Abstract

Recent studies have suggested that the age-personality relationship may be partially explained by age-related changes in social desirability. In the present study, we analyze how age affects social desirability and acquiescence, and how they affect the age-personality relationship. Method: We used a specially designed personality test, which provides response bias and personality dimension scores independently of each other. We applied this test to a sample of 3773 individuals aged between 13 and 97 years old (49.69% female) and analyzed the effects of age, sex, and their interactions on response bias and personality dimensions. Results: Age affects social desirability and acquiescence, both of which increase with age, and this increase affects the age-personality relationship, especially for dimensions such as Agreeableness or Conscientiousness. Conclusions: The age-related differences found in self-reported personality measures might be partly attributable to age-related increases in response bias. Furthermore, the high scores of elderly people on response bias measures implies that the results of self-reports that do not incorporate any correction for response bias should be viewed with caution, especially when they are obtained in samples of people over 50 years old.

Keywords
Response bias, five factor model, age.