Asking people to answer honestly on personality tests: A truly unbiased method to measure actual personality in faking studies?

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ABSTRACT

In 2004 in the USA only, personality testing represented a $400 Million industry with an average growth of 10% a year (Hsu, 2004). Despite their widespread use, concerns have been raised regarding responses biases that affect the construct validity of personality inventories and self-reports in general. This study focus on faking behaviour, which can be defined as a conscious and deliberate attempt to provide a self-description that helps the person to achieve personal goals in response to situational demands (Ziegler, McCann & Roberts, 2012). We provide a new method based on structural equation modelling that sheds a new light on faking studies showing that asking people to answer honestly on personality inventories does not always provides a truly unbiased measure of the Big5 dimensions.

INTRODUCTION

Classical methods of measuring faking behaviour in self report personality assessment:

1. Within subjects design: respondents answers the same personality inventory twice: under "respond honestly" instructions and under "fake good / bad" instructions. The amount of mean shift indicates respondents ability to fake when instructed to do so.

2. Between subjects design: comparison of means shifts between groups were faking motivation and behaviour is assumed to vary naturally. The mean shift indicates that motivated sample (e.g. applicants) do actually fake.

Classical assumption: answers given under honest instructions represent an unbiased measure of the underlying personality trait.

However self description on personality inventories are affected by the self-presentational issues perceived by respondents (Rolland, 1994). Therefore, **"honest answers" could be potentially affected by faking as a function of the issues perceived by respondents.**

Aim of the study: to model and quantify the amount of faking in "honest" answers as a function of the knowledge of the social value of the Big5 dimensions.

STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING

Because faking on personality inventories represent the deliberate attempt to match one's personality to one's **perception** of the ideal personality in a given situation, in order to effectively fake, individuals needs to **have and use** the **"knowledge" of the social value** of the items (defined in terms of social desirability) to convey the desired positive self-description (Chan, 2009).

Hypothesis tested

1. The knowledge of the social value is a general knowledge which concern the situation defined by the "faking condition" and affect answers given by respondents under faking instructions.

2. Answers given by respondents in the "honest condition" **could be** under the influence of the knowledge of the social value which indicate spontaneous faking.

3. Honest and faking condition for a given construct have something common due a common method bias (same items used twice).

4. The tendency to give social desirable answers, measured by the Marlowe Crowne, scale is a personological variable which can be valued or not as a function of the situation and that can be faked like any other construct.

METHOD

Sample:

317 Swiss University students; age: M=22.44, SD=3.17; 101 males.

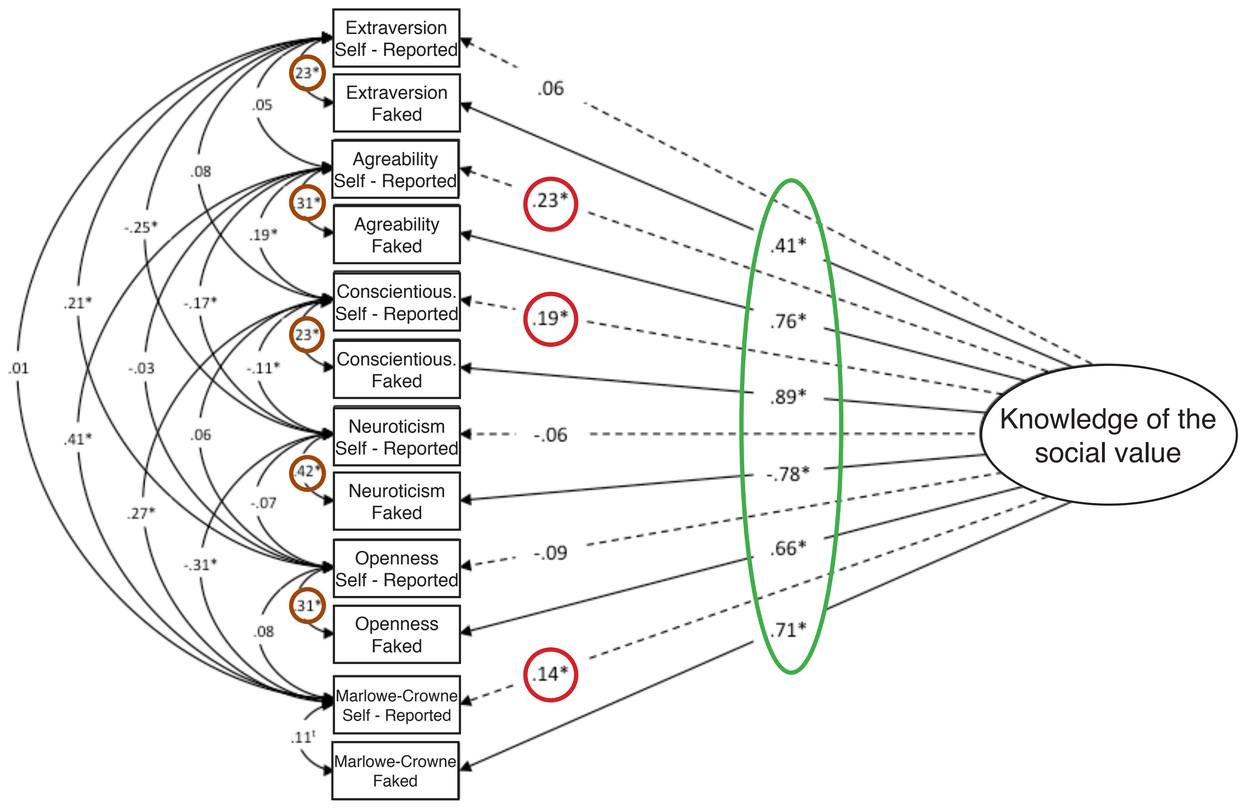
Instruments:

French version of the Big Five Inventory.
Short form (13 items) of the Marlowe Crowne Social Desirability Scale.

Procedure:

Students answers both scales twice, firstly under honest instruction and succesively under fake good instructions.

RESULTS



Hierachical Model Comparaison

We compare this model with a simplier one in which all links between the latent variable and the Big5 dimensions under honest condition are set equal to 0. Results highlight a better fit on data with our initial model.

Table 1- Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	X^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	ΔS-B$X^2(6)$
Model	1.48	0.98	0.97	0.04	
Alternatif Model	1.83	0.97	0.95	0.05	21.05***

***p < .001

DISCUSSION

1. The latent variable strongly positively predicts all the Big5 dimensions under «fake good» instructions exept for neuroticism which is negatively predicted. The latent variable differentiate the Big5 dimensions as a function of their social value.

2. Some dimensions under "honest instructions" are explained by the latent variable: **Agreability**; **Conscientiousness** and the **Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale**. Even if all dimensions are perceived as desirable, **respondents have spontaneously chosen** these dimensions in order to convey an overly positive self description.

3. Dimensions under "honest and fake good" instructions positively correlate due to common method bias (same items used twice).

4. The tendency to give social desirable answers (Marlowe-Crowne) is fakeable like others personnological variables.

5. Residual correlation between dimensions under "faking instruction" are completely explained by the latent variable. These dimensions correlate because of the latent variable.

Table2 - Pourcentage of variance explained by the latent variable

Faking Condition	Honest Condition
17% Extraversion	0% Extraversion
54% Agreableness	5% Agreableness
80% Conscientiousness	3% Conscientiousness
44% Openess	0% Openess
60% Neuroticism	0% Neuroticism
51% Marlowe Crowne	2% Marlowe-Crowne

Alternative explanations:

People that "have" the knowledge of the social value are really agreeable, conscious and with a preference for desirable behaviours.

Futures directions:

Manipulate the context and the evaluative pressure. Factor loadings are expected to increase under "honest instructions" as a function of the evaluative context.

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