



## Two mechanisms of biased responding account for the association between religiousness and misrepresentation in Big Five self-reports



Steven G. Ludeke<sup>a,\*</sup>, Bridget Carey<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Political Science, University of Southern Denmark, Campusvej 55, DK-5230 Odense M, Denmark

<sup>b</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, 75 E River Road, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Available online 17 March 2015

#### Keywords:

Big Five personality  
Religiousness  
Spirituality  
Idiographically desirable responding  
Values

### ABSTRACT

Religious individuals in a large community sample were found to exaggerate their level of Agreeableness whereas spiritual individuals exaggerated their degree of Openness. The association between religiousness and overclaiming Agreeableness was mediated not only by socially desirable responding (SDR) but also by personal views of the desirability of Agreeableness: religious individuals saw particular value in Agreeableness, and overclaimed it accordingly. The overclaiming of Openness by spiritual individuals could not be accounted for by SDR, but was partially mediated by spiritual individuals' views of Openness as a particularly desirable trait. Independent ability to explain the association between misrepresentation in self report and both religiousness and spirituality were thus indicated by both SDR and by an approach which expects an individual's overclaiming behavior to match their personal values.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

Attempts to understand the origins of individual differences in religiousness and spirituality increasingly focus on the role of personality traits. Such studies (reviewed recently by Saroglou, 2010) overwhelmingly rely on self-report assessments of personality, typically using various measures of “Big Five” traits. Although the predictive utility of such measures has been amply demonstrated, long-standing concerns over the accuracy of such assessments have never been put fully to rest. One cause for concern in the present context is that differences in religiousness are correlated with differences in measures thought to capture the tendency to provide biased responses (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010). Previous research has identified such tendencies using measures of *socially desirable responding* (SDR), which aim to identify individuals who inaccurately claim high levels of traits viewed as desirable by society at large, and on which religious individuals typically obtain high scores (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010).

The association between religiousness and scores on SDR measures presents a challenge to the interpretation of the self-reported personality correlates of religiousness. We must consider whether the Big Five correlates of religiousness are real or instead the product of inaccurate reporting – or, perhaps, a bit of both.

These concerns are somewhat alleviated by the current consensus that scores on SDR measures reflect true variance in Big Five traits as much or even more so than the tendency to misrepresent one's traits (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Reiss, 1996). In the absence of additional evidence, the correlation of religiousness with SDR scores is thus consistent with all three interpretations: differences in religiousness may be associated with differences in Big Five traits, with differences in the tendency to provide biased responses, or both.

More recent research has provided an additional impetus for resolving the question more fully. This research focuses on the individual's tendency to overclaim traits that they personally view as desirable; because individuals differ in their views of which traits are most desirable, they differ as well in which traits they are most prone to overclaim (Ludeke, Weisberg, & DeYoung, 2013). For example, someone who values Extraversion highly is more likely to exaggerate their level of this trait in a self-report than is someone who does not value Extraversion. In contrast with SDR, which identifies differences in the tendency to exaggerate traits that society in general views as desirable, this source of bias is particularly concerned with the individual's view of the desirability of a characteristic; it is labelled *idiographically desirable responding* (IDR) to highlight both its similarity to and distinctness from SDR.

Importantly, IDR has been observed in samples for which personality and trait desirability were not simultaneously assessed (Ludeke et al., 2013), indicating that the correlations between

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [stevenludeke@gmail.com](mailto:stevenludeke@gmail.com) (S.G. Ludeke).

ratings of trait desirability and overclaiming were not induced by the assessment itself. IDR might instead be interpreted as an example of the general tendency to believe one has positive qualities, consistent with previous results showing those with high self-esteem were particularly prone to engage in IDR (Ludeke et al., 2013). Crucially, IDR does not entail that the correlation between views of trait desirability and self-reported personality exclusively capture misrepresentation. Ratings of trait desirability are, in fact, correlated both with true trait levels as well as overclaiming; thus, the individual who rates Extraversion as highly desirable is thus likely to actually be relatively extraverted, though not as extraverted as he will claim to be (Ludeke et al., 2013).

The importance of IDR to the study of religion and personality is highlighted by the pronounced value differences associated with religiousness. For example, conventionally religious individuals tend to value Agreeableness-related characteristics such as politeness and helpfulness (Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004), and individuals scoring high on mysticism-related measures of spirituality report valuing Openness-related characteristics such as curiosity and creativity (Hirsh, Walberg, & Peterson, 2012). (Hereafter, we will reserve the term “religious” to refer to the general domain of religious behavior and practice which includes both “conventional religiousness” and “spirituality” as distinguishable sub-dimensions.) According to the logic of IDR, this indicates that the tendency to exaggerate one’s levels of these Big Five traits will vary based on one’s level of conventional religiousness or spirituality. Previous research on the personality correlates of educational attainment (Ludeke, 2014) and of sociopolitical attitudes (Ludeke, Reifen Tagar, & DeYoung, 2015) has observed results of precisely this nature: for example, authoritarians particularly valued Conscientiousness and thus overclaimed their levels of the trait. Because meta-analyses of self-reported Big Five correlates of conventional religiousness and spirituality indicate that Agreeableness is the most pronounced correlate of the former and Openness is the most pronounced correlate of the latter (Saroglou, 2010), the possibility that such associations are inflated by the above-noted value differences would be particularly intriguing.

Both SDR and IDR thus indicate the need for an explicit test of whether conventional religiousness and spirituality are associated with misrepresentation in self-reports of personality. Such a test requires a comparison of self-reports of trait levels against other effective indicators of Big Five trait levels, such as reports from knowledgeable peers; such comparisons are often referred to as the “gold standard” for identifying self-report misrepresentation, and to our knowledge no such test has previously been reported.<sup>1</sup>

To the extent that conventional religiousness and/or spirituality predict a discrepancy between self-reports and an independent indicator of Big Five trait levels, both SDR and IDR should be considered as explanations for this discrepancy. This can be done by testing different possible mediators of the association between religiousness and misrepresentation in self-reports. If general differences in the tendency to provide socially desirable responses

can account for the relationship, then SDR measures should be effective mediators. If IDR is better able to account for the relationship, then ratings of trait desirability should be effective mediators. Finally, it may be that both SDR and IDR independently account for part of any relationship between religiousness and misrepresentation in self-reports: that is, that conventional religiousness and/or spirituality are associated both with a general tendency to overclaim societally-desirable traits as well as with a tendency to overclaim traits seen as particularly desirable by conventionally religious or spiritual individuals.

Importantly, although mediation analyses are often conducted with a specific causal claim in mind, they also have usefulness outside of such contexts. In the present circumstance, we suggest that one need not endorse the causal chain we present (in which religiousness influences values, self-presentation styles, and overclaiming behavior) in order to derive value from the proposed analyses. In testing for statistical mediation, we are at a minimum able to more fully characterize the nature of the association between religiousness and misrepresentation in self-reports: a significant mediation result indicates that a non-zero portion of the relationship between the predictor and criterion is attributable to variance that each shares with the mediator. We suggest that such a result is worth knowing even if important questions about the causal chain remain.

Although the focus of this study is to identify and explain and association between religiousness and misrepresentation in self-reports, it will also provide a direct test of the relative utility of SDR and IDR in explaining misrepresentation in self-reports. In the only such test published to date, SDR was unable to account for misrepresentation associated with level of education, whereas IDR was (Ludeke, 2014). However, because the link between religiousness and SDR is much better documented (and likely larger) than is the connection between education and SDR, the present study is arguably a fairer test of the relative utility of SDR and IDR.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were members of the Eugene-Springfield Community Sample; predominantly middle-aged ( $M = 50.78$  years,  $SD = 12.27$ , range 18–80), female (58%), and Caucasian (97%), with a median of two years of post-secondary education. Participants were drawn from a list of homeowners in the Eugene-Springfield area of Oregon, and completed surveys by mail over the following 14 years in exchange for money, beginning in 1994 (Goldberg et al., 2006; Goldberg, 1999). Not all participants completed all surveys administered by the survey; after excluding two participants whose responses indicated inattention (all 97 trait desirability ratings were marked as “neither desirable nor undesirable”), 524 participants remained who had provided self-reports of personality, trait desirability, and religiousness, as well as two or more peer reports of their personality.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Big Five

In 1998 participants completed the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999) and Saucier’s (1994) Mini-Markers (MM). Copies designed for peer ratings were also given to participants, who were asked to deliver them to any three people who knew them “very well.” Participants described 28% as “friend,” 28% as “relative,” 23% as “spouse,” 12 as “co-worker,” 7% as “other,” and 2% as “significant other.” No relationship status was provided for 1% of informants. Data from all three informants was used when

<sup>1</sup> Of course, although peer reports have both conceptual (Hofstee, 1994) and empirical (Connelly & Ones, 2010) appeal as an indicator of “true” personality, no such indicator or collection of indicators should be expected to fully capture all of the true variance of a trait. This means that not all of the true trait variance contained in self-reports for a trait will necessarily be shared with other indicators such as peer reports. Accordingly, although self-criterion residuals will contain differences in tendencies to misrepresent oneself, they may also somewhat reflect true differences in the trait of interest. The severity of this problem – a limitation that plagues nearly all attempts to identify misrepresentation in self-reports – will vary based on the quality and number of the non-self-report data. Accordingly, the present study’s use of multiple, highly familiar peers substantially but incompletely reduces this particular interpretative concern. See Ludeke et al. (2013; study 2) for an empirical examination of this issue as it relates to IDR.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7326788>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7326788>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)