Influence of Private and Public Self-Consciousness on Dissembling
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Abstract

College students (62 male, 80 female) completed Fengistein, Scheier, and Buss's Self-Consciousness Scale and the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) under standard instructions. Subjects then completed the HPI under instructions to role-play as if applying for the position of manager. As predicted, changes in HPI response patterns were positively correlated with public self-consciousness, but negatively correlated with private self-consciousness. Effect sizes were generally small, but slightly larger for scales measuring unlikely virtues.
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One effort to improve the validity of personality self-reports in recent years has been to search for personality moderator variables. One moderator variable that has attracted much study is dispositional self-consciousness (Buss, 1980; Cheek, 1982; Nasby, 1989; Paunonen, 1988; Wymer & Penner, 1985).

Persons high in public self-consciousness attend to appearances and are concerned about making a good impression on others, whereas persons high in private self-consciousness attend primarily on internal aspects of the self such as feelings, motives, and attitudes (Fenigstein, Scheier & Buss, 1975). Personality self-reports show the greatest predictive validity for persons low in public but high in private self-consciousness (Scheier, Buss, & Buss, 1978; Turner, 1978).

The present study tests, for the first time, the moderating power of self-consciousness in an evaluative procedure, viz., personnel selection. It is generally accepted that persons are more likely to dissemble ("fake good") in such an evaluative context (Dunnette, et al., 1962). Past efforts to predict precisely who is more likely to dissemble have found weak and
inconsistent results (Buffardi & Oppler, 1989; Johnson, 1986, 1987). The present study tests whether persons low in public but high in private self-consciousness are less likely to dissemble. We tested this hypothesis by administering a personality inventory and the SCS under standard instructions and then readministering the inventory under instructions to pretend that the results would affect whether one was hired for the position of manager.

We hypothesized that persons high in public self-consciousness would be more likely to alter their responses across conditions because they are more sensitive than low scorers to social expectations. We hypothesized that high scorers on private self-consciousness would be less likely to change their responses because they have more highly articulated self-schemata than low scorers (Nasby, 1989), and would therefore resist endorsing items that conflict with their self-schemata, even under pressures to dissemble.

We hypothesized that this effect would be especially pronounced for "unlikely virtue" scales, composed of items that either claim socially desirable but highly improbable characteristics or disclaim common frailties (cf. Tellegen, 1982).
Method

Subjects

Subjects were 142 introductory psychology students (62 male, 80 female) who completed the procedures as part of their course experience.

Instruments

Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS). The SCS (Fenigstein et al., 1975) was used to assess private and public self-consciousness. The Private Self-Consciousness Scale contains 10 items such as "I'm always trying to figure myself out" and "I'm generally attentive to my inner feelings." The Public Self-Consciousness Scale contains 7 items. Items on this scale include "I'm usually aware of my appearance" and "I'm concerned about what other people think of me." The reliability and validity of these scales have been amply documented (Buss, 1980; Carver & Scheier, 1981).

Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI). The HPI (Hogan, 1986) contains 325 True-False, self-report personality items. The six standard content scales of the HPI include Intellectance, Adjustment, Prudence, Ambition, Sociability, and Likeability. All six scales have demonstrated good reliability and validity; evidence is documented in Hogan's manual.

Unlikely Virtue Scales. The HPI was augmented with six unlikely virtue scales, created to increase subjects' opportunities to exaggerate
good qualities or deny weaknesses. The content of each scale corresponds to the content of one of the standard scales. For example, one unlikely Intellectance item is "Most people think I'm a genius" (see Appendix for complete list). Items were embedded after every fifth standard HPI item.

Procedure

Subjects first completed the SCS. Next they completed the augmented HPI, first according to normal instructions and then according to the role playing instructions. Order of instructions was counterbalanced to control for practice effects (Wiggins, 1966). To assess tendency to dissemble, squared differences ($d^2$) were calculated between scores on each scale across instructional conditions. Next we computed $Q^2$ (Cronbach & Gleser, 1953), a global index of incongruence between profiles across conditions, by summing the individual $d^2$s for each subject. This was done separately for the standard and unlikely virtue scales, providing 12 $d^2$s and 2 $Q^2$s for each subject. These dissembling coefficients were then regressed on subjects' public and private self-consciousness scores.

Results

An examination of scale means across instructional conditions
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indicated a significant effect for the role-playing manipulation. Scores on all standard and unlikely virtue HPI scales increased significantly, with the exception of the standard Sociability scale. Effect sizes were of the order of one \( \text{sd} \) for the standard scales and one to two \( \text{sd}s \) for the unlikely virtue scales. Rank order of scores across conditions was preserved somewhat; most standard HPI scales correlated about .40 across conditions, whereas the unlikely virtue scales correlated about .20-.30 across conditions (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

The results of principle interest concern the ability of the self-consciousness scales to predict score changes across conditions. These results, summarized in Table 2, indicate that public and private self-consciousness correlated with dissembling in the predicted directions, but that the correlations were very small. Public self-consciousness showed 10 out of 14 positive correlations, while private self-consciousness showed 12 out of 14 negative correlations. The absolute magnitudes of the correlations were on the order of zero to .20. Even the multiple correlation coefficients assessing the joint impact of the two
types of self-consciousness were not much higher. As expected, however, dissembling on unlikely virtues tended to be better predicted than dissembling on the standard HPI scales.

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Insert Table 2 about here
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Implications and Conclusions

As predicted, persons low in public and high in private self-consciousness tended to change their responses the least between standard instructional conditions and simulated employment interview conditions. The effect of dispositional self-consciousness was very small, however, and these weak effects are consistent with previous efforts to predict dissembling (Buffardi & Oppler, 1989; Johnson, 1986, 1987). It would appear that the "stimulus strength" of the evaluative personnel assessment context is so strong as to override individual differences in tendency to dissemble.
References


Table 1

**HPI Score Changes across Instructional Conditions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Normal</th>
<th>Role-Play</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
<th>t(141)</th>
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<td><strong>Mean SD</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>38.3</td>
<td>.20*</td>
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<td>28.2</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>-12.07***</td>
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<td>Ambition</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>- 8.77***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sociability</td>
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<td>.41***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Likeability</td>
<td>20.9</td>
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<td>.41***</td>
<td>- 7.70***</td>
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<td><strong>Unlikely Virtues</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7.0</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>-12.89***</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.29***</td>
<td>-14.75***</td>
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<td>6.3</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>-10.45***</td>
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</table>

*p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001
Table 2

Correlations between Dissembling and Self-Consciousness

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Public Sf-Cs</th>
<th>Private Sf-Cs</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.15*</td>
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<tr>
<td>D²</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001
Appendix: Unlikely Virtue Items

Intellectance

6. I am smarter than most people.
42. Sometimes I think I am a genius.
78. I always got high scores on tests in high school.
114. Every subject in high school came easily to me.
150. Some people think I am brilliant.
186. I have an unusually broad range of knowledge.
222. I have unusually deep insight into things.
258. In my own way, I am an intellectual giant.
294. I am extremely well-read in the arts, humanities, and sciences.
330. I am a modern Renaissance man (or woman).

Adjustment

12. I never worry.
48. I feel perfectly relaxed when meeting new people.
84. I never feel guilty.
120. I never feel depressed.
156. I am always in perfect health.
192. I never get upset.
228. I can do anything I set my mind to.
264. I never have trouble making decisions.
300. I have never been dissatisfied with my life.
336. I have no psychological problems whatsoever.

Prudence

18. I was extremely well-behaved as a child.
54. I never do anything on impulse.
90. I do not break even minor laws.
126. I have never been in any kind of trouble.
162. I have never done anything unsafe.
198. I always fulfill my obligations.
234. I have always done what was expected from me.
270. I have always kept my word.
306. I never even think about doing things that are wrong.
342. I always do what is right, even if I suffer for it.
Ambition

24. No one manages people better than I do.
60. I am an extremely talented and gifted leader.
132. My work will bring me an international reputation.
168. I have never given up.
204. People will talk about my achievements for generations.
240. I will make an extraordinary contribution to mankind.
276. People have been extremely impressed with my leadership.
312. I can win any game I choose to play.
348. I think I am special, better than most people.

Sociability

30. I could talk to people all day long.
66. At parties everyone wants to talk to me.
102. I can't stand to be alone.
138. For me, just being with people is the meaning of life.
174. Everyone I meet seems to be attracted to me.
210. Nothing is more important to me than socializing with people.
246. I am the most sociable person I know.
282. Being able to work with people is more important than salary.
318. I have more friends than most people.
354. I am with other people all the time.

Likeability

36. Everyone liked me in high school.
72. I care more about others than I do about myself.
108. I am extremely easy to live with.
144. I love all people.
180. No one has ever really disliked me.
216. I am one of the nicest persons you will ever meet.
252. I feel sympathetic rather than angry toward people who wrong me.
288. When injured I turn the other cheek.
324. There is no such thing as being too trusting.
360. I never argue with people.