

A Survey of Deception Among Job Seekers

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Abstract

This paper offers a set of five propositions, which if true, would indicate that personality testing is of more limited value in personnel screening than much of the current research would suggest. In a limited evaluation of these propositions, we conducted a survey of job seekers which indicates that many individuals misrepresent themselves to employers. The data also indicate that there are individual differences in the extent to which job seekers will misrepresent themselves. The results of the survey are supportive of the five propositions.

A review of recent years' research on personality testing presents compelling evidence that personality measures have substantial utility in personnel selection (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hough, Eaton, Dunnette, Kamp, & McCloy, 1990; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993; Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991). The purpose of this paper is to present an opposing view. Specifically, we present a series of propositions that, if true, would mean that personality tests have more limited value in personnel screening than the current research would suggest.

The empirical section of this paper provides some support for our propositions. We review other studies which are also supportive of our propositions. However, we do not anticipate that we will convince most readers that our propositions are true. To date there are insufficient data to warrant strong confidence in our propositions. However, we do anticipate that we can present sufficient arguments and data to cause many readers to become more skeptical about the value of personality testing for personnel screening.

We agree that some personality traits are related to job performance. For example, there is ample evidence that, on average, those high in conscientiousness perform better on the job than those low in conscientiousness (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hough et al., 1990; Ones, et al., 1993; Tett, et al., 1991). However, we argue that the utility of personality tests is harmed by some applicants misrepresenting themselves when

completing personality measures. We argue that some job seekers misrepresent themselves more than others. We also argue that when a person misrepresents herself on a personality test, her test score contains variance related to her true standing on the trait and variance related to her degree of misrepresentation. This misrepresentation variance might best be called response distortion variance. To the extent that this response distortion variance is large, a respondent's test score will not be primarily a measure of the intended personality construct and may fail to be an indicator of job performance. In brief, although conscientiousness predicts job performance, the test score of a respondent who misrepresents herself does not measure the respondent's true degree of conscientiousness and should not be expected to have the same relationship with job performance as the true score of the respondent.

In the section that follows we present five propositions, that if true, suggest that the value of personality testing in personnel selection is limited. For each proposition, we discuss relevant literature. Following these propositions, we present the results of a survey of deception among job seekers that permits us to further evaluate these propositions.

PROPOSITION #1. SOME PEOPLE MISREPRESENT THEMSELVES MORE THAN OTHERS WHEN COMPLETING PERSONALITY TESTS.

Some advocates of personality testing in personnel screening argue that job applicants do not misrepresent

themselves when completing personality tests. Thus, if no one misrepresents themselves on a test of conscientiousness, the test scores will accurately reflect the applicants' standing on the trait of conscientiousness. Other advocates of personality testing argue that all job applicants misrepresent themselves but they do so to the same degree.¹ One can think of this as adding a constant to each person's test score. Thus, for a conscientiousness test, the observed test scores will be inflated estimates of the true conscientiousness scores, but the rank order of the observed scores will be the same as the rank order of the true conscientiousness scores (except for minor departures due to random measurement error). For response distortion to create problems for the use of personality tests in personnel selection, the rank order of applicants must change. In other words, some job seekers would need to misrepresent themselves more than others.

Douglas, McDaniel, and Snell (1996) have argued that there are at least three classes of factors that would cause some applicants to misrepresent themselves more than other applicants. These classes of factors are opportunity to fake, personal characteristics, and situational factors. Below, we briefly summarize the arguments of Douglas et al.

First, job seekers differ in their opportunity to fake. Consider two applicants with equal desire to misrepresent themselves in order to improve their chances of obtaining a valued job. The first applicant has never consumed alcohol or recreational drugs. The second applicant has a long history of alcohol and drug abuse problems. Both applicants are presented with questions concerning past problems with alcohol and drug use. No matter how motivated to improve her test score, the first applicant has no opportunity to do so. However, the drug-abusing applicant has the opportunity to lie on every item.

Personal characteristics may influence the tendency to fake. Some individuals' behavior is strongly influenced by personal or religious values (standards, tenets) that cause them to present themselves accurately even if it includes admitting to undesirable behavior and

results in the loss of a valued outcome, such as a desired job. Other individuals will freely distort the facts to gain advantage. These individual differences will cause some people to fake more than others. Another personal characteristic is ability to fake. Some are likely to be better at faking than others. For example, those with knowledge of the construct being measured might be better able to fake than those who are unaware of the construct being measured.

Finally, faking may be influenced by situational characteristics. A person whose job serves her needs (e.g., financial, emotional) may have few situational pressures encouraging her to fake when applying for a job. In contrast, a person who hates her present job and who cannot meet her financial responsibilities with her present job may have substantial situational pressures to fake good. For example, consider the situation of an individual who has been fired as a result of a layoff. If the person has substantial financial pressures (e.g., housing payments, car payments, children in college), she may be more likely to fake than most others.

There is a growing body of empirical literature indicating that some applicants misrepresent themselves more than others. For example, Hogan (1991) argued that some individuals can improve their scores more than others. Hamill and Wheeler (1997) have shown that males misrepresent themselves more so than females. Thus, there is at least some literature indicating that some individuals misrepresent themselves more than others. Evidence for this variability in the degree of misrepresentation can also be found in studies in which the construct and criterion-related validities of personality tests vary as a function of whether the individuals respond honestly or seek to misrepresent themselves.

PROPOSITION #2. WHEN APPLICANTS MISREPRESENT THEMSELVES, THE CONSTRUCT VALIDITY OF THE PERSONALITY MEASURES SUFFER.

Construct validity can be assessed in a variety of ways including multi-trait, multi-method analyses, as well as exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. When applicants seek to misrepresent themselves on a battery of personality tests, each applicant might misrepresent herself to an equal extent. This would cause a constant to be added to each applicant's score on each personality measure. The addition of a constant to each personality score would cause the intercorrelations of

¹ Personality researchers are advocates of the study of individual differences. We find it odd that those who argue that individual differences are important would hold that all individuals are the same in regards to faking.

the personality tests to be the same as the inter-correlations of the tests when no misrepresentation occurs. Thus, if applicants misrepresent equally, the correlations among the personality tests should be equal to the correlations among the personality tests when no misrepresentation occurs. Therefore construct validity analyses based on the correlation or covariance among personality tests scores should yield the same results regardless of whether the applicants are responding honestly or are engaging in misrepresentation. In contrast, if some individuals misrepresent themselves more than others, the correlation and covariance structure of the personality tests will differ from the correlation and covariance structure of the tests for respondents who all are completing the test battery without any misrepresentation.

Several studies indicate that the construct validity evidence for personality tests is much more compelling when respondents are answering honestly than when respondents misrepresent themselves. Douglas et al. used both multi trait/multi-method analyses and exploratory factor analyses to demonstrate that the construct validity of a non-cognitive battery is much worse under conditions of faking than in honest responding conditions. Frei, Griffith, Snell, McDaniel, and Douglas (1997) came to the same conclusion when reanalyzing the Douglas et al. data using confirmatory multiple groups LISREL.

Griffith, Frei, Snell, Hamill, and Wheeler (1997) conducted a confirmatory multiple groups LISREL analysis on two sets of applicant data using the same personality test battery. Initially this screening battery included a strong warning to applicants not to fake. A substantial number of applicants completed the battery under this "you better not fake" instruction set. Later the faking warning was no longer employed. The factor structure of the battery completed by those warned not to fake was clear and interpretable. The factor structure of the same battery completed by those not warned about faking suffered substantially and showed that a strong response-distortion method factor was operating.

In brief, all studies examining the issue to date have provided clear evidence that applicant misrepresentation substantially harms the construct validity of non-cognitive tests. The survey of job seekers presented in this

paper will also provide a limited data set to address this question.

PROPOSITION #3. WHEN APPLICANTS MISREPRESENT THEMSELVES, THE CRITERION-RELATED VALIDITY OF THE PERSONALITY TEST SUFFERS.

The consistent finding that applicant misrepresentation harms the construct validity of personality tests suggests the possibility that the criterion-related validity of the tests might also be harmed. Hogan (1991) and Hogan, Hogan, and Roberts (1996) have argued that a respondent's ability to misrepresent herself is an important individual difference variable. They argue that the ability to make a favorable impression is an important job-related skill. Based on this argument, one might propose that although applicant misrepresentation might make the measure less construct valid, the systematic response distortion variance might be job-relevant variance that permits the measure to maintain or possibly even increase its criterion-related validity. The data presented in this paper examines the extent to which misrepresentation enhances or harms validity.

Schmit and Ryan (1992) provided an incentive for a group of undergraduates to misrepresent themselves when completing a personality test. Other undergraduates had no incentive to misrepresent. The validity of the test to predict grade point average was lower for the subjects encouraged to misrepresent.

Douglas et al. instructed one sample of college students to misrepresent themselves when completing a non-cognitive test. A second sample was instructed to respond honestly. A subset of both samples held real jobs and the subjects' supervisors provided an appraisal of the subjects' job performance. The validity of the non-cognitive tests was at useful levels for the honest-responding subjects and was near zero for the subjects instructed to misrepresent. The survey of job seekers presented in this paper will also provide a limited data set to address the question of potential decay in criterion-related validity.

Thus, in the limited set of studies addressing the issue, it is shown that misrepresentation harms the criterion-related validity of personality tests. However, the conclusion that the criterion-related validity of test scores for those who misrepresent is near zero is not necessarily problematic. The key consideration in the

utility of a test is the extent to which selection decisions based on the test scores yield employees who will be more productive on-the-job than a randomly-selected applicant. Thus, it is critical to determine the extent to which those who misrepresent are found at the high end of the score distribution from where selection decisions are typically made.

PROPOSITION #4: THOSE WHO MISREPRESENT THEMSELVES ON PERSONALITY TESTS WILL BE DISPROPORTIONATLY REPRESENTED AT THE HIGH END OF THE SCORE DISTRIBUTION.

Douglas et al., Zickar, Rosse, and Levin (1996), and Zickar (1997) have consistently shown that one needs relatively few misrepresenting respondents in order to have the majority of respondents at the high end of the score distribution to be those who misrepresented. Table 1 presents data from Douglas et al. indicating that with only 10% of the respondents engaging in misrepresentation on a personality test of agreeableness, 6 of 10 of the highest scoring respondents are those who have misrepresented. When 25% of the respondents engage in misrepresentation, 9 of the 10 highest scoring respondents are those who have misrepresented. Thus it appears that one needs relatively few misrepresenting applicants in order to have the majority of those in the hiring range to be those who have misrepresented. The survey of job seekers presented in this paper will also provide a limited data set to address this question.

Table 1 about here

PROPOSITION #5: THE VALIDITY COEFFICIENT FOR A PERSONALITY TEST IS A FLAWED INDICATOR OF THE USEFULNESS OF THE TEST FOR PERSONNEL SELECTION.

We have presented evidence for the common occurrence of a situation in which some applicants misrepresent more than others. Douglas et al. have also provided evidence that the validity of personality tests can be at useful levels for honest respondents and at near-zero levels for those who misrepresent. The validity of a personality test for a sample containing honest and misrepresenting respondents is going to be somewhere between the validity of the test for the honest respondents and the near-zero validity of the test for the respondents who misrepresent. Table 1 shows that even when 9 of the top 10 respondents are those who misrepresent, the validities of the tests for the full

sample are at apparently useful levels (.19, .20) despite the fact that the validity of the tests for 9 of the top 10 respondents is near zero. If one extends employment offers to the top 10 respondents, one would be engaging in random selection for 9 of the 10 employment offers even though the validity for the full sample is at useful levels. Thus, the validity coefficient for a personality test appears to substantially overestimate the validity of the test for those actually hired.

The present study

Rynes (1993) argued that psychologists have given little attention to the potential problems of misrepresentation in personality tests because it is so difficult to determine whether applicants have misrepresented themselves. For example, if one is going to misrepresent oneself on a personality test, one is unlikely to admit it. The present study sought to contribute to this sparse literature by surveying a sample of 1,000 job seekers concerning the extent to which they have made misrepresentations when being screened for jobs.

Method

Participants.

Sample members were selected from the population of individuals who have placed their resumes on the world wide web. No personal identifiers were required on the survey so that the responses would be anonymous. A postage-paid envelope was supplied for the return of the survey. Of the 1,000 surveys mailed, 51 were returned by the postal service as undeliverable because the applicant was no longer at the address listed on the resume. 192 completed and partially-completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 20%.

We suggest that the survey sample who responded was not a random subset of the original 1,000 member sample. Specifically, we argue that those who misrepresent the most would be less likely to return the survey due to fear that their responses could be traced. Some sample members indicated that they believed the survey to be secretly coded such that their identities could be discovered. Thus, we suggest that the misrepresentation rates found in this study underestimate the true misrepresentation rate of the original 1,000 sample members. A copy of the survey is presented in Appendix A.

Variables.

Misrepresentation items. The survey contained 24 statements describing how one might misrepresent herself when applying for a job. Respondents were asked to check whether they "have done this" or "have never done this."

Misrepresentation scale. The sum of 21 of the 24 misrepresentation items marked "have done this" constituted the misrepresentation scale score. Three items concerning lying about convictions for a crime, being fired, or denying having been disciplined for poor performance were not included in the scale score due to large amounts of missing data. For example, if the respondent had never been convicted of a crime, her score on the misrepresentation item concerning denying the conviction would be missing. High scores on the misrepresentation scale indicate that the respondent has misrepresented herself concerning several behaviors. A score of zero indicates that the respondent has not admitted to misrepresenting herself on any of the items.

Typical behavior scale. This one item scale asked the respondent to check a statement which best describes her behavior when seeking a job. The response options were:

- I am always honest and tend to volunteer all relevant information about myself, both positive and negative.
- I tend to volunteer only information that makes me appear a good job candidate. If asked, I will admit, honestly, any and all information.
- I tend to volunteer relevant, positive information. If pressed, I will admit negative information in such a way as to make it appear as good as possible.
- I always present myself in a positive manner and never admit to any negative information, even when directly asked.

A high score on the scale indicates that the respondent always presents herself in a positive manner.

Conscientiousness and social influence scales. Respondents were presented with 21 personality items. Nine items were intended to assess conscientiousness and 12 items were intended to assess social influence. Initially, the items were presented to the respondents with the following instructions: "Some employers use personality tests to screen applicants. Pretend you are

applying for a job that you want and you are asked to complete this short personality test. Please answer the questions in the same way you would if you were applying for a job that you really want." We refer to this as the applicant condition. Later in the survey, the respondents were presented with the same items and instructed: "Please answer these same questions again as honestly as you can. Please remember this is an anonymous survey and we cannot trace your identity. Please respond honestly even if it makes you look bad." Conscientiousness and social influence scales scores were calculated for both conditions yielding four scale scores per person.

Conscientiousness and social influence faking scores. The conscientiousness scale score for the honest condition was subtracted from the conscientiousness scale score for the faking condition to yield a score indicating the extent of faking in the applicant condition. High scores on this conscientiousness faking scale indicate a high degree of score improvement. The social influence scale score for the honest condition was subtracted from the social influence scale score for the faking condition to yield a score indicating the extent of faking in the applicant condition. High scores on this social influence faking scale indicate a high degree of score improvement.

Job performance. The respondent was asked "How would your present supervisor evaluate your overall job performance? (If you are not currently employed, how would your most recent supervisor evaluate you?)." The respondent could answer on a four point scale ranging from "below average" to "extremely above average." High scores on this variable indicate good (self-reported) job performance.

Occupation. Respondents were asked to specify the type of job they usually seek. The web site resumes were categorized into 3 groups: accounting/finance, computer, and sales/marketing. Equal numbers from three groups were sampled. Whereas the surveys were returned anonymously, we needed to determine the respondent's occupational area by asking them. In addition to asking them to check one or more of the three explicitly-sampled occupational groups, we also permitted them to check "Management" and "Something else. Please specify." These additional categories were added based on pilot testing in which we discov-

ered that the predominate content of the resume (e.g., accounting/finance) was not always the type of job they seek (I seek jobs in management).

Demographics. Age, race, and sex data were also collected. For the data analyses, race is coded as a series of dummy variables. For example, if the respondent is white, her value on the white variable is 1. Non-whites would have a score of 0 on the white variable. Females were coded 1 on the sex variable and males were coded 2.

Results

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for all variables discussed in this paper as well as a full correlation matrix.

Table 2 about here

Interrelations among misrepresentation variables.

The four misrepresentation variables are coded such that high scores correspond to a greater amount of misrepresentation. The correlation matrix for the four variables show positive manifold with intercorrelations ranging from .24 to .64. Thus those who endorse specific misrepresentation statements (e.g., Give a false age in order to gain employment), tend to report that they always present themselves favorably when applying for jobs, and they also engaged in misrepresentation when responding to personality items under an applicant instruction set.

Are there individual differences in the extent to which people misrepresent themselves when applying for jobs?

Table 3 shows the misrepresentation rates for all statements for which at least 5 percent of the full sample admitted to misrepresentation. Our sample had been stratified by three occupational groups: financing/accounting, sales/marketing, and computers. We had anticipated that finance/accounting job seekers would engage in relatively low rates of misrepresentation because incumbents to such positions are often tasked with maintaining financial controls to minimize financial fraud, waste, and abuse (e.g., financial misrepresentation). We anticipated that sales/marketing jobs would have the highest levels of misrepresentations. Incum-

bents in such positions are often encouraged to misrepresent products in order to enhance sales.

Table 3 about here

Table 4 shows the frequency distribution for misrepresentation scale scores. The mean is 2.9 and the standard deviation is 2.54. Clearly some job seekers misrepresent more than others. As seen in Table 2, and consistent with our expectations, accountants/finance job seekers reported lower than average levels of misrepresentation as evidenced by the -.06 correlation between the dichotomous accounting/finance variable and the misrepresentation scale score. Sales and marketing job seekers reported greater than average levels of misrepresentation as evidence by the .05 correlation with the misrepresentation scale score. Although the relationships between occupational interest area and misrepresentation are modest they do indicate that there are individual differences with respect to misrepresentation.

Table 4 about here

There are also demographic correlates of misrepresentation. As seen in Table 2, older job seekers and male job seekers tend to misrepresent less than younger or female job seekers. Note that age and sex are correlated .31 in this study. The mean age for males is 39.5 and the mean age for females is 31.6. Thus one cannot determine whether it is age, sex, or both age and sex that is an explanatory factor in explaining the variance in misrepresentation. However, it is clear that some individuals misrepresent more than others. Whereas 82% of the sample is white, and the nonwhites are dispersed across several other racial categories, analyses concerning race differences in the level of misrepresentation are not feasible.

The level of misrepresentation in the personality scales under applicant instructions can be defined as the standardized mean difference between scale scores for the applicant condition and the honest condition. When responding as applicants, respondents increased their conscientiousness scale score by .26 standard deviation units and their social influence scale score by .16

standard deviations. These effect sizes appear reasonable. When one instructs non-applicant subjects to misrepresent on personality tests, one typically obtains about .5 standard deviations of improvement (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Korbin 1995). Thus, in an applicant situation in which it is reasonable that some might choose to misrepresent and others may choose to respond honestly, one would expect average score improvement somewhere between zero and .5 standard deviations.

A mean shift in scores would not be expected to be harmful to the use of the test as long as all respondents increased their scores equally. This was not the case. For the conscientiousness scale, 5% of the sample had lower scores when responding under applicant conditions than honest conditions, 72% of the sample obtained the same score in both conditions, and 23% of the sample improved their score in the applicant condition. For the social influence scale, 9% of the sample had lower scores when responding under applicant conditions than honest conditions, 65% of the sample obtained the same score, and 26% percent improved their scores in the applicant condition. Clearly, some respondents had more misrepresentation in the applicant condition than others.

Does opportunity to fake contribute to individual differences in misrepresentation?

Douglas et al. had argued that individual differences in the degree of faking are very likely because some respondents have more opportunity to fake than others. One can evaluate this speculation by correlating the honest response scores with the scale improvement scores. As seen in Table 2, the correlation between the conscientiousness test score under honest conditions and the conscientiousness score improvement variable is $-.56$. The comparable correlation for social influence is $-.30$. On both scales, the higher one scores when responding honestly, the less the amount of score inflation in the applicant condition. Thus, Douglas et al.'s speculation concerning opportunity to fake as a major contributor to individual differences in faking appears well founded.

Do deceptive applicants make bad employees?

Hogan (1991) has argued that an individual's ability to make a favorable impression is an important individual difference variable which is positively related to job

performance. We correlated the four indicators of applicant misrepresentation with the self-report job performance variable. For all four deception variables, higher scores indicate higher level of misrepresentation. All four deception variables are negatively correlated with job performance:

- Misrepresentation total. ($r = -.14$)
- Typical behavior ($r = -.05$)
- Scale inflation score for social influence ($r = -.09$)
- Scale inflation score for conscientiousness. ($r = -.09$)

Although the correlations are of small magnitude, they support the assertion that, on average, as a job seeker's misrepresentation increases, their expected job performance decreases. This finding could be explained with reference to the opportunity to fake hypothesis (Douglas et al.). Those who have very favorable scores on a job-related personality trait have little opportunity to appear even more favorable through misrepresentation. However, those who have very unfavorable scores on a job-related trait have substantial opportunity to improve their scores through misrepresentation. Thus, even if impression management skills are job-related, the most incompetent people have the most opportunity to make use of their impression management skills. These data suggest that the degree of misrepresentation is negatively related to job performance.

Does faking harm the construct validity of non-cognitive measures?

The present data set permits a weak test of whether faking harms the construct validity of non-cognitive measures. Past research has shown that measures of distinct constructs become more correlated when applicants fake (Douglas et al., 1996; Frei et al., 1997). Based on the Griffith et al. (1997) data, it appears that this greater correlation with faking is due to items loading heavily on a response distortion method factor for faking respondents but not for honest respondents. Thus, one should expect the intercorrelation of the conscientiousness and social influence scales to be larger for the applicant condition than for the honest condition. For the applicant condition the correlation is $.15$; for the honest condition the correlation is $.08$. Thus, these data, although limited, are consistent with the growing body of knowledge demonstrating that the construct validity of non-cognitive measures decays with misrepresentation.

Does faking harm the criterion-related validity of personality measures?

Table 2 presents the correlation between the conscientiousness and social influence scales with the self-reported performance appraisal score by instruction condition (honest or applicant). The validities are higher in the honest condition (conscientiousness .14 vs .06; social influence .23 vs .19). The generally lower validity of the conscientiousness scale in both conditions is most likely due to range restriction due a ceiling effect on the scale. Nineteen percent of the respondents in the applicant condition and 17 percent of the respondents in the honest condition received the highest possible score on the scale.

Do misrepresenting applicants rise to the top of score distributions?

Douglas et al., Zickar et al. (1996), and Zickar (1997) have consistently shown that one needs relatively few misrepresenting respondents in order to have the majority of respondents at the high end of the score distribution to be those who misrepresented. Table 5 shows rankings for the top 10 individuals in the applicant condition for the social representation scale. The individuals rank in the honest condition is also shown. Their scale scores under honest and applicant conditions, expressed in a t score metric using the mean and standard deviation of the honest group to standardize the scores in both conditions, are also shown. Six of the top 10 individuals in the applicant condition ranking are there because they misrepresented themselves. In the most extreme example, one respondent moved from a rank of 174 in the honest condition to a rank of 1 in the applicant condition. We note that the average amount of misrepresentation is very small for the applicant condition as a whole ($d = .16$). Thus, even if applicants on average do not misrepresent and only a few applicants misrepresent, most of the applicants at the top of score distribution (in this example 6 of 10) from where most people are hired, are there because they have misrepresented themselves. The corresponding table for the conscientiousness scale is not shown because no one changes rank in the top 10 applicants. This is due to a ceiling effect on this scale.

Table 5 about here

Discussion

Our results are supportive of our propositions. First, we show that some job seekers misrepresent themselves more than others. Second, we offer evidence, limited though it is, that when applicants misrepresent themselves, the construct validity of the personality tests suffer. Third, we show that when applicants misrepresent themselves, the criterion-related validity of the personality tests suffer. Fourth, we demonstrate that those who misrepresent themselves are disproportionately at the high end of the score distribution. The evidence we offer for the first four hypotheses, lends credence to the fifth proposition that the validity coefficient for a personality test is a flawed indicator of the usefulness of the test for personnel selection. Although supportive of our propositions, none of the data we offer are overwhelming and we do not believe that it warrants sounding the death bell for personality tests in personnel screening. However, we do suggest that it might cause some to worry about the health of such tests.

Limitations

The population from which the sample was drawn is not representative of all jobs. This population is primarily those in professional jobs who have the interest and skills needed to place their resume on the world-wide web. Likewise, our response rate is not high so our sample is probably not representative of the defined population. We would suspect that people who engage in misrepresentation when seeking jobs would be less likely to return the survey than people who never misrepresent. Thus, this survey probably underestimates the percentage of people who misrepresent. Our sample, then, is skewed to the honest and thus would most likely underestimate the degree of individual differences in faking.

We also concur that the sample members are not applicants for a single job and did not complete the personality test as an applicant for a real job. However, these sample members are job seekers. They had placed their resumes on the internet in the hopes of locating a job. We argue that their misrepresentation on the personality test on this survey would not be dramatically different from their misrepresentation in a real applicant setting. This is, of course, an empirical question.

Summary

Some job seekers misrepresent more than others. When a very undependable job seeker substantially improves her score on a conscientiousness test to appear to be a very conscientious person, her score primarily reflects her ability and motivation to fake. Thus, her score does not reflect her true level of conscientiousness and thus the test, for her, lacks construct validity. The employer hires this job seeker because she has a very favorable score on the conscientiousness test. Due to the job seeker's true low level of conscientiousness, her job performance is unsatisfactory. Thus, the conscientiousness test, for her, lacks criterion-related validity. In brief, regardless of what the sample statistics tell us about the construct and criterion-related validity of a test, when job seekers misrepresent, they are found disproportionately at the high end of the score distribution from which most individuals are hired. For these misrepresenting job seekers, their scores do not reflect the intended construct of the test and their scores may have limited value in predicting job performance.

This paper has summarized past research, offered new data, and supplied logical arguments supporting the contention that industrial psychology's current love affair with personality tests can lead to disappointment. We have argued that the driving factor leading to potential problems in the value of personality testing is that some respondents misrepresent more than others. The present study has presented several lines of evidence supporting the proposition that some job seekers misrepresent more than others. Although more research is clearly warranted, the Ones et al. dismissal of potential problems of response distortion as a "red herring" is a conclusion that we suggest needs revisited. As Griffith (1997) has noted, "Red herring is hard to swallow."

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Table 1. Validity of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness with Varying Percentages of Faking Applicants. Adapted from Douglas et al. (1996). Appendix.

Percent Faking	Agreeableness		Conscientiousness	
	Mean Validity	# of fakers in top 10 respondents	Mean Validity	# of fakers in top 10 respondents
0%	.34	0	.30	0
10%	.27	5.8	.25	4.9
15%	.24	7.4	.23	7.1
20%	.22	8.4	.21	8.5
25%	.20	8.8	.19	8.9

Table Note: Subsets of respondents in the faking sample were randomly selected and added to the honest subjects, so that the resulting sample has either 10, 15, 20, or 25% faking subjects. The validity of the measures of agreeableness and conscientiousness for the prediction of job performance were then calculated. Also the number of fakers in the top 10 applicants of each sample, rank ordered by descending agreeableness or conscientiousness scores, were counted. This was done 500 times for each of 10, 15, 20, and 25% samples. The numbers reported in the tables are the mean validities and the mean numbers of fakers across these 500 iterations.

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Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
12. Sales/Marketing	.32	.47	.05	.08	.06	.01	-.09	-.04	.25	.26	-.02	-.25	-.23	-								
13. Management	.46	.50	-.04	-.05	-.10	-.04	.17	.11	.01	.01	.06	-.12	-.15	-.06	-							
14. Other	.15	.36	.07	.16	.09	.00	.01	.10	-.03	-.01	.04	-.13	-.02	-.05	.00	-						
Demographic variables																						
15. Age	37.7	10.8	-.21	-.09	-.25	-.20	.30	.10	-.04	-.13	.00	-.04	-.05	-.16	.25	.00	-					
16. Sex	1.8	.42	-.14	-.13	-.25	-.33	.04	-.19	.05	-.16	.03	.06	.13	-.11	.10	-.11	.31	-				
17. White	.82	.38	.04	-.05	.03	-.07	.05	.07	.13	.09	.19	-.06	.00	.06	.10	-.01	.15	.04	-			
18. Black	.06	.23	.02	.08	.04	.12	-.09	-.07	-.18	-.09	-.17	.06	.09	-.03	-.01	.10	-.04	.03	-.53	-		
19. Asian	.05	.22	-.09	-.08	-.05	-.09	-.04	-.08	-.06	-.14	-.02	-.03	.00	.04	-.12	.02	-.14	.01	-.50	-.06	-	
20. Hispanic	.05	.22	.00	.10	-.06	.05	.02	-.01	.02	.05	-.10	.02	-.10	-.06	-.03	-.09	-.03	-.04	-.50	-.06	-.06	-

Table 3

Percentage of respondents in various job categories and across job categories who have admitted to misrepresenting themselves when seeking a job.

Common Misrepresentations	Marketing	Accounting	Management	Computer	Total
Gave false opinions.	49%	34%	34%	35%	42%
Exaggerated work experience to make it more impressive.	45%	30%	26%	30%	33%
Inflated a past pay rate to get a larger starting pay at a new job.	21%	22%	26%	28%	27%
Denied being fired if you have been.	34%	16%	23%	12%	27%
Exaggerated your skills in an interview.	23%	30%	27%	18%	26%
Tried to portray yourself as more agreeable than you are.	21%	28%	27%	25%	26%
Reported less jobs than you actually have held in order to appear a more reputable candidate.	30%	18%	26%	18%	24%
Overstated your ability to get along with management.	15%	12%	20%	9%	15%
Tried to portray yourself as more conscientious than you are.	22%	12%	12%	16%	14%
Denied having been "written up" for poor job performance if you have been.	20%	0%	10%	10%	14%
Embellished your educational accomplishments.	11%	14%	12%	11%	13%
Claimed to have knowledge that you did not.	16%	14%	8%	9%	12%
Reported a lower pay rate to appear a better job applicant.	13%	10%	11%	9%	11%
Exaggerated your past work evaluations to look like a better employee.	16%	2%	8%	5%	10%
Inflated a past pay rate to appear more impressive.	10%	6%	8%	5%	10%
Claimed to have experience that you did not have.	10%	2%	6%	9%	9%
Exaggerated qualities such as dependability and reliability.	7%	14%	6%	12%	8%
Denied having been convicted of a crime if you have been.	0%	20%	4%	0%	7%
Used family members for references in order to get exaggerated recommendations.	2%	6%	5%	2%	5%

Table 4.. Frequency of misrepresentation total score

Misrepresentation score	Frequency	Percent
0	31	16
1	42	22
2	27	14
3	27	14
4	21	11
5	14	7
6	12	6
7	7	4
8	1	.5
9	6	3
10	2	1
11	2	1

Table 5. Rankings and scores for top 10 individuals in the applicant condition for the social presentation scale

Rank on Social Presentation Scale		Scale Scores on Social Presentation Scale	
Applicant condition	Honest Condition	Applicant condition	Honest condition
1	1	70.4	70.4
1	1	70.4	70.4
1	1	70.4	70.4
1	1	70.4	70.4
1	5	70.4	66.5
1	27	70.4	58.6
1	28	70.4	58.6
1	174	70.4	27.1
9	70	66.5	50.7
9	157	66.5	35.0

Appendix A
Survey Instrument

SURVEY OF JOB APPLICANTS

This survey asks you to reply honestly to questions concerning how you present yourself when applying for jobs. To assist you in replying honestly, this survey is anonymous. This survey does not ask you for your name or other personal identification that would permit us to discover who you are.

Below is a list of statements describing how people may represent themselves when applying for a job. If the statement describes how you have behaved when applying for a job, place a check in the box under HAVE DONE THIS. If you have never done the behavior described, place a check in the box under HAVE NEVER DONE THIS.

When seeking employment, have you ever:	HAVE DONE THIS	HAVE NEVER DONE THIS
Exaggerated your work experience to make it more impressive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listed awards or distinctions on a resume or application that you did not actually receive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Claimed to have experience that you did not.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Used family members for references in order to get exaggerated recommendations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Claimed to have knowledge that you did not have.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inflated a past pay rate to get a larger starting pay at a new job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inflated a past pay rate to appear more impressive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reported a lower pay rate to appear to be a better job applicant.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exaggerated your past work evaluations to make yourself look like a better employee.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exaggerated your skills in an interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exaggerated qualities such as dependability and reliability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overstated your ability to get along with management.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Given false opinions. (Example: Stated you would enjoy a type of work when, in fact, you do not enjoy that type of work)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Given a false age in order to gain employment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tried to portray yourself as more agreeable than you are.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tried to portray yourself as more conscientious than you are.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Embellished your educational accomplishments on a resume or application.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reported fewer jobs than you actually have held in order to appear a more reputable job candidate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Claimed to have more education than you actually did.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overstated the excellence of your attendance record.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lied in an interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

When seeking employment, have you ever:	HAVE DONE THIS	HAVE NEVER DONE THIS
Denied having been convicted of a crime. (Check here: <input type="checkbox"/> if you have never been convicted of a crime.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Denied being fired. (Check here: <input type="checkbox"/> if you have never been fired.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Denied having been disciplined or "written up" for poor job performance (Check here: <input type="checkbox"/> if you have never been disciplined or "written up" for poor job performance.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please check the statement that best describes you when seeking a job. Check only 1 of the following 4 statements.

- I am always honest and tend to volunteer all relevant information about myself, both positive and negative.
- I tend to volunteer only information that makes me appear a good job candidate. If asked, I will admit, honestly, any and all information.
- I tend to volunteer relevant, positive information. If pressed, I will admit negative information in such a way as to make it appear as good as possible.
- I always present myself in a positive manner and never admit to any negative information, even when directly asked.

What type of job do you usually seek. Check as many as apply:

- Accounting/Finance Computer Sales/Marketing Management
- Something else. Please specify:

How old are you?	____ years old
What is your sex?	<input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male
What is your race?	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Black <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic <input type="checkbox"/> Other
How old were you when you first started working outside the home?	____ years old
Have you ever been laid off from a job?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you currently employed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

How would your present supervisor evaluate your overall job performance? (If you are not currently employed, how would your most recent supervisor evaluate you?)

- Below average Average Above average Extremely above average

Some employers use personality tests to screen applicants. Pretend that you are applying for a job that you really want and you are asked to complete this short personality test. Please answer the questions in the same way you would if you were applying for the job that you really want.

In the past, when you have made major purchases, you usually researched your options (ex: reading <i>Consumer Reports</i>) before making the final decision.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In the past, when you received a gift or bought a new item, you usually found a place for that item as soon as you got home.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually find it easy to convince friends or relatives to do something that they don't want to do (e.g., see a movie that they don't want to see).	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In the past, once you created a new routine, (e.g., exercise, diet etc....) you usually stuck to it.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In the past, when you created a "to do" list, you usually accomplished most things on it.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In a group setting (e.g., team project for work), you have frequently volunteered to be the group's spokesperson.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
When you spend a day doing errands, you usually plan the order of the stores that you will visit.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually leave early for appointments or meetings to make sure that you get there on time.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually feel comfortable in social situations.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
After a long trip, you usually unpack your things immediately and put them back in their appropriate places rather than unpacking things as you need them.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
People often compliment you on your ability to give clear instructions (e.g., giving directions, explaining how something works).	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually get "side-tracked" when you are working on a project or task, such as a work assignment or a household chore.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
At work, if given a choice, you usually chose to do an oral presentation rather than a written report.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually make sure that there is pen and paper by the telephone in your home.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
People often compliment you on your ability to quickly talk your way out of an embarrassing situation.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
When socializing with a group of people, you frequently feel that the group is relying on you to keep the conversation going.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
When you feel strongly about something, you can easily get others to see your point of view.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
When you get emotional, you usually have a difficult time organizing your thoughts into speech.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In the past, you have enjoyed defending your point of view in an argument or debate.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually enjoy persuading someone to understand your point of view.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In the past, you have frequently chosen hobbies that involved performing in front of other people (i.e., sports, theater, music).	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False

Please answer these same questions again as honestly as you can. Please remember this is an anonymous survey and we cannot trace your identity. Please respond honestly even if it makes you look bad.

In the past, when you have made major purchases, you usually researched your options (ex: reading <i>Consumer Reports</i>) before making the final decision.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In the past, when you received a gift or bought a new item, you usually found a place for that item as soon as you got home.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually find it easy to convince friends or relatives to do something that they don't want to do (e.g., see a movie that they don't want to see).	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In the past, once you created a new routine, (e.g., exercise, diet, etc....) you usually stuck to it.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In the past, when you created a "to do" list, you usually accomplished most things on it.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In a group setting (e.g., team project for work), you have frequently volunteered to be the group's spokesperson.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
When you spend a day doing errands, you usually plan the order of the stores that you will visit.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually leave early for appointments or meetings to make sure that you get there on time.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually feel comfortable in social situations.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
After a long trip, you usually unpack your things immediately and put them back in their appropriate places rather than unpacking things as you need them.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
People often compliment you on your ability to give clear instructions (e.g., giving directions, explaining how something works).	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually get "side-tracked" when you are working on a project or task, such as a work assignment or a household chore.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
At work, if given a choice, you usually chose to do an oral presentation rather than a written report.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually make sure that there is pen and paper by the telephone in your home.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
People often compliment you on your ability to quickly talk your way out of an embarrassing situation.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
When socializing with a group of people, you frequently feel that the group is relying on you to keep the conversation going.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
When you feel strongly about something, you can easily get others to see your point of view.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
When you get emotional, you usually have a difficult time organizing your thoughts into speech.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In the past, you have enjoyed defending your point of view in an argument or debate.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
You usually enjoy persuading someone to understand your point of view.	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False
In the past, you have frequently chosen hobbies that involved performing in front of other people (i.e., sports, theater, music).	<input type="checkbox"/> True <input type="checkbox"/> False

Thank you for your help with this survey!

