Self-Monitoring Boosts Relationship Conflicts, But Why?: A Mediation Analysis on Japanese Undergraduate Students

1. Research Objective. Relationship conflicts (interpersonal tension, annoyance, and animosity) in class discussions can prevent effective learning by lowering motivation and interfering with concentration. Therefore, it would be useful to determine how to avoid such conflicts. Self-monitoring (personal traits to manage behaviors and impressions consistent with the demands of other people) has been found to decrease relationship conflicts as it enables people to see themselves from others' perspectives. However, the quantitative data collected from Japanese undergraduate students showed a positive association between self-monitoring and relationship conflicts. This study investigated the factors that play a mediating role in counter-intuitive relationships. 2. Method and Results. Data were collected by questionnaire from 187 Japanese undergraduate students (48.1% male; mean age = 19.65 years). The results of the bootstrapping mediation analyses showed that task conflicts (disagreements over topics due to a difference of opinion) in class discussions and work value orientation, which emphasizes hierarchy, significantly mediated the relationship between self-monitoring and relationship conflicts. 3. Conclusion and Discussion. Students with a higher level of self-monitoring were found to more often notice differences of opinions during class discussions, which meant that they tended to experience more task conflicts, which became relationship conflicts after a certain point. The participants with self-monitoring personalities were observed to place greater importance on hierarchy, because in well-defined hierarchy, people with self-monitoring personalities could easily understand other's expectations and thus feel comfortable. Rigid-hierarchy adherents tended to be stubborn and to compel others to obey the rules, which led to relationship conflicts.