An examination of the factorial dimensionality of the Marlowe Crowne Social Desirability Scale

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ABSTRACT

Using a sample of 555 undergraduate students, the present study examined the factorial dimensionality of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS). In particular, using confirmatory factor analysis, the study explored the goodness of fit of both one and two factor models, the latter of which were based upon the work of Paulhus and Reid (1989). Findings indicate that while both one and two factor models demonstrate many features of adequate fit, the two factor model emerged as superior. The study concludes with a discussion of the meaning of the results and suggestions for future research.

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1. Introduction

Socially desirable responding, broadly defined in terms of a person responding to a test in a manner that he/she feels will present them in a positive light (i.e., faking good), has been a concern in the area of personality measurement since at least the 1950s (e.g., Edwards, 1953, 1957). Since that time, and despite some indications that social desirability (SD) may be better understood as a substantive personality trait rather than a problematic response style (e.g., Kurtz, Tarquini, & Iobst, 2008; McCrae, 1986; McCrae & Costa, 1983) considerable effort has been given to developing means of identifying and minimizing the impact of SD on both the validity of test scores and on how scores from differing tests empirically relate. The most common of these means has involved the creation of measures specifically designed to quantify the extent to which a person responds in a socially desirable way.

While there are a variety of instruments available that claim to assess SD, the one that has found most regular usage in research is the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS, Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). The MCSDS is a 33-item instrument which uses a true/false response format that was designed to assess social desirability defined as need for approval (i.e., a person's level of approval seeking and avoidance of disapproval). As noted by Beret-vas, Meyers, and Leite (2002), the MCSDS has been used in over 1000 studies since its publication.

Since the creation of the MCSDS, research has been done to not only examine the psychometric properties of the test, but to also more rigorously identify the conceptual nature of SD as a construct. At present, there is a fair amount of discrepancy in the literature with regard to whether or not SD in general, and what is measured by the MCSDS in particular, is best understood as a one, two, or multi-dimensional construct (e.g., Fischer & Fick, 1993; Leite & Beretvas, 2005; Loo & Thorpe, 2000; Paulhus, 1984; Ramanaiah, Schill, & Lock, 1977; Seol, 2007; Tatman, Swogger, Love, & Cook, 2009).

Despite the lack of compelling empirical support for any specific dimensional model, a two factor model of SD with one dimension relating to deliberate efforts at presenting one's self in a positive manner to others and the second involving self-denial of one's faults and limitations as a person has essentially become accepted by researchers (Damarin & Messick, 1965; Millham & Kellogg, 1980; Paulhus & Reid, 1989, 1991; Sackeim & Gur, 1978; Wiggins, 1964). While various names have been given to these dimensions including self versus other deception (Millham & Kellogg, 1980; Sackeim & Gur, 1978), the most widely known and accepted names presently are impression management and self-deceptive enhancement (Paulhus, 1984). In fact, next to the MCSDS, Paulhus' two factor model and its associated measure, called the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1988), has become one of the most commonly used in the literature (e.g., Lanyon & Carle, 2007; Li & Bagger, 2006, 2007; Li & Reb, 2009).

Out of the recognition that the MCSDS has been, and essentially continues to be, the measure of choice for most researchers, Paul-

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hus has attempted to determine if the MCSDS demonstrates a two factor structure consistent with his model which could then be used for the development of subscales. In particular, in an unpublished study, Paulhus and Reid (1989) factor analyzed the items of the MCSDS along with self deceptive enhancement and impression management subscale scores from the BIDR and found evidence in support of separate impression management and self-deception components (see Table 1). While their results appear somewhat promising, to our knowledge, no one has attempted to use Paulhus and Reid's findings to test the fit of different dimensional models to the MCSDS, including most notably Paulhus' (1984) two-factor model. We surmised that if evidence in support of a two factor model could be obtained, then Paulhus and Reid's original intent of devising subscales for the MCSDS could be more rigorously pursued by investigators.

In light of this, the purpose of the present study was to examine the factor dimensionality of the MCSDS. More specifically, this study aimed at using confirmatory factor analytic procedures to determine if a one versus two factor structure best fits the MCSDS. Given the findings of Paulhus and Reid (1989), it was expected that a two factor structure would demonstrate better fit than a one-factor structure.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 555 students at a mid-sized university located in Southern Ontario, Canada. The study included 391 females and 164 males. Participants' ages ranged between 17 and 51 with a mean age of 21.00 (SD = 4.37) for the total sample.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960)

The MCSDS is designed to be a measure of non-pathological socially desirable response tendencies. The MCSDS consists of 33 true–false items that describe acceptable but improbable behaviors as well as unacceptable, probable behaviors. Crowne and Marlowe (1960) reported that the MCSDS demonstrated an internal consistency of .88 and a 1 month test–retest correlation of .89.

2.2.2. The Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1988)

The BIDR is a 40 item instrument containing two 20-item subscales designed to measure a two-factor model of social desirability which operationalizes the construct in terms of impression management (IM) and self-deceptive enhancement (SDE). Impression management can be understood as response distortion aimed at improving one's impression on other people. SDE, alternatively, can be understood as response distortion involving the need for favorable self-presentation. Internal consistency alphas for the total scale, SDE, and IM range from .68 to .86. Five week test–retest correlations of .69 and .65 have been found for SDE and IM, respectively (Paulhus, 1988).

Table 1
Factor loadings from the two factor solution reported in Paulhus and Reid (1989) (*N* = 196).

BIDR scale/MCSDS item	Factor one	Factor two
BIDR impression management	.60	.23
19—I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget	.69	−.06
15—There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone	.61	.21
33—I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings	.53	.13
9—If I could get into a movie without paying and be sure I was not seen, I would probably do it	.49	−.06
21—I am always courteous, even to people that are disagreeable	.45	−.10
24—I would never think of letting someone else be punished for my wrongdoings	.45	.10
30—I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me	.44	.22
16—I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake	.40	.28
22—At times I have really insisted on having things done my own way	.39	.14
4—I have never intensely disliked someone	.39	−.12
13—No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener	.37	.16
14—I can remember "playing sick" to get out of something	.35	.17
2—I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble	.34	.25
29—I have almost never felt the urge to tell someone off	.30	.27
32—I sometimes think when people have a misfortune, they only got what they deserved	.29	−.12
31—I have never felt that I was punished without cause	.28	.14
27—I never make a long trip without checking the safety of my car	.22	−.11
25—I never resent being asked to return a favor	.18	.17
23—There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things	.17	.14
8—My table manners at home are as good as when I eat out in a restaurant	.16	.13
7—I am always careful about my manner of dress	.12	.08
BIDR self-deceptive enhancement	−.01	.63
5—On occasion I have had doubts about my ability to succeed in life	−.19	.62
10—On a few occasions, I have given up doing something because I thought too little of my ability	.00	.61
28—There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others	.09	.53
11—I like to gossip at times	.18	.48
6—I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way	.25	.42
1—Before voting, I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates	−.09	.39
12—There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right	.27	.38
3—It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work if I am not encouraged	.12	.33
26—I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own	.24	.30
18—I don't find it particularly difficult to get along with loudmouthed, obnoxious people	.03	.25
17—I always try to practice what I preach	.15	.24
20—When I don't know something, I don't mind at all admitting it	.00	.23

Note. MCSDS items are listed in order of size of factor loading going from highest to lowest. BIDR variables were included by Paulhus and Reid to serve as marker variables in the analysis.