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Effects of faking on self-deception and impression management scales

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Abstract

To investigate the effects of self-presentation on the construct validity of the impression management (IM) and self-deceptive enhancement (SDE) scales of the Balanced Inventory of Social Desirable Responding Version 7 (BIDR-7), 155 participants completed the IM and SDE scales combined with standard instructions. IM and SDE were also presented with three self-presentation instructions: fake good, Agency, and Communion instructions. In addition, self- and social desirability ratings were assessed for a list of 190 personality-trait words. It could be shown that not only IM, but also SDE can be faked if participants are appropriately instructed to do so. In addition, personality-trait words related to IM were rated as socially more desirable than those related to SDE. BIDR scales were more highly related in the faking conditions than in the standard instruction condition. In addition, faked BIDR scores were not related to undistorted BIDR scores. These results implicate that both SDE and IM are susceptible to faking like any other personality questionnaire, and that both SDE and IM loose their original meaning under faking. Therefore, at least under faking social desirability scales do not seem to provide additional diagnostic information beyond that derived from personality scales.
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1. Introduction

The question of whether and how responding affects scores of personality questionnaires is an important question especially for applied settings, where conscious deception in questionnaires is

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rather problematic. Therefore, the desire for a scale, which could assess conscious deception or impression management is understandable. One of the instruments, which were developed for the assessment of conscious and unconscious deception is the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1984, 1991, 1998b), which has been enjoying great popularity since its beginnings. However, by looking at the literature of different research areas, the application of the BIDR as an instrument for the assessment of conscious and unconscious deception leads to results frequently contradicting theoretical predictions and thereby causing a lot of confusion. The main aim of the present study is to question the construct validity of the BIDR, and to offer an alternative explanation for a number of confusing and inconsistent results concerning this questionnaire.

1.1. The construct validity of the BIDR scales

1.1.1. Differences in the kind of deception of SDE and IM

Since the early work of Sackeim and Gur (1978) as well as Paulhus (1984), it is a widely held belief that two facets of socially desirable responding can be distinguished, which are typically described as self-deceptive enhancement (SDE) and impression management (IM). As mentioned above, one prominent instrument for the assessment of SDE and IM is the BIDR. The theoretical rationale for the application of the BIDR is deeply grounded in the assumption that individuals with high scores in SDE actually believe in their overly positive self-reports, whereas individuals with high scores in IM consciously dissemble, especially under public conditions (e.g. Paulhus, 1984, 1991). Thus, according to this view, facets of social desirable responding are mainly distinguishable by the kind of deception that means conscious vs. unconscious deception.

Indeed, there seems to be some evidence that the IM scale actually measures other-deception or conscious distortion in order to impress an audience. There are a number of studies demonstrating that the IM scale is particularly responsive to situational demands for positive self-presentation. For example, in a comparison of six social desirability measures, the IM scale showed the largest increase from private to public conditions (e.g., Paulhus, 1984). In addition, the IM scale is more susceptible to the manipulation of faking instructions than the SDE scale (e.g., Paulhus, Bruce, & Trapnell, 1995; Holden, Starzyk, McLeod, & Edwards, 2000; Reid-Seiser & Fritzsche, 2001).

Despite this evidence, other researchers questioned the validity of the Paulhus scales. For example, Derakshan and Eysenck (1999) showed that neither self- nor other-deception assessed with an older 10 items version of the BIDR (Paulhus, 1984) were related to changes in social desirability scores assessed with the Marlowe–Crowne scale and an anxiety scale from a standard to a "bogus-pipeline" condition. In addition, research on self-esteem and narcissism has shown that high self-esteem and narcissism are related to positive self-presentation especially under public conditions (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). At the same time self-esteem and narcissism are positively correlated with SDE, and not with IM (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Paulhus, 1998a). Therefore, it is very probable that SDE is related to behavioral impression management strategies, too.

Finally, in a recent paper Paulhus (2002) admits that both SDE and IM scores could be manipulated when the scales are combined with appropriate instructions (unpublished data), which would imply that not only IM but also SDE scores are susceptible to conscious distortion.

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