



Toward More Authentic Self-Reports: A Self-Determination Theory Approach



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Introduction

- Self-report responses may be biased, either intentionally or unintentionally.
- Past researchers devised methods to circumvent Ps' motivation to appear socially desirable:
 - Bogus pipeline paradigm
 - Implicit Association Test (IAT)
- However, these methods were not ideal and could be elaborate or time-consuming.
- A **low-cost way to promote more honest responses in self-reports would be useful** for researchers and other applied contexts. Applying self-determination theory may provide a way to do this. (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

- SDT suggests that people have motivation orientations (**autonomous, controlled, impersonal**) that influence the way they perceive situations and react to experiences.
- Select findings from past research indicate that:
 - Autonomous orientation** is associated with less defensiveness, **more honesty** and trust in interpersonal interactions, and **reduced tendency to hide information**.
 - Controlled orientation** is associated with a focus on approval from others, **less honesty** and disclosure in interpersonal interactions, and a **greater need for impression management**.
 - The third orientation, impersonal, is not used in the current study.
- Based on this, **fostering an environment of acceptance and support may be the key to increasing authenticity**.

Priming Orientations

- SDT suggests that people can possess all orientations to varying degrees, but **priming them can yield the same results**. (Weinstein & Hodgins, 2009)
- Past studies have used a scrambled sentence task to prime the various orientations.

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The Current Study

Primary Goals

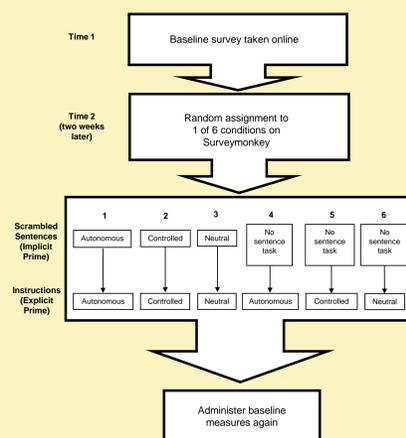
- Autonomous and controlled orientation were expected to change the degree to which Ps were authentic in their responses.
- Primed with **autonomous orientation** - less likely to feel like they were being evaluated and would be more authentic.
- Primed with **controlled orientation** - more likely to feel pressured to present themselves more favorably and give more socially desirable answers.
- In this study, "authentic" was operationally defined as **giving responses that are less socially desirable**.

Method

Participants (N = 83 UH students)

- Age:** 18-57 ($M = 22.94$, $SD = 7.14$)
- Sex:** 88% were female
- Education:** freshmen (17%), sophomores (21.7%), juniors (35%), seniors (24%), post-bac students (2.4%)
- Racial descent:** Asian (26.5%), African (18.1%), Caucasian (34.9%), Hispanic (16.9%), "Other" (3.6%)
- Sexuality:** Heterosexual (92.8%), bisexual (3.6%), homosexual (3.6%)
- Religion:** agnosticism (7.2%), atheism (3.6%), Buddhism (10.8%), Catholicism (21.7%), Christianity (41%), Judaism (1.2%), Islam (10.8%), "Other" (3.6%)
- Political orientation:** 3.10 ($SD = 0.90$) on economic, 2.79 ($SD = 0.98$) on social issues, 5 being conservative
- Importance of political beliefs:** 3.11 ($SD = 1.08$), 5 being very important

Procedure



Method (continued)

Procedure

Scrambled Sentence Primes

- Ps were given 30 scrambles (15 filler) to complete. Each scramble presented 5 words that could be unscrambled to form a correct 4-word sentence, and target words (e.g., choiceful, option, must, pressured) were mixed in with the 15 priming items. (Hodgins, Yacko, & Gottlieb, 2006).
- Sample scrambles containing primes:
 - Autonomous (Condition 1)**
 - enjoy I freedom my he (I enjoy my freedom)
 - options have I two and (I have two options)
 - Controlled (Condition 2)**
 - do I should to homework (I should do homework)
 - for required to I'm study (I'm required to study)
 - Neutral (Condition 3)**
 - I student am a how (I am a student)
 - often soda but drink I (I often drink soda)

Priming Instructions

- Autonomous (Conditions 1 and 4)**
 - The following pages contain questionnaires about current topics. Many people find it enjoyable and interesting to have this chance to share their opinions. These attitudes have not been measured previously in University of Houston students, however. Therefore, your responses will be useful for establishing norms.
- Controlled (Conditions 2 and 5)**
 - The following pages contain questionnaires about current topics. You should give us your opinions on them. These attitudes have not been measured previously in University of Houston students, however. Therefore, we must have your responses to establish norms.
- Neutral (Conditions 3 and 6)**
 - The following pages contain questionnaires about current topics. These attitudes have not been measured previously in University of Houston students, however. Therefore, we will use your responses to establish norms.

Select Measures

Authenticity Scale (Kernis & Goldman, 2006)

- A 45-item measure of authenticity that assesses the subscales of awareness, unbiased processing, behavioral authenticity, and relational orientation. Ps rated statements such as:
 - "I have a very good understanding of why I do the things I do."
 - "I find it very difficult to critically assess myself."
 - "I find that my behavior typically expresses my values."
 - "My openness and honesty in close relationships are extremely important to me."

Sizeism (Anti-Fat Attitudes Scale) (Crandall, 1994)

- A 13-item measure that examines individuals' attitudes toward weight. Respondents rated statements such as, "I really don't like fat people much" and "I feel disgusted with myself when I gain weight."

Other Attitudinal DVs

- Ageism (Fraboni, Saltstone, & Hughes, 1990), homophobia (Herek, 1998), and sexism (Morgan, 1996) were also explored but will not be discussed here.

Results

- H1: Ps in Condition 1 (two autonomous primes) would show a greater degree of authenticity compared to Condition 2 Ps (two controlled primes).
- Condition 1 – **significantly higher levels of authenticity than Condition 2 Ps** ($F(1,77) = 5.63$, $p = .02$)
- H2: Ps in Condition 4 (one autonomous prime) would show a greater degree of authenticity compared to Condition 6 Ps (one neutral prime).
- Condition 4 – **significantly higher levels of sizeism compared to Condition 6 Ps** ($F(1,77) = 7.04$, $p = .01$)

Discussion

Conclusions

- Past studies by Hodgins et al. noted that priming orientations worked on self-reports of behavior (self-handicapping) and personality attributes (self-esteem) but did not work on affect. **This manipulation may be more effective on some constructs than on others**.
- If future studies examining different DVs are successful, instructions priming autonomy could be useful in applied settings where reporting information honestly is vital.

Limitations

- Gay youth suicides in media while study was run.
- Controlled prime may not have worked as it was intended to (8 Ps detected the control themes).
- Attitudinal DVs used may be too strongly linked to Ps' political identity; therefore, they may have been more consistent in how they reported their attitudes, regardless of condition primes.
- Definition of authenticity in this study may be limiting.

Select References

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