

CHAPTER 8

A SOCIOANALYTIC VIEW OF FAKING

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Deception is the essence of all communication. Plants and animals constantly deceive predators and prey through mimicry, camouflage, and other duplicitous acts. Some animals, including humans, deceive members of their own species and even themselves in order to achieve status, build coalitions, attract mates, and realize other life goals. The ability to deceive is a function of natural selection and an inherent part of life. At the same time, to be deceived by others is a problem, so natural selection has also favored the ability to detect deception. The result is an arms race wherein improvements in the ability to deceive are countered by improvements in the ability to detect deception.

Faking on personality tests, and identifying that faking, can be seen as special cases of deception and the detection of deception. We believe, however, that many who study this issue take a simplistic and largely incorrect view of the test-taker-test-interpreter relationship. This (incorrect) view assumes that test-takers are detached scientific colleagues who reflect on their past thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and then use personality test items to provide an accurate account of their reflections. Those who take this view worry about factors that may distort accurate

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and factual communication. One of the most feared factors is the so-called social desirability motive. Describing one's self in a socially desirable manner is generally regarded as a deceptive practice that must be detected and counteracted.

In contrast with the foregoing view, we believe that objective communication is an ideal that rarely occurs, even in science; therefore it is a mistake to assume that test-takers ever communicate with dispassionate precision. We think it is more fruitful to assume that all people, including test-takers, have agendas and that they use communication to further their agendas. Describing one's self in socially desirable terms is a part of some—but only some—people's agendas. Furthermore, even among people with these tendencies, we find (a) differences in what they consider to be socially desirable (Scott, 1963), (b) differences in behaviors designed to appear socially desirable, and (c) differences in the importance people attach to seeming respectable as compared to their other goals. Moreover, describing one's self in socially desirable terms does not necessarily involve deception, and some forms of deception have nothing to do with trying to be socially respectable. Finally, our research indicates that not all deception interferes with the valid assessment of personality and that sometimes telling the literal truth invalidates the assessment process.

We believe that the key to valid personality assessment through self-report lies neither with encouraging respondents to be detached reporters of information nor with eliminating the specter of social desirability. Rather, we think it will be more productive to allow and expect respondents to act like ordinary human beings who pursue their goals using a combination of factual communication, deceptive statements, and self-deceptive maneuvers. In our view, a comprehensive model of item responding would include all of these communication processes and would suggest methods to maximize the validity of personality measurement, regardless of the degree and type of deception that occurs.

We present our view of faking in three steps. First, we provide an analysis of what we think actually takes place in everyday social interaction. Next, we explain why we think answering personality items is a form of social interaction. Finally, we review some data that support the view that test-taking is social interaction and that provide insight into the role of faking on personality tests.

A SOCIOANALYTIC MODEL OF EVERYDAY SOCIAL INTERACTION

Consider the fact that much social interaction involves telling other people about yourself. You will mostly talk about what interests you, but your attitudes and opinions tell others a great deal more about you—far more

than where you stand on certain issues. What you say and how you say it tells others whether you are judgmental or tolerant, logical or emotional, assertive or inhibited, how educated you are, and what your cultural background might be. The clothes you wear indicate whether you are bold or reserved, hip or old-fashioned, sophisticated or down-to-earth. And so forth. From our speech patterns to our clothing to our preferences in music and literature to the bumper stickers on our cars, all of these behaviors say, “This is the kind of person I am.”

This line of analysis comes from the symbolic interactionists, particularly Goffman (1956). Our view, socioanalytic theory (Hogan & Holland, 2003; Hogan, 1983, 1991) begins with Goffman’s observation that competent adults try to manage the impressions that others form of them. Socioanalytic theory extends Goffman’s analysis in two ways. First, it explains *why* people engage in self-presentation—what motivates us to present ourselves in particular ways and what functions these self-presentations serve. Second, socioanalytic theory accounts for the *consistencies* in our self-presentational strategies. Whereas social psychologists, following Goffman, focus on the fact that we present ourselves differently to different audiences (Schlenker & Pontari,), personality psychologists focus on recurring patterns of self-presentation that lead to a stable reputation.

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Why Tell Others Who We Are?

Advertising who we are serves many useful functions. Seeming spontaneous and fun-loving attracts people with whom we can party. Appearing tough and crazy scares away troublemakers. Appearing tolerant, considerate, and accepting creates friends and romantic partners. And appearing intelligent and reliable may persuade an employer to hire us. These are some of the functions of interpersonal communication.

Socioanalytic theory assumes that the disposition to advertise ourselves evolved millions of years ago. Only by cooperating could our relatively small and puny ancestors survive. Coordinated activity required group members to anticipate the expectations and behavior of other members of the group. And accurately anticipating one another’s behavior required the ability to display one’s, and read others’, intentions. Thus, we evolved a talent and disposition to let others know what we are up to, and this remains a part of human nature.

Although socioanalytic theory assumes that human beings are fundamentally cooperative, it also assumes the presence of a tendency toward competition, especially among males. Early American ethologist Wallace Craig (1928) noted that most social animals have evolved “rules of fair

play” that constrain competition to keep it from getting out of hand and destroying the group. Males in social species normally engage in ritualized battles that involve a minimum of real physical violence. The winners in these competitions move up in the status hierarchy and gain access to better food, mates, and territories. Establishing relatively stable hierarchies and territories reduces fighting and increases the stability of the group. Ritualized competition inevitably involves deceptive tactics such as bluffing, feinting, intimidation, and braggadocio. Understanding that deception more often accompanies competitive than cooperative interactions helps explain when faking is likely to occur on personality tests. When job applicants are focusing on “beating” other applicants or on “beating the test” in order to secure the position, they may be more likely to fake. Such a competitive mind-set is not inevitable; we suggest methods for reducing competitiveness later in this chapter.

Why Do We Present Ourselves Consistently?

Consistency of self-presentation over time is what we mean by personality. If we behaved in different ways each day—cheerful and outgoing today, fearful and reserved the next, outgoing the following day—people would be unable to predict our actions and would shun us. The fact that people who are acquainted with Jane and Henry agree that she is extraverted and he is shy signifies the existence of personality.

So, why does Jane seem extraverted and Henry seem shy? The answer lies in the evolution of the brain. According to evolutionary psychology, the brain evolved so as to handle routine activities with automatic processes, and reserve conscious control for novel problems (Gaulin & McBurney, 2004). Routines require far less energy than improvising, so our brains are designed to maximize automatic activity, and these automatic mental routines are what impart regularity to our behavior (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). When we consciously learn new tasks, our performance is slow, effortful, and somewhat awkward. When we began learning how to type or drive a car, our first efforts were halting and clumsy. But with practice our performance became smooth and effortless, requiring little conscious attention. When our behavior becomes automatic, it becomes consistent.

So it is with personality traits, the behavioral consistency that others attribute to us. Personality traits are patterns of behavior rooted in temperament and habits; as a result, we tend to be unaware of our characteristic behavior—and how others perceive us. When individuals try to act in deceptive ways in everyday life (e.g., introverts try to act like extraverts), their natural tendencies “leak through” and observers readily detect them

(Lippa, 1976). Only good actors can make atypical performances seem convincing (Lippa, 1978).

That most of our behavior goes on routinely outside of our conscious control may surprise many of us. We normally think our behavior is voluntary, but that is an illusion. This illusion has caused some psychologists to argue that our conscious choices to behave differently in different situations (e.g., acting happy at weddings and somber at funerals) makes our behavior too inconsistent to be described in terms of personality traits such as *cheerful* or *gloomy* (Mischel, 1969). For those of us who know cheerful and gloomy people, Mischel's early critique is obviously wrong. At the same time, is it not true that people behave differently at weddings and funerals? How can we reconcile our observations that behavior changes across situations with our intuitions about personality consistency?

Mischel's (1969) error in his early work was to equate having a personality with behaving the same way in different situations (Johnson, 1999).¹ Only socially insensitive (e.g., psychotic, mentally retarded, clinically narcissistic) people behave the same way in every situation. Socially competent people (i.e., most of us) adjust their behavior to be appropriate to particular situations. This competence is not a rare and highly developed skill; it is a basic prerequisite for normal functioning. Even insects, whose behavior is completely automatized, behave differently around predators, prey, mates, and offspring. Personality is not reflected in the tendency to behave the same way across different situations; rather, it is reflected in the tendency to seek out (and avoid) particular kinds of situations and the consistent ways people present themselves in particular situations (Johnson, 1997b, 1999). Again, socioanalytic theory maintains that our behavior in most situations is guided by unselfconscious habit. People cannot help dealing with certain situations consistently, and these consistencies define their personalities.

Deception as Deviation from Consistency

Deception is a conscious, deliberate deviation from typical forms of self-presentation, a deviation that acquaintances would describe as uncharacteristic behavior. This view of deception contrasts with the view that deception involves acting in a way that is inconsistent with a single "true self" hidden inside of us. Freud may have been wrong about many things, but he was certainly correct in arguing that we are constantly prompted by conflicting impulses and ambivalent feelings, and that a single true self does not exist. Research by Gazzaniga (1998) suggests that the mind consists of independent modules rather than a single, "real" unitary self. We are not endorsing the radical, postmodernist notion that

the self is only a social construction, leading to an infinite number of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Surely personality is constrained by *some* stable structures in the brain. Yet, because neuroscience has just barely begun to identify these structures (e.g., DePue & Collins, 1999), socioanalytic theory defines the “real” person in terms of observable consistencies in social behavior and defines deception in terms of deliberate deviations from those consistencies.

Our view of interpreting item responses lies between the social constructivist position that item responses can imply virtually any personality trait (Gergen, Hepburn, & Fisher, 1986) and the “trait realist” position that valid item responses correspond veridically to behaviors or experiences guided directly by the trait being measured (McCrae & Costa, 1996). In agreement with constructivists, we see the act of item-responding as a negotiation of identity. In agreement with trait realists, we believe these negotiations are constrained by biology in nonarbitrary ways. Whereas social constructivists seem to have abandoned notions of truth and objective reality, trait realists assume that validity rests on a simple one-to-one correspondence between item content, item response, and the trait that guides the behavior or experience referenced in the item. We believe item responses are valid when respondents produce scores that correspond to their established social reputations, whether or not their responses correspond literally to actual behaviors and experiences in real life.

TEST-TAKING AS A FORM OF SELF-PRESENTATION

Personality Testing as Scientific Reporting

Tyler (1963) and others assume that the ideal form of personality assessment involves multiple observers rating a person's behavior over a period of time. Detached, disinterested, and objective, these observers record actual behaviors to derive a valid representation of personality. According to Tyler, the inconvenience of this method requires us to ask the persons we are assessing to serve as detached, disinterested, objective observers of their own behaviors. Their task, as they read each item on a personality test,² is to determine whether the item accurately describes their behavior and then respond according to the literal correspondence. In this view, if the item says, “I read at least 10 books a year,” test-takers should think carefully about how many books they read each year and mark agreement with the item only if that number is at least 10.

This traditional view of assessment causes psychologists to worry about respondents' willingness or ability to accurately report their behavior. In

particular, psychologists fear that respondents will provide socially desirable, rather than accurate, responses, especially in competitive and evaluative conditions such as preemployment screening. Consequently, much of the “self-report” personality research since the 1960s has involved efforts to work around the potential reluctance of respondents to behave the way we wanted them to. Some of these efforts appear in this volume.

Personality Testing as Social Interaction

We have a different perspective on what happens when people respond to items on a personality test. Our view is that people spontaneously use personality tests as vehicles for self-presentation (Hogan, 1991; Hogan, Carpenter, Briggs, & Hansson, 1985; Johnson, 1981; Mills & Hogan, 1978). People are naturally eager to express themselves, whether in terms of responses to personality items or bumper stickers for their cars. What are the implications of this view for understanding deception and how do they differ from the implications of the traditional view of test item responses?

Recall that the traditional view requires that people’s responses correspond to their actual behaviors and worries that people will provide deceptive rather than accurate responses. In contrast, we expect that people’s responses to items on a properly constructed test will create the same impressions that their behavior creates in real life. Furthermore, people who present themselves in negative ways (e.g., neurotics, delinquents) in real life will also provide socially *undesirable* item responses—because they are telling us who they think they are. A person’s self-presentational style represents a habitual strategy designed to manipulate others. A neurotic’s complaints and other signs of helplessness are designed to elicit pity, special consideration, and support from others (Watson & Andrews, 2002). A delinquent’s signs of deviance and defiance are intended to create the impression of someone too dangerous to mess with (Emler, 2005).

Because people normally employ the same self-presentational gambits in response to personality test items as they use in everyday life, scores on a well-designed personality test tend to predict how the person is seen by others in everyday life. However, we do not claim that testing guarantees a personality portrait that perfectly matches a person’s reputation. This is because factors other than honesty and deception affect test validity. One of the most crucial issues is whether an item’s reputational significance is easily and intuitively grasped by test-takers. If the item “I read at least 10 books a year,” actually conveys the impression of being smart, then people who are regarded by others as smart should endorse the item, even if they read less than 10 books and have to “lie” about the number of books

they read. The trick is for the test author write items that a respondent will naturally answer in a way that accurately reflects his or her established reputation. And this accuracy must be established empirically.

The fundamental problem of valid assessment is not whether people tell the literal truth but whether they respond in ways that are consistent with their established reputations. If intellectuals fail to endorse the book-reading item, it is the test author's fault. The test author has failed to provide a clear opportunity for self-presentation. On the other hand, if most intellectuals endorse the item but a few fail to endorse it, the problem lies in the social intelligence of the few who did not get it. Presenting oneself to others is a social game, and those who are not skilled enough to play the game will provide invalid portraits of themselves on personality tests.

To recap, we assume that most social behavior consists of habitual forms of self-presentation over which we have little conscious control. The consistency of these habits creates consistent impressions on the people with whom we frequently interact, and we call these impressions *reputation*. We say that people are "authentic" when their current behavior is consistent with their reputations. Conscious attempts to act in uncharacteristic ways are usually perceived to be inauthentic. We regard personality testing as a form of social interaction that is guided by the same habits that govern everyday behavior. Socially competent people respond to well-designed test items in ways that are consistent with their reputations. Literal truth-telling is less an issue for valid testing than the social skills of the test-taker and the proper design of personality items.

Is Faking More Likely on Tests than in Real Life?

Researchers concerned with deception will probably complain that we overestimate the amount of habitual self-presentation that occurs during personality testing. Even if personality test responses are seen as self-presentations, the process differs from everyday interactions in ways that encourage inauthentic self-presentation. For starters, in everyday life people can observe the degree to which our words and nonverbal behavior are consistent. Nonverbal behavior carries far more weight than words in communication (Mehrabian, 1972) and is a cue in detecting deception (DePaulo, Lindsay, Malone, Muhlenbruck, Charlton, & Cooper, 2003). But with personality data we have only responses to written statements without the information provided by nonverbal cues. Furthermore, in everyday life we are monitored for long periods of time so that it would be easy for acquaintances to notice an uncharacteristic self-presentation. This puts limits on who we can claim to be without contradicting ourselves (Hogan, 1987). When responding to personality test items, we are on

stage for an hour at most—and surely most people can put on an act for such a short time.

Ultimately it is an empirical question as to whether people can present themselves in coherent but duplicitous ways so as to produce interpretable but duplicitous personality profiles. The next section of this chapter presents some data relevant to this question. Before looking at the evidence, consider the possibility that making a positive but inauthentic impression on a personality test is quite difficult. Falsifying a good impression requires knowing how personality is related to effective job performance. Such knowledge is available for certain jobs (e.g., successful managers are socially ascendant), but less available for others (e.g., successful architects receive low scores on measures of emotional stability). Without knowing which personality characteristics are needed for a job, applicants will not know how falsely to present themselves.

But knowing the relevant personality characteristics is still an insufficient basis for creating a desirable profile. Job applicants must also determine how to respond to individual items in order to manipulate their scores. This may be obvious for face valid items, but good inventories contain subtle and non-obvious items. Also, like the proverbial students who score poorly on multiple choice exams because they think too much about each answer, people who think too much about the implications of each item will find themselves nearly paralyzed.

To create a specific impression on a personality inventory requires intuitive knowledge and skills (Sternberg & Hedlund, 2002). Responding to a personality inventory is a kind of skilled performance; personality measures—often regarded as capturing typical performance—are more like ability tests (measures of maximal performance) than most people realize (Wallace, 1966). In the next section we present evidence indicating that the factors that facilitate skillful self-presentation in everyday life might also apply to competent self-presentation on personality tests.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH GUIDED BY THE SOCIOANALYTIC VIEW OF TEST-TAKING

Earliest Socioanalytic Studies

If responding to personality items is a form of social interaction, then the scores for socially competent people should be more valid than scores for less socially competent people. Mills and Hogan (1978) tested this hypothesis by asking members of a suburban community service organization to complete CPI-based measures (California Psychological Inventory; Gough, 1975) of dominance, femininity, social insight, and empathy, and

then asking the participants to rate one another on these characteristics. The discrepancy between standardized scores on the first three personality scales and peer ratings for these traits correlated $r = -.87$ with scores on Hogan's (1969) Empathy Scale, a well-validated measure of social competence (Johnson, Cheek, & Smither, 1983). Socially competent people were more able than less competent people to appreciate how others perceived them and their item responses more closely matched how they were described by knowledgeable acquaintances.

In a follow-up study, Johnson (1981) examined the relation between social skill and the consistency of self-presentation on personality inventories (defined as providing the same response to identical or nearly-identical items on two inventories). According to Johnson, the traditional view of personality assessment predicts that honest, earnest, and cooperative people would be more consistent, while the socioanalytic view predicts that people with good social skills would be more consistent. In three separate samples (normal adults, convicted murderers, students), all of the socioanalytic predictions, and none of the traditional predictions were verified—self-presentational skill was associated with consistency.

The Mills and Hogan (1978) and Johnson (1981) articles support the socioanalytic view of personality assessment under nonevaluative research conditions. The next two studies concern personality assessment during simulated personnel selection. Because these studies have not been previously published, the first will be described in some detail. The second study replicates the first with a different personality inventory.

Performance Under Simulated Employment Testing

Johnson (1986) asked 83 college students to complete the CPI (Gough, 1975) under standard instructions. Then participants completed four scales (Dominance, Socialization, Self-Control, and Flexibility) from Burger's (1975) short form for the CPI; these scales were chosen as markers for four of the five major factors of personality: Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability/Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience (McCrae, Costa, & Piedmont, 1993). Also, the validity of these scales for predicting job performance had been established by past research. As they completed the short form of the CPI, participants were asked to imagine that they were applying for six jobs representing Holland's (1985) six RIASEC occupational categories (police officer, dental technician, architect, religious counselor, business manager, and cashier/short-order cook). The order of retesting was randomized, with rest between test sessions to minimize order effects and fatigue. Participants received extra credit, and those with the best scores

for each of the six jobs were promised additional extra credit as an incentive for doing well.

Full CPI scores were estimated from the short form scores using regression equations provided by Burger (1975). Two different analyses were conducted. First, changes in scores on the four CPI scales from straight-take conditions in each of the six employment testing conditions were examined, to see whether average scores increased for scales known to correlate with effective job performance. Second, a measure of success for each employment testing condition was constructed by adding scores from CPI scales known to correlate positively with job performance and subtracting scores from CPI scales known to correlate negatively with job performance. CPI scores under standard conditions were correlated with these six measures of successful employment testing to see if personality as normally measured predicted maximal performance under evaluative conditions. Also, individuals receiving the highest performance scores were interviewed to see if they had any distinguishing characteristics.

Results indicated that, across all six jobs, scores on Dominance, Socialization, and Self-Control increased, and Flexibility scores decreased. The *amount* of change differed across jobs, suggesting that participants were attempting to tailor their presentations across conditions. However, the participants failed to raise their Flexibility scores for occupations for which this scale correlates positively with job performance (e.g., dental technician) or lower their scores on Self-Control, Dominance, and Socialization for occupations where these scores are negatively correlated with job performance (e.g., manager, counselor, and architect, respectively). The participants may have reacted to the *general* social desirability of the items (low for Flexibility and high for the other three scales), but they were unable to raise or lower their scores according to the performance profiles specific to the different jobs.

Some differences in successful test performance could be accounted for by personality as measured normally (see Table 8.1). Baseline personality scores were partialled out of all predictions. Higher scores for different occupations were associated with different combinations of personality traits. Space limitations preclude a detailed discussion of the results presented in Table 8.1; in short, the ability to look good in each job category was a function of a unique set of established personality strengths.

The more informal interview data on the six best performers again illustrated that high test performance for different jobs is based on established assets. The best police officer simulator was an administration of justice major who received the Most Valuable Player honor for the college's baseball team. The best dental technician simulator was a nurse

Table 8.1. Personality Correlates of Employment Testing Performance

	<i>Police Officer</i>	<i>Dental Technician</i>	<i>Architect</i>	<i>Religious Counselor</i>	<i>Business Manager</i>	<i>Cashier/ Cook</i>
CPI Scale						
Dominance	13	14	12	11	16	13
Capacity for Status	08	15	04	11	28*	-05
Sociability	10	07	-08	-11	14	07
Social presence	18	25*	-13	02	14	16
Self-acceptance	14	14	-05	06	-01	18
Well-being	25*	31**	-16	03	08	08
Responsibility	14	13	09	-18	22*	08
Socialization	27*	25*	-34**	-11	-03	20
Self-control	16	18	-23*	-02	-04	-08
Tolerance	19	22*	-23*	-03	16	-05
Good impression	08	15	-20	09	12	-09
Communality	10	24*	01	10	-01	14
Achievement via conformance	29**	31**	-26*	-03	-08	01
Achievement via independence	-05	05	-03	04	15	-24*
Intellectual Efficiency	17	25*	-11	-17	09	03
Psychological Mindedness	11	08	-05	10	-05	-15
Flexibility	-40**	-24*	22*	17	14	-27*
Femininity	12	06	-16	26*	-10	01
Empathy	13	-03	-03	-10	18	-02

Note: Decimal points omitted from all correlation coefficients. Criterion is the raw sum of personality scale scores related positively to effective performance minus the scale scores related negatively to effective performance. Coefficients are partial correlations corrected for scores on Dominance, Socialization, Self-Control, and Flexibility under straight-take conditions. $N = 83$.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$ (both two-tailed).

who had returned to school and was sporting a 3.9 grade-point average. The best architect simulator was an individualistic, adult returning student in the honors program and majoring in human development. The

best religious counselor simulator was a soft-spoken, yet intelligent psychology major whose father is a psychiatrist. The best business manager simulator was a vivacious business major who was president of a scholastic fraternity, vice-president of the student government association, writer for the college newspaper, and recipient of four academic awards at the college's honors convocation. The best cashier/cook simulator was undistinguished academically, but had experience in the short-order food business.

Johnson (1987) investigated the degree to which these CPI-based findings would generalize to the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI; Hogan, 1986). Seventy-eight students completed the HPI under standard instructions. They then completed the HPI at home over a 2-week period, as if they were applying for jobs as a long-haul truck driver, Navy bomb disposal technician, counselor at a private psychiatric institution, or middle-level manager. Hogan developed criterion-keyed HPI scales to predict performance in precisely these four occupations. Extra credit was given to all students, and additional extra credit was promised to the best performers in the four employment conditions.

Applicants improved their scores considerably on two criterion-keyed HPI scales for person-related occupations (counselor, manager). Scores on the HPI bomb technician scale were barely, but statistically significantly higher in the employment simulation, and scores on the HPI truck driver scale show a nonsignificant decrease. This suggests that it may be easier to enhance self-presentation for person-related occupations—perhaps because valued traits are common knowledge—but difficult to impossible for more technical occupations. Unlike the Johnson (1986) study, performance scores under simulated employment testing showed no significant relations to personality scores gathered under normal test-



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Table 8.2. HPI Score Changes When Applying for Different Jobs

Job Position	Straight-Take		Applying		Pearson <i>r</i>	<i>t</i> value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Truck Driver	134.0	19.4	131.9	32.3	.16	-0.52
Bomb Technician	38.4	6.6	40.3	5.7	.03	2.03**
Counselor	76.5	14.0	81.9	12.4	.24*	5.28
Manager	59.1	9.6	71.3	9.4	.23*	9.11**

Note: *N* = 78; significance of *rs* and *ts* based on 77 *df*.
 **p* < .05
 ***p* < .01 (both two-tailed).

ing conditions. We need more research to understand what kind of person can present him/herself well on HPI criterion-keyed scales and whether scores gathered under normal or interview conditions are better predictors of job performance.

Valid and Invalid Lying

For decades psychologists have worried that people respond to the social desirability of personality items rather than their content. To deal with this concern, psychologists (e.g., Tellegen, 1982) developed *unlikely virtues* scales. These scales contain items describing behaviors that are so implausibly virtuous (e.g., “I have never hated anyone.”) that they are unlikely actually to describe anyone. The assumption is that those who endorse unlikely virtue items are lying in order to make a good impression.

Johnson and Horner (1990) question the unlikely virtue assumption in two ways. First, they point out that, although saying something like “I have never hated anyone” may be literally untrue, in real life we often say things we do not mean to be taken literally. What people may mean by endorsing “I have never hated anyone” is that they have rarely hated anyone or that they do not carry long-term grudges. From a socioanalytic view, what matters is the image that is created by saying “I have never hated anyone.” And the image is that of a forgiving, nonvindictive individual. People with reputations for being tolerant and forgiving are likely to endorse this item, even if it is literally untrue.

Johnson and Horner (1990) also question whether, when people endorse unlikely virtue items, they are responding to the social desirability of the items rather than the items’ unique content. There are, after all, many different ways to be virtuous, and people may endorse only those unlikely virtues that are consistent with their reputations (Cawley, Martin, & Johnson, 2000). To test this idea, Johnson and Horner constructed six unlikely virtue (UV) scales whose contents corresponded to the content of each of the six primary scales of the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI; Hogan, 1986): Intellectance, Adjustment, Prudence, Ambition, Sociability, and Likeability. UV Intellectance items claim unusual intellectual prowess (“In my own way, I am an intellectual giant.”), UV Adjustment items claim exceptional mental health (“I have no psychological problems whatsoever.”) and so forth. These UV items were embedded in the standard HPI items, and 142 students completed this augmented HPI. Participants also completed the Bipolar Adjective Rating Scales (BARS; Johnson, 1997a), designed to mea-

Table 8.3. Correlates of Unlikely Virtue Scales

	<i>Unlikely Virtue Scales^a</i>					
	<i>UINT</i>	<i>UADJ</i>	<i>UPRU</i>	<i>UAMB</i>	<i>USOC</i>	<i>ULIK</i>
<i>Standard HPI Scales</i>						
Intellectance	.56***	.19**	.11	.31**	.09	.00
Adjustment	.04	.44***	.05	.24**	.09	.08
Prudence	.01	.04	.56***	.01	-.05	.19**
Ambition	.42***	.27***	-.04	.39***	.38***	.08
Sociability	.23**	.23**	-.21**	.34***	.40***	.08
Likability	-.09*	-.03	-.01	-.10	.10	.22**
<i>BARS Self-Ratings</i>						
Mentality	.49***	.11	.11	.32***	.03	.04
Poise	.14*	.38***	.01	.33***	.21**	.19*
Discipline	.08	.06	.31***	.06	.01	.10
Power	.19**	.20**	.12	.30***	.10	.00
Sociality	.16*	.23**	.03	.23**	.30***	.01
Likeableness	-.07	-.07	.18*	-.06	-.07	.23*
<i>BARS Acquaintance-Ratings</i>						
Mentality	.16*	-.13	.08	.08	-.07	-.04
Poise	.08	.19**	.07	.16*	-.06	.04
Discipline	-.10	-.09	.24**	-.01	-.11	.16*
Power	.10	.14*	.03	.23**	.14*	.03
Sociality	.15*	.26***	.01	.24**	.28***	.06
Likeableness	-.09	-.08	.14*	-.09	-.16*	.20**

Note: Boldface coefficients indicate expected convergent validity coefficients for the unlikely virtue scales.

^aUnlikely virtues (UV) scale labels are *UINT* = UV Intellectances, *UADJ* = UV Adjustment, *UPRU* = UV Prudence, *UAMB* = UV Ambition, *USOC* = UV Sociability, *ULIK* = UV Likability.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (all one-tailed)

sure six HPI dimensions. In addition, they had two people who knew them well rate them with the BARS.

Table 8.3 presents the correlations between the UV scales and their HPI and BARS counterparts. A clear pattern emerges: In every case, the unlikely virtue scales have their highest correlations (on the order of .40-.50) with the HPI scale for the same dimension (e.g., unlikely Ambition's strongest correlate is with the HPI Ambition scale). Also, each unlikely vir-

tue scale has its highest correlation with the BARS scales assessing the same dimension. The correlations with acquaintance ratings are especially noteworthy; they show that endorsing unlikely virtues items are associated with a person's reputation.

Using the same data set, Johnson (1990) tested the degree to which endorsing unlikely virtues is a generic (unitary) or selective (multidimensional) process. Four alternative models of the data were compared using LISREL. The best fitting model revealed two patterns of responding to HPI UV scales. One involved individuals selectively endorsing UV items consistent with their scores on standard HPI scales. The second was a pattern of indiscriminant exaggeration associated with elevated scores on Intellectance, Ambition, and Sociability, and low scores on Likeability. This particular profile is seen in narcissists (Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991). According to Raskin et al. and Paulhus and Reid (1991), the exaggerated self-presentational style of narcissists is an unconscious form of attention seeking, a style that is self-defeating because it leads "ultimately to rejection and interpersonal failure" (Raskin et al, p. 35).

One might conclude, then, that persons who selectively endorse items from the spectrum of virtues are engaging in genuine self-presentation, and their scores can be considered valid. Others who endorse the full range of unlikely virtue scales are genuine also—genuine narcissists. Their exhibitionistic displays and excessive need for social approval make them poor candidates for jobs that require working cooperatively with others. This study implies two things about the valid assessment of personality for employment. One is that applicants can lie (exaggerate) and still provide information that validly reflects their established reputations. The second is that different patterns of exaggeration can reflect different degrees of suitability for employment within particular jobs. We do not want narcissists in jobs that require cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork.

The Impact of Social and Cognitive Competencies on Assessment

The Mills and Hogan (1978) study was the first to suggest that the validity of personality testing varies with the respondents' capacities for appreciating how their behavior will be interpreted by others. Johnson (2002) devised a way to measure this capacity. He asked 74 students to complete the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI; Hogan, 1986) and to have two acquaintances rate them with the Bipolar Adjective Rating Scales (BARS; Johnson, 1997a). He then asked participants to imagine, for each HPI item, how they would rate the personality of someone who

had endorsed the item. The procedure for rating each item was nearly identical to the CPI item-rating procedure used by McCrae et al. (1993). Participants assigned a -2 to items that *strongly* reflected the low end of a personality factor, +2 to items that *strongly* reflected the high end, a -1 or +1 to items *somewhat* implying the low or high end of a factor, and *zero* to items that implied nothing about a factor.

Averaging these ratings across the participants established a standard for what each item implied about personality, and the agreement between an individual's ratings and this standard reflected the degree to which individuals understood how item responses would be interpreted by the community at large. The HPI scores for individuals who appreciate how item responses are interpreted predicted acquaintance ratings better than scores for those who didn't understand the implications of their responses; however, the difference was statistically significant only for sociability.

Johnson (1981) suggested that responding consistently to similar personality items indicates social competence. Johnson (2005) developed two methods for assessing consistency using an Internet sample of over 20,000 respondents to an online personality inventory. One method used the similarity of scores from odd- and even-numbered items on each scale (see Jackson, 1976). The second method identified 30 item pairs that the sample as a whole answered in different directions and then measured how closely each individual followed the normative pattern. Consistency on both measures was related to low neuroticism and high openness/intellect; this finding once again supports the competency view of self-presentational consistency. Johnson (2005) noted that in only about 1% of all cases was inconsistency severe enough to invalidate a protocol.

Implications for Constructing and Using Personality Scales in Applied Contexts

The research described in this chapter implies several recommendations for building personality tests and using them in personnel selection. Some of these recommendations are consistent with conventional wisdom, but some contradict existing practices.

First, socioanalytic research maintains that we should write personality items that encourage effortless self-presentation rather than literal self-description. We do not really want to know precisely how many books people read; we want to know how bookish people appear to others. Gordon and Holden (1998) found that, when people are asked to recall and count specific behaviors while responding to items, their scores were less

valid than when they were asked to describe their general tendencies and how others see them.

What, exactly, makes an item a good vehicle for self-presentation? Traditional guides to item-writing (e.g., Wolfe, 1993) emphasize the need for simplicity and clarity of item meaning. This is not bad advice; people can easily use items such as “Others see me as shy” to communicate relative degrees of shyness. Yet, the directness and ease with which an item conveys an impression is more important than simplicity and clarity. Johnson (2004) used the term *trait indicativity* to describe how clearly an item implies a trait. He found that trait indicativity affected measurement validity more than all of the other item characteristics he measured.

Valid items with high trait indicativity may or may not be semantically ambiguous. Take the neuroticism item, “I often get headaches.” The imprecision of the word “often” makes this item slightly ambiguous. Traditionally, item ambiguity is regarded as bad. Nonetheless, the very ambiguity of the item is what allows it to convey neuroticism. Neurotics exaggerate somatic complaints and are likely to endorse the item *even though the objective frequency of headaches is no greater than average*. So, we have a literally untrue response to an ambiguous item serving as a valid indicator of neuroticism.

Item ambiguity can reduce validity if the different interpretations imply different tendencies. For example, the CPI item “When I get bored I like to stir up some excitement” is ambiguous because the word “excitement” conveys very different meanings depending on the context. In some cases “excitement” means intense social stimulation. For example, McCrae et al. (1993) suggested the item implies excitement-seeking, an aspect of Big 5 Factor I (Extraversion). However, delinquents use the phrase “stir up some excitement” to refer to potentially illegal behavior. Consequently, Johnson (1997) believes the item implies delinquency and puts it at the low end of Big 5 Factor III (Conscientiousness). On the CPI, the item is scored in the positive direction for Social Presence (a Factor I scale) and in the negative direction for Responsibility (a Factor III scale). Ultimately, it does not matter what the authors feel an item implies; what matters is how respondents understand an item. To make this determination involves asking one’s target audience to evaluate the implications of items (Johnson, 2002).

Socioanalytic theory also recommends writing items that people enjoy endorsing one way or the other. People take pleasure in telling us who they are. They feel good about their bumper stickers, the letters they write to the editor, and the entries they make in their Internet blogs. Responding to personality items should tap this hedonic process. Johnson (in press) measured how much people enjoyed responding to each item on

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the CPI. Items rated as most enjoyable had higher validity than less enjoyable items.

Traditional psychologists might regard these recommendations as giving away the ranch. If the constructs reflected in our items are obvious, aren't we making it easier for job applicants to fake and create the reputation that will get them the job? Earlier we presented two arguments against this possibility. First, we think that automatic habits of self-presentation usually overwhelm attempts at conscious impression management. Second, even when individuals consciously claim non-characteristic views and preferences, their ability to fake is constrained by their knowledge, competencies and social skill. Those people who can use inventory items to make a good impression on an inventory are, in fact, socially competent; it is also likely that their competence will make them effective employees.

We offer one final suggestion for encouraging job applicants to "be themselves" (that is, respond to items in a way that is consistent with their reputations). In the beginning of this chapter, we argued that deception is more likely to occur in competitive interactions. The personnel selection process is a prototypically competitive situation. There are typically more applicants than positions, so the applicants compete for the limited slots available. Applicants also often regard the test as an enemy that must be beaten to become employed.

Although the personnel selection process is competitive, employers can make the situation better or worse by the way in which they present tests to applicants. Some employers use inventories with embedded validity scales and warn applicants that attempts to misrepresent themselves will be detected and they will be dismissed from further consideration. This tactic may prevent some conscious misrepresentation, but also creates an uncomfortable tone for those who had no intention of faking. Pace and Borman present several alternative "warning" formats in chapter 12 that employ this logic.

Instead of trying to scare applicants straight, we suggest that employers consider creating a more cooperative tone. Hiring people with the right characteristics for a job is in the best interest of employers and job candidates. Employers obviously want the most qualified candidates. But job applicants should also be concerned about their fit with a particular work environment, because a good fit will increase their chances of success and satisfaction (Holland, 1985). If applicants can score well on a test only by uncharacteristic impression management, they will find it hard to maintain that false impression on a daily basis in the job. We are not so Pollyannaish to think that we can prevent all faking; consequently, we advocate the use of unlikely virtue scales to help detect rare but troublesome patterns such as narcissism. We do believe, nonetheless, that treating the pro-

cess of personality testing as a form of social interaction rather than scientific data gathering will in the end yield far more valid results.



NOTES

1. In fairness to Mischel, his later writings recognize that different situations require different kinds of competencies related to different kinds of personality traits, such that only a particular range of situations is even relevant to a particular trait (Shoda, Mischel, & Wright, 1993). While we continue to disagree with Mischel on a number of points (Johnson, 1999), Mischel's conceptualization of personality in terms of competencies bears a resemblance to the present view of personality as skilled self-presentation.
2. We use the term *personality test* interchangeably with terms such as *personality scale*, *inventory*, *measure*, and so forth, despite the traditional view that personality measures have no right or wrong answers while tests do. The reason for this is that we believe that responses to personality measures do in fact have correct or incorrect answers. Correct answers lead to valid scores and incorrect answers lead to invalid scores. Later in the chapter we also argue that differences in abilities underlie differences in providing correct or incorrect responses to items, thereby denying a sharp distinction between measures of typical performance and maximal performance.

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