# The impact of psychopathy and warnings on faking behavior: A multisaturation perspective

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Evidence suggests that individuals can and do present themselves positively on personality assessments when motivated to do so. This faking can reduce the validity of personality assessments and is of special concern in high stakes situations where critical decisions are being made at least partially on personality scores (e.g., personnel selection). In the current study, we take a multisaturation perspective of faking, and examine how psychopathy might be related to faking on normal range personality traits measured using single-stimulus or forced-choice personality assessments in a simulated selection context. To examine whether warnings interacted with psychopathy in predicting faking behavior, we included a warning condition. Findings suggest that faking on the single-stimulus personality assessment was more affected by elevated psychopathy such that those higher in psychopathy were more likely to fake than those lower in psychopathy, however psychopathy was also associated with faking behavior on the forced choice measure. This may result in an unintentional bias toward selecting employees with higher psychopathy when evaluating candidates with normal range personality assessments. Warning condition did not play a significant role either as a main effect or in interaction with psychopathy.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Faking

Faking on a personality assessment involves the portrayal of oneself in a more socially approved manner than is true. Faking has been a general concern since the 1930's (cf. Kelly, Miles, & Terman, 1936) and of specific interest in the employment context since the 1950's (cf. Rothe, 1950). Faking is of special concern in an employment context because it can deleteriously affect psychometric properties (Schmit & Ryan, 1993), criterion-related validity (Komar, Brown, Komar, & Robie, 2008), and hiring decisions (Christiansen, Goffin, Johnston, & Rothstein, 1994).

Recently, Tett and Simonet (2011) developed a performance-based, multisaturation perspective of faking, suggesting that opportunity, ability, and motivation are jointly critical to faking. Under the multisaturation perspective, faking can be eliminated with the removal of any of the three critical components. Consistent with this theorizing, two methods of combating faking that have shown promising results are forced-choice (FC) personality assessments and faking warnings. FC, in contrast to single-stimulus (SS), personality assessments require

respondents to choose one or more statements that describe them best (or worst) among a group of statements that are similar in social desirability. Several studies have found that faking is more difficult on FC compared to SS personality assessments (cf. Christiansen, Burns, & Montgomery, 2005). Faking warnings typically involve a written direction to test takers that less-than-honest responses can be identified, resulting in disqualification for hiring consideration. Several studies have found that this type of warning generally reduces faking (see Dwight & Donovan, 2003 for a meta-analysis). While the opportunity to fake exists for both FC and SS personality assessments, both FC assessments and faking warnings would be expected to reduce an applicant's ability to fake (Tett & Simonet, 2011) by making it more difficult to determine *how* to fake, and by increasing the cognitive load required to fake while avoiding being caught.

Drawing further on the multisaturation perspective, there is reason to believe that dark side traits may also play a role in understanding faking via individual differences in motivation to fake. Indeed, Tett and Simonet suggest that Machiavellianism (which has recently been found to be indistinguishable from psychopathy; Miller, Hyatt, Maples-Keller, Carter, & Lynam, 2016) would directly influence motivation to fake, and thus saturate faking behavior. Dark side traits are normally seen as

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leading individuals to derail in their daily lives and are distinguished from clinical pathologies in that they do not reflect an inability to function in everyday life (Harms & Spain, 2015). Individuals high in dark side traits have poorer job performance (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012), are not likely to organizational citizenship behavior (Becker & O'Hair, 2007), and engage in more workplace deviance (Zettler & Hilbig, 2010) and more unethical organizational decision-making (Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Trevino, 2010). Given that faking may represent a form of deviant or unethical behavior, we sought to explore the relationship between dark-side personality (namely psychopathy) and warnings against faking in the context of both FC and SS personality assessment response formats.

### 1.2. Psychopathy and faking

Recent research on psychopathy suggests that it may be related to personality assessment faking. Book, Holden, Starzyk, Wasylkiw, and Edwards (2006) found that psychopathy was correlated with ability to fake on a self-report assessment. MacNeil and Holden (2006) found that specific aspects of psychopathy (high Machiavellian egocentricity and blame externalization, and low stress immunity) were associated with increased levels of faking good on a self-report personality inventory. Finally, MacNeil (2008) found that psychopathy and Machiavellianism showed some success in predicting ability to fake, but narcissism was unrelated to success at faking.

Past studies examining the effect of Dark Triad traits, and specifically psychopathy, on faking have focused on faking ability using a between-subjects design (Book et al., 2006; MacNeil, 2008; MacNeil & Holden, 2006). The present study was designed to examine actual faking behavior using an induction that would mimic motivational conditions in a typical applied setting. We used a within-subjects design to examine how much participants' personality scores changed from an honest sitting to a motivated sitting. In this study, we examine the possible effects of psychopathy on faking behavior and whether faking warnings moderated those effects. It would be especially concerning if warnings against faking affected faking behavior for individuals low, but not high, in psychopathy. We expect this to be the case as those high on psychopathy are typically not rule followers (Hare, 1985).

We were also interested in whether these effects would be differentially evidenced between SS and FC personality assessments. Successful faking requires that the person completing the personality assessment have both the motivation and ability to distort responses favorably (McFarland & Ryan, 2000; Tett & Simonet, 2011). Christiansen et al. (2005) argued that any motivated respondent can successfully fake a SS assessment independent of ability; however, faking FC assessments requires additional ability-based demands. Therefore, if psychopathy saturates faking primarily via motivation (e.g., a lack of desire to follow rules), we would anticipate larger faking effects on SS than FC assessments. Respondents high in psychopathy should be similarly motivated across assessment conditions but the additional difficulty in inflating scores on a FC assessment should decrease the magnitude of faking in this condition. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1.** A faking warning will reduce personality faking behavior on a (a) single-stimulus and (b) forced-choice personality measures.

**Hypothesis 2.** Psychopathy will saturate faking behavior on the (a) single-stimulus and (b) forced-choice personality measures.

**Hypothesis 3.** Psychopathy will saturate faking behavior to a greater degree on the (a) single-stimulus and (b) forced-choice personality measures when participants have been warned.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants and design

A total of 275 undergraduate business students from a mid-sized Canadian university were recruited to participate in the study. Participants were compensated with course credit for participating in the study. A total of 237 participants (86%) took part in both the first and second parts of the study. 42 participants were removed for failing careless response items in either of the two parts of the study (see Meade & Craig, 2012). Thus, the final sample consisted of 194 participants (42.8% male; 52.1% Caucasian, 19.6% East Asian, 17% South Asian, 11.3% other ethnicities).

### 2.2. Procedure

Participants took part in the study in two sessions held in a computer lab, separated by at least two weeks. In the first session, participants were asked to complete a series of personality measures and provide demographic information and encouraged to respond as honestly as possible. Upon completing the first session, participants were invited to return to the computer lab for the second session.

Participants completed the second session in groups of approximately 20. Participants were told that they would be viewing a job description and taking part in a selection test for that position. They were further instructed that the individual who scored the best on the test would receive $20 at the end of the session in addition to their course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to either the Warned or Not Warned condition. In the Warned condition, after viewing the job description (see Supplementary material) for the position they were competing for, but before taking part in the selection test, participants were shown a "warning" graphic, consisting of a red triangle enclosing an exclamation mark, followed by the word **WARNING**, capitalized in a large, bold font, accompanied by the following message:

> Before you begin, you should know: the test you are about to take part in contains a lie detector scale and we will automatically disqualify those who appear to be providing dishonest responses. Disqualification in this case means that you will be ineligible to win the cash prize at the end of the session.

Participants in the Not Warned condition were directed immediately to the selection test. Upon completing the selection test, participants in the Warned condition were asked whether they remembered the warning to ensure that the manipulation was salient (100% responded 'Yes'). At the end of the session one participant was randomly "selected" and awarded $20.

### 2.3. Time one measures

#### 2.3.1. Five-factor personality: multidimensional forced-choice measure

The 18-item Multidimensional Forced-Choice (MFC) scale (Heggestad, Morrison, Reeve, & McCloy, 2006) was used to measure participants' personality scores in each of the Big Five personality traits (Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, Openness to Experience, and Extraversion; McCrae & John, 1992). This measure consists of 18 dichotomous quartets, where four statements, each reflecting a different personality dimension, are grouped together. Each quartet consists of two socially desirable statements, and two undesirable statements (Heggestad et al., 2006). Participants responded to each MFC item by indicating which of the four statements was "most like me" and which was "least like me". Cronbach's α ranged between 0.62 and 0.77.

#### 2.3.2. Five-factor personality: single-stimulus measure

The 72 individual statements in the MFC measure were unpacked