Individual differences in impression management: an exploration of the psychological processes underlying faking

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Abstract

The present study proposes and tests a model of psychological processes underlying faking, which integrates concepts from earlier models of faking by McFarland and Ryan (2000; 2001) and Snell, Sydell, and Lueke (1999). The results provided partial support for the model, suggesting personality factors and perceptions of situational factors contribute to faking behavior. The implications of these findings are (a) people differ with regard to how much they will fake on a personality test in a simulated employment setting with some people faking substantially and others faking very little or not at all, and (b) the extent to which an individual fakes is partially determined by the person’s attitudes and personality characteristics. The present findings are interpreted, discussed, and might be useful for the prevention and mitigation of faking by altering people's beliefs about their ability to fake and the appropriateness of faking.

Key words: faking, impression management, response distortion, social desirability, personality assessment

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The possibility of faking raises the specter of personality test scores ‘measuring’ not permanent dispositions but momentary presentations of self to suit the occasion… First, faking or response ‘distortion’ is a misleading concept because it implies that there is a ‘true’ response that can be determined independently of the behavior of the test-taker. Because determining the true response is logically and empirically impossible, the concept of faking must be replaced by the concept of strategic action or the idea that the test-taker uses the test items to portray himself or herself as a certain kind of person for the occasion (Kroger & Wood, 1993, p. 1297).

As the above quote illustrates, personality test scores may be thought of as a strategic attempt by a test-taker to present him or her self in a certain light to suit an occasion rather than as a reflection of one’s “true” disposition. When the situation is neutral and there are no consequences to the testing outcome (e.g., a research setting, vocational counseling) test-takers are likely to respond in a manner consistent with their internal thoughts and beliefs about their dispositions and behavior. However, in situations where there are consequences associated with test scores (e.g., an employment setting where getting a desirable job is contingent on getting a “passing” score), test takers may provide item responses so as to create a favorable impression. As the above quote suggests, test takers may use test items to portray themselves either truthfully (i.e., a research condition) or favorably (i.e., an employment selection setting). Score differences associated with these two testing situations have been given many labels, such as impression management, response distortion, dissimulation, and faking (which is the term we will use in this article).

The effect of faking on the validity and utility of personality testing in employment settings has been debated extensively in the literature and remains a contentious issue. One group of researchers has argued that faking is rare in selection settings (e.g., Ellingson & Sackett 2001; Hogan, Hogan, & Roberts, 1996; Hogan & Nicholson, 1988) and that when it does occur it does not affect the construct (Ellingson, Smith, & Sackett, 2001; Smith, Hanges, & Dickson, 2001) or criterion-related validity (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1996; Hough, Eaton, Dunnette, Kamp, & McCloy, 1990; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Reiss, 1996) of non-cognitive measures. In contrast, other researchers have argued that faking is common among applicants (e.g., Anderson, Warner, & Spencer, 1984; Douglas, McDaniel, & Snell, 1996; Kluger & Colella, 1993; Thumin & Barclay, 1993; Zickar & Robie, 1999), and that it has negative effects on both the construct (Douglas et al., 1996; Schmitt & Ryan, 1993) and criterion-related validity (Douglas et al., 1996; Holden & Jackson, 1981; Pannone, 1984; Topping & O’Gorman, 1997; Worthington & Schlottmann, 1986) of the measures. Moreover, several authors have argued that faking impacts the quality of selection decisions (Douglas et al., 1996; Griffith, Chmielowski, Snell, Frei, & McDaniell., 2000; Mueller-Hanson, Heggestad, & Thornton, 2003; Rossé, Stecher, Miller, & Levin, 1998; Zickar, Rossé, Levin, & Hulin, 1997).

The lack of clear definition, measurement, and understanding of the psychological processes that underlie faking has further complicated the debate regarding the impact of faking on test scores and selection decisions. Moreover, while there is evidence for individual differences in faking (Douglas et al., 1996; Lueke, Snell, Illingworth, & Paidas, 2001), little is known about the characteristics that contribute to these differences. Developing an understanding of the antecedents of faking behavior is important in that it could lead to better detection of faking, better understanding of how faking may impact construct and criterion-
related validity, and, assuming faking negatively effects selection, to ideas for mitigating the effects of faking on selection. To date, at least two models (McFarland & Ryan, 2000; 2001; Snell, Sydell & Lueke, 1999) have been proposed to explain the antecedents of faking behavior. Although there is certainly some similarities in these two models, there are also notable differences. In addition, each model has received only partial empirical support. In the present paper we propose a new model of the antecedents and process of faking behavior by drawing on the elements of the McFarland and Ryan and Snell et al. models that have received the strongest empirical support. We then provide an empirical evaluation of our integrative model.

Previous models of faking

At least two models (McFarland & Ryan, 2000; 2001; Snell et al., 1999) have been proposed to explain the psychological processes that underlie faking behavior. Snell et al. (1999) proposed an interactional model of faking, which integrated individual differences constructs and contextual factors thought to be related to faking. Individual differences related to faking were organized into two categories: those associated with the ability to fake and those associated with the willingness to do so. Characteristics associated with the ability to fake include dispositional factors such as general cognitive ability and emotional intelligence, experiential factors such as knowledge of what is required on the job and knowledge of what is being measured, and characteristics of the test that make it easier or more difficult to fake such as item type and format. Characteristics associated with the willingness or motivation to fake include demographic factors such as age and gender, dispositional factors such as integrity, Machiavellianism, manipulativeness, organizational delinquency, locus of control, and stage of moral development. Contextual factors were also predicted to influence faking and include warnings and desirability of the test outcome.

In a partial empirical test of this model, Lueke et al. (2001) asked participants to respond to a personality inventory in a variety of hypothetical scenarios (e.g., “you are starving and have to get the job to feed your family,” and “you are not competing against very many people for the job”). Lueke et al. measured faking behavior by examining change in responses between an honest condition and responses given in these situational scenarios. They found that people tended to cluster into three groups according to their willingness to fake, providing support for the notion that there are stable individual differences in faking behavior. However, this study did not examine specific personality traits that may have contributed to the differences in willingness to fake or individual differences in the ability to fake.

Although this model provides a useful framework to better understand the antecedents of faking, it is not without conceptual and empirical limitations. For example, much of the research examining the link between cognitive ability and faking has shown a negative rather than positive relationship (e.g., Ones, et al, 1996; Weiner & Gibson, 2000). In addition, it can be argued that categorizing immutable demographic variables such as age and gender as a “willingness” to fake is questionable. Finally, the model is largely untested, and hypothesized relationships remain an open empirical question.

McFarland and Ryan (2000, 2001) proposed a second model of the psychological processes underlying faking based on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1992). According to this model, faking behavior results from the intention to fake, which, in turn, results from
attitudes toward faking, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitudes toward faking included beliefs about the rightness or wrongness of faking, subjective norms included beliefs about how others view faking, and perceived behavioral control included beliefs about the ease or difficulty of faking. Further, situational influences, including warnings to participants not to fake and the ability to fake were proposed to moderate the relationships between these three factors and intentions to fake. McFarland and Ryan (2001) found substantial support for their model, though their hypotheses about situational moderators were not fully supported. Moreover, the model does not address the impact of dispositional factors on faking intentions.

An integrative model of faking

Both of the models described above have found partial support in the literature; however, there are significant differences between them. Moreover, each model has some limitations that might be addressed by combining the most supported aspects of the two. Therefore, we propose a model of faking behavior that integrates concepts from both the Snell et al. (1999) and McFarland and Ryan (2000; 2001) models. Specifically, we believe that a comprehensive model of the psychological processes underlying faking should include both dispositional antecedents and attitudinal antecedents. In addition, we believe that, consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1992), these antecedents precede intentions, which precede behavior. In this proposed model (presented in Figure 1), the antecedents of faking
are similar to the concepts of the ability and motivation to fake included in the Snell et al. model. However, in addition to these factors, we include the following antecedent variables: one’s perceptions of the situation and the general personality characteristics of Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability. Finally, building on the model proposed by McFarland and Ryan (2000; 2001), we propose that these antecedent variables influence the intention to engage in faking, which, in turn, influences faking behavior. However, the present model differs from McFarland and Ryan’s in that it includes individual differences in personality characteristics as antecedents to the intentions to fake. The various components of the model are explained in detail below.

Antecedents

Snell et al. (1999) proposed that several individual difference constructs contribute to an individual’s ability and motivation to fake, though little empirical research has been done to date to test these relationships. In the present model, the constructs antecedent to the intention to fake differ somewhat from the antecedents in Snell et al.’s model. Our antecedent constructs include one’s perceptions of the situation, ability to fake (operationalized as knowledge), willingness to fake, and two core personality characteristics: Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability.

Perceptions of the situation. Both Snell et al. (1999) and McFarland and Ryan (2000; 2001) included attitudinal factors in their models. For faking to occur, individuals must perceive that the situation is important enough to merit faking and that faking is appropriate and/or possible within a given context. These concepts are similar to the components of expectancy-instrumentality-valence (VIE) theory (Campbell & Pritchard, 1976; Vroom, 1964) in which the degree of effort that one chooses to expend to attain a given outcome is a function of the valence (or importance) the person places on the outcome, perceived instrumentality (i.e., the degree to which the individual perceives the outcome is contingent on various performance levels), and perceived expectancy (i.e., the perceived probability that one can attain the performance levels necessary to achieve the desired outcome). In addition, attitudinal research has demonstrated the importance of subjective norms: the finding that people are more likely to engage in a behavior when they believe that others condone the behavior (e.g., Ajzen, 1991).

In the present model, how one perceives the situation is hypothesized to impact one’s intention to engage in faking behavior. We grouped these perceptions of the situation into three categories: belief in the importance of faking, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms. Belief in the importance of faking is similar to the concept of valence described above. That is, we hypothesized that the degree to which an individual fakes is partially a function of how important the outcome of faking is to the individual in the context of a given situation. Perceived behavioral control in this model is essentially identical to the notion of perceived behavioral control in the McFarland and Ryan model (2000; 2001). That is, perceived behavioral control is the extent to which individuals were confident that they could increase their scores on the personality inventory (regardless of their actual ability to do so).
As such, this construct is similar to the concept of expectancy as described above. The concept of subjective norms in our model is also essentially identical to the subjective norms included in the McFarland and Ryan (2000; 2001) model. As such, subjective norms are perceptions that others would engage in and condone faking. In support of this assertion, Lueke et al. (2001) found that beliefs about the prevalence and acceptability of faking were related to faking. Therefore, we hypothesize these attitudes are likely to lead to intentions to fake in the appropriate situation.

Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of the situation, defined as the belief in the importance of faking, perceived behavioral control, and perceived subjective norms, will be positively related to intentions to fake.


table

Ability to fake. Frei, Snell, McDaniel, and Griffith (1999) proposed that ability to fake is related to both the ability to identify personality characteristics associated with good job performance and the ability to figure out what a personality test is measuring. However, McFarland and Ryan (2001) found that knowledge of what the test measures did not affect faking. This finding may have occurred because they attempted to manipulate knowledge by providing some subjects with information about what the test measured, while others did not receive any information. McFarland and Ryan posited that the personality test they used was fairly transparent so even individuals in the group that did not receive information were probably able to guess what the test measured. Other researchers have theorized that general cognitive ability is related to the ability to fake (e.g., Snell et al., 1999); however, the opposite relationship has frequently been observed in the literature (Hartshorne & May, 1928; Ones, et al., 1996; Weiner & Gibson, 2000).

Despite these conflicting theories, it seems intuitive that to engage in faking behavior one must know how items should be answered to obtain a good score. For example, when confronted with the item “I get anxious easily at work,” one must know that answering “false” or “disagree” will result in a more favorable score on the scale than answering “true” or “agree.” Therefore, it is hypothesized that individuals who know how to answer personality questions to obtain a more desirable score are more likely to intend to engage in faking. Thus we have operationalized “ability to fake” as possessing the required knowledge to do so.

Hypothesis 2: Ability to fake, defined as knowledge of how to obtain a desirable score, will be positively related to intentions to fake.

Willingness to fake. As noted by Snell et al. (1999), in addition to having the ability to fake, one must be motivated to do so for successful faking to occur. Part of this motivation may come from situationally specific factors, such as the context of the immediate situation (e.g., scoring well on the test must lead to a perceived benefit). These factors are captured in our model by our concept of “Perceptions of the Situation.” In addition, there may be dispositional factors that contribute to one’s willingness to fake (Snell et al., 1999). We chose three characteristics to represent dispositional factors associated with the willingness to fake:

\[\text{It should be noted that we did not include a direct measure of perceived instrumentality as this was a function of the experimental design. As described in the method section, participants were told that a positive outcome (i.e., getting hired for one’s dream job) was contingent on doing well on the personality test.}\]
Machiavellianism, lack of rule-consciousness, and self-monitoring. These characteristics were selected based on theoretical and empirical support from the literature as described below.

Machiavellianism (the willingness to be deceitful and manipulative to further one’s own interests) has consistently been theorized to relate to faking (e.g., Schlenker, 1980; Snell et al., 1999) and some support for this relationship has been found (Cunningham, Wong, & Barbee, 1994). People high on the characteristic of Machiavellianism, therefore, could be expected to alter their scores on a personality scale to achieve a desired goal.

Organizational delinquency, or a tendency to disregard rules, has also been theorized to relate to faking (Snell et al., 1999). To successfully fake, one must be willing to ignore warnings and prohibitions against faking, such as those admonishments typically given to test takers in selection settings to respond honestly. Therefore, lack of rule-consciousness may also be a factor in one’s willingness to fake.

Self-monitoring has also been linked to faking behavior. Self-monitoring is defined as “self-observation and self-control guided by situational cues to social appropriateness” (Snyder, 1974, p. 526). In other words, individuals who engage in self-monitoring are especially skilled at reading situational cues, modifying their behavior to fit the situation, and observing the outcome of their behavior to ensure it has the desired effect. Although evidence for the link between self-monitoring and faking behavior has been mixed, some research has suggested that high self-monitors are more likely to be successful fakers (McFarland & Ryan, 2000; Paulhus, 1991; Schlenker, 1980).

Hypothesis 3: Willingness to fake, defined as Machiavellianism, lack of rule-consciousness, and self-monitoring, will be positively related to intentions to fake.

Core personality characteristics. Core personality characteristics, including Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability, may also be related to faking behavior. For example, McFarland and Ryan (2000) found that Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability were negatively correlated with faking behavior. One explanation for this finding could be that, at a broad level, Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability are related to integrity (Murphy & Lee, 1994; Ones, 1993), and lack of integrity is thought to relate to faking, though support for this hypothesis has been mixed (c.f. Cunningham, et al., 1994; Lilienfeld, 1993; McFarland & Ryan, 2000). In addition, among the Big Five Factors, Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability generally have the strongest correlations with social desirability (Barrick & Mount, 1996). Therefore, we hypothesize that Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability will impact faking behavior.

Hypothesis 4a: Conscientiousness will be negatively related to intentions to fake.

Hypothesis 4b: Emotional Stability will be negatively related to intentions to fake.
Intentions to fake and faking behavior

As Ajzen (1992) noted, “the most immediate determinant of any given behavior is the intention to perform or not perform that behavior” (p. 33, emphasis in original). As faking is a behavior, it is most proximally predicted by intentions to fake. Therefore, as in McFarland and Ryan’s (2000; 2001) model, we propose that the intention to fake is the most proximal predictor of actual faking behavior. Consistent with our model, faking behavior in the present study was measured directly by the difference in personality test scores between responses in an honest condition and responses in a simulated applicant condition.

Hypothesis 5: The intention to fake will be positively related to faking behavior.

Method

Participants

Participants were 489 undergraduate students from introductory psychology classes who volunteered in exchange for research credit. Seventy percent of the participants were women, and ages ranged from 18 to 43 ($M = 19$, $SD = 1.94$). The majority of the participants were Caucasian (86%), which is representative of the university population from which the sample was taken. Ninety eight percent of the participants reported having at least some previous work experience, with an average of 3.6 years ($SD = 2.3$) of work experience.

Procedures

Participants were run in groups of up to forty. After informed consent was obtained, participants completed a background questionnaire, the Machiavellianism, lack of rule-consciousness, and self-monitoring scales; the Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability measures; and the Job Fit Assessment (the measure of honest personality). Prior to completing each of these measures, participants were urged to respond honestly and reminded that their responses would be kept strictly anonymous and confidential. They were further instructed to respond by describing the way they truly saw themselves, and not how they wished others to see them. After completing the Job Fit Assessment, participants completed the knowledge measure and were given a brief break (five to ten minutes). After the break, participants were led through a guided imagery exercise in which they were asked to imagine their dream job. The instructions for this exercise were as follows:

We are now going to do something completely different. Put down your pencils for a moment, lean back in your seats, close your eyes, and think about your dream job. Think about the type of work you want to be doing. Think about where you will be working. Think about the type of people you will be working with. Lastly, think about the type of salary that you will be making. Now open your eyes and imagine that you have finished
college and any graduate training needed to qualify for your dream job. Imagine that you are now applying for this dream job and that you have had several interviews with a very desirable company. Things seem to be going well when you get a call from the human resources director who says, “We are really interested in you and we think you are just who we are looking for. But there is just one more thing we need you to do. We need you to take and pass a personality test before we can make you an offer because we only want the right kind of people working here. If you can pass the test, I’m ready to make you an offer – if not I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors. However, I will be able to detect if you have lied on this test, and if I catch you doing this, you will not be offered the position.

Participants were asked if they understood these instructions and if they had any questions. When all questions were answered, participants completed the Job Fit Assessment for a second time, this time imagining that they were in the situation described above. Participants were asked to imagine their “dream job” because it was important that they imagined a job that was desirable to them. Additionally, the instructions made it clear that passing the personality test was the only thing standing in the way of obtaining this job; however, they were warned not to lie. Although this exact scenario is unlikely in actual employment settings (i.e., rarely would a personality test be used to make a final decision in a selection setting), these instructions were carefully constructed to give participants the psychological realism (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 1994) of an applicant setting, and in many situations a personality test may be a major determinant of whether an applicant continues through the screening process. Additionally, participants were instructed that they should respond to the items without regard to how they had responded to them previously.

After completing the Job Fit Assessment under the simulated applicant scenario, participants completed the intentions to fake measure. Participants were instructed to reflect back on the scenario and to recall their intentions in completing the personality assessment. Participants were told that they should no longer respond as if applying for their dream jobs, and they were urged to be candid about their intentions. The intentions to fake questionnaire was given after the simulated applicant scenario because we believed that giving the intentions to fake measure before would only prime people to fake (McFarland & Ryan, 2001, used the intentions to fake questionnaire in a similar manner). Moreover, because participants had been warned against lying, it may have been difficult for some individuals to admit up front that they intended to lie on the personality assessment.

Finally, participants completed the perceptions of the situation measure. Again, participants were asked to reflect back on the applicant scenario and to honestly report what their perceptions had been at that time. These perceptions were measured after the actual scenario because measuring them beforehand may have primed people to fake and some participants may have had difficulty answering honestly. Once all the questionnaires had been completed, the participants were debriefed and dismissed. The experimental procedure lasted approximately two and a half hours.
Measures

*Perceptions of the situation.* As described previously, the perceptions of the situation measure consisted of three scales: perceived importance of faking, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms. Perceived importance of faking was measured by 3 items (e.g., “It was important for me to perform well on the personality test in order to be more competitive for the job I wanted.”); perceived behavioral control was measured by 4 items (e.g., “I felt confident that I could increase my score on the personality assessment.”), and perceived subjective norms were measured by 3 items (“Other people would think less of me if they knew that I faked on this test to try and get a better score.”), using a questionnaire developed specifically for this study. Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale (response options ranged from 0 = *Strongly Disagree* to 4 = *Strongly Agree*). High scores on the perceptions questionnaire indicated a perception that faking was appropriate and desirable in the simulated applicant situation. In the measurement model, error terms for the first and second variables were allowed to correlate because these two clusters reflected beliefs about one’s self whereas the third variable reflected beliefs about others.

*Ability to fake.* Ability to fake was measured with a knowledge questionnaire consisting of 20 items from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP: Goldberg, 1999). Ten items were from the Emotional Stability scale and 10 items were from the Conscientiousness scale. Rather than rating themselves on these items, participants were asked to indicate what the “right” response would be in order to achieve the best score possible and were given the following choices: “strongly agree,” “strongly disagree,” and “neither agree nor disagree.” Items that were answered in the keyed direction were scored as correct. For example, the item “I waste my time” measures Conscientiousness and answering “strongly disagree” would result in a higher Conscientiousness score. Therefore, “strongly disagree” was scored as a correct answer while “strongly agree” and “neither agree nor disagree” were scored as incorrect. The total score on the knowledge questionnaire could range from 0 to 20 with high scores indicating greater knowledge of how the items should be answered to obtain a desirable score. These items were chosen because Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability are traits that are typically valued by employers across a variety of occupations, and therefore, knowledge of how to obtain a high score on these traits appears to be particularly relevant in selection settings.

*Willingness to fake.* Three scales were used to identify one’s disposition associated with the willingness to fake: Machiavellianism, lack of rule-consciousness, and self-monitoring. Machiavellianism was measured by the Mach IV, Version 1 (Christie & Geis, 1970). The Mach IV, a 20-item scale, was designed to measure a person’s tendency to manipulate others to achieve his or her own ends and has been shown to have adequate reliability and validity in a variety of studies (Wrightsman, 1991). Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale (response options ranged from 0 = *Strongly Disagree* to 4 = *Strongly Agree*). High scores indicate a high level of Machiavellianism.

Lack of rule-consciousness was measured by a 10-item scale from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP: Goldberg, 1999). IPIP scales have been shown to have good internal consistency and to relate to other well-developed measures of similar constructs. Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale (response options ranged from 0 = *Very Accurate* to 4 = *Very Inaccurate*). This scale was reverse scored so that high scores would indicate lack of rule-consciousness.
Self-monitoring was measured using Snyder’s (1974) 25-item self-monitoring scale. This scale has shown adequate reliability and validity evidence in a number of studies (e.g., Snyder, 1974; Snyder & Tanke, 1976). Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale (response options ranged from 0 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). High scores indicate high levels of self-monitoring.

Conscientiousness. Conscientiousness was measured by 20 items from the IPIP (Goldberg, 1999). Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale (response options ranged from 0 = Strongly Agree to 4 = Strongly Disagree). Rather than using the 20 items as indicators for a Conscientiousness latent variable, the items were grouped, on the basis of a theoretical evaluation of item content, into four homogeneous item clusters (HICs). The HICs represented: a tendency to be neat (6 items; e.g., “Like to tidy up”); planfulness (5 items; e.g., “Do things according to a plan”); dutifulness (5 items; e.g., “Neglect my duties”); and detail orientation and perfectionism (4 items; e.g., “Am exacting in my work). Each of the HICs was reverse scored so that positive relationships could be observed between the latent variable and other variables of interest, making our results easier to interpret.

Emotional Stability. Emotional Stability was measured by 20 items from the IPIP (Goldberg, 1999). Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale (response options ranged from 0 = Strongly Agree to 4 = Strongly Disagree). To define indicators for the latent variable, three HICs were created on the basis of a theoretical evaluation of item content. The HICs represented: anger and hostility (8 items; e.g., “Get angry easily”); anxiety (7 items; e.g., “Worry about things”); and moodiness (5 items; e.g., “Change my mood a lot”). Each of the HICs was reverse scored so that positive relationships could be observed between the latent variable and other variables of interest, making our results easier to interpret.

Intentions to fake. Intentions to engage in faking behavior were measured by the seven items used by McFarland and Ryan (2001). This scale assesses whether an individual intended to fake on the personality assessment to raise his or her scores (e.g., “I attempted to fake my responses on the test.”). The scale demonstrated good reliability and validity (for predicting actual faking behavior) in the McFarland and Ryan study. Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale (response options ranged from 0 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). High scores indicated a greater intention to engage in faking behavior.

Faking behavior. Faking behavior was measured by examining the differences between responses to the Job Fit Assessment (ADP Screening & Selection Services, 2002) in the straight take condition and in the simulated applicant condition. The Job Fit Assessment is a commercially available personality assessment that measures five broad characteristics that relate to the five-factor model of personality (Digman, 1990; John, 1989). Definitions of the scales are provided in Appendix A. The Job Fit Assessment consists of 75 items (12 per scale, plus 15 items for an impression management scale). Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale (response options ranged from 0 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). The Job Fit Assessment was chosen for the present study because it was designed specifically for use in selection settings and is typical of other self-report assessments used with job applicants. High scores on each scale indicate higher levels of each trait.

To define a faking latent variable, difference scores were calculated for each scale by subtracting scores from the simulated applicant condition from the straight take condition. Difference scores have often been criticized in the literature (Edwards, 1994; Edwards &
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Parry, 1993) as they are often found to have low reliability estimates. The effect of this lower reliability in correlational analyses, such as those performed in this study, serve to make it harder to observe relationships between difference score variables and other variables because correlations are attenuated due to unreliability. Thus, our use of difference scores will serve to make it more difficult for our predictors to relate to faking behavior. As such, low reliabilities for the difference scores would lead to a conservative test of our model. However, it is also important to recognize that we do not use the individual difference score variables in our analyses. That is, the difference scores were used as indicators for a latent variable, which we call faking behavior. To the best of our knowledge, difference scores have not been used in this way before, and faking has never been operationalized in this manner. In this approach, a latent variable will be identified on the basis of the covariation between the difference scores from each of the personality scales. Should the difference score indicators covary in a manner sufficient enough to define a latent variable that fits the data, we believe that an interpretation of this variable as faking behavior is warranted.

Analyses

The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) with EQS (Bentler, 1995). Using SEM allowed us to operationalize faking as a latent variable rather than looking at faking on a scale-by-scale basis. Following the process outlined by Byrne (1994) and Bentler (1995), a two-step approach was used. First, measurement models were tested for the antecedents, intentions to fake, and faking behavior using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Testing the measurement models before the structural models is necessary to ensure that the indicators adequately represent the hypothesized underlying latent variables. Second, the hypothesized structural model was tested. For all these analyses, Mardia’s coefficient was used to evaluate multivariate normality. For all models tested, the normalized estimate of Mardia’s coefficient was greater than 3, which indicated significant non-normality. Therefore, all models in the present study were evaluated using maximum likelihood estimation with the robust command, which is the most effective way of analyzing non-normal data in EQS (Bentler, 1995).

Results

Means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores for the antecedents of faking and the intentions to fake are presented in Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and reliabilities on the Job Fit Assessment from both the straight take and simulated applicant instructional conditions are presented in Table 2. Standard deviations and reliabilities tended to be higher in the simulated applicant condition, which suggests there was greater variance in scores under this condition. Paired t-tests revealed significant differences ($p < .001$) between the mean scale scores across the two instructional conditions, such that mean scores from the simulated applicant condition were higher than mean scores from the straight take condition. Standardized mean difference effect sizes ($d$) ranged from a low of 0.25 standard deviation units for the trait of assertiveness to a high of 0.87 standard deviation units for the
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Min Value</th>
<th>Max Value</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th># of Items</th>
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<tr>
<td>Belief in Importance of Faking</td>
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<td>10.91</td>
<td>6.45</td>
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</table>

Note: M indicates the scale mean; SD indicates the scale standard deviation. N = 489; * These variables were reverse scored in the analyses.

Table 2: Descriptive and Comparative Statistics for the Job Fit Assessment Across Instructional Conditions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
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<th>Pearson Correlations</th>
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<td>α  M  SD  t-value</td>
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<td>Striving</td>
<td>.78 28.61 6.05</td>
<td>.84 34.03 6.34 18.93* 0.87</td>
<td>.48 .36 .37 .65 .49 .56</td>
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<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>.84 26.95 6.90</td>
<td>.85 28.62 6.51 7.57* 0.25</td>
<td>.19 .74 .36 .19 .44 .22</td>
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<td>Extroversion</td>
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<td>.79 32.00 5.82 11.25* 0.39</td>
<td>.19 .35 .71 .25 .29 .19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>.72 31.53 5.58</td>
<td>.78 35.24 5.66 15.96* 0.66</td>
<td>.43 -.03 .03 .58 .38 .50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress Tolerance</td>
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<td>.17 .34 .21 .09 .57 .54</td>
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<td>.85 29.17 8.49 17.87* 0.87</td>
<td>.16 -.04 -.02 .23 0.30 .45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For the t-values, * p < .001. d is the standardized mean difference effect size. r is the correlation between scores from the two instructional conditions. Correlations below the diagonal are intercorrelations in the straight take condition; correlations above the diagonal are intercorrelations in the simulated applicant condition; correlations along the diagonal are between the two conditions. Correlations above .10 are significant at the .05 level (two-tailed). N = 489.
trait of achievement striving and for the impression management scale. These findings are consistent with previous literature that has found traits related to Conscientiousness (in this case dependability and achievement striving) and Emotional Stability (stress tolerance) to be the most susceptible to faking, while traits such as assertiveness and extroversion are less so (e.g., Merydith & Wallbrown, 1996; Ross, Bailey, & Mills, 1997), though all these traits are fakable to a certain degree. In addition, the effect sizes between the straight take and simulated applicant condition are consistent with differences between applicants and incumbents observed in the literature (e.g., Ellingson et al., 2001; Rossé et al., 1998).

Table 2 also shows the intercorrelations among the Job Fit scales in each of the two instructional conditions as well as the correlation between these two conditions. The scale intercorrelations are generally higher in the simulated applicant condition than the straight take condition. For example, in the straight take condition, intercorrelations are higher between conceptually related scales such as achievement striving and dependability and lower between unrelated scales such as assertiveness and dependability. In contrast, the scale intercorrelations are consistently higher in the simulated applicant condition. This finding suggests that construct validity of the Job Fit Inventory may be compromised when applicants fake (c.f., Douglas, et al., 1996; Schmitt & Ryan, 1993). The magnitude of the correlation between the two instructional conditions is generally moderate, and, taken together with the higher reliabilities and standard deviations in the simulated applicant condition, indicates notable changes in the rank ordering of people from the straight take to the simulated applicant conditions.

Reliability estimates and correlations between the study variables are presented in Table 3. As shown, the reliabilities for the indicators of faking – i.e., the difference scores between scores from the straight take and simulated applicant conditions – were generally low, which is typical of difference scores. As noted above, low reliabilities lead to substantial attenuation in the relationships between variables. With that fact in mind, it should be noted that intentions to fake was significantly positively correlated with each of the difference scores despite their low reliability. Moreover, the separate difference scores were used as indicators of a more general, faking behavior latent variable, which we believe mitigates the problem of low reliabilities of single difference scores. To examine the reliability of the faking behavior construct, we calculated Cronbach’s alpha, treating the six difference scores as items. The resulting estimate of Cronbach’s alpha was = .87, making it likely that individuals who were faking raised their scores in a consistent fashion across the individual scales.3

The results presented in Table 3 also indicate that the antecedent variables were all correlated significantly and positively with the intentions to fake variable (with the exception of the ability to fake variable), which is generally consistent with the hypotheses. In addition, the intercorrelations among the study variables are generally low, except among variables that are conceptually related (e.g., Machiavellianism, self-monitoring, and lack of rule-consciousness). One notable exception is Conscientiousness, which shows a moderate correlation with Machiavellianism and lack of rule-consciousness. This finding is addressed in more detail in the discussion.

3 We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this analysis.
Table 3: Pearson Correlation Coefficients for Study Variables

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Note: N = 489. *These variables were reverse-scored in the analysis. Correlations above .08 are significant at the .05 level (one-tailed). Alpha coefficients are along the diagonal. Reliabilities for difference scores were calculated using the formula presented by Crocker and Algina (1986).
Test of hypotheses

Measurement models. To test the latent variable for faking behavior, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using each of the difference scores from the Job Fit scales as indicators of a general faking factor. Error terms for the achievement striving and dependability difference scores were allowed to correlate because achievement striving and dependability are both part of the larger construct of Conscientiousness. Standardized factor loadings and residuals for the indicators are presented in Table 4. Overall, the faking behavior latent variable appears to be well specified by the difference score indicator variables ($\chi^2 = 21.8, df = 8, p < .001, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .08$); therefore, this latent variable was used in the structural model to represent faking behavior.

The measurement model for the intentions measure was tested using the seven items as indicators. Error terms for Item 4 (i.e., I intended to make myself look as good as possible on the test) and Item 5 (i.e., I intended to make myself look very good on the test) were allowed to correlate because these items had very similar wording. Standardized factor loadings and residuals for this model are presented in Table 4. Overall, the intentions to fake latent variable appears to be well specified by the item indicators ($\chi^2 = 44.13, df = 13, p < .001, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .08$), and therefore this intentions variable will be used in the structural model.

The measurement models for the antecedents of faking were tested altogether as presented in Figure 2. The latent variable for perceptions of the situation was indicated by three scales: belief in importance of faking, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms. The latent variable for willingness to fake was indicated by three scales: self-monitoring,

<table>
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<th>Residual</th>
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</table>

Note: $N = 489$. All factor loadings are significant at $p < .001$. 
Figure 2:
Measurement model of the antecedents of faking intentions.

Path coefficients indicated with an asterisk (*) are significant at p < .01; Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability were reverse scored in these analyses.
lack of rule-consciousness, and Machiavellianism. The Conscientiousness variable was reverse scored and indicated by four theoretically derived HICS: lack of neatness, lack of planfulness, lack of dutifulness, and lack of detail orientation. The Emotional Stability variable was reverse scored and indicated by three theoretically derived HICS: anger and hostility, anxiety, and moodiness.

When testing the antecedent measurement model, all latent variables were allowed to correlate except for Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability because these two characteristics are conceptually unrelated. The model provided a fair fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 238.28, df = 59, p < .001, CFI = .89, RMSEA = .08$), and all path coefficients were significant at $p < .05$.

**Structural model.** Next, the full structural model was tested. The full model, including standardized path coefficients, is presented in Figure 3. Overall, the model provided a fairly good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 842, df = 311, p < .001, CFI = .90, RMSEA = .06$). Hypotheses were tested by examining the structural path coefficients in the model.

Hypothesis 1, that perceptions of the situation would relate to intentions to fake, was supported as indicated by the significant path coefficient between these two variables (.99, $p < .01$). The ability to fake variable was not significantly related to intentions to fake and, therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported (-.01, n.s.). Hypothesis 3, that willingness to fake would be related to intentions to fake, was not supported. Although the path coefficient between these two variables was significant, it was negative; the opposite direction of what was predicted (-.31, $p < .01$). This seemingly counterintuitive finding is discussed in greater detail.

![Figure 3: Structural model of faking](image)

*Path coefficients indicated with an asterisk (*) are significant at $p < .01$; Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability were reverse scored in these analyses.*
detail below. Hypotheses 4a and b, that Emotional Stability and Conscientiousness would be related to intentions to fake, were supported (respectively .22 and .15, \( p < .01 \)). Hypothesis 5, that intentions to fake would be related to faking behavior, was supported as indicated by the significant path coefficient between these two variables (.70, \( p < .01 \)).

**Discussion**

In an effort to integrate prior literature on the psychological processes underlying faking behavior, a new model of impression management was proposed. In the model, faking behavior was preceded immediately by intentions to fake, which was preceded by several antecedents: perceptions of the situation, ability to fake, willingness to fake, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability. The model was partially supported. Specifically, one’s perceptions of the situation (belief in the importance of faking, one’s perceived behavioral control, and one’s beliefs about subjective norms) and Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability were related to intentions to fake which, in turn, were related to faking behavior. However, ability to fake was not related to intentions to fake, and willingness to fake had an unexpected negative relationship to intentions to fake.

This latter finding is all the more curious in light of the positive zero order correlations between the indicators of the willingness variable (Machiavellianism, lack of rule-consciousness, and self-monitoring) and the intentions to fake measure. One possible explanation for this seeming contradiction is that the willingness variable was highly correlated with both the perceptions of the situation variable and the Conscientiousness variable. Therefore, it may be possible that the effects of willingness to fake on intentions to fake operate through the mediating effects of how one perceives the situation.

Previous literature has suggested that perceptions about the importance of one’s behavior, the belief that one has the ability to engage in the behavior, and subjective norms are most proximal to intentions to engage in the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Personality variables, such as the attributes captured in the willingness to fake construct are more distal to actual behavior. According to this line of reasoning, personality factors may influence perceptions of the situation, which, in turn, influence intentions, which ultimately affect behavior. With respect to the variables in the current investigation, it could be hypothesized that the willingness variable operates on intentions to fake through its effects on one’s perceptions of the situation. Therefore, it may be appropriate to respecify the model with willingness leading to intentions through the mediating effects of one’s perceptions of the situation. We tested this respecified model with the present sample, and we found the fit to be similar to the fit of our hypothesized model (\( \chi^2 = 951.13, df = 314, p < .001, CFI = .90, RMSEA = .07 \)). However, we would urge caution in the interpretation of these results, as it would be more appropriate to test this revised model with a new sample to avoid capitalizing on chance. Further research on this point, as well as other alternative models of faking may be fruitful.

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4 It should be noted that in the respecified model tested here, the Conscientiousness and emotional stability variables were not allowed to correlate with the perceptions variable.
The findings in the present study make three main contributions to the faking literature. First, the model proposed in this study integrates concepts from two distinct, yet complimentary, models proposed by McFarland and Ryan (2001) and Snell et al. (1999). Like the McFarland and Ryan model, and consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), our model proposes that faking behavior is most proximately predicted by intentions to fake, which, in turn, are preceded by attitudes about the behavior (one’s perceptions of the situation). Additionally, consistent with Snell et al.’s (1999) model, in our model individual differences in personality traits also predict faking behavior.

By integrating various concepts from these two models and testing our conceptual model, we now have a better understanding of the psychological processes that contribute to faking behavior. Specifically that intentions to fake are driven by a complex set of characteristics, including how one perceives the situation and one’s core personality characteristics. Moreover, the strong relationship between intentions to fake and actual faking behavior indicates that faking, as operationalized in the present study, was a conscious and pre-planned attempt to present oneself in a more favorable light to suit the occasion, which supports Kroger and Wood’s (1993) contention that personality tests measure “not permanent dispositions but momentary presentations of self to suit the occasion” (p. 1297). Therefore, as Kroger and Wood so aptly pointed out, faking is akin to “strategic action” in which the test taker uses the test items to portray a more favorable image, as warranted by the situation.

The second contribution of the study was in using a direct measure of faking behavior rather than simply asking participants to “fake good.” Similar to past research (e.g., McFarland & Ryan, 2000; 2001) faking behavior was operationalized by differences in scores between straight take and simulated applicant conditions. However, the use of difference scores has been severely criticized because of problems with reliability and validity (e.g., Edwards, 1994; Edwards & Parry, 1993). Moreover, low reliability necessarily limits the relationships of the difference scores to other variables. In the present study, this problem was mitigated by treating each difference score as an indicator of a latent faking variable. Combining the difference scores in this way provided a more powerful measure of faking behavior that was substantially related to other factors in the model.

The fact that the difference scores were highly intercorrelated indicates that test takers who faked appeared to use a general “score high” strategy on the personality instrument. That is, those who faked tended to increase their scores on nearly every scale, rather than picking only some scales in line with their “dream jobs.” Therefore, even though each participant may have had a different vision of what constituted his or her “dream job,” the participants had similar visions of what a desirable applicant for those varied jobs might look like. These results suggest that there may be consistent individual differences in faking behavior. However, future research needs to examine the extent to which faking behavior remains consistent across different situations.

The third contribution of this study relates to the finding that people’s perceptions of the situation have a strong relation to faking intentions. As suggested by McFarland and Ryan (2000), organizations may mitigate the effects of faking by altering people’s attitudes and beliefs. The findings in the present study also suggest that altering these perceptions may prevent, or at least reduce the extent of faking. Previous research has already demonstrated that warnings about detection can slightly reduce faking (Dwight & Donovan, 2003). Perhaps the effects of these warnings can be strengthened by altering perceptions about the importance of faking (e.g., that “high” scores are not necessarily desirable), the efficacy of
faking (e.g., that good detection methods are in place and that fakers will be caught and disqualified), and the subjective norms about faking (i.e., that faking is unacceptable). To date, many efforts to control faking have focused on the detection of faking through lie scales, which has met with mixed success. However, the results of our study suggest that a more proactive approach may entail mitigating faking before it occurs by altering people’s perceptions.

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations in the present study that warrant discussion. First, this is a laboratory study with a student sample; it did not examine the natural tendency to fake which may operate in organizational settings. Although pains were taken to ensure participants were in a frame of mind that was similar to actual applicants, it is unknown whether actual applicants would behave in a similar manner. The limitations of student samples reinforce the need to replicate this research in actual applicant populations. However, given the design of the present study (where individuals take the assessment in both a straight take and applicant condition), it would be difficult to replicate this experiment with actual applicants. Perhaps the best approach would be to use a design in which applicants are first tested in an actual employment selection setting, and then tested as incumbents. It may be difficult, however, to get honest reports of intentions to fake from people outside of a research setting.

A second major limitation was the lack of usefulness of the measure of ability to fake. This measure was fairly range restricted with a mean score of 18.46 out of a possible maximum score of 20. Moreover, 77% of the participants scored an 18 or higher on this measure, revealing that there were few individual differences in knowledge of how to fake. These results were consistent with McFarland and Ryan’s (2001) finding that knowledge of what a test measures does not influence faking.

In hindsight, the items for our knowledge measure were probably too transparent. Moreover, the items on the target personality measure were also very transparent, making it relatively easy for individuals to increase their scores if they so desired. Given that the personality measure used in the present study is typical of personality measures used in employment settings, it may be that ability to fake on a self-report personality measure is not an important determinant of faking behavior because nearly anyone would have the ability to fake in these situations. However, when more subtle employment tests are used such as structured interviews and simulation exercises where the “right” answer is less clear, ability to fake might be more important. Further research on this point seems warranted.

Summary and conclusions

The results from this study indicate that: (a) people differ with regard to how much they will fake on a personality test in a simulated employment setting with some faking substantially and others faking very little or not at all, and (b) the extent to which an individual fakes is partially determined by the person’s perceptions of a given situation and partly determined by individual personality characteristics. The implications of these findings are that faking
Impression management may be prevented or mitigated by altering people’s beliefs or perceptions. Consistent with the quote at the beginning of this paper, this study does indeed support the notion that the traditional concept of faking as a deviation from one’s “true” personality should be replaced with the concept of faking as an overall impression management strategy, which may manifest itself differently in different situations, yet has a basis in individual personality differences. However, it remains to be seen whether individuals who fake on personality tests are more likely to fake in other selection contexts.

References


Appendix:
Definitions for the scales of the job fit assessment

Extroversion
Extroversion is a preference for working with others rather than alone. This dimension also refers to the extent to which an individual enjoys situations in which he or she can interact with others, such as company gatherings, meetings, etc.

Dependability
Dependability refers to the tendency to be punctual, reliable, and responsible at work. Dependable individuals have a tendency to follow established rules and procedures and follow through on their work commitments.

Assertiveness
Assertiveness reflects a preference for dealing with others in a direct manner, expressing opinions openly, and taking initiative in work situations. Assertive people are persuasive, decisive, and strong leaders.

Achievement striving
Achievement Striving is a tendency to work hard, a willingness to delay personal gratification to meet work goals, and an intrinsic desire to improve one’s work-related skills.

Stress tolerance
Stress Tolerance refers to how an individual handles stress at work. This dimension reflects an individual’s resiliency in the face of demanding or difficult situations, events, or people at work.

Impression management
Impression Management is a scale designed to assess conscious response distortion. Similar to the impression management scale of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1991), this scale consists of statements about behaviors in which nearly everyone engages, but to which hardly anyone likes to admit. This scale is not typically part of the Job Fit Assessment, but was included for the purposes of the present study. In a previous study (Mueller-Hanson, 2001), this scale demonstrated adequate reliability and validity.