



Underestimating the effects of faking on the validity of self-report personality scales

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Abstract

The influence of faking on the validity of self-reported personality is examined in two experimental studies. Although separate instructional group analyses and moderated multiple regression analyses using instructional group as a moderator indicated statistically significant effects for faking on validity, moderated multiple regression analyses with social desirability scales generally did not. Effect size estimates for faking were much larger for separate instructional groups analyses and for instructional group as a regression moderator than for socially desirability scales as regression moderators. It is concluded that using social desirability scales in moderated multiple regression can substantially underestimate the effects of experimental faking on validity.

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Does faking affect the validity of self-report personality scales? For experimentally induced faking (one form of socially desirable responding), the answer is yes (e.g., Douglas, McDaniel, & Snell, 1996; Holden, Wood, & Tomashewski, 2001; Topping & O'Gorman, 1997). For natural occurring socially desirable responding, notable studies imply the answer is no (i.e., Barrick & Mount, 1996; Hough, Eaton, Dunnette, Kamp, & McCloy, 1990; Piedmont, McCrae, Riemann, & Angleitner,

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2000). In a meta-analysis, Ones, Viswesvaran, and Reiss (1996) conclude that “social desirability is not a response bias that attenuates criterion-related validity” (p. 670) and Hough (1998) indicates that, although instructed faking reduces validity, such distortion is less prevalent with job applicants and incumbents. It is hypothesized that discrepancies between experimental and non-experimental research represent quantitative or qualitative differences – experimental studies exaggerate faking effects or induce different types of faking relative to what naturally occurs.

Although experimental and non-experimental socially desirable responding studies could differ in the extent or nature of the responding process, distinctions in operationalizations and analyses also exist between these types of studies and could also explain discrepancies. In experimental studies, socially desirable responding is usually operationalized as instructional group membership (e.g., standard answering instructions, fake good, fake bad). Validities (i.e., self-report personality scale/criterion correlations) are calculated per instructional group and compared across groups. Alternatively, instructional group membership is coded as a variable and analyzed as a moderator where a criterion is regressed on the personality scale, the moderator, and a product term of the scale and moderator. Statistical significance of this product term tests the effect of faking on validity.

In shifting from experimental to non-experimental research, focus changes from experimental instructions to naturally occurring variations in socially desirable responding. However, another alteration is confounded with this. Socially desirable responding is no longer measured or analyzed as an instructed faking group membership but, instead, through a faking or socially desirable responding scale. This is because there is no instructional group membership in non-experimental research. Importantly, however, scales of socially desirable responding are fallible substitutes of faking and may assess extraneous constructs as well as a response style (Holden, 2007). Further, faking may be only one among multiple forms of socially desirable responding measured by a particular scale.

Is it possible that differences between experimental and non-experimental research on socially desirable responding are explainable by variations in the measurement and analysis of faking instead of by differences in the extent and nature of faking? This research addresses this issue by demonstrating that the effect of socially desirable responding on self-report personality scale validity may be substantially underestimated when, as in non-experimental studies, a socially desirability scale is used in moderated regression analysis.

1. Study 1

Data are from Holden, Book, Edwards, Wasylikiw, and Starzyk (2003).

1.1. Method

1.1.1. Participants

Participants were 260 undergraduates (195 women, 65 men). Mean age was 19.11 years.

1.1.2. Materials

The personality scale was the Holden Applicant Reliability Measure (HARM; Holden, 2000). The self-report HARM assesses job behaviour counterproductivity including employment misde-

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