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Response patterns for the identification of fakers: Detecting drifting dissimulators☆

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ABSTRACT

In this research, we provide a simple, novel operationalization of a method for identifying fakers on a self-report measure of personality. This operationalization is applied to six distinct samples of experimentally instructed fakers (total $N = 1360$) who completed the NEO-FFI under varying instructions, modes of test administration and answering, and response time constraints. Based on quantifying individual item response patterns that indicate changes in response positivity over items, the new index of faking demonstrated medium to large effect sizes for identifying faking. Further, this index generally demonstrated added value relative to a standard validity scale for accounting for variability in faking.

1. Introduction

Self-report can be a convenient, accurate technique for assessing personality. Although this method can provide veridical information in many contexts (e.g., Holden & Passey, 2010), disruptions to the validity of self-report exist and include the threats of socially desirable responding, in general, and faking, in particular. Faking/impression management on self-report personality assessment is not uncommon in some circumstances and its effect can be substantial (Holden & Book, 2012). For example, within employment contexts, faking among job applicants has been estimated to range between 30% and 50% (Griffith, Chmielowski, & Yoshita, 2007) or between 15% and 40% (Arthur, Glaze, Villado, & Taylor, 2010). Moreover, other research has found large effect sizes for impression management, for example, with job seekers applying to a property management firm (Rosse, Stecher, Miller, & Levin, 1998).

Concerns about faking on self-report measures have a long history (e.g., Steinmetz, 1932) with indices for the detection of faking arguably dating back to Humm (1944) and the Humm-Wadsworth Temperament Scale. Over the decades when issues of faking have been present, standard practice has been to include, in the assessment, validity scales such as the Marlowe Crowne Social Desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) or the Impression Management scale of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1999). Notwithstanding the merits of these measures (e.g., Lambert, Arbuckle, & Holden, 2016), these scales have limitations; they do not with perfect accuracy identify fakers, they may themselves be subject to faking, and they may be susceptible to personality trait variance (Connelly & Chang, 2016). As a result of these potential shortcomings, other procedures for detecting fakers have been created. For example, the examination of item response times has become a promising method for identifying respondents who are distorting their self-presentation (Holden & Lambert, 2015). Nevertheless, despite response times having incremental validity relative to standard validity scales for detecting dissimulation (Holden & Hibbs, 1995), the identification of fakers remains imperfect and a continuing demand exists for developing additional, valid and incrementally valid procedures for detecting dissimulators. The current research implements a novel operationalization of a method (Holden & Book, 2009) for identifying fakers and looks to demonstrate its merits in terms of accuracy and in terms of improving on an existing, standard validity scale.

In previous research, Holden and Book (2009) applied hybrid Rasch-latent class modeling to Paulhus' (1999) Impression Management scale items in order to uncover patterns of responding associated with fakers. They identified two classes of respondents who tended to become either more positive or more negative in responding over time. Whereas the class of respondents associated with becoming more positive over time was primarily comprised of individuals who were experimentally instructed to fake so as to maximize the chances of obtaining a goal (i.e., fake good), the type of respondent who became more negative

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Table 1
Participant information for each sample.

	Source	*N*	Sample	Gender	Mean age in years (*SD*)
Sample 1	Holden and Book (2009)	347	First-year undergraduate student volunteers	269 women, 78 men	19.39 (3.68)
Samples 2, 3, & 4	Holden (2005)	420	First-year undergraduate student volunteers	347 women, 73 men	19.03 (2.50)
Sample 5	Lambert et al. (2016) – Study 1	293	Undergraduates	227 women, 66 men	18.82 (1.04)
Sample 6	Lambert et al. (2016) – Study 2	300	Undergraduates	243 women, 57 men	19.22 (1.79)

over time was predominated by those instructed to minimize the chances of obtaining that goal (i.e., fake bad). Interestingly, a third class of respondents who responded consistently over time were those individuals who were given standard instructions for completing a scale.

In the present research, we operationalize Holden and Book's (2009) technique by indexing through a Pearson product-moment correlation the similarity of responding between an individual respondent's answers and patterns of responding that are associated with standard responding and with dissimulation. Then, using this similarity index, we classify respondents in terms of honest or faked answering. Here, for a set of six samples that have variations in experimental faking instructions and modes of administration, we apply our operationalization to an inventory (i.e., the NEO Five-Factor Inventory; Costa & McCrae, 1992) that is distinct from the measure used by Holden and Book (2009). As such, we extend the operationalization to a new inventory in order to demonstrate that the novel technique and its underlying basis are not inventory-specific but generalize across measures and across response formats. Further, in investigating the merit of this operationalization, we evaluate both classification accuracy and the added value of this operationalization relative to using a standard validity scale.

1.1. Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that using an index of response pattern similarity, individuals could be correctly classified as honest responders or fakers. Further, it was hypothesized that the use of the response pattern similarity index would have added value relative to using a standard validity scale.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were from 6 different samples (see Table 1).

2.2. Materials

Participants in all samples completed the 60-item NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992) and the 20-item Impression Management (IM) scale of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1999). The psychometric merits of the NEO-FFI are well documented (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992; Fetvadjiev & van de Vijver, 2015). For example, NEO-FFI scales display prominent associations with job performance indicators (Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese, & Thoresen, 2004). The IM scale assesses a "… form of dissimulation known as faking or lying" (Paulhus, 1999, p. 9). The measurement strengths of this scale have been demonstrated in terms of scale score reliability, validity, and the ability to detect faking (Holden & Fekken, in press).

2.3. Procedure

For all samples, participants provided informed consent and were subsequently randomly assigned to either 1 of 3 (Samples 1, 5, and 6) or 4 (Samples 2, 3, and 4) instructional conditions. Each participant was to imagine, when responding, that they were undergoing screening for military induction. When there were three instructional conditions, participants were given 1) standard instructions (i.e., asked to circle the answer best corresponding to their agreement or disagreement), 2) asked to fake to maximize their chances of being inducted into the military (i.e., fake good), or 3) asked to fake to minimize their chances of military induction (i.e., fake bad). When a fourth instructional condition was present, participants who had been randomly assigned to that condition were 4) asked to answer as honestly as possible.

Samples 1, 5, and 6 were warned of the presence of checks for faking that they were instructed to avoid. In addition, Samples 5 and 6 were offered a monetary incentive. They were informed that for every 25 participants, $50 would be awarded to the participant who followed the instructions most closely and thus was farthest from activating any validity check.

Sample 1 had stimulus administration using paper-and-pencil material, Samples 2, 3, and 4 had stimulus material read to them via

Table 2
Means (standard deviations) on the Impression Management scale by sample and instructional condition.

	Instructional condition						
Group	Standard instructions (S)	Answer honestly (H)	Fake good (FG)	Fake bad (FB)	*F*-ratio	Partial η^2	Tukey's HSD
Sample 1	6.19 (3.26)	Not applicable	8.93 (5.09)	4.94 (4.56)	25.24***	0.13	FG > S, FB
Sample 2	5.94 (3.34)	7.48 (3.66)	12.66 (4.24)	3.32 (4.20)	36.00***	0.44	FG > S, H > FB
Sample 3	6.54 (3.38)	6.73 (3.84)	12.08 (4.93)	3.62 (4.88)	23.40***	0.34	FG > S, H > FB
Sample 4	6.51 (3.81)	7.99 (3.76)	11.18 (4.97)	3.89 (4.36)	17.91***	0.28	FG > S, H > FB
Sample 5	6.43 (3.49)	Not applicable	12.57 (4.17)	2.78 (3.10)	182.51***	0.56	FG > S > FB
Sample 6	5.85 (3.53)	Not applicable	10.98 (5.10)	2.52 (2.67)	119.71***	0.45	FG > S > FB

*** $p < 0.001$.