Abstract

The susceptibility of self and informant reports to faking, which is understood as the distortion of responses, has been widely studied in literature; however, there is limited research comparing the extent of faking between the two. Thus, a 2×2 between-subject study was performed to examine and compare the extent of faking in psychopathy tests for self and other reports. Surprisingly, it was found that whilst faking can occur on behalf of self and others, distorting the results in a favourable direction, the extent of faking is greater for individuals responding for others compared to those responding for themselves. This brings to question the validity of both self and other reports, which play important roles in employment personnel selection.

Self-reports have played an increasingly important role in our society, particularly in the form of self-reported personality-related tests which are used in employment selection due to the association of personality with performance (Griffin & Wilson,2012). However, various studies have criticised the validity of self-reported questionnaires due to its susceptibility to faking, which is defined in this study as the tampering of responses for the purpose of increasing social favourability (Paulhus & Reid,1991; MacCann,2013). Observer reports have therefore surfaced as a more objective measure of personality that also acts to validate self-reports through the convergence of the responses (Schneider & Schimmack,2010).

There is general consensus in faking literature that suggests that when instructed to fake good, individuals were able to significantly alter the results of self-reported questionnaires to appear more favourable (MacCann,2013). However, while MacCann (2013) examined honest and fake good results in regards to an individual's own self-reported traits on a facet level, the current study considers the total psychopathy score of honest and fake good results in both self-reported and other-reported responses. This was done to extend the patterns of faking to other reports and allow conclusions to be drawn about general self and other reports without the focus being on psychopathy.

Studies have also compared responses in self and other reports, suggesting that whilst self-observer agreement varied with several factors, there was an overall significant level of convergence of responses (Schneider & Schimmack, 2010; Klonsky, Oltmanns & Turkheimer,2002). However, unlike Schneider & Schimmack (2010) and Klonsky et al. (2002), which examine agreement between honest self and informant reports, the current study will extend this comparison to self and other reports when asked to fake good through the 2×2 study design. Prior studies relating to faking in observer reports suggests that the extent of faking is greater for individuals faking for themselves compared to others, and thus

that informant reports are less susceptible to distortion than self-reports (König et al.,2017). The current study differs to Körnig et al.'s (2017) as it will specify a universal motive across all participants through instructions that encourage faking good rather than bidirectional faking which is allowed for in Körnig et al.'s (2017) study.

This study therefore aims to compare the extent to which faking can occur in informant reports in contrast to self-reports. In line with MacCann's (2013) report, we would expect to find a higher mean psychopathy score in individuals faking good for themselves compared to those answering honestly for themselves. Similar patterns of faking are also expected to translate across to informant reported responses as suggested by König et al. (2013), with higher mean psychopathy scores expected in those faking good for others over those being honest for others. In terms of self and informant comparisons, based on Schneider & Schimmack's (2010) findings that suggest agreement among self-informant responses, we would expect that there are no significant differences between individuals answering honestly for themselves and those answering honestly for others. In terms of self-informant comparisons when asked to fake good, it would be reasonable to expect individuals faking for themselves to have a higher psychopathy score compared to those faking good for others based on patterns found in König et al.'s (2017) research.

Results

There was a significantly higher mean psychopathy score for individuals that answered honestly for themselves ($M=50.82$) compared to those who faked good for themselves ($M=42.1, p<.001$). There was also a significantly higher mean psychopathy score for individuals answering honestly for others ($M=53.01$) compared to those faking good for others ($M=37.52, p<.001$). Surprisingly, individuals that were instructed to fake good for themselves ($M=42.1$) had a significantly higher mean psychopathy score than those that faked good for others ($M=37.52, p=.004$). However, there was no significant difference in

mean psychopathy score between individuals who answered honestly for themselves (M=50.82) and honestly for others (M=53.01,p=.14) (See Figure 1).

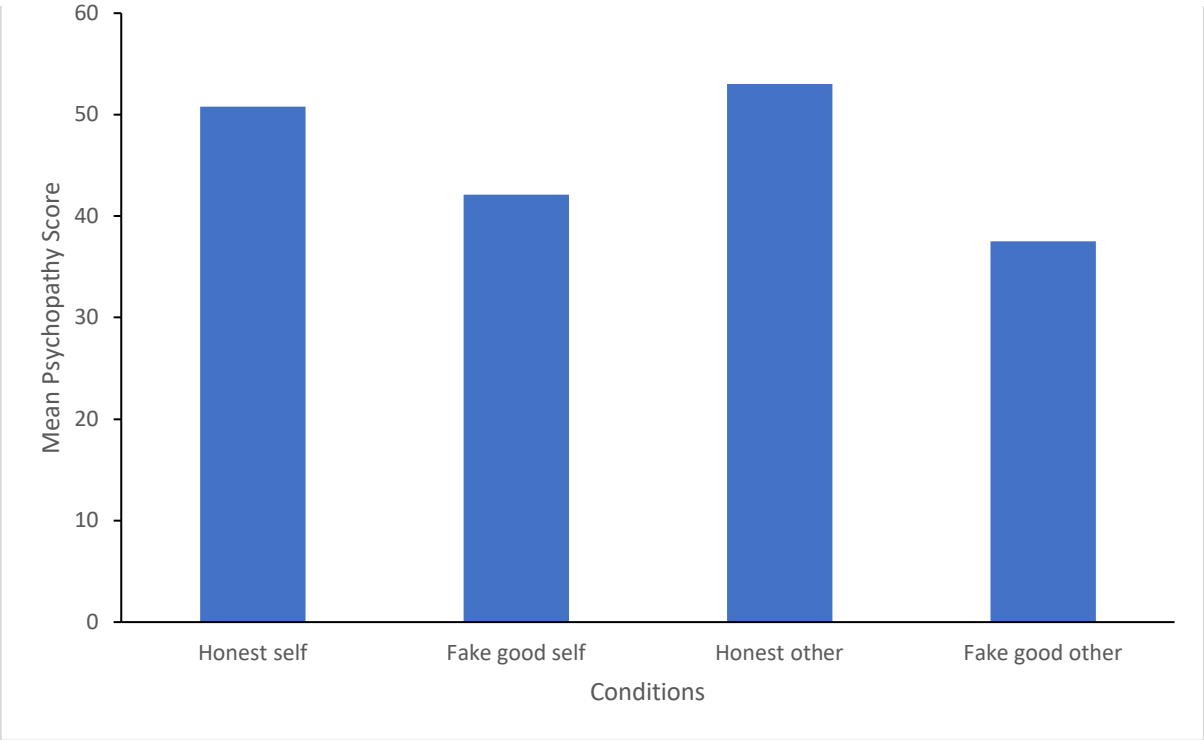

Figure 1. Mean psychopathy scores for participants (n=547) who were instructed to respond under either honest self, fake good self, honest other or fake good other conditions.

Discussion

The current study sought to explore the extent to which faking on a psychopathy scale can occur for individuals responding to questions about themselves and others. As predicted, the results for honest and fake good self-reports are consistent with the findings of MacCann's (2013), with fake good responses being more socially favourable than honest reports as demonstrated by the lower psychopathy score. Similar patterns were observed between honest and fake good informant reports with instructed faking resulting in significantly more favourable responses, indicated by the higher psychopathy score of honest other responses, which is understandable as we would expect that the ability to fake the psychopathy test would translate, regardless of the target. This suggests that the extent of

faking for the purpose of social favourability in both self and other reports is able to significantly distort results, and thus influence the hiring process by altering the ranking of individuals (Griffith, Chmeilowski & Yoshita,2007).

Further, differences in mean psychopathy score between honest self and other reports were insignificant, suggesting agreements in the two when answering honestly, and thus conforming to the findings of Schneider & Schimmack (2010). However, when instructed to fake good the results revealed that, contrary to König et al.'s (2017) key findings in literature and the hypothesised results, individuals reporting on behalf of others faked to a greater extent than those faking good for themselves. These contradicting results may be attributed to differences in instructions, as König et al. (2017) used different instructional sets for self and other, providing greater emotional motivation for self-reports, which is likely to increase motivation to fake for individuals responding for themselves, whilst the current study used instructions that were withdrawn and emotionally unbiased (Pauls & Crost,2005). This study contributes to a better understanding of the usefulness of informant reports which are revealed by this study to possibly be more susceptible to faking than self-reports and are therefore not as valid as we once assumed.

A major limitation of this study however, is its inability to allow for conclusions to be drawn about the reasons and motivations behind the differences in faking for other and self, due to the quantitative nature of the data collected. Another limitation of this study is the manufactured fake good instruction which does not adequately represent real-world situations as it excludes any real stakes and risks that come with faking employment applications (Nguyen, Biderman & McDaniel,2005; Pauls & Crost,2005). Future studies could therefore be done on the reasons that motivate individuals to fake more for others including an exploration of potential risks of faking.

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