Faking it! Individual differences in types and degrees of faking behavior

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ABSTRACT

Personality measures are commonly used in personnel selection and other high-stakes situations. In these settings, respondents may engage in purposeful deception, or faking, to increase the likelihood of receiving a valued outcome (i.e., being offered a job). However, some individuals may tend to only fake slightly, others may demonstrate more extreme response tendencies, and others may respond honestly. In this study, we used within-person, two-wave data to investigate faking on a conscientiousness measure across honest-responding and faking conditions using latent transition analysis (LTA) to identify different types of fakers. Agreeableness, neuroticism, and the perceived ability to deceive (PATD), obtained in the honest-responding condition, were used to predict faking behavior patterns. We also examined whether counterproductive workplace behavior (CWB) differed across the faking types. Results supported three-class solutions in both honest-responding and faking conditions, and that respondents could be classified as honest respondents, slight fakers, and extreme fakers. Results partially supported the role of high agreeableness and low neuroticism as predictive of stable response patterns. PATD results did not suggest a significant predictive relation with faking behavior. Extreme fakers were also found to generally exhibit the highest levels of CWBs. Implications and directions for continued research are discussed.

1. Introduction

Using personality measures for personnel selection and other high-stakes situations is common (Rothstein & Goffin, 2006). For example, job applicants may engage in purposeful deception when responding to personality questionnaires in order to obtain a job offer (McLarnon, Goffin, Schneider, & Johnston, 2016; Schneider & Goffin, 2012). Impression management, or faking, may emerge when applicants provide exaggerated, embellished, or otherwise dishonest responses, thus changing the result of which candidate should be offered a position (Christiansen, Goffin, Johnston, & Rothstein, 1994). Although past research has identified types of faking behavior (e.g., extreme faking, slight faking, honest responding; Ziegler, Maaß, Griffith, & Gammon, 2015), little has examined faking using within-person, multi-wave data. Accordingly, the current study offers a unique contribution in that it combines a within-person examination across responses to conscientiousness items under honest and faking conditions using latent transition analysis (LTA) to identify distinct types of fakers. We also investigated whether several individual differences variables (e.g., agreeableness) were associated with the distinct patterns of faking.

1.1. Faking prevalence and effects

Faking on personality tests can inflate scores in high-stakes testing (Ziegler, Schmidt-Atzert, Bühner, & Krumm, 2007). This can occur because responses are given in a way to enhance perceived chances of receiving a desired outcome (i.e., getting hired; Goffin & Boyd, 2009). Recent studies have found evidence for substantial faking-related increases. In experimental settings, O'Neill et al. (2013) asked participants to respond as an ideal applicant and found that individuals were able to substantially increase scores on job-relevant personality traits. Birkeland, Manson, Kisamore, Brannick, and Smith (2006) found that applicant conscientiousness scores were substantially higher than non-applicant scores ($d = 0.45$). Further, Donovan, Dwight, and Hurtz (2003) noted that 17–32% of applicants exaggerated responses to make themselves 'look better than they actually were,' and that over 50% of applicants downplayed negative traits (reflecting faking by decreasing scores on *undesirable* traits).

Nonetheless, the extent to which respondents alter their scores is not universal. For instance, evidence using person-centered approaches for different *types* of fakers has emerged (Robie, Brown, & Beaty, 2007; Ziegler et al., 2015). This evidence is built upon research underscoring
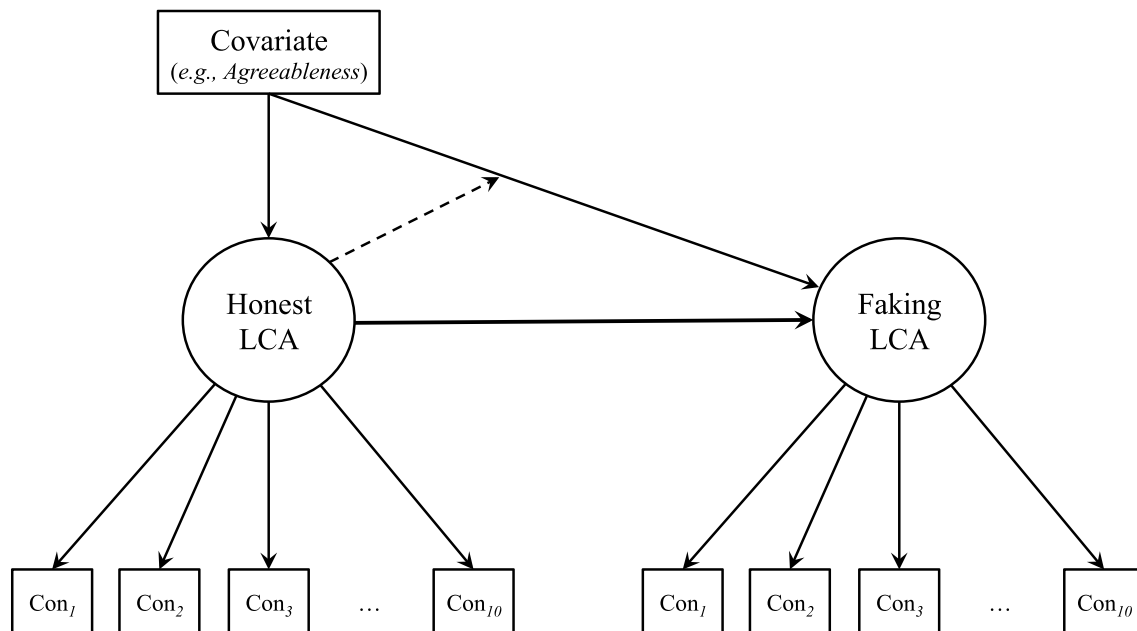
Fig. 1. Conceptual latent transition analysis (LTA) model. Depicts conscientiousness (Con) measured by the same set of 10 items across Honest and Faking conditions, in which each condition is represented by three latent classes (LCA). Covariates (agreeableness, neuroticism, PATD) incorporated to assess conditional membership across Honest and Faking classes. Dashed line indicates moderating influence of covariate on Faking LCA membership.

that distinct types of individuals can be identified based on patterns of responses to personality items (Holden & Book, 2009; Zickar, Gibby, & Robie, 2004).

1.2. Person-centered approaches

Person-centered approaches identify subgroups of individuals who share a similar pattern of scores of a set of variables, and can involve cluster analysis or mixture modeling (i.e., latent class analysis [LCA]; McLarnon, Carswell, & Schneider, 2015; McLarnon & O'Neill, 2018; O'Neill, McLarnon, Xiu, & Law, 2016). Variable-centered approaches (i.e., correlation and regression), in contrast, focus on the relations between variables, independent of the role of any other. Person-centered approaches, as applied to personality, stem from Allport (1937) who considered personality from a holistic perspective, in which personality reflects "an interrelated system of several traits" (Specht, Luhmann, & Geiser, 2014, p. 540).

1.2.1. Conscientiousness

Although we restrict our focus to the broad trait of conscientiousness in the current research, person-centered approaches can be applied to describe subgroups of individuals derived from the item-level responses to a personality measure. Thus, conscientiousness item responses were treated as focal indicators of faking, in alignment with Ziegler et al. (2015) and because it is used in personnel selection and other high-stakes testing (Rothstein & Goffin, 2006). Specifically, we examined the potential for differential, within-person patterns of responses to the same conscientiousness items administered under respond-honestly and faking conditions.

Highlighting applications of person-centered analyses that solely focus on conscientiousness, Rost, Carstensen, and Von Davier (1997) and Egberink, Meijer, and Veldkamp (2010) have used LCA to examine subgroups of individuals derived on the basis of conscientiousness responses. Rost et al. used a set of twelve items (measured on a 4-point scale) and found that a two-class solution, characterized by high and low response patterns, yielded optimal fit. Using a set of 30 conscientiousness items (anchored on a 5-point scale), Egberink et al. found that four latent classes represented optimal fit, characterized by ordered

patterns of low to high endorsement probabilities.

Our study differs importantly from Rost et al. (1997) and Egberink et al. (2010). Specifically, we predict that three latent classes will optimally describe *both* honest and faking condition LCAs. Using a larger number of items, which assessed a multidimensional conscientiousness construct, as in the case of Egberink et al., will result in recovering evidence for additional profiles. A shorter (10-item), unidimensional measure, as in the current study will result in fewer latent classes. Further, we expected a larger number of classes than Rost et al because they determined the number of latent classes via the consistent Akaike information criterion (CAIC), which has been found to underestimate the number of classes (Morin, Meyer, Creusier, & Biétry, 2016). Together, we propose that three distinct classes of respondents, differentiated on the basis of responses to a 10-item unidimensional conscientiousness scale, will be recovered in both the honest-responding and faking conditions, and will be characterized by high, moderate, and low response tendencies.

Hypothesis 1. Three classes will represent optimal fit to conscientiousness item responses in both the respond-honestly and faking conditions, and will be characterized by high, moderate, and low groups.

1.3. Types of faking behavior

Using a 'talk-aloud' protocol, Robie et al. (2007) found that respondents could be classified into honest responders (75%), slight fakers (17%), and extreme fakers (8%). Although sample size in Robie et al. (2007) was limited ($n = 12$), this suggests differences in degree of faking. The findings of Zickar et al. (2004) and Ziegler et al. (2015) also evidenced three distinct types of response patterns: stable/non-faking, slight faking, and extreme faking patterns. Thus, as summarized by Ziegler et al. (2015), "faking behavior manifests itself in distinct response patterns" (p. 696). These response patterns will, in the context of comparing across honest and faking conditions, as in the current research, will be exhibited as differential patterns of transitions across the latent classes. The term *transitions* is used to underscore the importance of subgroups of respondents, as denoted in Hypothesis 1, and to