

Crowne D P & Marlowe D. A new scale of social desirability independent of psychopathology. *J. Consult. Psychol.* 24:349-54, 1960.

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A social desirability scale based on items reflecting a good-bad dimension and likely to be untrue of most people was developed. The content of this scale is relatively independent of psychopathology, and it appears to measure approval dependence and defensiveness. [The *Science Citation Index*<sup>®</sup> (SCI<sup>®</sup>) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*<sup>®</sup> (SSCI<sup>®</sup>) indicate that this paper has been cited in over 660 publications since 1961.]

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"For many years, psychologists have recognized that personality tests are vulnerable to socially desirable responding. This vulnerability has been a problem of major proportion, limiting the predictive validity of personality tests and raising serious questions about discriminant validity when personality constructs have been defined by tests. A corrective approach has been to consider socially desirable responding as a source of error in tests and to take steps to eliminate it. The social desirability question may also be viewed from another perspective: as motivated and purposeful behavior, residing in the respondent's goals and beliefs about being evaluated.

"A number of years ago, our curiosity kindled by these contrasting views, David Marlowe and I set out to explore the tendency to give socially desirable personality test responses. As a descriptive account of test response distortion, the concept of social desirability had an intuitive plausibility about it, and it fitted rather neatly into an explanation that we thought bore some promise. That explanation was simply this: people describe themselves in favorable, socially desirable terms to achieve the approval of others. In a series of studies beginning in the summer of 1959, we developed a social desirability questionnaire and attempted first to test the implications of the concept of need for approval in personality testing. To do so, we had to establish that the need for approval was a valid inference from socially desirable test responses; we had to demonstrate that a presumed measure of an approval motive would predict approval-seeking behavior in situations

other than testing. In the process, we moved a long way from the domain of personality tests to seek the predictive utility of the approval motive in experimental situations in the laboratory and in life situations outside.

"We began by defining a class of personality test items with two principal attributes: (1) a 'good-bad' (social desirability) dimension, and (2) quite likely to be true of most people or untrue of most people. Personal endorsement of 'good' items means claiming some very improbable things about oneself, and rejection of 'bad' items entails denial of common human frailties. We constructed our social desirability scale of such items and obtained the expected result. Respondents who characterized themselves in a socially desirable way on our test tended to produce scores in the 'normal,' 'adjusted' direction on other personality tests. We considered that what we had was an indirect measure of need for approval.

"In an extensive series of subsequent experiments,<sup>1</sup> we found that the tendency to avoid self-criticism in favor of stereotypically acceptable self-evaluation is associated with behavior far transcending the test situation. In our experimental analysis of social desirability, we found that persons who respond to personality tests in a socially desirable manner are more conforming, cautious, and persuasive, and their behavior is more normatively anchored, than persons who depict themselves with greater frankness. Approval-dependent persons also have a problem with aggression, tending to repress hostility, and they also engage in self-protective measures to avert anticipated threats to self-esteem.

"Our initial research burgeoned into a continuing program of studies by ourselves and others. I believe the success of the scale we developed and the concept it represents resulted from the fact that this approach to social desirability brought the whole problem of dissimulation on personality tests into the domain of personality itself and made self-characterization an interesting variable in its own right. Social desirability would no longer be simply a noisome technical obstacle in personality assessment. Thus, the real achievement of the research was to see that the problem lay in understanding self-evaluative behavior and not in the fallibility of tests. For a report of recent work in the field see *The Experimental Study of Personality*.<sup>2</sup>

1. Crowne D P & Marlowe D. *The approval motive: studies in evaluative dependence*.

New York: Wiley, 1964. 233 p.

2. Crowne D P. *The experimental study of personality*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1979. 254 p.