Impression Management ("Lie") Scales Are Associated With Interpersonally Oriented Self-Control, Not Other-Deception

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Abstract

This article explores the status of impression management (IM) scales ("lie scales," notably, BIDR-IM) as measures of response bias, offers theory-driven substantive meaning to them, and compares them with self-deception enhancement (SDE). Study 1 \((N = 99)\) compared self-descriptions of actual self and ideal self given in a non-anonymous setting. High similarity indicates self-enhancement. Study 2 \((70 \text{ dyads})\) analyzed self-other agreement about IM and SDE. Agreement indicates substantive basis to the scales’ scores. Study 3 \((N = 182)\) explored the centrality of self-control in the self-perception of individuals varying in IM and SDE. Study 4 \((95 \text{ dyads})\) corroborated self-reports about self-control using informants’ reports. In Study 1, IM was associated with relative humility, whereas SDE was associated with self-enhancement. In Study 2, strong self-other agreement was found only for IM, indicating that high IM (but not SDE) is grounded in real-life behavior. In Study 3, self-control was central in the self-perception of high IM and high SDE individuals. In Study 4, strong relations with self-control were corroborated by informants only for IM. IM scales measure substantive content associated with self-control aimed at social adaptation, whereas the SDE scale depicts individuals with a grandiose self-perception, who fail to impress knowledgeable others.

Self-report methodology has shaped the field of personality psychology ever since its introduction. Much of what we currently know about traits, values, and self-related constructs rests on the manner with which these constructs were depicted via self-report. Such contributions notwithstanding, self-report methodology has often been treated with a grain of skepticism rooted in the idea that individuals often demonstrate self-favoring biases that undermine the validity of their reports (e.g., Morgeson et al., 2007). A variety of solutions has been offered to address self-favoring biases in self-reports. Among the tools suggested, validity scales—often referred to as impression management, lie, or social desirability scales—have occupied a central role in the attempts to gauge and control biases (cf. Paulhus & Vazire, 2007).

This article addresses the status of the most frequently applied cluster of social desirability scales—measures of “other-deception” (“lie scales”)—that in recent years have been commonly modeled by the Impression Management (IM) scale of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1991). This scale (and equivalent other-deception scales) has been developed with the intention of detecting individuals who consciously bias self-reports on personality scales in a self-favoring manner in order to impress others (Paulhus, 1984). In spite of its popularity, contemporary research has raised doubts about the success of the IM scale in achieving its objective (e.g., Li & Bagger, 2006), suggesting, instead, that it measures a substantive predisposition related to self-control (Uziel, 2010b).

The present report focuses on the two issues at the heart of the discourse on IM—namely, its status as a social desirability scale and the substantive meaning of individual differences in IM. Studies 1 and 2 offer novel ways of exploring whether IM is related to response bias. Study 1 evaluated how desirable the self-description of high IM individuals actually is. Study 2 validated self-reports about IM against reports by informants. Studies 3 and 4 considered a substantive meaning to IM by exploring the scale’s association with self-control (in self-report and in informant report). Throughout, IM-related outcomes were compared with results pertaining to self-deception enhancement (SDE), which reflects a less conscious form of social desirability and therefore (in theory) a milder problem of response bias.
**IM and Other-Deception**

Social desirability scales serve to validate other measures. However, validation of the validity scales themselves has proven to be quite challenging. A formal outline of what makes a social desirability scale valid is lacking (but see Uziel, 2010b, for suggested benchmarks). Notwithstanding, the present research suggests two fundamental criteria: (a) association with overly favorable self-description and (b) independence from substantive traits. The following elaborates on these criteria.

According to the first criterion, high scorers on social desirability scales are expected to portray themselves in an *overly favorable* manner. This criterion forms the basis for interpreting associations between IM scales and substantive traits as reflecting biased endorsement that needs to be controlled (e.g., Lönnqvist, Paunonen, Tuulio-Henriksson, Lönnqvist, & Verkasalo, 2007).

Consistent with that, evidence indicates that IM scores are associated with favorable variants of some of the Big Five traits (e.g., Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1992). Still, these associations are quite limited. For example, IM is not associated (or is negatively associated) with Extraversion and Openness (McCrae & Costa, 1983). Beyond the Big Five, IM also shows theoretically unexpected low (or negative) correlations with desirable qualities, such as with positive affectivity (Diener & Larsen, 1984), and even with making a positive first impression (see Paulhus, 1998, Table 2). Based on such findings, it was suggested that IM scales measure a restricted set of bias tendencies—a moralistic bias (i.e., “saint-like” self-presentation; Paulhus & John, 1998). That is, IM was said to be predictive of excessively favorable self-presentation only in the domain of morality, communalism, and dutifulness.

Notwithstanding, the essence of IM as a social desirability scale is the existence of exaggerated and excessively favorable self-presentation. That is, high IM individuals’ self-reports about traits should be inflated relative to more objective criteria. However, here too the evidence generally does not support the assertion, even for traits reflecting the restricted domain of moralistic bias (i.e., Agreeableness and Conscientiousness; Kurtz, Tarquini, & Iobst, 2008; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Reiss, 1996). However, direct tests pertaining to this criterion are lacking. Study 1 sought to offer an initial answer concerning the tendency by high IM individuals to inflate their self-ratings by analyzing differences between personality ratings of one’s actual self and ratings of one’s ideal self. If high IM reflects a positively biased self-description, there will be a closer match between one’s actual and ideal self among high (vs. low) IM individuals.

The second criterion for a valid measure of response style (i.e., a relatively stable personal disposition to distort self-reports; cf. Lönnqvist et al., 2007) requires that IM scales do not correlate with substantive personality traits (ad hoc correlations excluded, as these might reflect the unwanted effect of response style; the criterion refers to an intrinsic, cross-situational level). Arguing along this line, Paulhus has stated that “there is little reason to believe that individual differences in impression management bear any intrinsic relation to central content dimensions, so its elimination can be generally recommended” (Paulhus, 1984, p. 608). However, in the past 30 years, empirical evidence has shown that IM scales are reliably associated with substantive traits (see Ones et al., 1996, for a meta-analytic summary).

Notwithstanding, several models of IM as a response bias measure allow such scales to carry substantive nature, but suggest that individuals with such (substantive) characteristics are other-deceivers. For example, individuals scoring high on the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS) are said to possess a high need for approval, which is associated with defensiveness, which leads high scorers to deceive others in order to gain social acceptance (Crowne, 1979; Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). This approach stands at the heart of the defensiveness approach to IM (cf. Uziel, 2010b). Defensive individuals are inclined to endorse even extreme and unlikely items (like those found in IM scales) in order to avoid revealing weaknesses that would put them at risk of social disapproval (Crowne, 1979). A central implication of this approach is that relatively high scores on IM scales should not be corroborated by informants (i.e., informants) who are less likely to be defensive while completing the scale (Vazire, 2010).

Alternatively, if IM scores capture true variance of a desirable nature, self-reports about IM should be corroborated by informants, much like agreement on other personality traits. According to this approach (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1983), some individuals are truly highly socialized, have very few bad habits, and almost never lie or cheat. These individuals are inclined to agree with the somewhat unrealistic statements in IM questionnaires because these items reflect a close approximation of their true nature. As Schwarz (1999) argued, answering questions involves making inferences about the pragmatic meaning of items: “Respondents have no reason to assume that the researcher would ask a meaningless question and will hence try to make sense of it. To do so, they are likely to turn to the context of the ambiguous question, much as they would be expected to do in any other conversation” (p. 96).

Furthermore, high IM individuals may not be complete saints, but it could be the case that they aspire to be. The socioanalytic theory (Hogan, 1983) offers a pragmatic explanation that accounts for the substantive nature of individual differences in IM. According to the theory, personality questionnaires measure reputations, which reflect an actor’s characteristic way of behaving in public. That is, the processes that govern responses to items on personality scales are similar to those underlying social interactions in general (Hogan, Hogan, & Roberts, 1996). Because questionnaire responding is a process of self-presentation, there is no inherent disparity between individuals’ responses on ostensibly substantive traits and their responses on IM scales. Furthermore, the image a person conveys in his or her responses is the image that guides his or her actual social behavior.
Together, the above ideas suggest that individual differences in IM reflect individuals’ true desirable character, which also guides their social behavior. To the extent that this holds true, we could expect relatively sizable self-other agreement on IM scales. A direct approach to test this is to ask informants (knowledgeable but less defensive respondents; Vazire, 2010) to report about the behaviors depicted in IM scales. Self-other agreement on IM was the focus of Study 2.

**IM and Self-Control**

Not much is known about the core features of IM. Three of the Big Five traits (Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability) correlate with IM, but their sizes rarely exceed $r = .25$ (cf. Ones et al., 1996). Relatively weak correlations are reported with other constructs as well (e.g., self-esteem, subjective well-being, attachment styles). Recent empirical and theoretical developments have raised an alternative candidate—self-control, which reflects a person’s capacity to alter the self to fit the world (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004). Empirically, several studies found relatively strong (i.e., $r > .45$) correlations between measures of self-control and IM (e.g., Bertrams & Dickhäuser, 2012; Tangney et al., 2004; Uziel & Baumeister, 2012). Theoretically, IM–self-control relation is grounded in models that consider the broader implications of the interpersonal status of high IM individuals (cf. Uziel, 2010b; Uziel & Baumeister, 2012). Positioned within the interpersonal circumplex (Wiggins, 1979), high IM individuals are relatively low in dominance and high in warmth. As such, in public social contexts they are often required to adapt their responses (to those of more dominant status), but at the same time they also want to adapt (because of their high affiliation). Meeting repeated demands to adjust one’s behavior requires self-control (e.g., Seeley & Gardner, 2003), and research shows that high IM individuals perform adjustments in public social contexts highly adaptively (Uziel & Baumeister, 2012).

Self-control, therefore, appears to be a strong candidate to be a central component of IM. Studies 3 and 4 were aimed to explore this possibility more directly than before. Study 3 focused on the role of self-control in the self-definition of high IM individuals. Study 4 sought to validate IM–self-control association against an external criterion: informants’ reports about the targets’ self-control. If IM carries a substantive content and if—as predicted—this content is composed, to a large degree, of high self-control, there should be a positive correlation between self- and informant ratings. Study 4 therefore not only addressed IM–self-control association but also revisited the question of IM as a lie scale.

**IM and SDE**

Contemporary writings about social desirability differentiate between two forms of deception (Paulhus, 1984). IM is conceptualized as a deliberate and conscious form of social desirability, which, by definition, requires cognitive effort. IM is not supposed to be associated with one’s actual behavior, only with one’s self-description. The other form of social desirability—SDE—is conceptualized as nonconscious, reflecting one’s candid (yet distorted) beliefs about oneself. In general, the effect of SDE on behavior does not require effort (i.e., it is automatic), and one’s standing on SDE is expected to show in one’s actual behavior (i.e., beyond the questionnaire response setting). The distinction between IM and SDE is of importance in the present research because among the two, IM is expected to be measuring the more blatant form of bias (but see Pauls & Crost, 2004). Accordingly, IM, and not SDE, is generally controlled for in research and practical settings. The status of IM as a social desirability scale can therefore be evaluated in the context of a construct that represents a milder problem (i.e., SDE). In addition, because high SDE is often not considered a problem, relatively little research has explored its status as a measure of social desirability (e.g., Berry, Page, & Sackett, 2007). The present research will address this issue as well.

**STUDY 1**

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which high IM individuals idealize their self-descriptions. To that aim, participants worked under a non-anonymous setting while completing a Big Five questionnaire twice, once referring to their actual self and once referring to their ideal self. To the extent that the IM scale is a valid measure of social desirability, high IM individuals should describe themselves in a more desirable manner than low IM individuals (in terms of the Big Five, a desirable profile is commonly characterized by high scores on Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experience; Funder & Dobroth, 1987; Viswesvaran & Ones, 1999). Importantly, we can expect to find stronger similarity between the actual self profile and the ideal self profile among high as compared with low IM individuals because the former are expected to describe their actual self in an idealistic manner to begin with. This effect should be stronger for IM as compared with SDE because the non-anonymous setting is expected to stimulate self-presentational motives, which theoretically affect more strongly individuals varying along the IM scale.

**Method**

**Participants.** Ninety-nine psychology students took part in the study; 79 were female. Mean age was 22.7.

**Tools**

*Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding.* The Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR6; Paulhus, 1991) consists of 40 items measuring two expressions of social
desirability with two subscales: Impression Management (IM; 20 items, e.g., “I have never dropped litter on the street,” “I never swear”; $\alpha = .80$) and Self-Deception Enhancement (SDE; 20 items, e.g., “My first impressions of people usually turn out to be right,” “I rarely appreciate criticism”; $\alpha = .63$). Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored with 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree).

**Big Five.** To measure the Big Five traits, participants completed Saucier’s (1994) Mini-Markers. The Mini-Markers consist of 40 adjectives, eight for each of the Big Five dimensions: Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, and Openness. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely inaccurate) to 5 (completely accurate). Participants completed the questionnaire twice: first following regular instructions (“describe yourself as you are generally or typically”), and then following ideal self instructions (“describe your ideal self, your profile if you had a perfect personality”). Reliabilities of all five scales under the two instruction formats were adequate ($\alpha > .67$).

**Procedure.** The questionnaires were completed in class sessions. To induce a non-anonymous setting, Paulhus’s (1984) procedure was followed, such that the cover page of the booklet required participants to specify their full name, email address, and phone number, ostensibly so that we could contact them for future studies based on their responses. Participants completed the questionnaires in the following order: the BIDR, the Mini-Markers under regular instructions (i.e., actual self), and finally the Mini-Markers under ideal self instructions. When completing the Mini-Markers under regular instructions, participants were not aware that they were about to complete the questionnaire again.

**Results**

In order to verify that participants followed the instructions when completing the two forms of the Big Five scale, and that their perception of an ideal personality was consistent with reports in the literature (e.g., Funder & Dobroth, 1987), $t$ tests compared means for all five traits under the two instruction schemes. As expected, compared with their actual self, participants rated their ideal self as more extraverted ($M = 3.01 < 3.51$; $t = 7.38$, $p < .001$), more agreeable ($M = 4.13 < 4.67$; $t = 14.02$, $p < .001$), more conscientious ($M = 3.72 < 4.44$; $t = 12.11$, $p < .001$), more emotionally stable ($M = 3.31 < 4.51$; $t = 16.71$, $p < .001$), and more open to experience ($M = 3.92 < 4.42$; $t = 10.17$, $p < .001$). In addition, a composite score representing the mean of all five traits revealed a more desirable overall profile ($M_{\text{ideal self}} = 4.32 > M_{\text{actual self}} = 3.62$; $t = 22.36$, $p < .001$) in the ideal self setting.

The focus of Study 1 was on the effect of social desirability on the favorability of one’s self-description and on the similarity of one’s actual self profile to one’s ideal self profile. To address these questions, the correlations between participants’ IM ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .83$) scores and their scores on the Big Five traits under the two instruction schemes were calculated. The results are presented in Table 1.

As seen in Table 1, IM had a significant positive correlation with only two of the Big Five traits: Agreeableness and Emotional Stability. Correlations with the other three traits were insignificant. The correlation with the overall (desirable) profile was positive and significant, but relatively weak. The positive correlations with Agreeableness and Emotional Stability are in themselves not evidence of self-enhancement (they could reflect true variance), but the null correlation with the three additional traits and the weak correlation with the overall profile indicate that IM is not associated with an exceptionally positive self-description. Also informative are the correlations with the ideal self profile, which reflect one’s aspirations. As seen in Table 1, IM was associated with an aspiration to improve (i.e., score higher in a favorable direction) on Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and (a trend for) Emotional Stability. Even though high IM individuals described their actual self as relatively high on two of the traits (Agreeableness and Emotional Stability), they still found room for further improvement on these two traits.

Finally, Table 1 also presents the difference score between one’s actual and ideal self. It was hypothesized that to the extent that IM measures a self-enhancement tendency, a higher IM score will be associated with a narrower actual-ideal self difference. The difference scores in Table 1 reflect the $\beta$ weights associated with IM after regressing the ideal self score on actual self and IM (i.e., the association of IM with the residual of regressing ideal self on actual self) for each trait and for the composite score. Four of the five $\beta$ weights are in the positive direction, and the $\beta$ weight associated with Conscientiousness is significant. The $\beta$ weight associated with the overall profile is also positive and significant. This pattern of results indicates that high IM scores were associated with a larger—not smaller—difference between one’s actual and ideal self. The higher one’s IM score was, the larger was the gap between the favorability of one’s actual self profile and one’s ideal self profile.

Similar analyses conducted for SDE ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .53$) are presented in Table 2. As seen in Table 2, SDE had relatively strong correlations ($rs > .35$, $ps < .01$) with the desirable vari-

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### Table 1: Study 1: Association of IM With the Big Five Traits Under Different Instructional Schemes

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<td>Actual self</td>
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<td>.34**</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>.22*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideal self</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.25*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>.10</td>
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<td>.26**</td>
<td>.13</td>
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*Notes. N = 99. IM = impression management; E = Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; ES = Emotional Stability; O = Openness to Experience.

**Correlations between IM and Big Five traits under different instruction schemes.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.
ants of three traits (Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability), and correlations with the other two traits were also in the positive direction. Importantly, SDE had a very strong association ($r = .56$, $p < .01$) with the overall profile, meaning that when all traits are combined, a higher SDE score was associated with an extremely positive self-portrait. Turning to correlation with ideal self, high SDE individuals expressed an aspiration to score higher on just one trait (Conscientiousness). The correlation with the overall profile was also nonsignificant. That is, high SDE was associated with little aspiration to have a more desirable personality. This was made explicit in the analyses of the difference scores: SDE was significantly negatively associated with the actual-ideal self gap for Agreeableness and Emotional Stability. The association with the gap pertaining to the overall profile also had a negative sign. Together, these findings show that high SDE is associated with a highly favorable description of one’s actual self profile—in fact, so favorable that high SDE was a reliable predictor of not wanting to do any better.

### Discussion

Study 1 aimed at exploring whether BIDR-IM meets one of the basic criteria for a valid social desirability scale—excessive self-enhancement. To that aim, participants were asked to describe their actual self and later their ideal self in a non-anonymous setting. In contrast with predictions by approaches associating IM scales with a socially desirable response bias, IM was not associated with excessive self-enhancement. It actually had a significant effect in the opposite direction, indicating greater humility among high (vs. low) scorers. Results consistent with a pattern expected of a social desirability scale were found for the SDE scale. High (vs. low) SDE individuals described their actual self in a highly desirable manner, expressed relatively little aspirations for a “better” personality, and felt that their actual self is closer to an ideal self. Put simply, it was SDE, not IM, that “acted” like a social desirability scale.

The fact that the results pertaining to SDE have confirmed the predictions for a valid social desirability scale indicates that the design of the study was adequate in testing the self-enhancement criterion. Study 2 addressed the second criterion for a valid social desirability scale, that of no correlation with substantive content.

### STUDY 2

Study 2 explored the extent to which high IM (and SDE) individuals’ self-descriptions are dissociated from their real-life character. It builds on the second criterion for a valid social desirability scale, which is that the measures of response style should not correlate with substantive content (at an intrinsic level). As discussed above, ample evidence shows reliable IM-traits associations. The present study takes this criterion to an extreme by considering IM (and SDE) scale items themselves. These items were originally devised to sample highly positive behaviors. In theory, high IM scorers have endorsed unlikely qualities and are therefore deceivers. Study 2 puts this assertion to a direct test by comparing self-other agreement on IM (and SDE). Agreement was calculated between a target person and an informant. Informants are less defensive in their responses and therefore, to the extent that high IM individuals exaggerate the desirability of their character, we could expect to find weak, null, or even negative agreement coefficients (Vazire, 2010). If, however, high IM individuals describe their true selves, we could expect to find substantial self-other agreement. In the former case (i.e., that high IM individuals are deceivers), we can expect to find stronger agreement over SDE as compared with IM because (by definition) SDE guides ones real-life behavior, whereas IM does not.

### Method

**Participants, Tools, and Procedure.** One hundred forty romantic partners (for a minimal period of 6 months) had responded to notes posted on bulletin boards at a university campus. Seventy of the participants served as target persons, and the other 70—their partners—were informants. Of the 70 target persons, 37 were female, with a mean age of 29.3. Of the informants, 33 were female, and the mean age was 29.7. Ninety-seven percent of the dyads were married couples. Mean acquaintanceship was 80.9 months (range: 6–576). Each target-partner dyad received a packet of self-report (target person) and other-report (partner) questionnaires1 (i.e., a nonreciprocal design; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) sealed in individual envelopes and was asked not to discuss their content.

The target person first completed the BIDR (Paulhus, 1991; $\alpha = .81$ for the IM scale and $\alpha = .71$ for the SDE scale). Following that was the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991), which served to measure Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness with 44 statements, such as “I am someone who is reserved” ($\alpha > .69$). Participants also reported about their satisfaction with their relationship by answering seven questions (e.g., “in general, how satisfied are you with your partner?”) on a 1 (not at...
all) to 7 (very much) scale. The seven items were combined to a single satisfaction score ($\alpha = .84$). Informants completed the same set of questionnaires, referring (in the BIDR and the BFI) to the target person. Specifically, in completing the BIDR, informants rated items such as “my partner never swears” ($\alpha = .82$ for the IM scale and $\alpha = .71$ for the SDE scale). For the BFI, items were also modified to address the target person’s standing on each trait (e.g., “my partner tends to be disorganized”; $\alpha > .60$). Informants also rated their personal satisfaction with the relationship ($\alpha = .87$).

**Results**

The goal of this study was to evaluate the extent to which IM measures other-deception in a fairly direct way—by gauging the reliability of one’s self-report about the ostensibly unlikely items of the IM scale itself through comparison with reports by knowledgeable external observers. To that aim, self-other agreement on IM was calculated. The analysis showed a positive, moderately strong, significant correlation ($r = .44$, $p < .01$). That is, the higher one rated oneself on the IM scale ($M = 4.30, SD = .91$), the higher one was judged to be on the IM scale as rated by an external observer ($M = 5.07, SD = .88$), who was unaware of the target's responses, indicating that high IM individuals have been providing a candid portrait of themselves.  

Additional analyses explored two possible moderators of agreement. First, relationship duration was considered. It could be that it takes a little time to uncover the true deceptive nature of high IM individuals. If this is the case, agreement would be stronger among short-term versus long-term partners. Moderated regression analysis exploring the interaction between the target’s IM score and relationship duration (predictors were standardized first) in predicting a partner’s rating of IM yielded a nonsignificant interaction effect [$\beta = -.16, ns$; IM ($\beta = .41, p < .01$) but not relationship duration ($\beta = .07, ns$) had a significant unique contribution]. Agreement was similar among partners low ($r = .45, p < .01$) and high ($r = .49, p < .01$) in satisfaction.

All in all, the self-other agreement reported for the IM scale (i.e., $r = .44$) is highly similar to reports in the literature about agreement on the Big Five traits (e.g., Connelly & Ones, 2010). This was also the case in the present sample, for which agreement on the Big Five traits ranged from $r = .46$ (for Openness) to $r = .64$ (for Extraversion; all $ps < .01$). A final set of analyses focused on the association between the target person’s IM score and the partner’s ratings of the Big Five traits. Results showed a single significant positive correlation for Agreeableness ($r = .26, p < .05$), meaning that high IM individuals were judged as more agreeable by their partners. Correlations for the other four traits were nonsignificant ($r < .13$).

A parallel set of analyses was conducted for SDE ($M_{self} = 4.10, SD = .70$; $M_{other} = 4.47, SD = .70$). First, self-other agreement was calculated and revealed a notably weaker agreement ($r = .24, p < .05$) than agreement on IM. That is, high SDE individuals’ claim for supreme abilities was only partially corroborated by knowledgeable informants. The role of relationship duration regarding agreement was explored next, yielding a nonsignificant interaction [$\beta = -.18, ns$; SDE ($\beta = .23, p < .06$) but not relationship duration ($\beta = .04, ns$) had a significant unique contribution]. However, self-other agreement on SDE approached significance only among relatively short-acquainted dyads ($r = .33, p < .05$) but not among relatively long-acquainted dyads ($r = .07, ns$). That is, in contrast with the expectations for a substantive personality trait—but consistent with the expectations for a social desirability scale—the more knowledgeable the informant was, the weaker was self-other agreement on the SDE scale. The role of relationship quality regarding agreement was the focus of the next analysis. The moderated regression analysis did not yield a significant interaction [$\beta = -.20, ns$; SDE ($\beta = .24, p < .05$) and relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .29, p < .05$) each had a significant unique contribution], but again, the pattern of correlations indicated that knowledgeable informants tended to agree less with the self-description of individuals varying along the SDE scale. With detail, agreement was relatively strong among dyads sharing relatively low relationship quality ($r = .42, p < .05$), but it was weak and insignificant among dyads with high relationship quality ($r = -.14, ns$). That is, when the relationship was sound, and as a result informants probably had more intimate acquaintance with their partners, high SDE was not corroborated. Finally, the partner’s report about the target’s Big Five traits was not associated with the target’s SDE score ($-.15 < r < .14, ns$). That is, as expected from a measure of response bias, SDE did not correlate with substantive traits that were obtained from an external source.

**Discussion**

Study 2 was aimed at exploring an important criterion for a valid response bias scale, that of no correlation with substan-
tive traits. This study has taken a direct approach of corroborating self-reports about behaviors depicted in the social desirability scales themselves. The results revealed a relatively strong correlation between one’s rating on the IM scale and the score obtained from knowledgeable informants. Relationship duration or quality had no impact on agreement. That is, when a person rated herself or himself as possessing desirable qualities associated with impulse control and agreeable acts, he or she were probably true to reality. Furthermore, the magnitude of the correlation, which was similar to agreement on the Big Five traits, indicates that the behaviors associated with the IM scale are as stable and consistent as those of any other trait. Additional analyses showed that high IM individuals are described by their acquaintances as agreeable.

As in Study 1, it was the SDE scale that “acted” like a social desirability scale. SDE scores were only weakly corroborated by informants. Furthermore, ironically, the more knowledgeable the informant was, the less likely he or she was to agree with the target person’s rating. This pattern of results is consistent with findings showing that a high SDE score is associated with a positive first impression that wanes as acquaintanceship improves (Paulhus, 1998). High SDE individuals’ self-attributed positive qualities were not corroborated by the most knowledgeable of informants, who are less likely to be impressed by short-term self-presentational acts. In addition, targets’ SDE was not associated with any of the Big Five traits as rated by the informants, again consistent with a social desirability interpretation of this scale.

In sum, Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that the IM scale does not meet basic criteria for a valid response style measure. It is not associated with excessively desirable self-description, and scores along this scale are actually corroborated by external observers. The goal of Studies 3 and 4 was to explore a substantive meaning to the IM scale. Based on past research (e.g., Uziel & Baumeister, 2012), an association of IM with self-control appears to be a strong candidate. Study 3 focused on the role of self-control in the self-perception of individuals varying along the IM scale, and Study 4 sought to corroborate IM–self-control association using an external criterion. Again, results pertaining to IM were compared with SDE.

**STUDY 3**

To the extent that IM measures substantive content, what comprises this content? Much research on IM–Big Five association speaks about an association with Agreeableness (e.g., Ones et al., 1996). But, as mentioned above, the correlations are not strong enough to define Agreeableness as a core feature of IM (cf. Graziano & Tobin, 2002). Relatively little research has been devoted to exploring IM associations with other constructs, but recent work has signaled self-control as a strong candidate (e.g., Uziel, 2010b). To further explore this possibility, participants in this study were asked to complete a series of personality inventories that allowed assessing the relative importance of self-control in the self-definition of high IM individuals. In addition to self-control, participants completed scales measuring the Big Five traits, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and needs for affiliation, autonomy, dominance, and achievement.

**Method**

**Participants, Tools, and Procedure.** One hundred eighty-two students (53% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 24.15$) completed the questionnaire packet in class sessions. Participants completed the BIDR (Paulhus, 1991; see Study 1; IM $\alpha = .82$, SDE $\alpha = .68$) and the Big Five Mini-Markers (Saucier, 1994; see Study 1; $\alpha = .75 < \alpha < .84$). In addition, participants completed the brief (13-item) version of the Trait Self-Control Scale (Tangney et al., 2004; e.g., “I am good at resisting temptation”; $\alpha = .85$), a short (15-item) version of the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (Spinella, 2007; e.g., “I act on the spur of the moment”; $\alpha = .83$), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965; e.g., “I feel that I have a number of good qualities”; $\alpha = .83$), the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001; e.g., “Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well”; $\alpha = .92$), as well as the 20-item Manifest Needs Questionnaire (MNQ; Steers & Braunning, 1976), measuring four needs: achievement (e.g., “I try to perform better than my co-workers”; $\alpha = .50$), affiliation (e.g., “When I have a choice, I try to work in a group instead of by myself”; $\alpha = .26$), autonomy (e.g., “I try my best to work alone on a job”; $\alpha = .38$), and dominance (e.g., “I seek an active role in the leadership of a group”; $\alpha = .68$). Unfortunately, reliabilities of some of the MNQ subscales were low, and thus results pertaining to them should be treated with caution.

**Results and Discussion**

Table 3 presents the correlation of IM ($M = 3.91$, $SD = .93$) and SDE ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .62$) with the various scales. As can

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation With</th>
<th>IM</th>
<th>SDE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>-.42**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait self-control</td>
<td>-.47**</td>
<td>-.52**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsiveness</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>-.42**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.53**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General self-efficacy</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.42**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nAchievement</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nAffiliation</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nAutonomy</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nDominance</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.21**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 182$. IM = impression management; SDE = self-deception enhancement. **$p < .01$.**
be seen, IM had the strongest correlation with trait self-control ($r = .47, p < .01$) along with positive correlation with measures related to self-control, namely, Conscientiousness and impulsiveness. Measures of affiliation (Agreeableness and need of affiliation) were also correlated with high IM scores. SDE had a strong correlation with almost all traits sampled, most notably with self-esteem ($r = .53, p < .01$) and self-control ($r = .52, p < .01$). Null correlations for SDE emerged only for measures of affiliation and Openness.

To facilitate interpretation and to advance the exploration of the relative importance of different expressions of personality in the self-perception of IM (and high SDE) individuals, the various scales were subjected to factor analysis (principal axis factoring with promax rotation). Based on parallel analysis (O’Connor, 2000), five factors were retained (accounting for 52% of the variance): self-control (trait self-control, Conscientiousness, impulsiveness—reversed, Neuroticism—reversed), self-esteem (self-esteem and general self-efficacy), affiliation (Agreeableness, need of affiliation, need of autonomy—reversed), dominance (need of dominance, need of achievement, Extraversion), and openness (Openness). Factor scores were saved. Next, to evaluate the relative importance of the different constructs in defining IM, IM was simultaneously regressed on the five factor scores. As seen in Table 4 (left panel), self-control had the strongest unique loading in predicting IM, followed by low dominance and high affiliation. Unexpectedly, Openness also had a unique positive contribution to predicting IM. Together, the results are highly consistent with previous reports in the literature about IM, which associate it with high affiliation and low dominance (referring to the interpersonal circumplex; e.g., Cervenka, Gustavsson, Halldin, & Farde, 2010; Paulhus & John, 1998). The present results show that self-control also plays an important role in defining IM, at least in the self-perception of high IM individuals.

Table 4 (right panel) presents the results of the equivalent analysis, whereby SDE scores were regressed on the five factors. Similar to IM, self-control was the strongest unique predictor of SDE, followed by self-esteem, which also had a strong unique contribution. Low affiliation was also associated with high SDE, whereas the remaining two factors (dominance and Openness) had no added unique contribution. It therefore appears that individuals with a high SDE score perceive themselves as having high self-control, high self-esteem, and a low need for interpersonal contact.

In sum, Study 3 showed that self-control plays a major role in the self-perception of high IM (and high SDE) individuals. This aspect of IM has not been studied before even though self-control can be immensely important in facilitating the adaptation of low-dominance/high-affiliation individuals. Study 4 sought to corroborate these relations by referring to an external criterion.

### STUDY 4

The present study was set to explore the extent to which high IM (and high SDE) individuals’ claim to possess high self-control is corroborated by external sources. Specifically, akin to Study 2, informants’ reports were applied as an external criterion. Based on the results of Study 3, it was expected that IM would be associated with high self-control in self-report. If self-control is indeed an integral part of high IM individuals’ daily conduct, informants are expected to corroborate their self-report. Whereas the results of Studies 1 and 2 suggested that high IM individuals report candidly about their character, they also suggested that SDE was associated with report bias. High SDE individuals’ self-attributed high self-control was therefore not expected to be corroborated by knowledgeable others. This study also sought to expand the generalizability of the results by measuring IM with the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-revised (EPQ-R) Lie Scale (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985) in addition the BIDR-IM, which was applied in Studies 1–3.

### Method

#### Participants, Tools, and Procedure.

Ninety-five participants and their romantic partners had responded to notes posted on bulletin boards throughout the campus (61% of the target persons were female; targets’ $M_{age} = 24.80, SD = 3.50$; partners’ $M_{age} = 25.39, SD = 3.67$; 33% of the couples were married; $M_{acquaintanceship length} = 38.52$ months, range = 6–163). Each target-partner dyad received a packet of self-report (target person) and other-report (partner) questionnaires (i.e., a nonreciprocal design; Kenny et al., 2006) sealed in individual envelopes. The participants were asked not to discuss the content of the questionnaires before completing them. In exchange for their participation, dyads were offered the opportunity to win a substantial sum of money in a raffle.

The target person completed the BIDR (Paulhus, 1991; $\alpha = .77$ for the IM scale and $\alpha = .69$ for the SDE scale). As a second measure of IM, participants completed the short (12-item) Lie Scale of the EPQ-R (Eysenck et al., 1985; e.g., “Do you always practice what you preach?”). A 4-point answer format anchored with 1 (definite no) and 4 (definite yes) was applied ($\alpha = .74$). The Lie scale had a strong correlation with
the BIDR-IM ($r = .69, p < .01$) and a moderate correlation with the BIDR-SDE ($r = .36, p < .01$). Next, the brief version of the Trait Self-Control Scale (Tangney et al., 2004; see Study 3; $\alpha = .83$) was completed. Following that, participants rated their satisfaction with their relationship (two questions; e.g., “how satisfied are you with your romantic relationship?”) using an 11-point scale ranging from not at all to very much ($\alpha = .65$). Finally, demographic information, including the duration of the romantic relationship, was reported. Informants completed the brief Trait Self-Control Scale, modified to refer to the target person (e.g., “my partner is good at resisting temptation”; $\alpha = .82$), and reported about their own satisfaction with the relationship using the same items presented to the target person ($\alpha = .84$). Target and informant satisfaction ratings were correlated ($r = .39, p < .01$) and pooled together to form a general measure of relationship quality (which was not correlated with relationship duration, $r = .01, ns$).

**Results**

The first analysis sought to explore whether the strong correlation between measures of IM ($M_{BIDR-IM} = 4.00, SD = .90$; $M_{EPQ-R-LIE} = 2.28, SD = .37$) and self-control ($M = 3.12, SD = .64$) in self-report from Study 3 replicates. Indeed, this was the case for both measures of IM ($r = .53, p < .01$ for BIDR-IM; $r = .40, p < .01$ for EPQ-R-Lie Scale). Next, turning to the focal question of the present study, the correlation between the target’s IM score and informant rating of the target’s trait self-control ($M = 3.71, SD = .59$) was explored. The analysis revealed a positive and significant correlation ($r = .26, p = .01$ for BIDR-IM; $r = .22, p < .05$ for EPQ-R-Lie Scale). That is, high IM individuals were judged as having relatively high self-control by external observers, indicating that self-control is an integral part of IM, expressed in high IM individuals’ daily acts. Note that the size of the correlation was bounded by the magnitude of self-other agreement on trait self-control ($r = .43, p < .01$). Additional analyses exploring the role of relationship duration and relationship quality as potential moderators yielded nonsignificant interactions ($ns < 1$).

Theoretically, to the extent that IM measures response bias, the targets IM should suppress agreement, leading to stronger agreement once the variance associated with IM is controlled. However, in practice, basic conditions for classical suppression (e.g., no correlation between the suppressing variable and the criterion; Paulhus, Robins, Trzesniewski, & Tracy, 2004) are not met here. Consistent with that, when IM was partialed out, agreement on self-control became weaker ($r = .35$ for BIDR-IM; $r = .38$ for EPQ-R-Lie Scale).

A parallel set of analyses was conducted for SDE ($M = 4.14, SD = .60$). First, SDE correlation with self-control in self-report was found to be very strong ($r = .59, p < .01$), replicating Study 3. Next, to evaluate whether external observers attribute high self-control to high SDE individuals, a correlation between the target SDE and informant-rated self-control was calculated, yielding a near-zero, nonsignificant correlation ($r = .05, ns$). That is, whereas high SDE individuals attributed a high level of self-control to themselves, knowledgeable informants did not corroborate it. This pattern of results is consistent with the identification of SDE as a social desirability scale. Analyses of moderation revealed a marginally significant effect for relationship quality (i.e., interaction between relationship quality and the target’s SDE; $\beta = -.17, t = -1.87, p = .06$), whereby in dyads with relatively low relationship quality, SDE had a small positive correlation with attributed self-control ($r = .12, ns$), but among dyads with relatively high relationship quality (and more intimate knowledge about each other; e.g., Gore et al., 2006), the correlation had a negative sign ($r = -.09, ns$). No effect was found for acquaintanceship duration.

The role of SDE in suppressing self-other agreement on self-control was also explored. For a formal test of suppression (cf. Pandey & Elliot, 2010; Paulhus et al., 2004), SDE was entered into a regression analysis for predicting informant-rated self-control with self-rated self-control. Introducing SDE significantly increased the model’s $R^2$, from $R^2 = 18$ to $R^2 = .25, F_{\text{change}}(1, 93) = 7.73, p < .01$. The $\beta$ weight associated with the target’s self-control has increased from $\beta = .43, t = 4.59, p < .01$, to $\beta = .61, t = 5.48, p < .01$. SDE nonsignificant stand-alone $\beta$ weight ($\beta = .05, ns$) in predicting informant-rated self-control turned significant and had a negative sign when entered simultaneously with self-rated self-control ($\beta = -.31, t = -2.78, p < .01$). Sobel test showed that unlike the positive sign of the direct effect (between self- and informant rating of self-control), the indirect effect (with SDE as a suppressor) had a negative sign ($- .17, z = 2.56, p = .01$). That is, SDE served as a classical suppressor of self-other agreement on self-control.

**Discussion**

Consistent with the results of Studies 1 and 2, the present study found no evidence demonstrating that IM is a valid social desirability scale. High IM individuals’ reports about their level of self-control were corroborated by external observers. In contrast, SDE emerged as a measure of bias. High SDE individuals’ self-reports about their level of self-control were not corroborated. Based on these data, in seems unlikely that SDE and self-control are substantively related. The opposite is true for IM, where informants’ reports corroborated the central role of self-control in defining individual differences along this dimension. Moreover, application of a second measure of IM that yielded results highly similar to the BIDR-IM supports the generalizability of these conclusions beyond any single instrument.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

IM scales are the most widely used instrument to monitor and control response bias in research and practical contexts. Con-
sequently, the impact of these scales spans much beyond a given measurement context, from affecting individual career trajectories to influencing omnibus scientific conclusions. The present research put forward two basic criteria for a valid social desirability scale: First, the scale should have a positive association with an excessively favorable self-description; second, social desirability scales should be free of intrinsic association with substantive traits.

Study 1 addressed the first criterion by exploring whether IM scores predict excessive self-enhancement. It compared individuals’ descriptions of their actual selves under non-anonymous conditions to their descriptions of their ideal selves. The rationale was straightforward; among individuals who artificially elevate the description of their true character, we should find a narrower difference between their actual and ideal self. This rationale has proven valid, but only among high SDE individuals. These individuals provided an excessively positive description of their actual self, and high SDE score was a predictor of a narrower actual/ideal self discrepancy. Such a pattern of results did not show for the IM scale. In fact, high IM was a predictor of a larger discrepancy between individuals’ actual self and their aspirations for their ideal self, implying that high IM was associated with relative dissatisfaction about one’s actual self even when the setting was not anonymous.

Study 2 addressed the second criterion, of no (intrinsic) correlation with substantive traits. Because past research has already substantiated such association (e.g., Ones et al., 1996), a more direct approach was adopted here by validating ratings on the IM/SDE scale itself. Using a real-life-based criterion, individuals’ IM/SDE ratings were compared with reports by well-informed others. Again, the SDE scale “behaved” in accordance with the expectation from a social desirability scale, demonstrating relatively low self-other agreement that had completely diminished among well-acquainted dyads. The IM scale showed no evidence of being a response bias measure. High IM individuals’ self-descriptions were corroborated by informed others, indicating that the IM scale has a visible substantive nature to it.

The nature of the desired features associated with IM was the focus of Studies 3 and 4. In Study 3, self-control emerged as a major feature of IM. Interestingly, high SDE individuals also ascribed high self-control to themselves. These correlations were replicated in Study 4, where they were also tested against reports by well-informed external observers. Observers’ reports have corroborated high IM individuals’ high self-control, but they have disconfirmed high SDE individuals’ report of having high self-control.

**Implications for IM**

Most research on IM thus far has been directed at exploring the status of IM scales as measures of response bias. Even when alternative interpretations to IM have been offered, they often rested on negation of the “defensiveness approach” to IM (cf. McCrae & Costa, 1983; Uziel, 2010b). That is, most research has focused on what IM scales fail to do rather than on what characterizes high IM individuals. The present set of studies sought to advance a substantive meaning to IM scales.

The picture that emerged places IM at a unique position in terms of high scorers’ interpersonal behavior. Adopting the conceptualizations of the interpersonal circumplex (e.g., Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990), high IM individuals could be described as high in affiliation and low in dominance. This profile explains their strong reactivity in the transition from private to public social contexts (e.g., Uziel, 2010a): Low dominance necessitates one to make behavioral adjustments in public contexts, and high affiliation motivates one to do so. Importantly, the present research adds an important process layer to the structural positioning of IM. In self- and other reports, high IM individuals were characterized as successful self-regulators. An interpersonal profile composed of high affiliation/low dominance necessitates individuals to constantly adjust their behavior in order to adapt. High IM individuals have the capacity to do so well (Uziel & Baumeister, 2012).

Rethinking IM scales as measures of interpersonally oriented self-control (cf. Uziel, 2010b) could offer substantive accounts for some of the paradoxes associated with this trait: for example, the low correlation with a large number of desirable traits (e.g., Extraversion), the ironic negative first impression associated with a high IM score (e.g., Paulhus, 1998), or the surprising nonhelpfulness of high scorers in emergency situations (e.g., Darley & Latane, 1968). These and other effects could be accounted for by considering that high IM individuals are relatively reserved, nondominant, and passive, without attributing deceptiveness to their behavior. Implications also span to behavior in organizations. Although the futility of applying IM scales as faking measures has taken root in industrial and organizational psychology (e.g., Griffith & Peterson, 2008), little research has been directed at exploring substantive outcomes associated with the IM scale. IM is expected to affect performance in organizations through its impact on social behavior. Search for the impact of individual differences in IM should therefore focus on passive expressions of organizational citizenship behavior, counterproductive behaviors, in-role behaviors, and reactions to supervision.

Lastly, does all this mean that IM scales cannot be used to detect response bias? No. Like responses on any other substantive trait, responses on IM scales are prone to bias. But using IM scales as a measure of response bias needs to follow the rules that apply to other substantive traits. Bias can be detected with IM scales not by studying individual differences, but by comparing a person’s score on the scale on at least two occasions. Individuals with the largest change score (not necessarily those with the highest score on the scale) are most likely biasing their responses (Griffith & Peterson, 2008).
Implications for SDE

Whereas the present results suggest a new meaning for IM scales, they offer strong support to the interpretation of the SDE scale as a measure of self-deception (Paulhus, 1984). Across four studies, high SDE individuals attributed to themselves excessively positive qualities, depicting themselves in a grandiose manner. This conclusion is enhanced by the fact that in both Studies 2 and 4, self-other agreement was weaker among dyads who were expected to share much common knowledge (e.g., long-acquainted dyads) as compared with relatively less informed dyads. Only individuals who self-deceive will tend to agree less with those who know them well as compared with those who know them less well. These findings are in agreement with Paulhus (1998) in arguing that the impact of self-deception (for the self-deceiving person) is positive in the short term but wanes in the long term. The main advantage of self-deception appears to be in nourishing a (overly) positive self-image, even at the expense of interpersonal sensitivity. Accordingly, in Study 3, when different motives were pooled together, self-esteem was a strong positive predictor of high SDE, whereas affiliation was a negative predictor.

Somewhat surprisingly, the SDE scale has received very little attention as an independent measure of response bias. However, the present results show that we could probably measure self-deception more reliably than other-deception, and that self-deception has behavioral consequences that merit further attention. Recent work (e.g., Berry et al. 2007; Li & Bagger, 2006) has begun to document the advantage of focusing on SDE over IM when considering the negative impact of response bias, and the present research strengthens this approach.

Still, a question remains about why the SDE scale succeeds where the IM scale fails. Returning to Schwarz’s (1999) suggestion about applying pragmatic meaning to scale items, it appears that endorsing IM content at face value (i.e., actually behaving according to the standards depicted in a high IM score) yields mostly adaptive implications (moral and agreeable behavior). This is not the case with SDE scale items. Even if a person is not engaging in active deception, behaving in a manner typical of a (face value) high SDE scorer incurs many interpersonal difficulties (e.g., lack of care about others’ opinion). Put simply, for a high SDE score to be associated with maladaptive social behavior, individuals need not endorse SDE scale items deceptively; adopting them candidly is sufficiently detrimental.

LIMITATIONS

The present study had several limitations. First, with the exclusion of Study 1, completion of the IM scale was not under “high demand” conditions. It could be argued that IM is a measure of bias only in these settings. However, the present settings are typical of the manner with which these scales are used in research and probably in most occupational contexts (cf. Hogan, Barrett, & Hogan, 2007). Importantly, they inform us about substantive content associated with individual differences in IM. Unless unrealistic assumptions are made, a given scale cannot be measuring substantive content in one setting (e.g., a low-demand situation) and response bias in a different setting (cf. Paunonen & LeBel, 2012). Therefore, the present findings are very relevant to the meaning of individual differences in IM even under clear high-demand settings.

Second, yet related, it is sometimes argued that IM scoring should follow dichotomous rather than continuous format (i.e., that only instances of extreme ratings of 6 and 7 to each item should be counted, as compared with averaging across items; e.g., Paulhus, 1991). However, empirical investigation indicated that continuous scoring is superior across all psychometric indices and thus preferable (Stöber, Dette, & Musch, 2002). Still, the present data allowed exploring this issue empirically. Results showed that the scores from the two scoring procedures of IM were strongly correlated (r = .88, .91, .85, .87, ps < .001, for Studies 1–4). Accordingly, conducting the analyses once more using a dichotomous scoring procedure had minimal impact on the results and did not change the conclusions. Furthermore, the fact that using dichotomous scoring had no impact on the conclusions speaks to the meaning of IM under high-demand situations because high dichotomous scorers (e.g., individuals with 14 instances of extreme agreement with IM items) were (ostensibly) under high demand to impress and yet their self-descriptions were corroborated.

Third, Studies 2 and 4 relied on reports by romantic partners as a criterion. Romantic partners, while presenting the advantage of possessing intimate knowledge about each other’s real-life behaviors across contexts and time, could by themselves be biased and provide overly favorable ratings of their partners (see footnote 4 for a discussion of one possible source of bias). However, favorability should not be confused with accuracy, which was the focus of the present investigation. Accuracy (in terms of correlation coefficient) is blind to mean ratings of traits. Furthermore, results for SDE demonstrated that even among knowledgeable romantic partners, low accuracy shows when the target person deceives.

Fourth, with the exclusion of Study 4, all studies in this article measured IM with the BIDR-IM scale. Even though extensive evidence supports the existence of strong commonalities and intercorrelations between different IM measures associated with Wiggins’s (1964) Gamma factor (i.e., lie scales, social desirability scales, moralistic bias scales; cf. Ones et al., 1996; Paulhus & John, 1998; Uziel 2010b), to further substantiate the generalizability of the conclusions, more research is needed that would apply a broader set of IM scales.

CONCLUSION

Measuring social desirability via indirect self-report questionnaires is a huge challenge. Four studies showed that scales of IM fail as measures of social desirability. These scales appear
to be measuring substantive content associated with self-control directed mainly to interpersonal contexts. Scales measuring SDE appear to be more adequate than IM scales to succeed as measures of response bias, not only because of what they measure indirectly, but also because of their direct face value content.

Notes
1. As is often the case (e.g., Paulhus, 1991), IM and SDE were also weakly to moderately correlated in the present set of studies ($r = .25, p < .05; r = .28, p < .01; r = .37, p < .01; r = .44, p < .01$, for Studies 1–4). All analyses reported in this article were conducted twice, with and without controlling for the “other” social desirability measure (e.g., controlling for SDE when focusing on IM). Across all studies, this procedure had no impact on the results. To maintain consistency with the common practice in the literature (e.g., Li & Bagger, 2006), the results are based on the no-control analyses.
2. Tables reporting intercorrelations among all variables in Studies 1–4 are available from the author.
3. Dyadic datasets often give rise to issues of nonindependence (Kenny et al., 2006). Studies 2 and 4 applied a one-sided nonreciprocal design, which does not introduce such a problem. In this design, every dyad is composed of one target person and one informant, and dyadic data are analyzed only for the target person, thus avoiding dependency (cf. Kenny et al., 2006, p. 21).
4. Similarity between partners on IM quite certainly could not have accounted for the reported agreement. Data from an independent sample of 95 dyads (190 participants) with a profile highly similar to the present sample revealed a correlation of $r = -.01$, ns, between partners’ self-rating of IM.
5. The questionnaire packet was part of a broader project that included additional measures that served other studies (see Uziel, 2012).

References


