

# Socially Desirable Responding in Organizational Behavior: A Reconception

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*Socially desirable responding (SDR) refers to presenting oneself favorably regarding current social norms and standards. While SDR has concerned organizational researchers as a contaminant in self-assessment, it is argued here that such a presumption is inappropriate and that SDR may represent content variance in some settings. Further, a two-component model of SDR as self-deception and impression management is presented. One or both components of SDR may be related conceptually to the variable of interest such that indiscriminate control of SDR removes the predictive power of a measure. Implications of this reconception are considered for measuring and controlling SDR in organizational research. The distinction between self-deception and impression management is used to clarify a number of theoretical issues.*

Socially desirable responding (SDR), the tendency of individuals to present themselves favorably with respect to current social norms and standards, represents an important and potentially wide-ranging concern in organizational research. Even the classic Hawthorne effect could be considered the result of employees presenting themselves favorably under the eyes of watchful researchers (Adair, 1984). Unfortunately, organizational research invariably has treated socially desirable responding as evidence of contamination. It is argued here that this presumption is incorrect, that how SDR fits into the researcher's theoretical network determines whether or not it represents contamination, and hence, whether or not control is appropriate. Moreover, SDR has two components, self-deception and impression management, which require separate examination. Before deciding on con-

trol measures, one should examine the theoretical import of self-deception and impression management for each organizational construct.

## **Traditional Treatment of Socially Desirable Responding**

In the organizational literature, SDR has been viewed almost exclusively as a contaminant to the accuracy of self-reports. Since the development of the most commonly used measure of social desirability, the Marlowe-Crowne (MC) scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960), many studies in organizational literature have included either the MC or other measures of SDR (e.g., Arnold & Feldman, 1981; Arnold, Feldman, & Purbhoo, 1985; Ganster, Hennessey, & Luthans, 1983; Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1975; Lopez, 1982; Rahim, 1983; Rosenkrantz, Luthans, & Hennessey, 1983; Schriesheim, 1979; Smith, Organ, &

Near, 1983; Stone, Ganster, Woodman, & Fusilier, 1979; Thomas & Kilmann, 1975). Although other studies on self-assessment and the faking of selection instruments and performance measures did not use individual difference measures of SDR, they explicitly conceived of SDR as contamination (e.g., Anderson, Warner, & Spencer, 1984; Ash, 1980; Holzbach, 1978; Levine, 1980; Sackett & Decker, 1979; Sackett & Harris, 1984; Schrader & Osburne, 1977; Thornton, 1980).

According to this perspective, individuals scoring high on SDR scales are assumed to be "faking good" and reports of these individuals are considered invalid. Moreover, self-report measures that correlate highly with SDR scales are rejected as invalid because they confound content with style. This perspective is typified in Thomas and Kilmann's (1975) conclusion that "these general dynamics and distortions would be expected to operate in studies of organizational climate, leadership, risk-taking, etc.—anywhere, in short, where ratings are used to assess variables with evaluative overtones" (p. 749).

### **Contamination and Control**

The various forms of SDR as contamination were detailed by Ganster, Hennessey, and Luthans (1983). They examined the effects of SDR on 13 organizational measures and distinguished three classes of SDR effects: spuriousness, suppression, and moderation. More specifically, SDR may (a) create spurious (i.e., misleading) correlations between variables; (b) suppress (i.e., hide) relationships between variables; and (c) moderate (i.e., interact with) relationships between other variables. For each of these cases, Ganster and colleagues proposed a method of assessing and statistically controlling for the effect.

In the spuriousness case, SDR is correlated with both the predictor and criterion variable. The observed correlation between the variables of interest results from the shared variance in social desirability rather than some other connection between the two constructs. This spuriousness is tested for (and controlled for) by partialing out the effect of social desirability us-

ing multiple regression or partial correlation techniques. [Note that Ganster and colleagues do not make a distinction between part and partial correlation. Part correlation may be preferable where control of SDR in only one variable is appropriate (McNemar, 1969).] In some cases, social desirability may be isolated on a separate factor (Fulk & Wendler, 1982; Paulhus, 1981; Rahim, 1983).

In the suppressor case, a relation between variables may be undetected because SDR contamination masks the true relation. Partialing SDR out of the relationship would change the correlation from zero to non-zero (Conger & Jackson, 1974). Alternatively, a non-zero correlation between dependent and independent variables may be revealed as larger when SDR is controlled for.

The moderator case is distinguished by an interaction effect between the independent variable and SDR. According to Ganster and colleagues, testing for SDR as a moderator variable takes the form of a test for the significance of the interaction between it and any independent variables of interest, using product terms in hierarchical multiple regression. [Arnold (1982, 1984) distinguished between moderation of the correlation between variables, or of "degree," and moderation of the slope of the regression line, or of "form." Different statistical procedures are appropriate to each case; specifically, hierarchical regression is appropriate only to tests of form. Moderation of degree is tested for by comparing subgroups formed on the basis of scores on the moderating variable. Ganster et al. (1983) tested only for moderation of form; their example, however, is of moderation of degree.]

There are other forms of control; the crudest of these is to disregard the self-reports of respondents who score too high (above some arbitrary score) on a measure of SDR. A better approach would be to use measures with items that are neutral with respect to social desirability, that have subtle (nontransparent) items with hidden content, or that force a choice between options with equal desirability (for a review, see Paulhus,

1981). Stone et al. (1979), for example, found a weaker relationship between SDR and the forced-choice Job Choice measure of Growth Need Strength (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) than with the Would Like measure. Extending this idea, Arnold and Feldman (1981) showed how a regression-based method of inferring objective weights (as proposed by Zedeck, 1977) was less likely to evoke a socially desirable response bias than traditional point assignment, ranking, or forced choice methods.

Arnold and Feldman focused on how questionnaire items and formats are more or less likely to evoke socially desirable responding. More problematic is that individuals differ in their tendencies to respond in a socially desirable manner. Indeed, the apparent ubiquity of SDR in self-report inventories of personality led a small number of researchers to conceive of SDR as a more general pattern of behavior. Originally, Crowne and Marlowe (1960) devised their scale to measure SDR as a contaminant, but they gradually accumulated evidence that socially desirable responding was a wide-ranging, stable personality trait reflecting need for approval. Individuals who respond in a socially desirable manner, including on questionnaires, do so to seek approval and to avoid disapproval (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). Thus, individual differences in SDR may represent, at least in part, wide-ranging differences in personality.

### **Reconsidering Control**

The conception of socially desirable responding as a stable individual difference demands reconsideration of the presumption that "a correlation between an inventory and [social desirability] means that the inventory is contaminated with social desirability" (Ganster et al., 1983, p. 323), and that control is mandatory (Zerbe, 1985a, 1985b).

Consider the case where one has developed a measure of conformity in organizations and a high correlation is found with the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale. Given Crowne and Marlowe's (1964) interpretation, such a cor-

relation would be evidence of convergent validity and would represent *support* of the appropriate hypothesis, not contamination. Similarly, Ganster and colleagues found that SDR moderated the relationship between role conflict and need for autonomy, which they took as evidence of contamination. Rather, this shows that need for approval and need for autonomy together are better predictors of role conflict than need for autonomy alone. Higher need for approval reduces perceived role conflict and overshadows the effect of need for autonomy. Including need for approval and its interaction with need for autonomy in the regression equation results in a nonsignificant main effect for need for autonomy.

In this theoretical context, socially desirable responding represents content variance because it is related conceptually to need for autonomy—individuals with a high need for autonomy have a low need for social approval and acceptance. The relationship between need for autonomy and SDR represents convergent validity; indiscriminate control would be throwing away content variance.

In general, SDR can be considered contamination only when, within a particular theoretical context, the construct that SDR represents is unrelated conceptually to the constructs of interest. Researchers must examine the conceptual role of SDR in the theoretical network surrounding the constructs that are of interest to them and determine whether SDR represents contamination.

Consider a study of employee turnover, for example. Although individuals scoring high on the Marlowe-Crowne scale tend to underreport intentions to leave the organization, need for approval is unrelated to actual turnover (Arnold, Feldman, & Purbhoo, 1985). In this context, SDR does not illuminate our understanding of the determinants of turnover; here, SDR effects are simply contamination. Again, in Arnold and Feldman's (1981) examination of the effect of SDR on ratings of the importance of job characteristics, need for approval is irrelevant conceptually and the manifestations of SDR are artifactual bias.

However, for many organizational research contexts, SDR plays a substantive role.

## Two Component Models

A number of organizational researchers have speculated that SDR might have two components. For example, Thomas and Kilmann (1975), in a study of conflict handling and SDR, noted a low correlation between the Marlowe-Crowne (1960) and Edwards (1957) measures of SDR. They suggested that the Edwards scale may tap self-esteem in addition to need for approval. "Clearly, these would represent two very different sources of social desirability biases in self-report" (p. 750). Similarly, Golembiewski and Munzenrider (1975) cited bidimensionality as a caveat to their conclusions, noting that the Marlowe-Crowne scale may contain two classes of items: those having to do with claiming good qualities and those having to do with denying bad qualities (cf., Millham & Jacobson, 1978). Paulhus (1984) reviewed the evidence for two-component models of SDR and concluded that evidence for this latter separation is weak.

Instead, Paulhus (1984) favored a second approach distinguishing between individual differences in *self-deception* and *impression management*. Self-deception refers to the unconscious tendency to see oneself in a favorable light. It is manifested in socially desirable, positively biased self-descriptions that the respondent actually believes to be true. To assess this bias, the Self-Deception Questionnaire (SDQ) (Sackeim & Gur, 1978) asks questions about psychologically threatening thoughts and feelings that are assumed to be experienced universally, but which some people (self-deceivers) deny. The construct validity and reliability of the SDQ has been supported by a series of experimental and correlational studies (Gur & Sackeim, 1979; Paulhus, 1982, 1984; Sackeim, 1983; Sackeim & Gur, 1978, 1979). It has been shown that the scale predicts self-deceptive behaviors in a laboratory situation (Gur & Sackeim, 1979; Sackeim, 1983). High scorers on the SDQ tend to show high self-

esteem, high need for achievement, and an internal locus of control (Paulhus, 1986). Low scorers are subject to depression and anxiety (Sackeim & Gur, 1979).

In contrast, the term *impression management* represents conscious presentation of a false front, such as deliberately falsifying test responses to create a favorable impression. To assess this latter construct, Sackeim and Gur (1978) designed the Other Deception Questionnaire (ODQ). In it, respondents are asked about the extent to which they engage in desirable but statistically infrequent behavior, and undesirable but common behavior. Since the questions concern behavior, rather than thoughts, it is assumed that self-deception is minimized.

Other-deception incorporates the notions of deliberate bias, lying, and faking that traditional treatments of SDR as contamination have assumed. In some cases, the tendencies to deceive others and to manage one's impression may be a situation-induced temporary state. On the other hand, certain individuals habitually and purposely may present themselves as good and desirable people. [Guion (1965) made a similar distinction between "attitudinal variables that may systematically influence scores" (p. 357). These were: (a) deliberate deception or out-and-out faking, (b) presentation of an idealized rather than realistic self-appraisal, and (c) honest intentions that owe their inaccuracy to lack of self-insight. Clearly, the first of these represents impression management and the last resembles self-deception. The second element could be either, depending on the individual's awareness of the discrepancy between the idealized and the realistic.]

In a series of factor analyses, Paulhus (1984; 1986) found strong evidence for his two-factor model of the relations among measures of SDR. Among the many SDR scales included were: Edwards' Social Desirability (SD) scale (Edwards, 1957); the MMPI Lie-scale (Meehl & Hathaway, 1946); Eysenck's Lie-scale (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1964); the Sd scale (Wiggins, 1959); the Marlowe-Crowne (MC) scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960);

and the Self- and Other-Deception Questionnaires (Sackeim & Gur, 1978).

As hypothesized, the relations among the SDR measures are best represented by two factors. The highest loading scales on the first factor are the SDQ and the Edwards SD scale. The ODQ is the purest marker of the second factor; also, Wiggins' Sd scale and Eysenck's Lie-scale have high loadings. The MMPI-Lie scale loads highly on the second factor, and moderately on the first. The Marlowe-Crowne scale loads highly on both factors.

This pattern provides strong evidence that the first factor represents Self-Deception and the second factor represents Impression Management. Paulhus (1984) also showed that the scales marking the Impression Management factor resulted in significantly higher scores under public as opposed to anonymous administration, while scores on scales that marked the Self-Deception factor were not significantly higher. These studies show that widely-used SDR scales reflect various combinations of self-deception and impression management processes.

### **Reconceiving Control**

The conception of socially desirable responding as two components requires that we consider in more detail when SDR represents contamination, and control is appropriate (Zerbe, 1985a). Both self-deception and impression management must be considered within the theoretical context of the research setting. Control of both, one, or neither component may be appropriate. In any case, the status of any measure as a contaminant should be evaluated explicitly. Either self-deception or impression management may be related to other variables in any of the ways specified by Ganster et al. (1983), namely, spuriousness, suppression, or moderation.

For example, Ganster and colleagues suggested that, as a consequence of an implicit theory of leadership, individuals who score high on the MC scale might show a strong positive correlation between leader behavior and satisfaction. For people who score low on the MC, the correlation might be somewhat negative. It

is argued here that although the MC scale measures both components of SDR, this pattern is most consistent with an impression management explanation. For impression managers, their reported satisfaction is related directly to the use of contingent rewards by supervisors. For individuals who do not use impression management, satisfaction is inversely related. In this case, impression management is not part of the concepts of satisfaction and leadership and should be controlled for, either through regression analysis with interaction terms, or through analysis of subgroups (Arnold, 1984).

Similarly, the spuriousness and suppressor effects described by Ganster and colleagues may be the result of either self-deception or impression management. They are appropriately tested and controlled for by alternately partialing out self-deception and impression management. For instance, self-reports of motivation may be confounded with self-deception, and this self-perception (if unrelated to performance) would mask or suppress the relationship between motivation and performance. In addition, the same self-reports of motivation may be confounded with impression management. Hence, both components should be controlled.

When a component of socially desirable responding is related conceptually to the variables of interest, control is inappropriate. Consider, for example, the accumulating evidence that self-deception is characteristic of adjustment. Well-adjusted individuals have an honestly held, positively biased view of themselves (Paulhus, 1986; Sackeim, 1983). This bias is manifested in: tendencies to (a) ignore minor criticisms, (b) discount failures, (c) avoid negative thoughts, and (d) have a high expectancy of success in new endeavors. In contrast, the anxious or depressed individual accepts criticism as information about his/her abilities and character (Paulhus, 1986). In short, some degree of self-deception promotes a healthy outlook.

Because of this confounding with adjustment, self-deception should never be controlled for in assessing adjustment-related constructs. After

statistically controlling SDR with either the Edwards or Marlowe-Crowne scale, measures related to adjustment lose predictive power (e.g. Borkenau & Amelang, 1985; Edwards, 1970; McCrae & Costa, in press). Other constructs that may involve an honestly held self-bias include perceived control, social dominance, optimism, and achievement motivation. Predictive validity may be the hapless casualty of attempts to control self-deception in measuring these constructs.

Similarly, impression management should not always be controlled. Kriedt and Dawson (1961) found that faking responses on the Gordon Personality Inventory correlated 0.47 with supervisory ratings of clerical performance. When desirable responding was partialled out, the predictive validity fell to an insignificant level. Kriedt and Dawson concluded that response set is not necessarily a "nuisance factor" in measurement and, therefore, should not necessarily be eliminated.

### **Alternative Views of Self-Deception and Impression Management**

Currently, some confusion exists about impression management. Some theorists have defined impression management to include self-deception. Schlenker (1982) argued that impression management included unconscious self-presentation to "internalized" audiences, that is, external audiences do not have to be present; impression management can be directed to the self. When defined this way, impression management and self-deception are indistinguishable conceptually. A similar problem arises if self-deceptive processes are viewed as directed to others. Staw (1980) argued that self-justification, or the rationalization of beliefs to protect one's self-image, also can motivate efforts to demonstrate competence in a social setting. When understood in this way, self-justification overlaps with impression management.

Chatman, Bell, and Staw (1986) pointed out this problem. For them, self-justification refers to "intrapsychic desires to reduce inconsistency or protect one's ego [and] impression management refers to the desire to please or impress others"

(p. 196). Thus, self-justification subsumes our notion of self-deception. Such processes may underlie career and organizational image management, organizational socialization, and conformity in the expression of job attitudes.

Consider the latter, for example. Workers who are dissatisfied with their jobs might perceive greater satisfaction by cognitively reevaluating their jobs to maintain consistency between their behavior (staying) and their dissatisfaction (Chatman et al., 1986), in other words, by self-deceiving. Simultaneously, workers may knowingly overreport satisfaction to avoid publicly appearing inconsistent. If defined according to Schlenker, such intrapsychic and impression management processes that underlie conformity cannot be separated.

Tetlock and Manstead (1985) exploited this confusion: They said that there is no difference between these concepts, that the distinction between impression management and intrapsychic explanations (like self-deception) for behavior is arbitrary and empirically indiscriminable. Tetlock and Manstead (1985) reviewed the current conceptions of impression management and identified seven strategies that researchers have used to distinguish between impression management and intrapsychic theories (e.g., cognitive dissonance). They rejected each of these strategies largely because of definitional overlap: When defined similarly it is difficult to distinguish empirically the phenomena. Therefore, here the desires to impress internal audiences are not included in impression management. Impression management is self-presentation directed knowingly to external audiences, for any number of reasons, including purely instrumental ones (Gaes, Kalle, & Tedeschi, 1978). Internalizing norms and standards and creating desired identities that people believe in and can present to others (Baumeister, 1982), are not impression management. If biased but honest, self-presentation can be attributed to self-deception. Impression management and intrapsychic processes can be distinguished empirically only if they are clearly defined.

For example, Tetlock and Manstead (1985) rejected the strategy of employing individual differences in personality variables, like that proposed here. They questioned whether self-report measures can distinguish between competing approaches because there are also impression management and intrapsychic explanations for how people respond to self-report personality measures. They cited the example of the debate over the social desirability and adjustment interpretations of personality inventory factors and posed the question: "Do self-report tests measure intrapsychic dispositions, claims to social identities, or some combination of these influences?" (p. 70). It should be clear that the answer is "yes" and that individual difference measures of self-deception and impression management can determine in what combination (Paulhus, 1986). Further, Tetlock and Manstead rejected the individual difference strategy largely on the strength of the methodological inadequacies of the Self-Monitoring scale. Admittedly, the multidimensionality of the self-monitoring construct creates serious ambiguities about its interpretation (John & Block, 1985; Briggs, Cheek, & Buss, 1980); however, these ambiguities are not present in either Tedeschi's (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984) conception or in the self- and other-deception framework presented here.

Tetlock and Manstead's final concern was that research should clarify points of similarity and difference among rival approaches. Clearly, definitional clarity is a necessary prerequisite. According to them, research should identify processes common to both impression management and intrapsychic explanations, rather than identifying crucial studies designed to reject theories. In fact, self-deception and impression management are complementary processes and may have similar antecedents, although these may be directed to different audiences. Researchers should consider how self-deception and impression management, in combination, affect organizations. For example, how much of professed employee satisfaction is honest and how much is feigned?

In other organizational contexts, self-deception and impression management may have conflicting effects, such as when an organizational role requires presenting an image that is inconsistent with one's self-concept (e.g., bill collectors) (Hochschild, 1983). In organizational decision making, impression management results in a search for excuses and self-justification so that there is a positively biased reevaluation of negative outcomes (Chatman et al., 1986). Here, it has been argued that it is characteristic of self-deception to discount failure and have a high expectation of success. Rather than presume that self-deception and impression management are indistinguishable, they might be examined in the face of base rates of success as a way of accessing honest organizational bias independent of impression management. The finding that organizations engage in self-serving biases, that is, taking credit for success and avoiding blame for failures (Bettman & Weitz, 1983; Salancik & Meindl, 1984; Staw, McKechnie, & Puffer, 1983), is open for consideration as either self-deception or impression management (Chatman et al., 1986).

## **Implications for Organizational Research**

### **Recommendations for Measurement**

The most often used SDR measure, the Marlowe-Crowne scale, simultaneously measures self-deception and impression management (Paulhus, 1984). Unfortunately, the Marlowe-Crowne scale cannot be split easily into two subscales because many items load on both factors. Because the Marlowe-Crowne scale is an imperfect measure of both components, it will underestimate relationships with either one. In its place, separate determination of impression management and self-deception, using the Other-Deception Questionnaire and the Self-Deception Questionnaire, is recommended.

Using the Self-Deception Questionnaire in its present form, however, may present some problems. The SDQ items were written specifically

with psychologically threatening content. In personnel assessment settings, where anonymity is seldom possible, such questions may be considered an invasion of privacy. One way to deal with this is to ask respondents to omit items that they would rather not answer. Subsequently, such omissions can be scored appropriately as self-deceptive responses (Paulhus, 1986). Alternatively, a less controversial measure of self-deception might be employed; currently, the present authors are attempting to develop such a scale.

To identify individuals who tend to engage in impression management, the Other-Deception Questionnaire is the measure of choice. Also effective is Eysenck's Lie-scale (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1964), which is much shorter.

In the past "faking" or "lie" scales were used solely to reject cases from selection or analysis. Such measures are at least as valuable in selecting appropriate personnel. Paulhus (1986) distinguished between the strategic, motivational, and skill components of impression management; each of these suggests a different application for identifying impression managers.

For instance, one might want to select personnel skilled in impression management for a setting where either social influence or conformity is important. Rosenthal (1969) showed that subjects scoring high on the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale spoke in a more enthusiastic and friendly tone of voice, smiled more often, and slanted their bodies more toward others — all advantageous behaviors in sales settings. Indeed, it has been found that people oriented toward retail sales are more likely to fake test scores (Kirchner, 1962).

Identifying individuals who have a self-deceptive bias also might be useful in certain settings. For example, Ruch and Ruch (1967) noted that a good salesperson should present a positive image, regardless of his or her personality. They called this "sensible deception" or "job-image discrepancy." Ruch and Ruch found that predicting the effectiveness of the salesperson was greatly *decreased* when correction was

made for response style. A salesperson's score on the MMPI K-scale, which loads highest on the Self-Deception factor (Paulhus, 1986) and characterizes socially skilled individuals, was the best predictor of job performance.

### **Administration Context**

The two-component model has implications for the social context in which measures are administered, specifically regarding anonymity. Self-deception may be observed even in private situations, such as anonymous questionnaires. Hence, some individuals score high on the SDQ, even in private. Moreover, these scores increase only slightly in public conditions (Paulhus, 1984). Scores on measures of self-deception are thus less affected by public vs. private administration.

On the other hand, impression management is low in private and increases under public conditions (Kral, 1985; Paulhus, 1984). In organizational research, measurement may be made with the promise of confidentiality, but this may not be matched by the respondent's perception of his/her privacy. Moreover, in practical assessment situations, such as selecting personnel or appraising performance, rarely is anonymity possible. Therefore, research performed under anonymous conditions will not reflect the socially desirable responding that is present in practice. Where the variables of interest are related conceptually to impression management, conditions of anonymity will suppress their manipulation and measurement. In short, the generalizability of organizational research, undertaken under conditions of relative privacy, may be limited when applied to real life, public, organizational contexts.

Schriesheim (1979) recognized this when examining the relationship between the Marlowe-Crowne scale and Fiedler's (1967) Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC), position power, and group atmosphere scales. In the first of two studies, he examined zero order correlations between the MC and other measures under anonymous conditions. In a second study, anonymity was not guaranteed, all participants were required to



sign their questionnaires, and one-half of the participants were told by their company presidents that they would discuss their answers with them. Such conditions more closely match those in organizations. Schriesheim found no significant relationships with the MC scale (although the LPC was moderately related) and no differences were found between conditions in Study 2. Unfortunately, Schriesheim's studies have a number of limitations. He examined only simple correlations in his first study and means in the second; thus he did not consider SDR effects on the relationships between the other variables, as Ganster and colleagues proposed. Also since the sample was very small, the studies' power to find significant effects was limited.

### **Prevalence of Socially Desirable Responding**

Much of the impetus for empirical examinations of socially desirable responding in organizational research has been the concern about the seriousness of contamination. Researchers variously have concluded that concern is warranted (e.g., Arnold & Feldman, 1981; Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1975; Rosenkrantz, Luthans, & Hennessey, 1983; Stone, Ganster, Woodman, & Fusilier, 1979; Thomas & Kilmann, 1975) or unwarranted (e.g., Ganster, Hennessey, & Luthans, 1983; Schriesheim, 1979). The reconception of SDR as impression management and self-deception now permits more critical evaluation of the prevalence of SDR as contamination. A number of findings support the conclusion that the role of SDR in organizational research has been assessed in only a limited way, that its prevalence has been underestimated, and that critical concern is appropriate.

First, very few studies have considered socially desirable responding. Early studies considered either differences in mean desirability ratings or the interpretation of simple correlations between SDR and other measures. The spuriousness, suppressor, and moderator effects that Ganster and colleagues presented remain unexplored.

Second, most studies used measures that underestimate the prevalence of SDR and its effects.

Using the Marlowe-Crowne scale underestimates relationships with self-deception and with impression management.

Third, some writers who have claimed on empirical grounds that SDR is minimal, fortuitously have used methodologies resistant to SDR. Self-deception is minimized by behavioral items, such as those that were used in the managerial behavior survey (Yukl & Nemeroff, 1979), and that were a part of Ganster and colleagues' (1983) assessment of SDR prevalence. Ratings of others, though evaluative and informative of individuals, do not evoke socially desirable responding *per se*. [Ratings of attributes of others can be subject to leniency response bias, which can be broadly understood as attributing socially desirable traits to others (e.g., Anderson, Warner, & Spencer, 1984).] The managerial behavior survey and the LPC scale (Schriesheim, 1979) ask participants to rate the behavior of others.

Fourth, socially desirable responding is reduced under conditions of anonymity, but anonymity reduces the likelihood of uncovering relationships when assessing the prevalence of SDR, particularly relationships related to impression management. Such anonymity may make studies of SDR more generalizable to organizational research but less so to behavior in organizations.

Finally, studies rarely have predicted *a priori* what measures or constructs are likely to be contaminated. More often, socially desirable responding has been posited as a *post hoc* explanation for unexpected findings and only occasionally sought out in sets of conveniently chosen measures. An understanding of SDR as self-deception and impression management provides the content necessary for hypothesis-driven research.

Only by considering (a) the role of self-deception and impression management in organizational measures, (b) the nature and range of relationships possible with SDR, and (c) the constraining effects of situational factors, can future researchers fairly test claims about the prevalence and importance of socially desirable responding in organizational research.

## Interpreting Current Constructs as Self-Deception and Impression Management

### Impression Management

Impression management has been noted for its role in organizational constructs involving social behavior (e.g., social influence, leadership, conformity, and political behavior, Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). Biggart and Hamilton (1984) argued that the creation and maintenance of interpersonal influence through impression management are pervasive in organizations because norms and role obligations defining what is acceptable and desirable are particularly salient and limiting.

That individuals deliberately may present a false front to achieve some goal is hardly a novel idea, but often it has been couched in other forms. Culbert and McDonough (1980) discussed "framing" as presenting a "self-convenient organizational reality" (p. 83) to others. Mowday (1978) examined "manipulation," or "the conscious effort by the influence agent to mask his or her intentions in exercising influence" (p. 146). Mowday found that using manipulation consistently differentiated between principals with high and low effectiveness. In Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson's (1980) categorizing of influence tactics, the category "clandestine" included pretending to understand a target's problem, puffing up the importance of a job, and lying to the target. Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) linked impression management to organizational self-presentation, including excuses, justifications, apologies, ingratiation, intimidation, and self-promotion. Wortman and Linsemeir (1977) construed ingratiation strategies in organizational settings in a similar way. Tedeschi and Melburg further argued that impression management is central to developing and perceiving leadership, specifically within path-goal theory (House, 1971).

Impression management also may have consequences at the organizational level. Caldwell and O'Reilly (1982) showed that organizational decision makers, when faced with failure, are

more likely to emphasize the positive aspects and to minimize the negative aspects of their decisions. One consequence is the maintenance of the organization's social fabric; this is consistent with Pfeffer's (1981) analysis of management as symbolic action. Smith, Organ, and Near (1983) analyzed organizational citizenship behavior, or the "myriad of acts of cooperation, helpfulness, suggestions, gestures of goodwill [and] altruism" (p. 653). They found that citizenship behavior comprised two factors, which they called altruism and general compliance. Smith and colleagues defined generalized compliance as an impersonal sort of conscientiousness, of doing things that are "right and proper." The results of a path analysis showed, to Smith and colleagues' surprise, that the best predictor of general compliance was scores on Eysenck's lie-scale. They argued that this reflected the influence of need for approval. It is now known that Eysenck's lie-scale measures impression management, which is more consistent with the definition of generalized compliance.

Viewing impression management as an aspect of personality differing in degree across individuals can contribute to further understanding in these areas. Most research has emphasized situational, rather than individual, determinants of behavior. Examining individual differences in impression management could help to better identify when, and by whom, influence strategies are likely to be used. Similarly, predicting individual effectiveness in particular settings could be enhanced. Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) suggested that the behavior of individuals who seek to gain leadership should be studied. Differences in impression management across individuals could help explain differences in such behavior, such as how leaders clarify paths to goals. In general, using individual differences as an approach to investigation of impression management can help us to understand behavior in organizations, just as the study of organizational context contributes to our understanding of situational influences on impression management.

## Self-Deception

Self-deception is implicated in any organizational construct involving a positive self-bias. Self-deceptive positivism may, for example, play a central role in expectancy theory (Lawler, 1973). It has been noted that the honestly held self-bias, which underlies self-deception, manifests itself in tendencies to discount failures and to have a high expectancy of success; it also contributes to adjustment and self-esteem. Indeed, Oldham (1976) found that people with higher self-esteem had higher expectancies. Other studies have found that people with internal locus of control have higher expectancies than those with an external locus of control (Lied & Pritchard, 1976; Mitchell, Smyster, & Weed, 1975). It has been argued that differences in self-esteem, locus of control, and expectancies reflect underlying differences in self-deceptive positivism (Paulhus, 1986). Self-deception may play a similar role in achievement motivation. Research has emphasized the bias in attributions for success and failure by individuals high in need for achievement (Weiner, 1978). Such individuals claim credit for their successes, but discount failures by attributing them to lack of effort or bad luck; they also persist longer in the face of failure (Weiner, 1978).

The role of self-deception in role ambiguity and role conflict also warrants examination. While Rosenkrantz, Luthans, and Hennessey (1983) found a significant negative correlation between the MC scale and role ambiguity, they did not find this significant negative correlation between the MC scale and role conflict. They argued that this is because of the transparency of the role ambiguity scale (i.e., it is easy to "fake good"). An alternative explanation is that self-deceivers are better at coping with role ambiguity, possibly by distorting the reality of the situation (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). In contrast, coping with role conflict may not require the distortion of reality. Mossholder, Bedeian, and Armenakis (1981), found that self-esteem moderated the relationship between job satisfaction and role ambigu-

ity but not the relationship between job satisfaction and role conflict. Further, studies have linked role ambiguity to internal locus of control (Abdel-Halim, 1980; Organ & Greene, 1974). Both role conflict and role ambiguity have been correlated with anxiety (Caplan & Jones, 1975; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Schuler, Aldag, & Brief, 1977) which showed a strong negative correlation with self-deception (Sackeim, 1983). Replication of the study by Rosenkrantz, Luthans, and Hennessey using the SDQ and ODQ rather than the MC scale would help resolve this question.

In his review of research on job stress, Staw (1984) stated that the study of coping mechanisms holds the greatest potential for future research. Self-deception is a promising candidate. Self-deceivers are likely to be better adjusted, to be more ego-resilient, to report greater control over decisions, and to have a higher expectation that effort leads to rewards. These are advantageous qualities in stressful situations, such as those characterized by high role ambiguity (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), lack of influence and participation (French & Caplan, 1972), or high job demands and low decision latitude (Karasek, Baker, Marxer, Ahlbom, & Thorell, 1981). In fact, it has been shown that individual differences in self-deception predict adaptive reactions to stress (Paulhus & Levitt, in press).

Lest this self-deceptive positivism sound like a universal panacea, the negative consequences of the possible collision between the real and the deceived self should be pointed out. The denial of stress and its physical consequences can contribute to severe physical illness (Janis, 1974; Pennebaker & Hoover, in press). These physical effects may result either from the cumulative impact of "not letting it out," or from simply ignoring warning signs until too late. Indeed, the Type A, coronary-prone personality has been linked to a repressive, self-deceptive coping style (Linden & Feuerstein, 1981; Jorgensen & Houston, 1983). Self-deception may be advantageous when the decision-making environment necessitates a rapid solution, but it may be dysfunc-

tional when a slower, more reasoned approach to decision making is appropriate.

## Concluding Remarks

Self-deception and impression management are important concepts for organizational behavior. In this paper a range of organizational constructs to which they are relevant has been presented, partly in order to expand the theoret-

ical network around socially desirable responding. Impression management in organizations is of growing interest; self-deception processes also are emerging in the research about the self-justification of organizational behavior. Although many of these speculations about impression management, and especially self-deception, remain untested, this conceptual development is an important and necessary forerunner to empirical examination.

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