.2 Self-monitoring and implicit theory of self

The answers to the partner’s dilemma are mainly conditioned by two factors: the belief that self may be modified, i.e. self is fluid and malleable, and the belief that it is possible to know self, i.e how deep you can know the self of another person without having a deep relation with that person. Those who are inclined to believe that it is better to evaluate in advance usually believe that it is difficult to change self, that you may have a sufficient knowledge of it without having a deep relation. Those who are inclined to believe that it is better to create a harmonious relation may have various reasons: they may believe that self is malleable during a relationship or that self is little malleable, but all you have to do is venturing into a relation, since self cannot be known in advance.

Both in the low self-monitoring group and in the high self-monitoring one there were individuals inclined to choose “it is better to evaluate in advance” and others who preferred “it is better to create a harmonious relation”. In both groups there were people who saw self as rigid and knowable, others who considered it fluid and malleable and some others who believed it rigid and unknowable.

However, those who believed in rigid self did not share the same opinions. Indeed, among them there were differences due to their levels of self-monitoring. LSM individuals tended to see self as a whole, while HSM individuals as a nucleus clad with an exterior shell. The former believed that rigid self means “you cannot change an individual’s personality”, the latter “there is a core you cannot change”. There were also differences among those who believed that self is rigid and impossible to be known. In order to explain the fact that you cannot know self, LSM individuals were inclined to say that you need a lot of time in order to know a person, while HSM individuals said that it is difficult to go deeper than the exterior shell of appearances. During the interview a HSM individual gave a clear explanation of social blindness caused by appearances.
You will never know if a person is truly what he/she appears to be or not. Therefore, it is better to get far from appearances and try to create a relationship, since this is the way to understand – at least partly, since you will never know how a person truly is – if a person is really reliable, if you can trust him/her… No matter how good is your evaluation, you will never know how a person truly is.

As regards Anna’s dilemma, everybody – regardless of their self-monitoring levels - answered that it is better a trial period in the new task. As resulted from the discussion and the answers to the direct questions on the subject (Describe a characteristic of yours/How can you say that you are so? How can you best know yourself, by retiring to private life or staying with other people?), the individuals under examination were all convinced that social life is far more important in order to know yourself than the private self-examination. Regardless of their self-monitoring levels, some of them stressed the importance of examining one’s own social behaviour, others of social confrontation while some other individuals attached more importance to the impression your interlocutor seems to have about you. As expected (Lippa, 1976; Ickes & Barnes, 1977; Garland & Beard, 1978), to the same question “Describe a characteristic of yours” HSM individuals frequently said they were likeable, while the most frequent answer of LSM individuals was “shyness”.

Anna’s dilemma, however, highlighted one difference, though very little, in the way they intended knowledge acquisition of self. LSM individuals seemed inclined to believe that knowledge of self means that you better understand your self, while HSM individuals believe that it means to know something new on yourself, i.e. to understand an aspect of the self which is still unknown. It seems that the former believe that self may consolidate, whereas the latter think that it may grow. Such difference is highlighted by motivations given in order to justify the fact that they chose “the trial period”. Here follow two examples:

Individual with score 17

A certain situation may help you discover abilities you were not aware of.

Individual with score 2

She should try, so she could see that she can manage it
Luca’s dilemma concerns the problem whether self is unique or multiple. In this case no differences which are worth mentioning were found comparing LSM and HSM individuals. Indeed, in both groups it is possible to find individuals believing that Luca’s selves (the careful and the shabby one) are both true and individuals believing, on the contrary, that the shabby self is the true one, the first one being only appearance. Someone thinks that it is possible to multiply self, in order to have various selves to be used in various situations of social life. On the other hand, there is also some other people who believe the only thing you can do in order to adapt to situations is to produce selves of appearance, which can be put before the true self, which remains always unique.
4.3 The moral of self

Antonio’s dilemma allows an exploration of the moral aspect of the implicit theories of self, encouraging individuals to say what they think about moral questions linked to self (what is the good self? How should self be in order to be good and right? What should behaviour be like in order to have a good self?). Here we found the most striking differences between LSM and HSM.

Individuals with a low score thought that Antonio should have replied, even though this meant he had to renounce to sell the product. Someone believed that within certain limits Antonio could try to get round the subject. Some individuals pointed out that in case he did not sell the product, it would have been the client’s responsibility: “If the client uses his/her mind in doing business, he/she should exclude personal opinions”. On the contrary, individuals with high scores tended to say that Antonio should either get round the subject or agree with the client, keeping in mind his objective (the sale of the product). Their opinions appeared more articulated. Generally they were more careful in specifying details of the situation (is he/she only a client or also a friend? Is he/she an occasional client that Antonio will probably never see again or not?) and in case they found particular reasons (the client is a friend of Antonio’s) they used to plan optimisation strategies (first the sale and then the discussion as friends or Antonio should find a compromise or use his eloquence in order to make the client think about what he/she is saying without risking too much).

It seems that LSM individuals have a moral of principles and tend to be coherent, while HSM individuals have a moral of consequences and are not worried with coherence. But this is not true. Interviews showed that HSM individuals had moral principles and cared for coherence: some of them even showed a sort of moral rigor and a strong belief in interior purity. However, if both groups give importance to principles and coherence, how can we explain the differences of their moral choices in dilemmas such as Antonio’s dilemma?

It depends on how they understand the relation means-ends. Individuals with low scores were convinced that in order to be coherent you have to be true to what you are, avoiding being influenced by situations and producing an exterior self which differs from the interior one in order to take advantage of it. Their idea of coherence may be
summed up as follows: “I do not allow the world to change me” and “I am transparent”. Conversely, individuals with high scores thought they could be coherent without having to resist to outside pressures and caring for transparency. How did they do that?

They adopted two solutions. Some of them – we called them unscrupulous – adopted different selves in various social life situations with a “director” which was not well characterized. As regards Luca’s dilemma they thought that self is multiple and as far as the partner’s dilemma was concerned they thought self is fluid. One of the interviewed individuals clearly explained how “unscrupulous” people maintain their coherence.

*At work you have to try to leave out personal opinions and just think how to reach your objective […]. There is what you are at work, what you are at home for your family, for your friends and then…. for other people and you are always behind, I mean, as a director.*

There is coherence, since each self has got its own logic and the director in the background knows them all and directs them.

The second group, made up of those we called *inflexible*, thought that self was unique and rigid. Their strategy was to distinguish a deep coherent nucleus and an external fluctuating halo, made up of ghosts of self to be produced in different situations. One of the interviewed persons clearly explained this theory:

*I believe that you always have the same deep self and a superficial self, that is an intimate part, which is yours: you can choose to whom you want to show it, if you want to do that, when and how you want to show it. Then there is another part you manage according to situations, to what you have to do, to possibilities and contingencies.*

Here follows a schema of the structure of self as explained by unscrupulous and inflexible individuals (Fig.3).

5. Conclusions and discussion

This research study aims at being just a preliminary exploration. It does not produce definitive answers to the research questions. Indeed, there is the need for more confirmations and deeper investigations. Moreover, it does not confirm the initial hypotheses. However, many elements of a certain significance have been found.
The implicit theories of self of LSM and HSM individuals mainly differ as far as the moral side is concerned. All other differences which were highlighted by this research are nuances or they do not appear to be of particular importance in order to understand individual differences of self-monitoring. Some of them, e.g. the different way of imagining the structure of self of the two moral types of HSM individuals, appear linked to the moral of self. In the light of the results we obtained the hypothesis of implicit theories of self should be changed: indeed, it is not the implicit theories of self on the whole that urge either for self-expression or self-presentation, but an aspect of them which is made up of the moral of self.

However, even reformulating the hypothesis, we found no confirmations. The differences we found in the moral of self were not the cause of self-monitoring behaviour, but seem to be rationalisations, self-justifications of such behaviour. There may also be a circular interaction: behaviour – moral – behaviour. Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose also a parallel development of self-monitoring behaviour and of the moral of self in its development.

This research study also highlighted that LSM and HSM individuals both have to face the problem of coherence and that they simply adopt different strategies to be coherent. Moreover, HSM individuals may adopt two different strategies, involving a different idea of the structure of self. The fact that the different morals of self we found may represent different strategic answers to the same problem (the problem of coherence), which has particular significance in the social life of each individual, strengthens the idea that morals of self are something more than simple rationalizations of behaviours. Each person, even as a child, has to face the problem of conciliating coherence and social pressures and has to find a solution; this imply choosing how to do that and develop a moral thought on this subject. It is difficult to know what comes first: doing or thinking?.

This research study has confirmed the initial hypothesis regarding the reading of implicit meanings: HSM individuals are better at doing it than LSM individuals and they tend to adopt inferences based mainly on foreground information. One could reply that HSM individuals usually perform better thanks to social facilitations: since they are inclined to self-presentation, they free their imagination and obtain best results in the
performance. The social facilitation context, however, mirrors natural situations where it is useful to read implicit contents. We do not want to show that HSM individuals have higher cognitive capacities in reading implicit meanings, but that their performances in the actual social life are better. The reason why they perform better is another question. The fact that HSM individuals perform better even in the written test suggests a higher ability regardless of social facilitations. Elements confirming this supposition can be found also in their behaviours during the interview. In particular strategies adopted by HSM individuals appeared effective as far as the reading of implicit meanings is concerned (drawing up scenarios, making up stories and evaluating themselves on the way).

However, it does not suffice to say that HSM individuals are better at reading implicit meanings in order to confirm the more general hypothesis of contingent perception of situations. During the tests concerning the reading of implicit contents before researchers many suggestive clues were found, such as the tendency to draw up scenarios and make up stories and scenes in their own minds, to gather information regarding the context linked to circumstances and to the interpersonal relations; moreover, it was also pointed out that HSM individuals, unlike LSM ones, did not adopt deductive inferences. It appears interesting that in theory there is a certain congruence between the kind of perception of situations and the moral of self both in LSM and HSM individuals.

Acknowledgements
We thank M. Snyder for his kind support on the article

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