CHAPTER 19

Self-Presentation of Personality

An Agency–Communion Framework

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OVERVIEW OF SELF-PRESENTATION

In its most general sense, all of human personality may be seen as self-presentational (Goffman, 1959; Sullivan, 1953t). That is, each human action communicates information about the actor. To most personality psychologists, the term also implies a degree of inauthenticity: Some actions are designed to convey a desired image rather than an accurate representation of one's personality. We follow suit here in using the term *self-presentation* to refer to motivated inaccuracy in self-portrayals. Because human motivation is so rich and diverse, self-presentation is no less so.

Indisputably, self-presentation is responsive to situational demands. When requested to do so, people can tailor their self-presentations exquisitely (e.g., Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986; Holden & Evoy, 2005; Paulhus, Bruce, & Trapnell, 1995). They can also embellish their representations in important real-world encounters. Job applicants, for example, present themselves more favorably during interviews than they do after they have been hired (Rosse, Stecher, Miller, & Levin, 1998). People tend to self-promote more with potential dating partners than they do in interactions with friends (Rowatt, Cunningham, & Druen, 1998; Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995). Proctored questionnaire administrations draw more socially desirable responding than do anonymous Internet studies (Richman, Weisband, Kiesler, & Drasgow, 1999). As a rule, people present themselves more favorably to public audiences than they do in private situations where the only audience is the self. Indeed, Baumeister (1982) viewed this discrepancy as the ultimate operationalization of self-presentation.

In this chapter, however, we are more concerned with chronic individual differences in self-presentation. We argue that such dispositions constitute strong and pervasive aspects of personality. People differ in the degree to which they are attuned to self-presentation demands, are motivated to self-present, and in the nature of the image they tend to present.

Both the process and individual differences literatures are immense. For book-length treatments, see Schlenker (1980), Rosenfeld, Giacalone, and Riordan (1995), or M. R. Leary (1995). Because our mandate here is to reframe rather than exhaust the literature, our coverage is necessarily selective. Our reframing is guided by an audience distinction (public vs. private) and a content distinction (agentic vs. communal image). As detailed below, an *agentic* image involves "getting ahead" whereas a *communal* image involves "getting along" (Bakan, 1966; Hogan, 1983). Our generic two-level framework is previewed in Figure 19.1. Throughout the chapter, we argue that the resulting four subtypes of self-presentation must be treated separately.

As noted already, our emphasis is on individual differences in self-presentation rather than the psychological processes maintaining these differences. However, the process literature has begun to fertilize the individual-differences literatures. Therefore, a brief review of the former is in order.

The Process of Self-Presentation

What psychological processes unfold during an episode of self-presentation? The answer is as complex as personality itself, and only a handful of researchers (e.g., Baumeister, Leary, Schlenker) have devoted sustained attention to the topic. Even fewer have focused on implications for assessment (e.g., Holden & Fekken, 1995; Rogers, 1974). The process most certainly involves the determination of whether or not one's behavior will be public (i.e., observed by important others) and, if so, deciding on the appropriate image to present to that audience (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

It is well known that awareness of an audience alters people's behavior in a variety of ways (Buss, 1980; Duval & Wicklund, 1972). But the production of an effective public self-presentation may require significant effort and attention. This process of regulating public self-presentations is often called *impression management*. If the context is private, there is no need for impression management, and people are often frank with themselves—even about issues that arouse shame and guilt. If the affective consequences are too severe, however, internal defensive processes such as *self-deception* are activated. Note that process researchers with a social-psychological bent tend to play down the inaccuracy implications. Instead, they emphasize that people are simply trying to establish and (to a large extent) live up to a chosen identity (Leary, 1995; Schlenker, Britt, & Pennington, 1996).

The contrast between impression management and self-deception corresponds roughly to the psychoanalytic distinction between conscious processes (e.g., suppression) and unconscious processes (e.g., repression). Within that tradition, the assumption is that

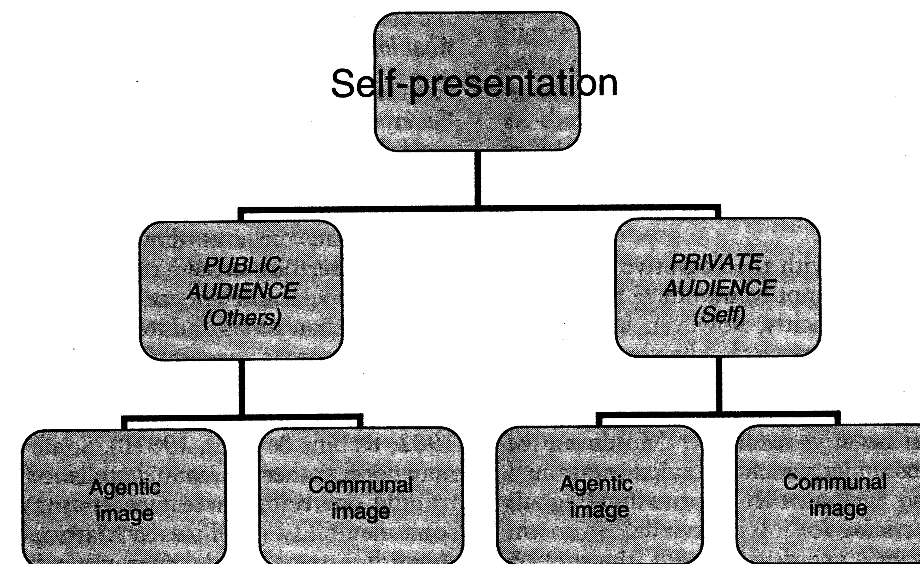

FIGURE 19.1. Hierarchy of self-presentation.

defensive processes can (in fact, must) operate outside of conscious awareness (Weinberger & Silverman, 1979; Westen, Gabbard, & Ortigo, Chapter 3, this volume). Confirmation of such self-deceptive processes in the laboratory has been constrained by prohibitions against inducing a serious psychological threat. One advance was the tightly controlled experiment conducted by Gur and Sackeim (1979): They demonstrated a motivated discrepancy between people's conscious and unconscious recognition of their own voices. Only a handful of other controlled experiments have verified the operation of an unconscious self-presentation process (Baumeister, Dale, & Sommer, 1998; Paulhus, Nathanson, & Lau, 2006; Quattrone & Tversky, 1984).

Those working within the information-processing tradition have characterized this distinction in terms such as in the language of *automatic* versus *controlled* self-presentation (Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988; M. R. Leary, 1995; Paulhus, 1995; Schlenker, 1980). For example, Paulhus and his colleagues showed clear evidence for an automatic component of self-presentation (e.g., Paulhus, 1995; Paulhus & Levitt, 1987). A key finding was that self-descriptions are more positive under a high cognitive load, for example, when respondents are speeded or engaged in a distracting task (Paulhus, Graf, & Van Selst, 1989).

Another research team provided a detailed account of the transformation of public to private self-presentation: Robert Hogan and John Johnson explained that repeated public self-presentations become automatized so that effort is no longer required. As a result, people's frank self-descriptions are eventually equivalent to their habitual self-presentations (Hogan, 1983; J. A. Johnson & Hogan, 1981).

Consistent with the cognitive tradition, such models attempt to minimize the role of motivation; implicitly, however, it pervades such models. For example, the choice among controlled behaviors is directed largely by motivation (e.g., recreating one's dating persona after negative feedback). Moreover, the conditions under which behavior is automatized may well involve motivational goals (e.g., practicing for job interviews).

In a welcome development, the process of self-presentation is now being studied at the physiological level. The self-regulation approach, for example, links psychological resources to physical resources. The fact that psychological resources are finite is evidenced by the demonstration that people show a measurable depletion in energy and performance after self-presentation episodes (Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). Moreover, those psychological resources can be renewed with a boost in glucose (Gailliot et al., 2007). Exciting new brain imaging research has begun to address self-presentation at the neuroscience level. For example, self-enhancement was reduced by activating the medial prefrontal cortex with transcranial magnetic stimulation (Kwan et al., 2007). This physiological work is especially important because it points to possible mechanisms for explaining deleterious effects of self-presentation (M. R. Leary, Tchividjian, & Kraxberger, 1999; Shepperd & Kwavnick, 1999).

In sum, public contexts tend to activate impression management processes tailored to the current audience. Although the result is typically a favorably biased self-portrayal, the key elements are flexibility and appropriateness. In private contexts, where the only audience is the self, personality descriptions may still be biased because of self-deception or habitualized impression management. In Figure 19.1, then, the private audience side subsumes self-deception as well as automatic self-presentation.

The Content of Self-Presentation: What Images Are Presented?

Are self-presentations infinite in number? Given the complexities of our social and work lives, do we really attempt to fine-tune the content of our images to suit each context? As Cantor and Kihlstrom (1987) have pointed out, the everyday management of such a repertoire would require a comprehensive "social intelligence" more elaborate in nature than any standard notions of "g." Instead, theorists suggest that people default to one of a finite number of standard self-presentation roles (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982; Robins & John, 1997b). Some people may confine themselves in a stylistic fashion to only one role, whereas others may show some flexibility (Paulhus & Martin, 1988). According to the early interactional framework of Timothy Leary (1957), people may show flexibility in undemanding situations but revert to their predominant role under stress.

To date, the most influential taxonomy of images is the quintet proposed by Jones and Pittman (1982): People can present themselves to embody intimidation, supplication, ingratiation, self-promotion, or exemplification. Research confirms that these five are indeed among the most common in everyday interactions (Bolino & Turnley, 1999).

Other research groups have been able to isolate a variety of self-presentation images (Holden & Evoy, 2005; M. R. Leary et al., 1999). Most comprehensive is the set of 12 self-presentational tactics isolated and measured by Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbet, and Tedeschi (1999). Interestingly, recent research using those same taxonomies suggests that the apparently varied measures can be summarized within two overarching themes (Trapnell & Paulhus, in press; Carey & Paulhus, 2008). The two default self-portrayals are (1) agentic (strong, competent, clever) and (2) communal (cooperative, warm, dutiful).

Such research helped convince us of the value of the agency–communion framework for organizing the content of self-presentations. Instead of enumerating the infinite variety of images that people are capable of displaying, we argue that the "Big Two" provide an efficient and coherent summary.

Individual Differences in Self-Presentation Attunement and Motivation

As previewed earlier, our focus in this chapter is on individual differences, rather than context effects, in self-presentation. At least three categories of individual differences have been given substantial attention: (1) attunement or attention to self-presentation, (2) motivation to engage in self-presentation, and (3) the amount of distortion involved in the self-presentation.

Attunement

Some individuals are more responsive to self-presentation issues than others. At least two personality concepts have generated substantial research by pairing an intuitively appealing concept with a solid research instrument.

Mark Snyder's (1974) conception of self-monitoring was that some people, more than others, attend to the social demands of their current situation and adjust their behavior to act in an appropriate fashion. His argument that people can self-report on these tendencies led to the development of his Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1974). The measure has seen wide usage, especially by social psychologists and, more recently, organizational psychologists. High scorers tend to show a variety of laboratory and real-world manifestations of their behavioral flexibility (e.g., Gangestad & Snyder, 2000).

Other researchers have reframed the concept of self-monitoring. For example, the claim for incremental validity of self-monitoring above and beyond extraversion has been questioned by John, Cheek, and Klohnen (1996). To make a similar point, Briggs and Cheek (1988) separated the extraversion component from the other-directedness factor with distinct subscales and showed distinctive correlates. Along with a revision to the concept, Lennox and Wolfe (1984) developed a revised instrument that partitioned ability and sensitivity subscales. Nonetheless, Snyder's scale continues to be the most popular choice in the research literature.

The other influential individual-difference construct addressing attunement is that of public self-consciousness (Buss, 1980). The idea is that some individuals are especially vigilant and reactive to public attention to their behavior. The standard instrument for measuring public self-consciousness is one of three subscales of the Public and Private Self-Consciousness scale: It also includes measures of private self-consciousness and social anxiety (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975).

Motivation

A variety of relevant personality constructs have arisen out of different assumptions about motivation. One assumption is that people differ in selfishness. Machiavellians, for example, are assumed to misrepresent themselves as part of a general pattern of instrumentally driven behavior (Christie & Geis, 1970). Other constructs based on the same assumption include subclinical psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002)

and unmitigated agency (Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). In all these cases, exploitative self-presentation stems from a more general egocentric personality.

On the other hand, chronic self-presentation may stem from chronic insecurity. Such was the basis for Crowne and Marlowe's (1964) concept of need for approval: Crowne (1979) concluded that the motive was more defensive than promotional. A similar notion underlay Watson and Friend's (1969) concept of fear of negative evaluation and some current conceptions of subclinical narcissism (e.g., Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). A deep insecurity may also be the source of perfectionistic self-presentation (Sherry, Hewitt, Flett, Lee-Baggley, & Hall, 2007). Such defensive motivations are directly contrasted with the acquisitive motivations in Arkin's (1981) two-factor model: People may chronically self-present for either self-promotion or self-protection (see also, Lee et al., 1999; Millham, 1974).

Several research groups have offered taxonomies of possible motivations for self-presentation. Swann and colleagues have emphasized two: self-enhancement and self-verification (e.g., Swann, 1990). Others have suggested that people are motivated at various times to self-enhance, self-verify, or be accurate (M. R. Leary, 2007; Sedikides & Strube, 1997).

An even broader taxonomy of self-presentational motives was provided by Robins and John (1997b), who offered intuitively compelling labels to capture four reasons why people's self-perceptions might depart from reality. The egoist is motivated by self-enhancement; the politician, by popularity; the consistency-seeker, by consistency. Only the fourth type, the scientist, is motivated by accuracy. To date, there are no specific measures of these four tendencies, but the labels do ring true as capturing the primary motives for self-presentations.

Degree of Inaccuracy

The remainder of our chapter focuses on measuring the degree of distortion in an individual's self-presentation. Although the possible motives are numerous, the typical content of self-presentation tends to resonate with images of agency and communion. The crossing of those images with the public-versus-private audience distinction—as depicted in Figure 19.1—forms the basis for the third and fourth sections of this chapter.

AGENCY AND COMMUNION AS CONCEPTUAL COORDINATES FOR PERSONALITY

Here we elaborate on the two most common images in self-presentation efforts. The prominence of these two images, we argue, ensues from the centrality of two human metavalues: agency and communion.

Before we make that case directly, we provide the reader with a brief overview of the literature on that topic. These two images, as we show, are not arbitrarily picked from a cherry tree of options. In fact, they derive from the single most powerful framework for organizing the field of human personality. The agency–communion framework helps link values to motives, and motives to goals, traits, and biases (Paulhus & John, 1998). Ultimately, we argue, their influence extends to the content of self-presentation. Whether the audience is self or others, people organize the content of their self-portrayals in terms of these broad themes.

The Organizational Sweep of Agency and Communion

Originating with Bakan's (1966) book, the superordinate labels of *agency* and *communion* have helped frame key issues in personality psychology, social psychology, and psychotherapy. The theoretical impact of the agency–communion distinction was reviewed and extended in an influential chapter by Wiggins (1991). He pointed out parallel distinctions in the literatures on evolutionary theory, gender roles, language, and religion.

Applications of the agency–communion framework have not subsided in recent years. The two constructs have played central roles in recent work on interpersonal behavior measurement (Moskowitz & Zuroff, 2004), interpersonal measurement techniques (Pincus, Gurtman, & Ruiz, 1998), narrative interpretation (McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996), social psychology (Abel & Wojiscke, 2007; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005), and interpersonal psychotherapy (Kiesler & Auerbach, 2003; McMullen & Conway, 1997). Most recently, Len Horowitz and colleagues (2006) have reworked several ingredients of the earlier theoretical positions on agency and communion. As noted below, the agency–communion framework is especially useful in organizing literatures with broad evaluative implications.

The Interpersonal Axes

Even earlier than Bakan, a group of clinical researchers in the San Francisco Bay Area developed a similar two-factor conception of personality (Laforge, Leary, Naboisek, Coffey, & Freedman, 1954). Their work was elaborated in the influential book written by Timothy Leary (1957). They went beyond the two-axis framework to flesh in the intermediate angles and create what was later dubbed the interpersonal circumplex (Carson, 1969). Especially influential were Leary's labels for the trait-level concepts, namely, dominance and nurturance.

Central to their writings was the Sullivanian notion that personality emerges from interpersonal engagement. That notion is also a key element in most theories of self-presentation: Both an actor and an audience are indispensible to the concept.

Picking up from these earlier writers, Jerry Wiggins put the measurement of interpersonal traits on a solid footing. His extensive research program yielded the Interpersonal Adjective Scales, which remains the standard instrument for measuring both the interpersonal axes and the intermediate traits around the interpersonal circle (Wiggins, 1979). Later, McCrae and Costa (1989) linked the interpersonal circle tradition to the five-factor model by showing that dominance and nurturance axes of the interpersonal circumplex were associated with extraversion and agreeableness, respectively (see also Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990). Wiggins and Trapnell (1996) went further to identify agency and communion elements within each of the Big Five factors.

Agency and communion also came to play a key role in the contributions of Robert Hogan: The two axes helped frame his socioanalytic theory (Hogan, 1983). His characterization of agency and communion as "getting along and getting ahead" captured in felicitous fashion the two primary human motives. Along with John Johnson, Hogan went further to argue that the nature of personality is essentially self-presentational (J. A. Johnson & Hogan, 1981). Their work is a key antecedent to our position that self-presentations of an agentic and/or communal nature are fundamental to personality.

Alternative Labels for the "Big Two" Factors

In recent years a number of other researchers have pointed to the value of a two-dimensional representation of personality (DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2002; Digman 1997; Judd et al., 2005; Saucier & Goldberg, 2001). Needless to say, all these models stand in stark contrast to the currently dominant five-factor organization (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992; John & Srivastava, 1999).

These alternative two-factor models have rather different theoretical histories, and none of the three applies the venerable agency–communion distinction. Digman's (1997) labels were *growth* and *socialization*, whereas Saucier and Goldberg (2001) suggested *dynamism* and *social propriety*. DeYoung and colleagues (2002) preferred the terms *plasticity* and *stability*.

Despite the disparate labels, a closer examination of the items and scale correlates reveals that those three models are remarkably similar in structure and content to the agency–communion model. Accordingly, we believe that our arguments about the content of self-presentation apply to all these two-factor models of personality content.

Note that, in all of these systems, the Big Two dimensions of personality are both positive: That is, society evaluates them both favorably. However, the nature of those two forms of positivity is dramatically different. Indeed, they implicate totally different value systems.

Agentic and Communal Values

The reigning structural model of values is undoubtedly that of Schwartz (1992). His model is a quasi-circumplex in which the relative compatibility or incompatibility of 10 value categories (e.g., power, benevolence, tradition) is represented by their relative distances around a circumplex. By dint of his methodology, Schwartz induced an inherent antagonism between agentic and communal values: They are contrasted on one bipolar dimen-

sion, *self-enhancement* (agency) versus *self-transcendence* (communion). The bipolarity of that axis was recently adduced as evidence that U.S. market capitalism promotes values inherently destructive to communion (Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2006).

Recently, however, research has indicated that orthogonal agency and communion dimensions can be identified both in Schwartz's value taxonomy and in comprehensive analyses of life goals (e.g., De Raad & Van Oudenhoven, 2008; Hinz, Brähter, Schmidt, & Albani, 2005; Roberts & Robins, 2000). Others have gone further to develop orthogonal measures of agentic and communal values (Locke, 2000; Trapnell & Paulhus, 2008).

Of key importance for this chapter is the notion that these two value systems culminate in rather different self-presentation styles (Paulhus & John, 1998). The style associated with agentic traits (egoism) involves exaggerated achievement striving and self-importance. In contrast, the style associated with communal traits (moralism) involves excessive adherence to group norms and minimization of social deviance.

Other Evaluative Domains

The need to distinguish two evaluative systems has become especially evident in three domains of psychological research: gender roles, dimensions of morality, and cultural values. Social scientists have long noted the strong historical and conceptual parallel between male versus female gender roles and agentic versus communal social roles. In the 1970s this parallel culminated in a new approach to assessing gender roles: Bem (1974) overturned the traditional bipolar notion by constructing independent measures of masculinity and femininity. However, Wiggins and Holzmuller (1978) showed that Bem's two dimensions are psychometrically indistinguishable from the orthogonal interpersonal circumplex dimensions of dominance and nurturance (cf. Spence, 1984).

A related controversy arose in the field of moral development. Gilligan (1982) argued that men and women need to be evaluated on different moral dimensions. Men should be evaluated with respect to instrumental (i.e., agentic) values; women, with regard to relationship (i.e., communal) values. Here again, we see the association of agency and communion with gender-based value systems.

A two-factor conception of self-presentation helps unify these literatures. Most societies make a clear distinction between what is desirable for men and what is desirable for women. From childhood, girls are encouraged to present themselves as "sugar, spice, and everything nice" and boys as "snips, snails, and puppy-dog tails." Even modern societies see no contradiction in honoring and encouraging both images.

Such complementary value systems are also evident in the new generation of research on cultural influences. Triandis's (1989) system led to the placement of countries and cultures within a two-factor system of individualistic and collectivistic values. Markus and Kitayama (1991) carried this distinction into the social psychological literature by contrasting *independent* self-concepts with *interdependent* self-concepts. The parallel between these cultural dimensions and the agency–communion coordinates is evident. In more recent writings, the issues are now specifically framed in terms of the agency and communion labels (Markus & Kitayama, 2003; Phalet & Poppe, 1997).

In sum, the dual values of agency and communion inevitably emerge when value systems are partitioned. Certainly they are implicit in the evaluation of morality, sex roles, and culture.

Links between Values, Motives, Traits, and Self-Presentation

Implicit in our discussion so far is a developmental sequence culminating in the agentic and communal images most typical in the content of self-presentation. In this section we spell out the sequence more explicitly.

Although differing in the details, most personality psychologists assume an interplay between traits, motives, values, and life goals (Roberts & Robins, 2000; Winter, John, Stewart, Klohnen, & Duncan, 2005; Woike, Gershkovich, Piorkowski, & Polo, 1999; see also Pervin, 1994, and the follow-up commentaries). Basic traits may partly determine values and goals (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; McCrae, 1994), may in part be goal-derived social categories (Borkenau, 1990; Read, Jones, & Miller, 1990), and may be inherently evaluative as well as descriptive (Peabody, 1984).

Paulhus and John (1998) have offered a developmental path sequence that applies specifically to the agency–communion model of personality. They argued that ontogeny of personality structure begins with (relatively orthogonal) genetic contributions from the Big Five traits (e.g., McCrae, Jang, Livesley, Riemann, & Angleitner, 2001). Gradually superimposed is the influence of socialization in the form of two preeminent values: agency and communion. Forces that inculcate one agentic trait will tend to inculcate the others (e.g., parents encouraging achievement); the same generalization holds for communal traits (e.g., religious training). Over the course of child development, then, this dual socialization process induces systematic correlations among the Big Five traits. Hence, the two-factor influence appears in higher-order factor analyses of the Big Five factors.

Interestingly, agency and communion also seem to have immediate impact on self-conceptions under conditions of acute evaluative load. For example, if respondents are hurried or forced to co-attend to a concurrent task, the five-factor structure reduces to a two-factor structure (Paulhus, 2002). In some respects, then, our two-factor self-conceptions are more "automatic" than our five-factor self-conceptions. As noted earlier, those automatic self-conceptions tend to emphasize agency or communion. Because automatic responses are socialized via repetition of controlled responses (Paulhus & John, 1998), the two-factor structure of agency and communion can ultimately be traced to society's two predominant socialized values.

Paulhus and John (1998) went further to argue that the two fundamental motives ensuing from two fundamental values are also responsible for the two-factor nature of biased responding. Individuals are rewarded for nurturing and maintaining the perception that they are agentic and/or communal. Accordingly, they err on the side of a biased presentation in those domains. This argument applies equally to socially desirable responding (see the third section) and private self-enhancement (see the fourth section).

SOCIALLY DESIRABLE RESPONDING

Socially desirable responding (SDR) is the term applied to self-presentation on self-report questionnaires (for a review, see Paulhus, 1991). When asked to rate their own personalities, people tend to bias their ratings in the favorable direction (Edwards, 1970). When measured as a stable individual difference, this tendency is often called a *social desirability response style*[1] (Jackson & Messick, 1962). As a local, context-driven behavior, it is known as an SD *response set*. The rationale behind measuring SDR is the diagnosis of dissimulation: High scores on an SDR measure raise concern about a respondent's answers on other questionnaires.

This concern extends to response tendencies beyond a simple positivity bias. People may purposely fabricate a unfavorable image, for example, by misrepresenting themselves as mentally ill (Baer, Rinaldo, & Berry, 2003) or incompetent (Furnham & Henderson, 1982).

A variety of SDR scales have been developed over the years. Attempts to determine the underlying dimensionality have utilized a variety of methods (e.g., Holden & Evoy, 2005; Messick, 1960; Paulhus, 1984) and have yielded a variety of answers. Here we focus on measures of favorable self-presentation and argue for two relatively orthogonal factors corresponding to the agency and communion axes introduced in the previous section.

We begin with a brief historical review of the construct *socially desirable responding*. That history led us ultimately to the view that the agency-versus-communion content distinction and public-versus-private context distinction could help organize and clarify the field. Figure 19.2 shows how these two distinctions map onto the generic framework provided earlier in Figure 19.1.

A History of Competing Operationalizations

Personality psychologists have interpreted SDR in (at least) three different ways. To some, SDR is an idiosyncratic behavior unique to questionnaire responses; to others, it is a personality construct that generalizes to other self-presentation contexts; still oth-

ers see it as an accurate report of a desirable personality.

Such diversity in interpretations has led to a diversity of operationalizations. Unfortunately, this same diversity led to a singular lack of empirical convergence among SDR measures (Holden & Fekken, 1989; Jackson & Messick, 1962; Paulhus, 1984).

Minimalist Constructs

Some SDR scales are based on a compilation of the total amount of desirable responding in an individual's answers. One standard approach entails (1) collecting SD ratings of a large variety of items, and (2) assembling an SDR measure comprising those items with the most extreme desirability ratings (e.g., Edwards, 1970; Jackson & Messick, 1962; Saucier, 1994). The rationale is that individuals who claim the high-desirability items and disclaim the low-desirability items are likely to be responding on the basis of an item's desirability rather than its accuracy. This operationalization of SDR (e.g., Edwards's SD scale) was open to a serious criticism: Some people actually do have an abundance of desirable qualities and may just be telling the truth (e.g., Block, 1965).

An alternative operationalization of SDR has been labeled *role playing* (Wiggins, 1959). In this case, some participants are asked to "fake good," that is, respond to a wide array of items as if they were trying to appear socially desirable. Other participants are asked for a "straight take": that is, an accurate description of themselves. The items that best discriminate the two groups' responses are selected for the SDR measure. This approach led to the construction of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) Malingering scale and Wiggins's Sd scale, which is still proving useful after 30 years (see Baer, Wetter, & Berry, 1992).

Although both operationalizations of social desirability seemed reasonable, representative measures (e.g., Edwards's SD-scale and Wiggins's Sd-scale) showed notoriously low intercorrelations (e.g., Jackson & Messick, 1962; Holden & Fekken, 1989; Paulhus, 1984; Wiggins, 1959). A critical difference in the two-item sets is that the endorsement rates of SD items were relatively high (e.g., "I usually expect to succeed in the things I do"), whereas the endorsement rates for Sd items (e.g., "I never worry about my looks") were relatively low. To obtain a high score on the Sd scale, one must claim many rare but desirable traits. Thus the Sd scale (and similarly derived measures) indirectly incorporated the notion of exaggeration.

Conceptually Elaborate Constructs

Other attempts to develop SDR measures employed the rational method of test construction. Here, item composition involved specific hypotheses regarding the underlying construct (e.g., Eysenck & Eysenck, 1964; Crowne & Marlowe, 1964; Sackeim & Gur, 1978). The items were designed to trigger different responses in honest responders than in respondents motivated to appear socially desirable. In this respect, the notion of exaggerated positivity was incorporated in the item creation.

Such measures were available as far back as Hartshorne and May (1928). Most influential was the MMPI Lie scale, written to identify individuals deliberately dissembling their clinical symptoms (Hathaway & McKinley, 1951). Eysenck and Eysenck (1964) followed a similar rational procedure in developing the Lie scale of the Eysenck Personality Inventory.

Undoubtedly, the most comprehensive program of construct validity was that carried out by Crowne and Marlowe (1964) in developing their SDR measure. As with the other measures, the items concerned improbable virtues and common human frailties. In contrast to the purely empirical methods, high scores were accumulated by self-descriptions that were not just positive but *improbably* positive.

Crowne and Marlowe (1964) elaborated the character of high scorers by studying their behavioral correlates in great detail. Such research led the authors to a personality interpretation for the underlying construct, namely, *need for approval*. As a result, the Marlowe–Crowne scale, as it came to be called, served two roles in the subsequent personality literature: (1) as an indicator of dissimulation on questionnaires, and (2) as a measure of a personality construct in its own right. The two roles were linked: High scorers dissimulate on the Marlowe–Crowne scale because they fear disapproval from others (Crowne, 1979).

Accuracy Constructs

Other writers never accepted the dissimulation interpretation of SDR measures, maintaining instead that they measure known personality traits. High scorers are to be taken at their word and actually do enjoy a socially desirable character (Block, 1965; McCrae & Costa, 1983; Milholland, 1964). To support the accuracy position, these researchers provided evidence that the self-reports on SDR instruments correlate with reports by knowledgeable informants.

Historically, the most influential example is the vigorous set of arguments set out in Block's (1965) book, the *Challenge of Response Sets*. His view was that high scores on Edwards's SD scale (as well as the first factor of the MMPI) represented a desirable personality syndrome called ego resiliency. His evidence included the confirmation by knowledgeable observers (e.g., spouses) of many of the desirable qualities that were self-ascribed on the SD scale.

McCrae and Costa (1983) developed a similar argument for the accuracy of self-descriptions on the Marlowe–Crowne and EPQ Lie scales. Because high scores were largely sustained by spouses, McCrae and Costa suggested that they reflect good social adjustment instead of SDR.

An Integrative Perspective

Few personality assessors are willing to completely accept the accuracy position. An obvious case where respondents cannot be taken at their word is with the assessment of narcissism. A spate of studies has demonstrated that the favorable claims of narcissists (e.g., "People admire me") are rarely substantiated by the facts (e.g., Paulhus et al., 2003; Robins & John, 1997a). Instead, the data indicate that narcissists are better characterized by their insecurity and inaccuracy (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001).

A reconciliation between the distortion and accuracy positions can be drawn from work by Millham and Jacobson (1978). They showed that high Marlowe–Crowne scorers would lie and cheat to impress experimenters of their good character. Such ironic distortion along with the accuracy demonstrated by other researchers can be explained under the umbrella construct of *need for approval*. High scorers realize that carrying out socially conventional behavior is usually the best way to gain approval; they also realize that deceit works better in a number of situations where detection is very unlikely.

A related idea points to the effort to project an identity. To ensure that others accurately view one as well adjusted, there are times when one may have to deny certain "misleading" facts; to ensure that others view one accurately as autonomous, one may have to exaggerate the supportive evidence (Schlenker & Weigold, 1990).

In sum, the available unidimensional measures of SDR appear to tap some unclear combination of distortion and reality. The distortion component is implicated when respondents describe themselves in unrealistic terms across a variety of trait dimensions.

Two-Factor Models of SDR

Alpha and Gamma

The notion that SDR appears in two distinct forms was recognized by a number of early researchers (e.g., Jackson & Messick, 1962). Factor analyses consistently revealed two independent clusters of SDR measures noncommittally labeled *Alpha* and *Gamma*[2] by Wiggins (1964).

The Alpha factor was most clearly marked by Edwards's (1970) SD scale, the MMPI K-scale (Hathaway & McKinley, 1951), Byrne's (1961) Repression–Sensitization scale, and Sackeim and Gur's (1978) Self-Deception Questionnaire. Measures falling directly on the Gamma factor included Wiggins's (1959) Sd scale. Others loading strongly included Eysenck's Lie scale (Eysenk & Eysenck, 1964), the Marlowe–Crowne scale, the Good Impression scale (Gough, 1957), the MMPI Lie scale (Hathaway & McKinley, 1951), and Sackeim and Gur's (1978) Other-Deception Questionnaire. For many years, researchers debated how to interpret the Alpha and Gamma factors of SDR. Ultimately, Paulhus (1984) settled on the labels *Self Deception* and *Impression Management*.

A Two-Factor Measure

After several preliminary versions, Paulhus (1986) offered measures of these two factors

with scales labeled *Self-Deceptive Enhancement* (SDE) and *Impression Management* (IM). Together, the scales formed early versions of the widely distributed Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding— Version 6 (BIDR-6; Paulhus, 1991, 1998b). Sample items include SDE ("My first impressions about people are always right") and IM ("I always pick up my litter"). The BIDR is now as widely used as the Marlowe–Crowne scale.

The SDE and IM scales yielded a useful combination of response style measures in that they captured the two major SDR dimensions with only a small to moderate intercorrelation. Their utility was demonstrated in several studies of self-presentation in a job applicant context. Paulhus and colleagues (1995) showed that the IM scale, but not SDE, was extremely sensitive to faking instructions requesting various degrees of self-presentation. In some studies, IM has been shown to moderate the validity of personality scales (Holden, 2007). In an actual applicant setting, the IM scale showed a special sensitivity to self-presentation (Rosse et al., 1998).

In other studies, the SDE scale, but not the IM, predicted various kinds of self-promotional distortions. These include tendencies toward overclaiming (Paulhus et al., 2003), narcissism (Paulhus, 1998a) and hindsight bias (Hoorens, 1995). High-SDE individuals also exhibit a discordance with reality, as indicated by a discrepancy in self-ratings of agency relative to ratings by group consensus (Paulhus, 1998a). More recently, SDE has also shown utility in moderating the validity of other self-report scales (Berry, Page, & Sackett, 2007; Otter & Egan, 2007). More than 40 other studies, the majority from other laboratories, have helped elaborate the construct validity of the SDE and IM scales. For an extensive list, readers are invited to view the following website (*www.psych.ubc.ca/~dpaulhus/research/BIDR*).

The adjustment correlates of these response style measures correspond to the adjustment correlates of agency and communion. In general, SDE, but not IM, is positively related to self-perceptions of mental health (e.g., Bonanno, Field, Kovacevic, & Kaltman, 2002; Brown, 1998; Nichols & Greene, 1997; Paulhus, 1998b; Paulhus & Reid, 1991). High SDE also has a positive association with task performance in certain circumstances (E. A. Johnson, 1995). In a study of discussion groups, however, high SDE scorers were perceived negatively after several meetings (Paulhus, 1998a). Those results bear directly on the debate about whether positive illusions are adaptive (see the fourth section).

Untangling Image Content and Audience

The labels *self-deception* and *impression management* turned out to be, at best, incomplete characterizations of Alpha and Gamma. The problem was uncovered by a series of studies that varied the self-presentation instructions (Paulhus, 2002). The Impression Management label for Gamma measures was originally justified by their sensitivity to instructional manipulations, such as "Respond in a socially desirable way" (e.g., Paulhus, 1984; Wiggins, 1964). Further research indicated that respondents interpreted such instructions to mean "Respond as if you are a 'nice person,' 'well socialized,' or 'good citizen.'" In retrospect, the instructions were tantamount to "Act communal."

With more agentic instructions (e.g., "Respond as if you are strong and competent"), Alpha measures were actually more responsive than Gamma measures (Paulhus, Tanchuk, & Wehr, 1999). In short, Alpha-related measures may be no more self-deceptive than are Gamma measures.

What, then, are we to make of the Alpha and Gamma factors of SDR? It appears that current measures of these factors confound content with manipulability. Both forms of distortion appear under anonymous conditions, suggesting a self-deceptive quality. Yet, with appropriate faking instructions, both are subject to impression management.

According to Paulhus (2002), the solution was to discard Alpha and Gamma and distinguish the content of SDR measures (agentic vs. communal) from their responsiveness to an audience manipulation (public vs. private). That distinction is represented by the two levels in Figure 19.2. Dissimulation to a public audience involves impression management of either agentic or communal forms. Dissimulation to a private audience (i.e., the self) involves self-deception via asset exaggeration and/or deviance denial.

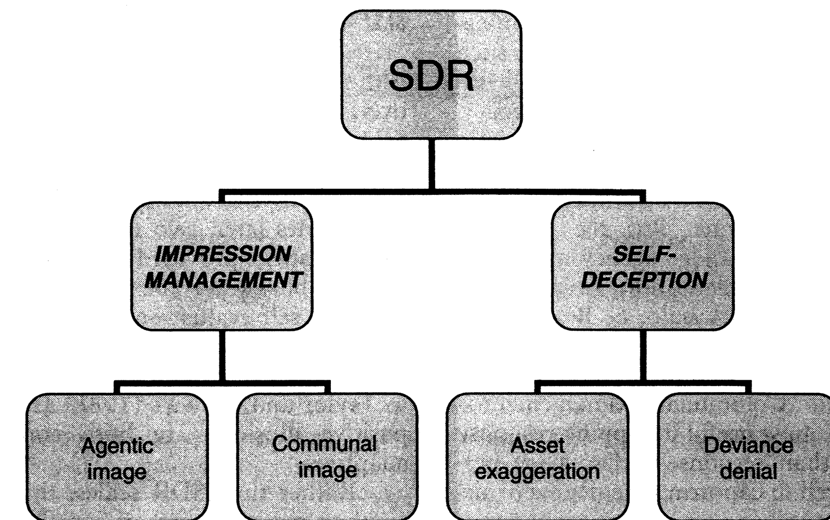

FIGURE 19.2. Hierarchy of socially desirable responding.

The content difference in SDR measures maps onto the agentic and communal values elucidated in the second section of this chapter. Excessive pressure from agentic values induces a tendency to exaggerate one's assets. This tendency leads to unrealistically positive self-perceptions on such personality traits as dominance, fearlessness, emotional stability, intellect, creativity, and even one's attractiveness. Self-perceptions of high scorers have a narcissistic, "superhero" quality. This self-deceptive distortion was summarized using the term *egoistic bias* (Paulhus & John, 1998). Similarly, excessive adherence to communal values induces a self-deceptive tendency to deny socially deviant impulses and claim sanctimonious, "saint-like" attributes. The tendency is played out in overly positive self-perceptions on such traits as agreeableness, dutifulness, and restraint. This version was labeled *moralistic bias* (Paulhus & John, 1998).

Responsiveness to audiences, that is, impression management, must also be distinguished in terms of content. People may be motivated to deliberately exaggerate their standing on agency or communion. The usual two clusters of traits are involved but the exaggeration is more deliberate. *Agency Management*, that is, asset-promotion or bragging, occurs on attributes such as competence, fearlessness, and creativity. Such behavior is most commonly seen in job applicants or in males attempting to impress a dating partner. Dissimulation on communal attributes is termed *Communion Management* and involves excuse making and damage control of various sorts. Such deliberate minimization of faults is likely in religious settings, in employees who are trying to exemplify integrity, or legal defendants trying to avoid punishment.

Measures of all four types of SDR measures are now available (Paulhus, 2005). Indeed, two of the four have been available for some time as subscales in the BIDR-6. Asset exaggeration can be measured with the SDE scale, now renamed Self-Deceptive Exaggeration to avoid confusion with the term *self-enhancement* in the fourth section. The Impression Management scale also remains useful but was renamed Communion Management to better indicate the scale's content.

Two new measures were developed to tap the unmeasured cells in Figure 19.2. The concept of self-deception on communal traits involves the denial of socially deviant thoughts and behaviors: They are incompatible with the preservation of one's social groups. The new subscale, *Self-Deceptive Denial* (SDD), includes such sample items as "I have never been cruel to anyone" and "I have never hated my parents." The fourth measure, *Agentic Management*, consists of items related to agency content but with low