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## A reassessment of social desirability

Laura Anna Negel

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Laura Anna Negel entitled "A reassessment of social desirability." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

Warren H. Jones, Major Professor

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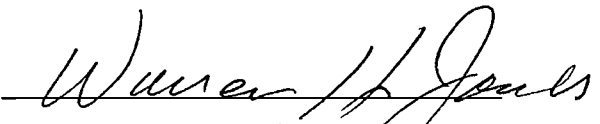
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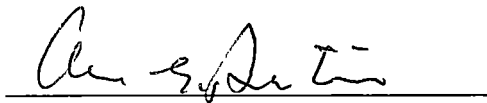
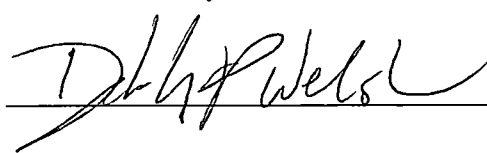
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and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council

  
Associate Vice Chancellor and  
Dean of the Graduate School

**A REASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL DESIRABILITY**

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Laura A. Negel  
May 2000

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to parents, Marion and Carmen Negel. Your love and support helped sustain me in my academic endeavors, culminating in the thesis I have herewith written. Education has been the central focus in my life and the combination of my love of learning and my parents' encouragement has accounted for my continuous academic pursuits.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Warren H. Jones for his incessant guidance and support. His wisdom has helped shaped the way I view and engage in psychological research, and without his tutelage, I would not be where I am today. This project entailed a great deal of forethought and reconceptualization, and Dr. Jones was most instrumental in helping to shape my initial views and consequent interpretation of this empirical inquiry.

## ABSTRACT

Social desirability reflects the tendency of individuals to present themselves favorably, or in a desirable light, with respect to social norms and standards. The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale is perhaps the best known index of socially desirable responding (SDR), but it has proven to be a dual measure of social desirability and the approval-dependent personality. Paulhus's Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR) sought to improve upon the BIDR by representing SDR as a dual component construct. Specifically, the BIDR measures two facets of social desirability: *self-deception*, underlying, overly positive, unconscious self-images and *impression management*, self-presentation to create a positive social image. Despite the various conceptualizations of socially desirable responding (*e.g.*, lying, faking good, need for approval), no extant SDR scale includes the conception of *deliberate deception* which can be defined as a purposeful misrepresentation of the self aimed at external gain. The Item Response Inventory (IRI) was designed to measure three facets of social desirability: self-deceptive positivity, impression management, and deliberate deception. Study 1 assessed the psychometric properties (*e.g.*, internal reliability) of the IRI. Both IRI subscales and combined scores were found to be reliable (*e.g.*, for combined scores Coefficient alpha = 0.81 and mean inter-item correlation = 0.14). Study 2 explored the convergent and discriminant validity of the revised IRI by comparing the IRI with extant measures of social desirability and other conceptually-related measures. Mixed results were found regarding the utility of including deliberate deception into the broader conceptualization of SDR.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Response biases, or systematic tendencies to respond to a range of questionnaire items on some basis other than the specific item content, have long been of interest to researchers involved in psychological measurement (Paulhus, 1991). One such bias is socially desirable responding (SDR) which covers an array of conceptualizations, including the creation of overly positive social images, lying, and defensiveness, and proves to be a source of inaccuracy in the measurement of personality, attitudes, and other behavior-related self-reports. According to Zerbe and Paulhus (1987), social desirability describes the tendency of individuals to present themselves favorably, or in a desirable light, with respect to current social norms and standards. If this tendency persists across time and assessment instruments for a given respondent, he or she is said to display a socially desirable response style that must be statistically or methodologically controlled in order to accurately assess his or her true score on a given scale or set of measures (Paulhus & Reid, 1991). As a response style presumably independent of the conceptual variable under investigation, social desirability represents an ever-present challenge to psychologists who seek to create measures of personality constructs and attitudes with high construct validity and to reduce the systematic error due to socially desirable responding. Therefore, social desirability is often referred to as the primary threat to the validity of psychological

self-report measures because individuals' reports of their own traits, attitudes, and behavior may involve systematic biases that obscure measurement of content variables (Edwards, 1953; Paulhus, 1991). In other words, socially desirable responding is thought to decrease the validity of a given scale by calling into question whether that measure is assessing the construct of interest or the degree to which an individual wishes to present himself or herself in a socially desirable light.

Given these considerations, there have been multiple conceptualizations of social desirability with corresponding assessment measures. Edwards first defined the construct of social desirability in 1957 as the tendency to give socially appropriate responses in self-reports. His measure of socially desirable responding, the Edwards Social Desirability Scale (ESD), was called into question, however, due to its significant content overlap with the MMPI. The belief that the ESD confounded social desirability with the presence or absence of psychopathology led to the development of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability (MCSD) Scale, which was initially developed as a SDR measure independent of psychopathology. Due to its assessment of social desirability as the need for social approval, the MCSD no longer can be considered a pure indicator of social desirability; it is instead a dual measure of social desirability and the approval-dependent personality.

Believing that the initial depiction of SDR as a single-factor construct neglected to capture its full meaning, researchers proposed a two-factor model of social desirability. Namely, it was believed that SDR can be broken down into two components: (1) *self-deception* which reflects an underlying, overly positive,

unconscious self-image; and (2) *impression management* which refers to a self-presentation directed toward the creation of a positive social image. Indices of this dualistic conceptualization of social desirability include the Self-Deception and Other-Deception Questionnaires and the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding. The best known of these two-factor SDR indices is Paulhus's Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR) which has been shown to reliably measure both self-deception and impression management.

Despite the various conceptualizations of socially desirable responding (*e.g.*, faking good, faking bad, need for approval), no extant SDR scale includes the notion of deliberate deception which can be defined as a purposeful misrepresentation of the self for external gain. Thus, the purpose of the present research was two-fold: (1) to develop a new social desirability scale and (2) to assess the resultant scale's reliability and validity. Specifically, the first study sought to generate a reliable, new measure of socially desirable responding (the Item Response Inventory) incorporating the concept of deliberate deception within the broader context of social desirability. Items were formulated to meet the definition of each of the three conceptualizations of SDR (*e.g.*, self-deceptive positivity, impression management, and deliberate deception). Then, Likert analyses were performed to eliminate items within each conceptual category which failed to meet normal psychometric standards. The surviving items made up the resultant subscales of the IRI. The second study was designed to assess the reliability and validity of the newly developed Item Response Inventory. Specifically, the operating characteristics of the IRI were performed once more to replicate initial

reliability findings. Furthermore, the IRI was compared with other SDR measures and measures of theoretically-related constructs to assess the validity of this new scale of social desirability.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:**

#### **EXTANT CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND MEASURES OF SOCIAL DESIRABILITY**

##### **Edwards's Social Desirability Scale**

Over the past 50 years, researchers have proposed various methods of conceptualizing, controlling, and measuring social desirability. Edwards (1957) defined social desirability colloquially as "the tendency to give socially desirable responses in self-description" and statistically as "the scale value for a personality statement, or test item, such that the scale value indicates the position of that statement on the social desirability continuum." In his view, social desirability is an index of statistical deviation from the true score that must be statistically controlled and toward this end he developed the Edwards Social Desirability Scale (ESD) based on items from various scales in the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, a commonly used measure of psychopathology. Edwards's Social Desirability scale was criticized by Crowne and Marlowe (1960) who argued that it confounded social desirability with the presence or absence of psychopathology. The high correlations between the Edwards SDS and the MMPI scales reflect a similarity in the pathological nature of the item content comprising all the measures. Crowne and Marlowe thus concluded from their analysis



that a high score on the Edwards SDS may simply reflect the absence or infrequency of psychopathology without regard to whether a participant has presented himself or herself in a desirable light. In other words, denying that one has pathological symptoms does not imply that one is trying to fake good. This is especially so in “normal” populations (*e.g.*, college students) for whom honest responses yield low SD scores simply on the basis that most of the participants are relatively free of psychopathology. This conclusion leads to the interpretation that, at best, the Edwards SDS is a measure of general neuroticism because it reflects the degree to which one is willing to admit to symptoms of a neurotic, or psychopathological, nature, and has very little to do with social desirability itself (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Similarly, Wiggins (1973) redefined the Edwards SDS as a measure of anxiety. More recently, Paulhus (1991) stated that Edwards’s original implication that a high correlation with his SD scale invalidates self-report measures is no longer tenable; on the contrary, controlling for social desirability may even reduce the validity of adjustment-related measures. In fact, high social desirability scores, as measured by the Edwards SDS, have been found to correlate with conscientiousness, better adjustment, and cooperation, suggesting convergence with adjustment (McCrae & Costa, 1983).

### **Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale**

To overcome the confounding of social desirability with psychopathology, Crowne and Marlowe (1960) proposed a new scale of social desirability based on a psychometric model different from the statistical deviance approach of Edwards. The

33 items comprising the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale (MCSD) describe either (a) desirable but improbable behaviors or (b) undesirable but common behaviors. In the development of the MCSD, Crowne and Marlowe (1960) redefined social desirability as the need for individuals to obtain the approval of others by responding in a socially appropriate manner. Using this conceptualization of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale, Crowne and Strickland (1961) found that subjects with a high need for approval tended to show an increase in the proportional use of plural nouns under positive reinforcement and a decrease in the proportion of plural nouns under negative reinforcement. These results were believed to represent the general tendency of high need for approval people to increase positively-reinforced responses and to suppress negatively-reinforced responses. Thus, Crowne and Strickland concluded that the personality measure researchers refer to as social desirability, defined as the degree to which one endorses socially approved characteristics, reflects a more general need for social approval and acceptance. Their experimental findings were further supported by Heilburn's (1961) theoretical supposition that response rates are strongly related to estimates of desirability because society instills desirable behavior in people which results in a universal tendency to err on the side of more flattering, or positive self-descriptions. In light of their findings and Heilburn's theoretical support, Crowne and Marlowe (1964) posited that the MCSD was assessing a more general motivational variable, which they labeled as the need for social approval.

In an attempt to validate the MCSD and Crowne and Marlowe's hypothesis that social desirability equated with the need for social approval, Goldfried (1964)

administered the MCSD under three instructional sets: (1) the standard instructions condition required the participants to answer questions as they pertained to themselves, (2) the social desirability condition asked participants to respond in the manner they believed to be more socially desirable than undesirable in our society, and (3) the social approval condition requested that the participants pretend to be a person who strongly needed the approval and acceptance of others. To his surprise, he found a main effect of experimental condition with significant differences among all three conditions. The clear lack of agreement between the socially desirable and approval conditions raised serious doubts about Crowne and Marlowe's hypothesis that social desirability and social approval reflect the same phenomenon. As a further complication, Millham and Kellogg (1980) found that participants scoring higher on the MCSD reported being willing to cheat in order to avoid the negative evaluations of others, suggesting that the tendency to engage in social desirability may reflect the avoidance of disapproval rather than the attempt to gain social acceptance. They also found that the need for approval was more highly related to the self-deceptive than the other-deceptive component of socially desirable responding. Thus, in light of these experiments denoting discrepancies between the notions of social desirability and the need for social approval, Crowne (1979) revised his earlier hypothesis and redefined the need for social approval as the tendency of people to avoid disapproval.

However, Paulhus and Levitt (1987) found a response-potential effect for which the presence of affective distracters facilitated socially desirable responses and inhibited undesirable responses, denoting the presence of automatic egotism. The

concept of automatic egotism, as manifested by self-enhancement on positive traits and defensiveness on negative traits, corroborates Crowne and Marlowe's earlier hypothesis that social desirability reflects the same phenomenon as the need for social approval and acceptance. Specifically, Paulhus and Levitt found that positive traits elicit quick responses while negative traits yield greater response latencies. These results signify the ease with which one attends to socially desirable stimuli and the discomfort exhibited in the presence of undesirable stimuli and suggest that the need for social approval is one of the underlying factors guiding item responding and perhaps all human behavior. Thus, it appears that the MCSD assesses the need for approval rather than a tendency to avoid the disapproval of others, supporting Crowne and Marlowe's original hypothesis and encouraging researchers to continue using the MCSD as a dual measure of social desirability and the approval-dependent personality (Paulhus, 1991).

### **Two-Factor Models of Social Desirability**

Despite the initial conceptualization of social desirability as a single-factor response style, two-factor models of socially desirable responding were also proposed. For example, various factor analytic studies structurally partitioned SDR response styles into two factors labeled *Alpha* and *Gamma* (Paulhus & Reid, 1991). Alpha is the general anxiety factor of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and it is used as an index of adjustment (MMPI; Block, 1965). Damarin and Messick (1965) postulated that alpha represents "autistic bias," or the unconscious tendency to distort self-perception to be consistent with socially acceptable attitudes that comprises the

evaluative bias in self-reports. Paulhus (1984) later hypothesized that alpha reflects “self-deceptive positivity.” Gamma, on the other hand, is linked to agreeableness and traditionalism as measured by the MMPI (Wiggins, 1964). Damarin and Messick interpreted gamma as “propagandistic bias,” or an instrumental distortion directed to a particular audience. Paulhus (1984) later used the expression “impression management” to refer to the gamma factor.

Thus, partitioning social desirability into two conceptualizations emphasized the distinction between the attribution, or enhancement, of positive attributes and the denial of negative attributes (Paulhus, 1984). To assess this distinction, Millham (1974) divided the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale into enhancement and denial subscales, but found that the evidence for the expectation that the subscales ought to result in differential patterns of responding was mixed. Subsequent analyses suggested that enhancement and denial are equivalent measures of the same construct and thus do not represent two separate components of socially desirable responding (Paulhus, 1984).

#### Sackeim and Gur’s Self-Deception and Other-Deception Questionnaires

Sackeim and Gur (1978) reconceptualized alpha and gamma as self-and-other deception, respectively, thereby denoting the difference between self-directed and other-directed deception. The Self-Deception Questionnaire (SDQ) contains 20 Likert-type items that describe universally true statements that are, nonetheless, psychologically and emotionally threatening. Sample SDQ items include “Have you

ever thought of committing suicide in order to get back at someone?," "Have you ever doubted your sexual adequacy?," and "Have you ever thought your parents hated you?" The Other-Deception Questionnaire (ODQ) is comprised of 20 questions regarding socially desirable but statistically infrequent behaviors. This scale contains items such as "Do you tell the truth?," "When you take sick leave from work or school, are you as sick as you say you are?," and "I always apologize to others for my mistakes."

#### Paulhus's Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding

Paulhus (1984) built on the work of Sackeim and Gur, using the SDQ and ODQ to provide support for the two-factor model by partitioning social desirability responding into self-deception and impression management. According to Paulhus, alpha represents "self-deceptive positivity," or honestly held but unrealistically positive self-views, and gamma represents "impression management," or the conscious manipulation of one's self-reports to make a favorable impression on others. In the first phase of his study, Paulhus (1984) found that the SDQ was the best overall marker for the alpha factor, supporting the notion that the first factor is indeed self-deceptive in nature. The ODQ, on the other hand, was the purest indicator of gamma with most items involving socially desirable yet infrequent behaviors, providing support for the notion that gamma is indicative of impression management. Paulhus (1984) assessed the competing two-model approaches by administering items assessing both the SDQ/ODQ model and the MCSD enhancement/denial model to the same set of

respondents and factor analyzing the items of each scale separately. Despite finding that the self-deception/impression management model accounted for more true score variance than the enhancement/denial model, he combined the SDQ/ODQ and MCSD scales to form his own two-factor measure of social desirability which he entitled the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR). The BIDR contains two subscales, namely the Self-Deceptive Enhancement scale (SDE) and the Impression Management (IM) scale, and identifies four possible composites, illustrating the possible interrelationships among conceptualizations of social desirability. The following four categories depict the conceptual combinations found within Paulhus's BIDR: (1) enhancement/impression management items, (2) enhancement/self-deception items, (3) denial/impression management items, (4) denial/self-deception items. Sample SDE items include "My first impressions of people turn out to be right," "It's hard for me to shut off a disturbing thought," and "It's all right with me if some people happen to dislike me." The BIDR IM subscale contains items such as "I never swear," "When I hear people talking privately, I avoid listening," and "I have done things that I don't tell other people about."

#### The relationship between self-deceptive positivity and impression management

In the third phase of his study, Paulhus (1984) compared various social desirability indices under differential testing conditions (*e.g.*, anonymous/private versus public) in a within subjects design in order to provide experimental support for his proposed two-factor model. In the public testing condition, the impression

management component scores increased significantly more than the self-deception subscale scores. The impression management (IM) and self-deceptive positivity (SDP) total scores were lowest in the anonymous condition. Paulhus thus concluded that the necessity of distinguishing between the two-factors comprising social desirability is consistent with Hogan's socioanalytic theory of personality in that responses to self-report measures are a function of underlying self-images that are unconscious and not situationally contingent. As the impression management factor was found to be most responsive to situational changes, Paulhus believed that this may be the only part of social desirability that ought to be statistically controlled when assessing personality constructs. Self-deceptive positivity, on the other hand, appears to be intrinsically linked to adjustment and subjective well-being. Thus, controlling for this SDR factor would eliminate a central component of individual difference variance found in personality (Paulhus, 1991). In this respect, establishing how a component of social desirability fits into the overall theoretical framework of a construct determines whether or not it constitutes systematic error or true score variance.

According to Zerbe and Paulhus (1987), social desirability traditionally has been used as a scapegoat, or catchall category, for explaining why results failed to support a given hypothesis. Instead of continuing to view social desirability as a threat to construct validity, it may be more useful to think of it as either a general pattern of responding, reflecting a continuous personality dimension (*e.g.*, need for approval, Crowne & Marlowe, 1964), or as providing content, or true score, variance. For example, categorizing impression management as an aspect of personality may allow



researchers to examine when it is beneficial to employ such strategies (*e.g.*, in leadership roles, job interviews, etc.) and how individual differences on this subscale may predict better adaptability to unstable environments. In their view, socially desirable responding generally should be considered contamination, or error variance, only to the extent that it is unrelated conceptually to the constructs of interest. “When a component of socially desirable responding is related conceptually to the variables of interest, control is inappropriate” (Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987, p.257). Similarly, McCrae & Costa (1983) argue that social desirability becomes a source of response distortion, or systematic measurement error, only to the extent to which it differentially affects individuals.

Ganster, Hennessey, and Luthans (1983) specified three ways in which either impression management or self-deceptive positivity may be related to other variables; specifically, spuriousness, suppression, and moderation. A spurious relationship, the pattern of current relevance, is what is meant by defining social desirability as the tendency to either fake good or fake bad on a questionnaire (*i.e.*, it reflects the degree to which one seeks to give a misleading view of oneself). For example, self-report indices of motivation may be confounded with impression management and/or self-deception, thereby suppressing the effect of motivation on performance (Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987). In this case, it would be wise to control for both dimensions of socially desirable responding. However, given the finding that well-adjusted people tend to have honestly held, positively-biased views of themselves (*i.e.*, exhibit self-deceptive positivity), the self-deception component of social desirability should not be suppressed

because doing so would result in a loss of true score variance (Paulhus, 1986). In fact, the control of SDE has been found to lower the validity of psychological adjustment measures, such as those assessing self-esteem and lack of neuroticism (McCrae & Costa, 1985; Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1989; Paulhus, 1991; Verkasalo & Lindeman, 1994). Similarly, self-deception should not be controlled when assessing perceived control, social dominance, optimism, and achievement motivation because all of these constructs are highly correlated with that aspect of social desirability and predictive validity would be significantly decreased as a result of partitioning out the variance due to self-deceptive positivity (SDP; Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987). Differences in self-esteem, locus of control, expectancies, and achievement motivation may also reflect underlying differences in self-deceptive positivity, and self-deception may also be responsible for adaptive reactions to stress, depression, and general patterns of adjustment (Paulhus & Levitt, 1987; Roth & Ingram, 1985).

Paulhus and Reid (1991) further explored the relationship between self-deceptive positivity and adjustment by administering the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) along with the BIDR. Results indicated that only self-deceptive positivity items, as identified by the SDP subscale of the BIDR, appeared to be associated with adjustment, highly correlating with self-esteem and inversely correlating with social anxiety and empathic distress. More specifically, self-reported adjustment was closely related to the tendency to attribute positive characteristics to oneself (*i.e.*, tendency to self-enhance). These findings thus support the distinction between enhancement and denial (Jacobson et al., 1977) and establish the degree to which item content reflects

positive or negative characteristics as the factor that triggers the two processes of SDE and IM (Paulhus & Reid, 1991). They also lead to the interesting speculation that ego enhancement may be more effective than ego defense in promoting adjustment, or that good adjustment may in turn promote ego enhancement (Becker & Cherny, 1992). According to this supposition, defensiveness appears to operate independently of adjustment; there is no direct correlation between the tendency, or the ability, to reject negative information about the self and the degree to which one exhibits psychological well-being, or adjustment (Paulhus & Reid, 1991).

Impression management, however, does not seem to be impacted by the distinction between the enhancement and denial components of SDR. When one engages in impression management, one's responses are geared toward impressing one's audience and are not self-directed (Paulhus & Reid, 1991). Research has shown that IM scores typically increase from private to public experimental conditions, with very little impression management motivation occurring in private settings (Paulhus, 1984; Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987; Verkasalo & Lindeman, 1994; Lindeman & Verkasalo, 1995). In the absence of impression management motivation, a person tends to evaluate scale items as possible self-descriptors without regard to the appropriateness of the social image one is portraying by one's responses. In such an instance, the degree to which an item reflects a positive or negative attribute determines whether one chooses to utilize enhancement or denial strategies. As a result his elucidation of the impact of enhancement and denial on the two underlying factors of socially desirable

responding, Paulhus redefined his Self-Deceptive Positivity subscale as Self-Deceptive Enhancement.

### Self-Presentation Effects

Due to the concern that most personality scales can be faked when respondents are instructed to do so, it is important to examine what effect, if any, such self-presentational demands make on personality profiles. According to Paulhus, Bruce, and Trapnell (1995), it is especially difficult to identify and control for self-presentation main effects. Moreover, some evidence indicates that self-presentation inflates correlations obtained among evaluative dimensions. For example, under fake good instructions, there is a tendency for positive correlations among personality constructs to increase in magnitude (Paulhus, Bruce, & Trapnell, 1995). Yet, this tendency for correlations to increase under self-presentational conditions seems ironic due to the self-presentational component of social desirability.

In order to examine the effect of self-presentational demand on self-report inventories, Paulhus, Bruce, and Trapnell (1995) administered the BIDR and the Five Factor Inventory to participants randomly assigned to one of seven experimental conditions: fake best, fake good, play up, fake modest, respond honestly, fake bad, and fake worst. The degree of self-presentation expressed by a given individual was assessed by the Impression Management subscale of the BIDR. Findings revealed a significant main effect of self-presentation on the Big Five profiles; specifically, the positivity of the profile rose steadily from fake worst to fake best conditions and

accounted for inflated intercorrelations among the five personality factors. These results thus appear to resolve the seeming paradox presented earlier:

Although self-presentation can artificially inflate intercorrelations, after decontamination, a deflation relative to the control group is more likely because of the restriction in range due to ceiling effect (Paulhus et al., 1995, p.105).

Hence, these researchers concluded that self-presentation causes a distorted correlational structure in personality inventories by either inflating or deflating their intercorrelations. However, Bradshaw (1997) found that while certain conditions may create a strong motivation for impression management which could potentially bias NEO profiles, this kind of response bias tends to have little, if any, overall effect. Similarly, McCrae and Costa (1983) found that correcting the Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) with the EPI Lie scale and the MCSD, two indices of social desirable responding, failed to improve correspondence among self and other raters. In fact, the suppression of social desirability within the EPI actually lowered both the agreement between self-reports and spousal ratings and the magnitude of other validity coefficients.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, social desirability is a multi-faceted concept that varies in its relation to construct validity from one personality inventory to the next, depending on the degree to which social desirability relates to the construct(s) of interest represented by such measures. Thus, it is imperative to fit social desirability into the theoretical

framework of whatever concept one is seeking to examine. If social desirability is conceptually related to the construct of interest, then its variance constitutes important true score variance and adds to the predictive validity of the given construct; thus, no attempt should be made to control for its presence in such circumstances. If, on the other hand, social desirability is completely unrelated to the construct under investigation, then it represents systematic error due to a response style independent of the variable being studied. In such instances, social desirability produces a threat to the validity of the construct itself by undermining its predictive value, and, therefore, it ought to be controlled in whatever manner is most appropriate. Thus, as McCrae and Costa (1983) stated, social desirability ought to be thought of as “the unconscious, stylistic end of a continuum that extends to deliberate lying,” or deliberate deception. Incorporating the construct of deliberate deception into a measure of social desirability is the primary goal of the present study.

Previous research has found that the self-deceptive positivity and impression management components of social desirability are substantive in nature and suggest that the principal need to control socially desirable responding arises with deliberate deception (Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1992). Ironically, none of the extant SD scales include a measure clearly assessing this construct. Thus, the purpose of the present research is to extend the recent conceptualization of social desirability to include deliberate deception, which can be defined as a purposeful misrepresentation of the self aimed at specific external gain. An inventory called the Item Response Inventory (IRI) will be developed and will include three social desirability subscales; (1) self-deceptive

positivity, (2) impression management, and (3) deliberate deception, providing a full array of the various meanings associated with the term social desirability.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD AND RESULTS

#### Study 1: Likert Analyses

##### Participants and Procedure

Participants for the first sample included 419 undergraduate students (255 women and 164 men). The group had a mean age of 20.1 years and the vast majority of participants were Caucasian (90.4%) and unmarried (94.7%). Participants completed the initial 45-item version of the Item Response Inventory (IRI) in out-of-class sessions in exchange for nominal course credit.

##### Item Response Inventory: Item Generation

Forty-five items were written to satisfy three definitions of social desirability (*i.e.*, self-deceptive positivity, impression management, and deliberate deception) with 15 items per category. The three definitions were believed to represent a broader range of meaning of the construct than is found in available measures of social desirability. Furthermore, it was assumed that statements referring to positive social qualities (*e.g.*, behaving appropriately, treating others with respect, acting genuinely, being honest, etc.) would reflect socially desirable responding, especially items containing exaggerated, perfectionist, universal, or unceasing qualifications. For example, it was



assumed that respondents agreeing with statements to the effect that they had never told a lie or that they always treat others with respect were engaging in one form or another of social desirability.

Self-deceptive positivity is defined as a presumably honestly-held, yet overly positive self-image as illustrated by statements such as “I have never hurt the feelings of another person,” “I often gossip about other people” (reverse scored), and “I act appropriately in every situation.” Impression management depicts a conscious effort to create an unwarranted positive social image, but without any concrete, or particular, expectation of gain beyond making a favorable impression. This concept is exemplified by such statements as “I only do things to make myself look good” (reverse scored), “Being someone important is better than being yourself” (reverse scored), and “I would rather be myself than try to impress others.” Deliberate deception refers to a purposeful misrepresentation of oneself ultimately aimed at external gain, for example, “I only tell people what they want to hear” (reverse scored), “I would never deliberately deceive another person,” and “I have never lied for personal gain.”

Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with the 45 statements of the IRI using a five-point Likert-type scale anchored by the following verbal labels: Strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly disagree. Responses were coded such that higher scores indicated greater social desirability (*i.e.*, greater self-deceptive positivity, impression management, and deliberate deception). The original items for self-deceptive positivity, impression management, and deliberate deception are presented in tables 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

Table 1. Self-Deceptive Positivity Subscale of the Item Response Inventory

Item #	Content	Mean	SD	I/T(1)	I/T(2)
03	I have never hurt the feelings of another person.	1.95	.89	.21	.24
05*	I often gossip about other people.	3.08	1.05	.23	.20
14	I'll admit I have some faults.	4.59	.76	.05	--
22	I make a good impression on everyone that I meet.	2.99	.88	.26	.30
24	Some people say that I am honest to a fault.	2.90	.82	.02	--
26	I act appropriately in every situation.	2.73	1.00	.35	.39
28*	I often promise what I can't deliver.	4.05	.80	.31	.28
29*	I only do things to please others.	4.14	.74	.02	--
30*	I have often been accused of being rude.	3.60	1.15	.24	.24
33	I study all the material thoroughly before a test.	3.09	1.09	.31	.32
35	I get along with every member of my family.	3.68	1.24	.19	.21
37*	It is very important for people to like me, no matter what.	3.80	.85	-.08	--
39	I have often done things that I later regretted.	2.35	1.10	.22	.27
43	I treat all people with respect, regardless of who they are.	3.73	.96	.33	.36
44	Basically, I don't care what people think of me.	3.24	1.03	-.08	--

Note: \* = reverse-scored item.

Table 1 continued.

Reliability ( $\alpha$ )	.50	.61
Mean Inter-item Correlation	.06	.14
Number of Items	15	10

Table 2. Impression Management Subscale of Item Response Inventory

Item#	Content	Mean	SD	I/T(1)	I/T(2)	I/T(3)	I/T(4)
02*	I always try to make the best impression possible.	4.28	.76	.08	--	--	--
07*	When meeting someone for the first time, I create an image that I want him or her to have of me.	2.91	1.12	.22	.31	.34	.31
12*	I only do things to make myself look good.	4.05	.76	.33	.34	.36	.39
16*	In a relationship, I am always trying to impress my partner.	3.33	1.12	.35	.39	.39	.38
18*	Getting ahead means acting nice to everyone regardless of how you really feel about them.	3.36	1.04	.22	.25	--	--
20*	I am only nice to those who can give me what I want.	4.36	.71	.37	.35	.34	.36
21*	I don't care about the way I come across to others.	3.69	.99	-.09	--	--	--
25*	Being well-liked is the most important thing in my life.	3.77	.92	.18	--	--	--
27*	I constantly have to change who I am in order to make friends.	4.41	.66	.50	.48	.46	.44
31*	Being someone important is better than being yourself.	4.35	.78	.52	.51	.48	.48
32*	The way I act depends on the people I am with at the time.	3.28	1.09	.29	.32	.26	--

Table 2 continued.

Item#	Content	Mean	SD	I/T(1)	I/T(2)	I/T(3)	I/T(4)
34	I would rather be myself than try to impress others.	4.11	.80	.46	.50	.47	.49
38	I always let others see the "real" me.	3.36	1.01	.29	.30	--	--
41	Basically, I like to present myself in a socially desirable manner.	3.86	.78	-.04	--	--	--
45	It is very important for people to like me, but not enough to make me pretend to be something I am not.	3.99	.89	.28	.25	--	--

Note: \* = reverse-scored item.

Reliability ( $\alpha$ )	.65	.72	.71	.70
Mean Inter-item Correlation	.11	.19	.23	.25
Number of Items	15	11	8	7

Table 3. Deliberate Deception Subscale of Item Response Inventory

Item#	Content	Mean	SD	I/T(1)	I/T(2)	I/T(3)
01	I would never deliberately deceive another person.	3.49	1.16	.37	.38	.34
04*	I would pretend to be something that I am not in order to make someone like me.	3.88	1.04	.37	.38	.41
06*	I would lie to my significant other to avoid hurting him or her.	3.35	1.10	.40	.40	.43
08	I believe honesty is the best policy.	4.16	.86	.43	.42	.46
09*	I only tell people what they want to hear.	4.04	.80	.36	.35	.37
10	I never make up stories about my past.	3.43	1.26	.27	.27	--
11*	Other people see me only as I want them to.	3.60	.94	.28	.27	--
13	I would never pretend to like someone, whom I'd otherwise dislike, in order to get something from him or her.	3.31	1.25	.26	.25	--
15*	I would rather lie to someone than tell them the truth.	4.45	.73	.34	.33	.33
17*	I would do anything to make myself desirable to others.	3.75	.95	.37	.34	.31
19	I always tell the truth, regardless of the hurt it may cause others.	2.84	.90	.42	.43	.48
23*	There is nothing I wouldn't do to get ahead.	3.98	.89	.19	--	--
36	I have never lied for personal gain.	2.53	.98	.40	.42	.32

Table 3 continued.

Item#	Content	Mean	SD	I/T(1)	I/T(2)	I/T(3)
40	I have never lied to my parents nor any other member of my family.	1.90	.84	.26	.27	--
42*	There is nothing wrong with lying if no one gets hurt.	3.82	.93	.46	.45	.43

*Note:* \* = reverse-scored item.

Reliability ( $\alpha$ )	.74	.74	.73
Mean Inter-item Correlation	.16	.17	.21
Number of Items	15	14	10

## Results

Study one sought to identify and select internally reliable items for the IRI. Analyses proceeded along two lines. First, Likert analyses were performed for each of the three sets of social desirability items, self-deceptive positivity, impression management, and deliberate deception, separately. Items were eliminated based on corrected item-total correlations until each scale reached acceptable standards of measurement. Second, a combined Likert analysis was performed for the items surviving the subscale analyses.

The Self-Deceptive Positivity items initially yielded a coefficient alpha of .50 and a mean inter-item correlation of .06. Items with corrected item-total correlations less than .20 were discarded, resulting in a subsequent version of the scale consisting of 10 items, with an alpha of .61 and a mean inter-item correlation of .14 (see Table 1). For Impression Management, the initial item pool yielded a coefficient alpha of .65 and a mean inter-item correlation of .11. Items with corrected item-total correlations of less than .20 were eliminated after the first iteration, resulting in an 11-item scale with a coefficient alpha of .72 and a mean inter-item correlation of .19. Two subsequent iterations dropped items with item-total correlations of less than .30 and resulted in a seven-item scale with an alpha of .70 and a mean inter-item correlation of .25. For Deliberate Deception, initial scale operating characteristics included an alpha coefficient of .74 and a mean inter-item correlation of .16. Two subsequent iterations dropping items with item-total correlations of less than .20 resulted in a 10-item scale with a coefficient alpha of .73 and a mean inter-item correlation of .21. Means, standard



deviations, and other operating characteristics for each of the three subscales are presented in Table 4 for males and females, separately and combined.

Items selected in the analyses described above were subjected to a Likert internal reliability analysis. Full-scale operating characteristics are presented in Table 4, separately for males and females, and combined. Also, as is indicated in Table 5, all 27 items yielded item-total correlations of .20 or higher. Coefficient alpha for the IRI combined scale was .82 with a mean inter-item correlation of .14.

## **Study 2: Validity**

### **Participants and Procedure**

One hundred and nineteen undergraduate students (41 men and 78 women) enrolled in psychology courses comprised the second sample. This group had a mean age of 20.0 years and the majority of the participants were Caucasian (82.5%) and unmarried (85.0%). Participants completed a 341-item questionnaire packet including (a) biographical questions (*e.g.*, age, gender, ethnicity, etc.); (b) the revised 27-item version of the IRI; (c) extant measures of social desirability; (d) measures of related constructs (*e.g.*, infrequency and lie scales); and (e) two general measures of adjustment (*e.g.*, self-esteem and depression).

### **Instruments**

**Social Desirability.** The Edwards Social Desirability Scale (ESD) is a 29-item measure of the level of self-presentation, or the tendency to give socially desirable

Table 4. Psychometric Properties of the Item Response Inventory (IRI) in Study 1

Subscale	Men	Women	Combined
<u>SDP</u>			
<i>M</i>	30.71	31.62	31.25
<i>SD</i>	4.56	4.88	4.76
High	46	46	46
Low	10	19	10
$\alpha$	.51	.65	.61
Inter-item $r$	.10	.16	.14
<u>IM</u>			
<i>M</i>	26.48	28.21	27.53
<i>SD</i>	3.86	3.19	3.56
High	35	35	35
Low	11	15	11
$\alpha$	.69	.64	.70
Inter-item $r$	.26	.23	.25
<u>DD</u>			
<i>M</i>	35.23	37.00	36.32
<i>SD</i>	5.05	5.08	5.12
High	50	50	50
Low	12	19	12
$\alpha$	.70	.74	.73
Inter-item $r$	.19	.23	.21
<u>IRITOT</u>			
<i>M</i>	92.41	96.83	95.09
<i>SD</i>	10.34	10.37	10.54
High	131	125	131
Low	33	64	33
$\alpha$	.78	.82	.82
Inter-item $r$	.13	.15	.14
<i>N</i>	164	255	419

*Note:* SDP=Self-Deceptive Positivity; IM=Impression Management; DD=Deliberate Deception; IRITOT=Item Response Inventory Total Score

Table 5. The Item Response Inventory (IRI)

Item #	Content	Construct	Mean	SD	Item-total r
01	I would never deliberately deceive another person.	DD	3.49	1.16	.36
02*	I always try to make the best impression possible.	IM	4.28	.76	--
03	I have never hurt the feelings of another person.	SDP	1.95	.89	.20
04*	I would pretend to be something that I am not in order to make someone like me.	DD	3.88	1.04	.44
05*	I often gossip about other people.	SDP	3.08	1.05	.27
06*	I would lie to my significant other to avoid hurting him or her.	DD	3.35	1.10	.35
07*	When meeting someone for the first time, I create an image that I want him or her to have of me.	IM	2.91	1.12	.28
08	I believe honesty is the best policy.	DD	4.16	.86	.45
09*	I only tell people what they want to hear.	DD	4.04	.80	.37
10	I never make up stories about my past.	DD	3.43	1.26	--
11*	Other people see me only as I want them to.	DD	3.60	.94	--
12*	I only do things to make myself look good.	IM	4.05	.76	.30

Table 5 continued.

Item #	Content	Construct	Mean	SD	Item-total r
13	I would never pretend to like someone, whom I'd otherwise dislike.	DD	3.31	1.25	--
14	I'll admit I have some faults.	SDP	4.59	.76	--
15*	I would rather lie to someone than tell them the truth.	DD	4.45	.73	.39
16*	In a relationship, I am always trying to impress my partner.	IM	3.33	1.12	.33
17*	I would do anything to make myself desirable to others.	DD	3.75	.95	.39
18*	Getting ahead means acting nice to everyone, regardless of how you really feel about them.	IM	3.36	1.04	--
19	I always tell the truth, regardless of the hurt it may cause others.	DD	2.84	.90	.37
20*	I am only nice to those who can give me what I want.	IM	4.36	.71	.36
21*	I don't care about the way I come across to others.	IM	3.69	.99	--
22	I make a good impression on everyone that I meet.	SDP	2.99	.88	.23
23*	There is nothing I wouldn't do to get ahead.	DD	3.98	.89	--
24	Some people say that I am honest to a fault.	SDP	2.90	.82	--

Table 5 continued.

Item #	Content	Construct	Mean	SD	Item-total r
25*	Being well-liked is the most important thing in my life.	IM	3.77	.92	--
26	I act appropriately in every situation.	SDP	2.73	1.00	.26
27*	I constantly have to change who I am in order to make friends.	IM	4.41	.66	.41
28*	I often promise what I can't deliver.	SDP	4.05	.80	.41
29*	I only do things to please others.	SDP	4.14	.74	--
30*	I have often been accused of being rude.	SDP	3.60	1.15	.21
31*	Being someone important is better than being yourself.	IM	4.35	.78	.46
32*	The way I act depends on the people I am with at the time.	IM	3.28	1.09	--
33	I study all the material thoroughly before a test.	SDP	3.09	1.09	.26
34	I would rather be myself than try to impress others.	IM	4.11	.80	.52
35	I get along with every member of my family.	SDP	3.68	1.24	.21
36	I have never lied for personal gain.	DD	2.53	.98	.41

Table 5 continued.

Item #	Content	Construct	Mean	SD	Item-total r
37*	It is very important for people to like me, no matter what.	SDP	3.80	.85	--
38	I always let others see the "real" me.	IM	3.36	1.01	--
39*	I have often done things that I later regretted.	SDP	2.35	1.10	.20
40	I have never lied to my parents nor any other member of my family.	DD	1.90	.84	--
41	Basically, I like to present myself in a socially desirable manner.	IM	3.86	.78	--
42*	There is nothing wrong with lying if no one gets hurt.	DD	3.82	.93	.43
43	I treat all people with respect, regardless of who they are.	SDP	3.73	.96	.33
44*	Basically, I don't care what people think of me.	SDP	3.24	1.03	--
45	It is very important for people to like me, but not enough to make me pretend to be something I am not.	IM	3.99	.89	--

*Note:* \* = reverse-scored items; SDP=Self-Deceptive Positivity subscale item; IM=Impression Management subscale item; DD=Deliberate Deception subscale item;

Reliability ( $\alpha$ ) .82

Mean Inter-item Correlation .14

Number of Items 27

responses in self-description (Edwards, 1957). Respondents are instructed to rate each item as either “true” or “false.” Possible scores range from 0 to 39 with higher scores indicating higher levels of socially desirable responding. Edwards (1957) reported means of 28.6 (s.d. = 6.5) for males and 27.1 (s.d. = 6.5) for females in a college sample of 192 students. The ESD has proven to be a reliable measure with alpha coefficients ranging from .83 to .87 (Edwards, 1957; Paulhus, 1984). The validity of the scale has been supported by studies indicating that the ESD is a marker for the self-deception component of SDR (Paulhus, 1984; Paulhus, 1986; Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1989). Additionally, the ESD has been shown to correlate with measures of individual well-being (*e.g.*, self-esteem) because of significant content overlap (Kozma & Stones, 1988).

The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSD) was originally constructed to be a measure of socially desirable responding, but recently, has been redefined as an index of the tendency to avoid social disapproval (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Crowne, 1970). Despite this reconceptualization, most researchers automatically equate the MCSD with social desirability, and thus the MCSD still remains the most commonly used index of socially desirable responding in both psychological and sociological research. The 33 items of the MCSD describe both behaviors that are desirable but uncommon and behaviors that are common but undesirable. Respondents are asked to respond to each item as true or false. Thus, score range from zero to 33 with higher scores indicating greater avoidance of social disapproval. The MCSD has been shown to be both internally consistent, with alphas ranging from .73 to .88, and

reliable over time, with a test-retest reliability coefficient of .88 (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964; Millham & Jacobson, 1978; Paulhus, 1984; Paulhus, 1991). Mean scores of 12.9 to 15.5 (s.d. = 4.4 to 4.6) have been reported in college student samples (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964; Goldfried, 1964; Paulhus, 1984). The MCSD has been translated into several languages and various abbreviated versions are available also (Nederhof, 1985). Research has shown that the MCSD is significantly correlated with the ESD, MMPI L, and MMPI K scales (Katkin, 1964; Kozma & Stones, 1988) and loads on both the self-deception and impression management components of social desirability (Paulhus, 1986; Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1989). Despite correlating with both SDR components, the MCSD tends to be more strongly related to impression management than self-deception (Paulhus, 1984; Nederhof, 1985). Additionally, people who score higher on the MCSD report being better adjusted, friendlier, and more open to experience (McCrae & Costa, 1983).

Paulhus (1984, 1988) created the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR) to distinguish between the self-deception enhancement (SDE; *i.e.*, the tendency to give positively skewed yet honest responses) and the impression management (IM; *i.e.*, the tendency to give self-presentational responses directed toward an audience) components of social desirability. Respondents are asked to rate the 40 items (*i.e.*, 20 SDE and 20 IM) of the BIDR on a seven-point Likert scale and one point of social desirability is scored for each extreme (*i.e.*, a score of six or seven) response. Thus, scores on the BIDR can range from zero to 40. Paulhus (1988) reported means of 7.5 (s.d. = 3.2) for males and 6.8 (s.d. = 3.1) for females, and coefficient alphas from .68 to



.80, for SDE; .75 to .86 for IM; and .83 for the total BIDR score. The BIDR is the primary index of social desirability cited by researchers familiar with the current literature on the construct, especially by those interested in partialling out the differential effects of self-deception and impression management. The validity of the BIDR has been supported by a pattern of significant correlations with existing measures of social desirability, such as the Edwards Social Desirability Scale, the RD-16, and the MCSD (Paulhus, 1984; Gillings & Joseph, 1996). Additionally, the self-deceptive enhancement items of the BIDR are more highly associated with measures of adjustment than the impression management/denial items, supporting the differentiation between these two components of SDR (Paulhus & Reid, 1991).

Schuessler, Hittle, and Cardascia (1978) developed the Responding Desirably on Attitudes and Opinions scale (RD-16) to measure the degree of socially desirable responding in attitude and public opinion surveys. The 16-item scale is made up of eight item pairs corresponding to tests of dejection, social estrangement, trust, social contentment, social opportunism, expediency, anomie, and self-determination. Responses are rendered as either true or false. Scores may range from zero to 16 with higher scores indicating higher levels of social desirability. Schuessler, et al. (1978) reported a coefficient alpha of .64 and a mean inter-item correlation of .10 (Nederhof, 1985). The RD-16 contains elements of both the self-deceptive and impression management dimensions of SDR, but research supports a stronger relationship between the RD-16 and measures of self-deception (*i.e.*, BIDR SDE; Gillings & Joseph, 1996).

A 10-item measure of social desirability was developed as a part of Profile

(PSD; Jones, 1988), an inventory of personality disorder dimensions. Responses are given on a 5-point, Likert-type response format, and scores may range from 10 to 50 with higher scores indicating greater socially desirably responding. Coefficient alpha has been found to be .53 with a mean interitem correlation of .10. Also, a test-retest correlation of .63 over a two-month time period has been reported. The validity of PSD has been supported by significant comparisons with alternative measures of social desirability and other responses sets and by detection of subjects given "fake good" instructions.

Sackeim and Gur (1978; 1979) designed the Self-Deception Questionnaire (SDQ) in an attempt to measure individual differences in the tendency to engage in self-directed deception. The SDQ consists of 20 items containing more-or-less universally true statements that are, nonetheless, psychologically and emotionally threatening. The SDQ items are stated in question format and responses are given as yes or no. SDQ scores range from zero to 20 with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-deception. Sackeim and Gur (1979) reported a coefficient alpha of .73 and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .81 for both 4 and 10 week administration intervals. The SDQ has been found to significantly correlate with other measures of social desirability and loads on the self-deceptive component in the factor analytic studies of social desirability (Paulhus, 1984). High scores on the SDQ have been reported to inversely correlate with indices of depression (*i.e.*, the Beck Depression Inventory) and other self-reported measures of psychopathology (Sackeim & Gur, 1979; Roth & Ingram, 1985).

Related Measures. Gough (1952; 1957; 1987) developed the Good Impression

(Gi) scale as a part of the California Personality Inventory (CPI) in order to identify responses associated with trying to create an extremely favorable impression to another person. The CPI Gi scale consists of 40 items, rated as true or false. Scores on the CPI Gi may range from zero to 40 with scores above 30 indicating impression management, or faking good. Gough (1987) reported means of 18.5 (s.d. = 5.9) and a coefficient alpha of .77 in a sample of 4126 college students.

The MMPI Lie (L) Scale was developed as a validity measure to discern the deliberate attempt of people to present themselves in an overly favorable, or highly virtuous, light so as to appear highly socially desirable. The L scale is comprised of 15 items which respondents are asked to rate as either "true" or "false." For all 15 items, a response of "false" is considered to be a lie. Hathaway and McKinley (1951) reported means of 4.5 (s.d. = 2.6) for females and 4.2 (s.d. = 2.6) for males. Paulhus (1984) reported an alpha of .60 in a college student sample.

The MMPI K scale was designed as an index of subtle defensiveness to identify people with known psychopathology who nevertheless appear normal on the MMPI. Hathaway and McKinley (1951) reported means of 16.1 (s.d. = 5.1) for males and 15.7 (s.d. = 5.0) for females in a college student sample. The K scale proved to be reliable with an alpha coefficient of .82.

The Tennessee Self-Concept Self-Criticism subscale (Fitts, 1965) is a ten item measure which describes common, but undesirable, behaviors that almost all people would admit to if answering honestly. Thus, a low score suggests that the person is deliberately trying to present himself or herself in a more favorable light, whereas a

moderate to high score indicates a healthy capacity for self-criticism. Nevertheless, a very high score denotes that the respondent may be pathologically undefended and thus his or her response pattern should be deemed unreliable (Fitts, 1965; Levy, 1997).

A 5-item measure of infrequency was developed as a part of Profile, an inventory of personality disorder dimensions, in order to identify participants rendering bizarre or improbable response patterns (PI; Jones, 1988). Responses are rendered on a 5-point, Likert-type response format, and scores may range from 5 to 25 with higher scores indicating higher levels of infrequent responding. Coefficient alpha has been found to be .73 with a mean interitem correlation of .35. Additionally, a test-retest correlation of .44 was reported over a two-month time period.

Adjustment Measures. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was designed to measure one's level of self-esteem, or feelings of global self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). The RSES is highly reliable and it is widely used in social psychological research as an index of trait self-esteem. The RSES is comprised of 10 items measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored by "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree." RSES scores may range from 10 to 50 with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-esteem (Robinson & Shaver, 1985).

The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) was developed to measure depressive symptomatology (*i.e.*, depressed mood, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, psychomotor retardation, loss of appetite, and sleep disturbance) in the general population (Radloff, 1977). The CES-D is comprised of 20 items rated on a 0 to 3 scale, indicating the

frequency of occurrence (*e.g.*, 0 = rarely or none of the time, 1 = some or little of the time, 2 = occasionally or a moderate amount of time, 3 = most or all of the time). Possible CES-D scores range from 0 to 60, with higher scores denoting a greater number of depressive symptoms. Radloff (1977) found high internal consistency for the CES-D in both a general population sample ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and a patient sample ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

## Results

The validity of the Item Response Inventory was analyzed in four ways. First of all, IRI subscales were compared with extant measures of social desirability in order to assess concurrent validity. Secondly, IRI scores were correlated with indices of constructs theoretically related to social desirability in order to assess construct validity. Third, the average correlations among and between measures of social desirability were compared in order to denote the relationships among the various conceptualizations of SDR (*e.g.*, self-deception, impression management, and deliberate deception) and to gauge the extent to which measures of the different dimensions exhibit convergent and discriminant validity. Fourth, IRI total and subscale scores were compared to adjustment measures to provide further evidence of construct validity.

The operating characteristics of the Item Response Inventory were calculated to replicate the findings of the reliability analysis. Table 6 shows the means, standard deviations, and other psychometric properties of the IRI in the second study. As can be

Table 6. Psychometric Properties of the Item Response Inventory (IRI) in Study 2

Subscale	Men	Women	Combined
<u>SDP</u>			
<i>M</i>	29.49	31.41	30.71
<i>SD</i>	4.52	4.66	4.68
High	39	42	42
Low	22	21	21
$\alpha$	.44	.58	.54
Inter-item $r$	.07	.12	.11
<u>IM</u>			
<i>M</i>	25.76	27.33	26.75
<i>SD</i>	3.38	3.09	3.28
High	32	35	35
Low	17	18	17
$\alpha$	.55	.62	.62
Inter-item $r$	.15	.19	.13
<u>DD</u>			
<i>M</i>	33.73	35.82	35.03
<i>SD</i>	5.37	5.38	5.49
High	49	46	49
Low	25	22	22
$\alpha$	.76	.73	.75
Inter-item $r$	.24	.22	.23
<u>IRITOT</u>			
<i>M</i>	88.98	94.56	92.48
<i>SD</i>	9.88	9.41	10.00
High	115	121	121
Low	73	72	72
$\alpha$	.76	.75	.77
Inter-item $r$	.10	.10	.11
<i>N</i>	41	78	119

Note: SDP=Self-Deceptive Positivity; IM=Impression Management; DD=Deliberate Deception; IRITOT=Item Response Inventory Total Score.

seen in Table 6, the reliabilities of the IRI Self-Deceptive Positivity and Impression Management subscales were slightly lower in the second study, whereas the IRI Deliberate Deception subscale and total reliability indices were higher than in the first study. Overall, IRI subscale and total scores continued to meet conventional psychometric standards for reliability.

The intra-scale correlations of the Item Response Inventory were calculated to denote the interrelationships among SDR conceptualizations (*e.g.*, self-deceptive positivity, impression management, and deliberate deception). The IRI Self-Deceptive Positivity subscale was significantly related to the IRI Deliberate Deception subscale ( $r=.31, p<.01$ ), but the relationship between the IRI Self-Deceptive Positivity and Impression Management subscales was not significantly different from zero ( $r=.16, n.s.$ ). Additionally, there was a strong correlation between the IRI IM and DD subscales ( $r=.46, p<.01$ ).

Then, the IRI subscales were compared to established measures of social desirability in order to explore their concurrent validity; the results of these analyses are presented in Table 7. It was expected that the IRI Self-Deceptive Positivity (SDP) subscale would correlate more strongly with SDR measures associated with the self-deceptive component of social desirability (*i.e.*, BIDRSDE, PSD, SDQ) than with measures related to the impression management component of SDR. As is shown in Table 7, the SDP subscale was significantly related to the BIDRSDE ( $r=.31, p<.01$ ), PSD ( $r=.40, p<.01$ ), and SDQ ( $r=.41, p<.01$ ) scales. It was also associated with the RD16 ( $r=.22, p<.05$ ). Surprisingly, the SDP subscale was most highly correlated with

Table 7. Correlations Between Item Response Inventory Scores and Extant Measures of Social Desirability

	SDP	IM	DD	IRITOT
<u>Self-Deceptive Positivity</u>				
SDQ	.41**	.32**	.23*	.42**
BIDRSDE	.31**	.21*	.37**	.42**
PSD	.40**	-.05	.07	.21*
<u>Impression Management</u>				
MCS D	.51**	.12	.36**	.47**
BIDRIM	.53**	.07	.30**	.43**
RD16	.22*	.29**	.29**	.36**
<u>Deliberate Deception</u>				
ESD	.13	.29**	.17	.25**

*Note:* \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ ; BIDRSDE = Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding Self-Deceptive Enhancement subscale (Paulhus, 1984); BIDRIM = Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding Impression Management subscale (Paulhus, 1984); ESD = Edwards Social Desirability Scale (Edwards, 1957); MCS D = Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960); PSD = Profile Social Desirability subscale (Jones, 1988); RD16 = Responding Desirably on Attitudes and Opinions scale (Schuessler, Hittle, & Cardascia, 1978); SDQ = Self-Deception Questionnaire (Sackeim & Gur, 1978).



the BIDR IM ( $r=.53, p<.01$ ) and MCSD ( $r=.51, p<.01$ ) scales. No relationship was found between the IRI SDP subscale and the ESD. This pattern of correlations provided mixed evidence regarding the concurrent validity of the SDP subscale as it was not expected for the self-deceptive positivity scale to be related to either the BIDR Impression Management or the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scales.

Conversely, the IRI Impression Management (IM) subscale was expected to be more highly associated with SDR measures assessing the impression management component of social desirability (*i.e.*, MCSD, RD16, BIDR IM) than those measuring the SDP factor of SDR. As may be seen in Table 7, the IRI IM subscale was significantly correlated with the ESD ( $r=.29, p<.01$ ) and RD16 ( $r=.29, p<.01$ ) scales. However, the IRI IM was not related to either the BIDR IM scale ( $r=.07, n.s$ ) or the MCSD ( $r=.12, n.s$ ). Surprisingly, the IRI IM was related to both the BIDR SDE ( $r=.21, p<.05$ ) and SDQ ( $r=.32, p<.01$ ) scales. This pattern of correlations once again provided, at best, mixed results regarding the concurrent validity of the IRI IM subscale as it appeared to have strong relationships with both self-deceptive positivity and deliberate deception scales and lacked association with two extant measures of impression management (*e.g.*, BIDR IM, MCSD).

Similarly, the Deliberate Deception (DD) subscale of the IRI was expected to correlate more strongly with measures of the impression management component of SDR as deliberate deception is hypothesized to be a more extreme form of impression management. As noted in Table 7, the IRI DD subscale was significantly correlated with the MCSD ( $r=.36, p<.01$ ), BIDR IM ( $r=.30, p<.01$ ), and RD16 ( $r=.29, p<.01$ )

scales. Unexpectedly, it also was related to the SDQ ( $r=.23$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and the BIDR SDE ( $r=.37$ ,  $p<.01$ ) scales. Therefore, mixed results were found with regard to the concurrent validity of the IRI DD subscale as deliberate deception scores were significantly related to both the impression management and self-deceptive positivity components of social desirability. The validation of the IRI DD subscale was further hampered by the lack of relationship between the IRI DD and the only other measure placed within the deliberate deception conceptual category, the ESD.

For the purpose of establishing construct validity, the IRI subscales were then compared to measures of theoretically-related constructs as shown in Table 8. Differential correlation patterns were expected between the IRI subscales and related constructs. Specifically, it was predicted that the Self-Deceptive Positivity subscale would be more highly associated with measures underlying self-protecting/enhancing mechanisms, whereas the impression management and Deliberate Deception subscales were presumed to have higher relationships with measures of overt response distortion. Additionally, it was expected that deliberate deception would be marginally related to lying. As expected, the SDP subscale was significantly correlated with the Tennessee Self-Concept Self-Criticism subscale ( $r=.31$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Surprisingly, the IRI SDP was significantly related to the CPI Good Impression scale ( $r=.33$ ,  $p<.01$ ). In contrast, as can be seen in Table 8, the Impression Management subscale was significantly related to the CPI Good Impression scale ( $r=.32$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and the MMPI K scale ( $r=.29$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The IRI IM subscale also was inversely related to the Profile Infrequency measure

Table 8. Correlations Between Item Response Inventory Scores and Related Measures

	SDP	IM	DD	IRITOT
CPIGi	.33**	.32**	.26**	.40**
MMPIL	-.05	.13	-.07	-.02
MMPIK	.17	.24**	.11	.22*
TSC	.34**	-.04	-.07	.11
PI	-.08	-.22*	-.07	-.15

*Note:* \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ ; CPIGi = California Personality Inventory Good Impression Scale (CPI; Gough, 1952); MMPIL = MMPI Lie Scale (Meehl & Hathaway, 1946); MMPIK = MMPI K Scale (Meehl & Hathaway, 1946); TSC = Tennessee Self-Concept Self-Criticism subscale (Fitts, 1964); PI=Profile Infrequency Scale (Jones, 1988).

( $r=-.22$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The Deliberate Deception subscale was positively correlated with the CPI Gi ( $r=.26$ ,  $p<.01$ ), but it proved to be unrelated to the MMPI L scale ( $r=-.07$ ,  $n s$ ).

In order to estimate the convergent and discriminant validity of the IRI, the average correlations among and between social desirability measures were calculated and compared within and between conceptual categories (*e.g.*, self-deception, impression management, and deliberate deception). It was predicted that the various social desirability scales as well as the IRI subscales would correspond, and therefore be more strongly related, to their respective conceptual categories. As may be seen in Table 9, scales reflective of self deceptive positivity were more strongly associated with other scales of SDP and less strongly related to measures of impression management and deliberate deception. Similarly, impression management inventories were related more strongly with other IM measures and had lower correlations with SDP and DD scales. Unexpectedly, the scales within the deliberate deception category were seemingly unrelated to one another, only weakly correlated with SDP scales, but moderately associated with measures of impression management.

For the purposes of providing further evidence of construct validation, IRI total and subscale scores were compared to measures of psychological adjustment (*e.g.*, RSES, CES- D). It was expected that the IRI SDP and IM subscales would be related to higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of reported depression. Significant correlations between the IRI DD subscale and adjustment measures were not hypothesized. As can be seen in Table 10, higher scores on the SDP ( $r=.26$ ,  $p<.01$ ),

Table 9. Average Correlations Among and Between Social Desirability Scales and Subscales

Construct and scale	SDP	IM	DD
<u>Self-Deceptive Positivity (SDP)</u>			
IRISDP	.37	.33	.17
BIDRSDE	.33	.37	.29
TSC	.46	.33	.07
SDQ	.37	.38	.19
PSD	.49	.36	.06
<i>M</i>	.40	.35	.15
<u>Impression Management (IM)</u>			
IRIIM	.16	.22	.30
BIDRIM	.53	.36	.23
MCSO	.48	.40	.21
RD16	.22	.27	.35
MMPIK	.29	.38	.37
CPIGi	.39	.49	.40
<i>M</i>	.35	.36	.31
<u>Deliberate Deception (DD)</u>			
IRIDD	.21	.30	.12
ESD	.17	.38	.10
MMPIL	.07	.21	.05
<i>M</i>	.15	.30	.09

*Note:* BIDRSDE = Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding Self-Deceptive Enhancement subscale (Paulhus, 1984); BIDRIM = Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding Impression Management subscale (Paulhus, 1984); ESD = Edwards Social Desirability Scale (Edwards, 1957); CPIGi = California Personality Inventory Good Impression Scale (CPI; Gough, 1952); MCSO = Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960); MMPIK = MMPI K Scale (Meehl & Hathaway, 1946); MMPIL = MMPI Lie Scale (Meehl & Hathaway, 1946); PSD=Profile Social Desirability subscale (Jones, 1988); RD16 = Responding Desirably on Attitudes and Opinions scale (Schuessler, Hittle, & Cardascia, 1978); SDQ = Self-Deception Questionnaire (Sackeim & Gur, 1978); TSC = Tennessee Self-criticism subscale (Fitts, 1964).

Table 10. Correlations Between Item Response Inventory Scores and Adjustment Measures

	SDP	IM	DD	IRITOT
RSES	.26**	.24*	.25**	.33**
CES-D	-.23*	-.18*	-.15	-.25**

*Note:* \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ ; RSES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965); CES-D = Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977).

IM ( $r=.24, p<.05$ ), and DD ( $r=.25, p<.01$ ) subscales were related to higher self-reported levels of self-esteem. Furthermore, higher SDP ( $r=-.23, p<.05$ ) and IM ( $r=-.18, p<.05$ ) scores were associated with lower levels of self-reported depression.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

#### **Item Response Inventory**

The Likert analyses supported the internal consistency of the Item Response Inventory. Specifically, the IRI Self-Deceptive Positivity, Impression Management, and Deliberate Deception subscales met conventional standards of internal reliability as indicated by coefficient alpha, mean inter-item correlation, and item-total correlations.

Comparisons with extant measures of social desirability and related measures indicated substantial support for the validity of the IRI as a whole and partially supported the tripartite conceptualization of social desirability. Validity evidence included data addressing the concurrent, construct, convergent, and discriminant validity of each subscale of the IRI as well as the total inventory score. With regard to concurrent validity, it was hypothesized that each of the IRI subscales would be most strongly related to the social desirability measures corresponding to the respective conceptual category. As expected, the self-deceptive positivity subscale showed significant correlations with other measures of self-deception and no correspondence with measures of deliberate deception. Unexpectedly, IRI SDP also yielded positive correlations with measures of the impression management component of SDR, providing conflicting evidence for concurrent validity. Thus, the self-deceptive positivity subscale of the IRI may not be a pure indicator of that conceptual category.



The IRI IM subscale was significantly related to three measures of impression management but lacked convergence with the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability and BIDR IM scales, raising doubts about the validity of the items written to comprise that measure. However, it should be noted that the MCSD is no longer assumed to be a pure indicator of SDR as it is also a measure of approval motivation. Thus, the lack of correspondence between the IRI IM and MCSD may be a result of IRI items reflecting impression management solely, whereas the MCSD items contain content relevant to multiple factors. Furthermore, the impression management subscale was moderately correlated with other measures of socially desirable responding, providing partial support for the validity of this particular subscale of the IRI and further establishing the validity of impression management as an essential component of social desirability.

The IRI DD subscale did not correlate with the other two measures placed in that conceptual category, thereby not supporting the inclusion of deliberate deception in the theoretical framework of social desirability. However, there are several possible reasons for the lack of correspondence between this subscale of the IRI and other SDR measures presumed to assess deceptive tendencies. First, no extant measures of social desirability were designed specifically to index deliberate deception. Second, it may be that the items written to correspond to this category were not clearly distinguishable from those written to correspond to impression management. Because of the assumption that deliberate deception is a more extreme form of impression management, the two constructs would be expected to be at least somewhat related. Further conceptual distinctions between DD and IM and subsequent refinement of the

wording of IRI subscale items may provide a clearer differentiation between these two SDR concepts. For now, additional research is needed to determine the merits of including deliberate deception as a separate component of SDR.

The IRI SDP subscale was most highly related to its corresponding category in the convergent and discriminant validity analyses, but it was also associated with the impression management conceptualization of social desirability. Surprisingly, the IRI IM subscale and RD16 were most reflective of the deliberate deception conceptual category, suggesting that their content was conceptually different from the other measures in the IM group. This pattern of results suggests that there may be substantial conceptual, as well as content, overlap between impression management and deliberate deception. In addition, the finding that the IRI DD scale was most strongly related to the impression management category may suggest that the names of the IRI DD and IM scales ought to be reversed as their item content reflects the opposite conceptualization of SDR.

Construct validity evidence was established by comparing scores on the three conceptualizations of social desirability and theoretically-related measures. Specifically, it was hypothesized that the IRI Self-Deceptive Positivity subscale would be more strongly related to measures underlying self-protecting/enhancing mechanisms, whereas the Impression Management and Deliberate Deception subscales were presumed to have higher relationships with measures of overt response distortion. As hypothesized, IRI SDP was the only scale related to the Tennessee Self-Concept Self-Criticism scale, supporting the assumption that self-deceptive positivity represents an

underlying self-enhancing, or self-protecting, mechanism. The IRI IM, on the other hand, was the only IRI subscale significantly related to the MMPI K scale which supports its construct validation as impression management scales are the only SDR scales found to correlate with that particular MMPI scale. The IRI DD subscale was only correlated with one of the measures presumed to be conceptually-related to social desirability, raising doubts about its addition to the broad conceptualization of social desirability. However, this may be due to the fact that deliberate deception represents a more negative, volitional conceptualization of social desirability which is not implicated in most of the other related construct measures.

Correlational analyses between IRI subscales and measures of psychological adjustment were conducted to provide further evidence of their construct validity. As expected, the IRI SDP scale was most strongly related to adjustment measures, indicating that people who report higher levels of self-deceptive positivity also report higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression. These findings support previous research suggesting that self-deception may be responsible for general adaptive reactions promoting psychological adjustment. The social desirability literature further maintains that SDP alone is associated with higher self-esteem and that impression management reflects an other-oriented, contextual depiction of SDR which has no adjustment-related implications for the self. However, one of the interesting findings of this study was that both impression management and deliberate deception were related to higher levels of self-esteem, suggesting that people who can

regulate the image they present to the world have a greater sense of self-worth perhaps due to a greater degree of adaptability to the environment.

Although this study offers additional insights into the multifaceted nature of social desirability, its findings are limited by various aspects of the methodology employed. One of the limitations of this study was that both the reliability and validity analyses were conducted on samples of college students, leaving unanswered the questions as to whether these results would generalize to other populations. Similarly, the test-retest reliability of the IRI was not examined in this series of studies, leaving the temporal stability of the IRI scores unassessed. Thus, subsequent research ought to include test-retest procedures and more diverse samples in order to assess the reliability of the IRI more thoroughly.

Furthermore, these studies were limited to self-report assessment procedures only. Behavioral analyses and sociometric ratings might yield supportive data and might help to untangle the conflicting findings thus far. Also, without experimental manipulation, it cannot be determined whether social desirability scores, as indexed by the IRI, reflect stable personality characteristics or whether they are context-specific. Previous research has found that impression management is especially sensitive to situational demands, with participant scores rising as participants change from private to more public situations. Therefore, further research may be necessary to test whether deliberate deception is similarly dependent on the presentational demands of a given situation.

The main purpose of this research was to develop a reliable and valid index of social desirability. Although the findings of these studies were unable to provide clear support for the inclusion of the concept of deliberate deception within the broad theoretical framework of socially desirable responding, there was enough evidence to suggest that it may be a useful avenue to pursue in future research studies. In addition, this research raises questions regarding the use of traditional social desirability measures, such as the MCSD and the BIDR, without further establishing their content and consequent validity. Social desirability has traditionally been assumed to be a relatively simple concept, a concept which everyone assumes he or she understands. However, as these results suggest, social desirability is a multifaceted construct that may not have been fully explained and accurately measured as of yet. Therefore, further research is needed to clarify the true nature of SDR and its various components.

### **Social Desirability Conceptualizations**

In the convergent and discriminant validity analyses of the IRI, the average correlations between social desirability scales and conceptual categories failed to establish a clear distinction among the various SDR components. As a whole, the measures of self-deceptive positivity had slightly higher levels of correspondence with other such measures than with measures in either of the other two conceptual categories. However, the BIDR SDE items were slightly more representative of the impression management social desirability category, suggesting that the BIDR may be inaccurately assessing the multifaceted nature of SDR. Similarly, the SDQ proved to

be equally representative of the self-deception and impression management conceptualizations of SDR which goes against earlier findings that the SDQ is the best marker of self-deceptive positivity.

The scales comprising the impression management conceptualization of SDR were just as likely to represent self-deceptive positivity and deliberate deception as they were to represent impression management. Specifically, the BIDR IM was more strongly related to the self-deception conceptual category than its own as was the MCSD. In fact, the BIDR IM scale proved to be the best indicator of self-deceptive social desirability. The IRI IM and the RD16 scales, on the other hand, were more strongly related to deliberate deception than impression management. These findings suggest that the conceptualizations of social desirability as reflected by these measures may not be as distinct as has been suggested by earlier research. With regard to the BIDR, this series of studies calls into question the validity of using this inventory as the primary index of SDR.

None of the measures in the deliberate deception category corresponded with one another; yet, all three were moderately related to measures of impression management. Additionally, the CPI Good Impression scale proved to be the best indicator of the deliberate deception conceptualization. This pattern of results supports the idea that deliberate deception may be seen as an extreme form of impression management that nevertheless ought to be considered in its own right and consequently included into the theoretical framework of social desirability.

Overall, these findings clearly suggest the need to more clearly demarcate and more accurately measure the differences among the conceptualizations of social desirability. Most of the extant social desirability measures were shown to represent either dual conceptualizations of SDR or to measure the opposite concept than that which it was designed to measure. Until researchers can fully understand the nuances of social desirability, there can be no clear conceptualization, either theoretical or empirical, of the construct domain of social desirability.

Many more questions were raised than answered by this empirical inquiry, and the answers to these questions are crucial to the understanding of social desirability, helping researchers to reshape SDR conceptualizations and measures in the future. Specifically, future research must focus on the inclusion of deliberate deception within the theoretical framework of social desirability. Therefore, a replication and extension of the present research would be an important first step. Additionally, researchers need to re-examine the current empirical distinction between self-deception and impression management as measures specifically designed to measure one or the other fail to assess their respective SDR conceptualization accurately.

In conclusion, future research ought to focus on the theoretical clarification of SDR. Specifically, researchers must refine extant social desirability measures to differentiate among SDR conceptualizations more accurately. The data presented in these studies suggest that the Item Response Inventory is a reliable SDR measure. The questions that arose in regard to the IRI's validity are not unique to this new measure as many other SDR measures fail to demonstrate the conceptual distinctions inherent in

their development. Therefore, further research ought to utilize this measure and explore the proposed tripartite conception of social desirability.



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## VITA

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