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A background image showing several hands of different skin tones holding a globe of the Earth. The hands are positioned around the globe, with some pointing at specific locations. The globe is the central focus, and the hands are in various positions, suggesting a collaborative or global effort.

A Registered Report to Disentangle the Impacts of Frame of Reference and Faking in the Personnel- Selection Scenario Paradigm

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Imagine that you are taking part in a study....

First, you are asked to respond honestly to a self-report personality measure. Afterwards, you retake the measure as part of a hypothetical personnel-selection scenario (PSS) and are asked to fake your responses in a way that would help you get a job offer.

When asked to answer honestly, you respond while keeping various contexts in mind (i.e., you respond with respect to how you think you generally behave). While faking your responses in the PSS, you think predominantly about a work context (i.e., how you think you behave at work).



Does the difference in your responses between these two conditions reflect faking behavior, differences in the adoption of a work frame of reference (FOR), or both?

We tried to answer this question in our Registered Report.



Theory

- Faking has been defined as “... a response set aimed at providing a portrayal of the self that helps a person to achieve personal goals. Faking occurs when this response set is activated by situational demands and personal characteristics to produce systematic differences in test scores that are not caused by the attribute of interest” (Ziegler et al., 2012, p. 8)
- Faking has negative consequences for psychological assessment (e.g., Birkeland et al., 2006; Tett & Simonet, 2021)
 - Statistical characteristics (e.g., means, standard deviations, and factor structures; Birkeland et al., 2006; Salgado, 2016; Ziegler et al., 2012)
 - Subsequent decisions (Jeong et al., 2017; Schmitt & Bradburn, 2018)
- Nevertheless, the antecedents, the consequences, and the process of faking are not yet fully understood (Bensch et al., 2019; Röhner & Ewers, 2016 a, b), thereby making further research essential

The Dilemma When Investigating Faking



- To investigate faking, researchers need to ascertain who faked and who did not
- However, faking has proven to be very difficult to detect (e.g., Röhner et al., 2022; Ziegler & Bensch, 2015)
- Several reasons:
 - The traditional way of detecting faking with the use of so-called lie scales (e.g., Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Lambert et al., 2016) has been criticized because the validity of such scales has been demonstrated to be questionable (e.g., Lanz et al., 2022; Röhner et al., 2024)
 - Alternative types of valid faking indicators are rare (see Röhner & Schütz, 2019, for an overview)
 - In most cases, faking indicators are restricted to a subset of psychological measures (e.g., the IAT, Röhner et al., 2023; the d2, Schmidt-Atzert et al., 2004), or their application is useful only under certain measurement conditions (Röhner & Holden, 2022)
 - Respondents use a variety of faking behaviors (e.g., role-playing, behaviors to avoid being detected) and even combine them (e.g., Röhner, Schütz, & Ziegler, 2025)

- As researchers need to ascertain who faked and who did not when valid faking indicators are still missing, they have systematically induced faking in the laboratory by manipulating participants' motivation to fake (e.g., Roulin et al., 2016)
- In laboratory faking research, participants are often instructed to respond honestly (generic instructions [GIs], control condition) or to fake (personnel-selection scenario [PSS], faking condition)

GIs:

“Please respond *honestly*.”

vs.

PSS:

“Please imagine that you are applying for your dream job and respond to the items in a manner that will *maximize your chances of getting hired*.”

- However, not only might changing the instructions motivate participants to fake, but it might also change their adoption of a work FOR

- The FOR represents the (predominant) context that participants consider when responding to items (Schmit et al., 1995)
 - For example, participants who pursue a hobby of stamp collecting may be very conscientious about trying to expand their collection (private context), but they might not be as conscientious at work (work context)
 - When using a self-report personality measure to assess such a participant's conscientiousness, it is relevant to know whether or not the participant predominantly adopts the FOR "at work"
- Depending on which FOR is predominant in a participant's mind, different responses may be given, each of which may be true but may provide information about the participant's behavior in different contexts
- In this case, changes in the participant's responses should not be considered faking but should instead be considered "honest" self-presentation (e.g., Robie et al., 2001)

- The adoption of a certain FOR can be promoted by manipulating the instructions or by manipulating the items (i.e., instruction-level vs. item-level contextualization)

Instruction-level:

Context is added to the instructions

(e.g., “Remember, think about how you are AT WORK in general when responding to these questions,” see p. 547, Hunthausen et al., 2003)

VS.

Item-level:

Context is added to each item by using fully contextualized items

(e.g., “I am an ordinary employee who is no better than others” instead of “I am an ordinary person who is no better than others”; Holtrop, Born, & De Vries, 2014)

How can the FOR Impact Faking Studies?

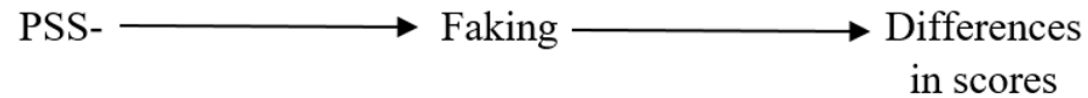


- Previous research has shown that contextualization not only impacts the adoption of FORs, but also the scale mean scores of personality measures
 - Applicants reported that they adopted a work FOR to a greater degree when items were contextualized with a work FOR than when items were noncontextualized (Fisher et al., 2017)
 - Incumbents who took a self-report personality measure that was contextualized with a work FOR obtained scores that may be considered more positive (e.g., higher scores on Conscientiousness) than when they took a general, noncontextualized one (e.g., Bowling & Burns, 2010; Fisher et al., 2017; Holtrop, Born, & De Vries, 2014, Pathki et al., 2022)
- The impact of instruction-level contextualization is considered to be weaker than the impact of item-level contextualization (e.g., Holtrop, Born, De Vries, & De Vries, 2014; Lievens et al., 2008; Schlotzhauer et al., 2024; Swift & Peterson, 2019)
- Nevertheless, FOR and faking may be confounded when using the PSS

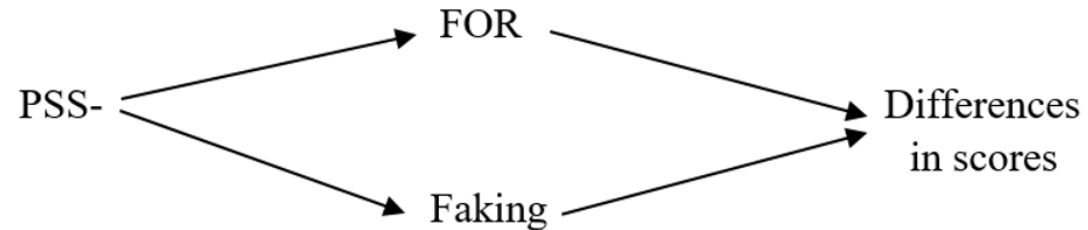
Previous Interpretations and Assumed Process in Experimental Laboratory Faking Research

Designs/

Interpretation



Process



Note. PSS- (personnel-selection scenario, full item-level work contextualization absent).

How can the two phenomena be disentangled?

Method



- We combined instruction-level and full item-level contextualization
- We conducted a four-wave longitudinal study with a 2 (instructions: GIs vs. PSS) x 2 (full item-level work contextualization absent [-] vs. present [+]) repeated-measures design
- We compared the effects of these four conditions on three HEXACO-PI-R scales (Conscientiousness, Emotionality, and Honesty-Humility)
 - We decided to investigate these traits because they are the three personality dimensions that are most predictive of behavior at work (e.g., De Vries et al., 2014; Holtrop, Born, & De Vries, 2014; Lee et al., 2005)
 - and because a self-report personality measure with full item-level work contextualization is available for them (Holtrop, Born, & De Vries, 2014)



Sample

- $N = 309$ participants (98 women, 211 men); average age of 47.90 years ($SD = 13.10$)
- Bilendi

Measures

- Measure of the adopted FORs (Fisher et al., 2017)
- Two versions of the self-report personality measure:
 - Full item-level work contextualization absent [-]: Conscientiousness, Emotionality, and Honesty-Humility scales HEXACO-PI-R (Lee & Ashton, 2004; Lee et al., 2009)
 - Full item-level work contextualization present [+]: Adaptation of the Conscientiousness, Emotionality, and Honesty-Humility scales from the HEXACO-PI-R, involving full item-level work contextualization (Holtrop, Born, & De Vries, 2014)



When giving my responses to these statements...

- ... I considered how I typically behave in *educational settings* (high school, college, study groups, etc.).
- ... I considered how I typically behave in *social settings* (with friends, family, etc.).
- ... I considered how I typically behave in *work settings* (work assignments, interacting with coworkers, etc.).

Note. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*)

Instruction-level contextualization (GIs vs. PSS)

- **The GIs read:** “On the following pages, you will find a series of statements about you. Please read each statement and decide the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. Please answer every statement, even if you are not completely sure about your response. *Please be as honest as possible.*”
- **The PSS read:** “You are applying for a very popular and well-paid position as a pharmacy assistant. This has always been your dream job. As part of the personnel selection, you will be asked to respond to a measure that will assess your personal characteristics. You will be asked to indicate the extent to which you agree with several statements. Your responses will influence whether or not you are offered the position. To get your dream job, you will have to make the impression that you are *very emotionally stable, very conscientious, and very honest and service-oriented.* Please answer the following questionnaire in a way that will maximize your chances of getting the job.”

Examples of full item-level work contextualization (absent [-] vs. present [+])

Absent (-)	Present (+)
<i>Conscientiousness</i>	
“I like to keep all my <u>belongings</u> stored in their proper place.”	“I like it when all of the <u>packaging</u> is in the right place.”
<i>Emotionality</i>	
“I feel like crying when I see other <u>people</u> crying.”	“I feel like crying when I see <u>customers</u> crying.”
<i>Honesty-Humility</i>	
“I wouldn't feel bad about deceiving <u>people</u> who allow themselves to be deceived.”	“I wouldn't feel bad about selling <u>customers</u> something that they don't need.”
Reference: Lee and Ashton, (2004), Lee et al. (2009)	Reference: Holtrop, Born, and De Vries (2014)



Hypotheses

H1: Changes in the adoption of a work FOR

- In line with previous research (e.g., Birkeland et al., 2006; Fisher et al., 2017; Holtrop, Born, & De Vries, 2014; Robie et al., 2001), we expected participants to report that they adopted a work FOR to a greater degree
 - when a PSS was presented than when GIs were presented
 - and when full item-level work contextualization was present than when it was absent
- Because the impact of instructions is weaker than the impact of item-level contextualization (e.g., Holtrop, Born, De Vries, & De Vries, 2014; Lievens et al., 2008; Schlotzhauer et al., 2024; Swift & Peterson, 2019), we expected both of the main effects—that is, the main effect of instructions (GIs vs. PSS) and the main effect of full item-level work contextualization (absent [-] vs. present [+])—on the adoption of a work FOR to be significant but qualified by a significant interaction for each personality trait under investigation

H2: Changes in participants' response behavior

- Both the manipulation of instructions (i.e., PSS vs. GIs; e.g., Birkeland et al., 2006) and the manipulation of items (i.e., work-contextualized items vs. noncontextualized items; e.g., Bowling & Burns, 2010; Pathki et al., 2022; Schmit et al., 1995; Shaffer & Postethwaite, 2012) have been found to have main effects on the scale mean scores of self-report personality measures
- We expected to replicate these findings and extend them by revealing a significant interaction
 - We expected that the effect of instructions when comparing the conditions *without* full item-level work contextualization (i.e., GIs- vs. PSS-) would be elicited by both the instruction-inherent FOR and faking (e.g., Birkeland et al., 2006; Robie, 2001; Robie et al., 2001)
 - In other words, only when comparing the conditions *with* full item-level work contextualization (i.e., GIs+ vs. PSS+) should the effect of instructions be elicited by faking without FOR effects biasing the results
- Thus, we expected both of the main effects—that is, the main effect of instructions (GIs vs. PSS) and the main effect of full item-level work contextualization (absent [-] vs. present [+])—on the scale mean scores of the self-report personality measure to be significant but qualified by a significant interaction for each personality trait under investigation

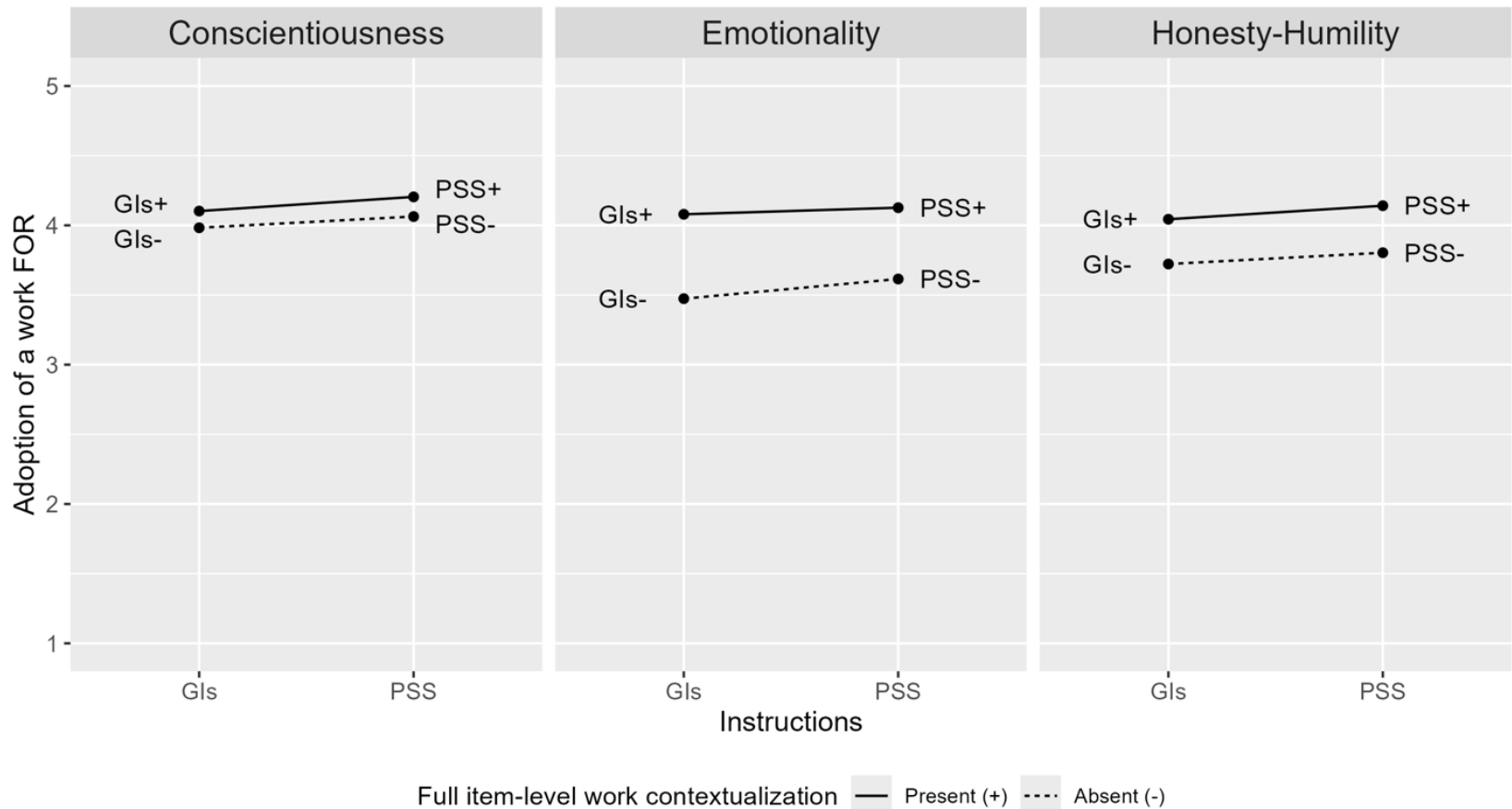


Results



- Irrespective of the personality trait under investigation, the ANOVAs revealed significant but small main effects of instructions (GIs vs. PSS)
 - As expected, participants reported the adoption of a work FOR to a greater degree when a PSS was presented than when GIs were presented
- In addition, there were moderate (Conscientiousness) to large (Emotionality and Honesty-Humility) main effects of full item-level work contextualization (absent [-] vs. present [+])
 - As expected, participants reported the adoption of a work FOR to a greater degree when using fully work-contextualized items than when using noncontextualized items, and as expected, these main effects were stronger than the effects of instructions
- The main effects of instructions and the main effects of full item-level work contextualization *were not qualified by significant interactions*
 - That is, the impact of instructions on the adoption of a work FOR was independent of the full item-level work contextualization, and vice versa

Effects of Instructions and Full Item-Level Work Contextualization on the Adoption of a Work FOR by Experimental Condition and Personality Trait



H2: Main Effects but no Interactions



- Also, as expected, the PSS (vs. GIs) and full item-level work contextualization present (vs. absent) changed participants' scale mean scores
- We found large (Conscientiousness), moderate (Emotionality), and small (Honesty-Humility) main effects of instructions (GIs vs. PSS)
 - Thus, as expected, compared with when GIs were presented, participants increased (Conscientiousness and Honesty-Humility) or decreased (Emotionality) their scale mean scores on the self-report personality measure when a PSS was presented
- In addition, there were significant and moderate (Honesty-Humility) to large (Conscientiousness and Emotionality) main effects of full item-level work contextualization (absent [-] vs. present [+])
 - Thus, as expected, compared with when noncontextualized items were used, participants increased (Conscientiousness) or decreased (Emotionality and Honesty-Humility) their scale mean scores on the self-report personality measure when fully work-contextualized items were used

Effects of Instructions and Full Item-Level Work Contextualization on the Mean Scores of the Self-Report Personality Measure by Experimental Condition and Personality Trait



H2: Main Effects but no Interactions



- Exploratory mediation analyses indicated direct rather than indirect (mediator: adoption of a work FOR) effects of instructions on participants' scale mean scores

Results of the Mediation Analyses for Each Personality Trait

Path	B	SE	t/Z	p	95% CI	
					LL	UL
<i>Conscientiousness</i>						
A path: Instructions (GIs- or PSS-) → adoption of a work FOR	0.08	0.04	2.28	.023	0.01	0.15
B path: Adoption of a work FOR → scale mean score on Conscientiousness	0.29	0.03	8.88	<.001	0.23	0.35
C' path: Instructions (GIs- or PSS-) → scale mean score on Conscientiousness	0.13	0.02	5.30	<.001	0.08	0.17
Total effect	0.15	0.02	6.65	<.001	0.11	0.19
Indirect effect	0.02	0.02	2.20	.028	–	–
<i>Emotionality</i>						
A path: Instructions (GIs- or PSS-) → adoption of a work FOR	0.14	0.05	2.97	.003	0.05	0.23
B path: Adoption of a work FOR → scale mean score on Emotionality	0.02	0.03	0.78	.435	-0.03	0.08
C' path: Instructions (GIs- or PSS-) → scale mean score on Emotionality	-0.08	0.02	-4.36	<.001	-0.12	-0.04
Total effect	-0.08	0.02	-4.27	<.001	-0.11	-0.04
Indirect effect	0.00	0.00	0.72	.472	–	–
<i>Honesty-Humility</i>						
A path: Instructions (GIs- or PSS-) → adoption of a work FOR	0.08	0.04	1.98	.049	0.00	0.16
B path: Adoption of a work FOR → scale mean score on Honesty-Humility	0.02	0.04	0.50	.617	-0.05	0.09
C' path: Instructions (GIs- or PSS-) → scale mean score on Honesty-Humility	0.03	0.02	1.56	.119	-0.01	0.07
Total effect	0.03	0.02	1.66	.097	-0.01	0.07
Indirect effect	0.00	0.00	0.44	.663	–	–

Note. FOR = frame of reference, GIs = generic instructions, PSS = personnel-selection scenario. – indicates that the full item-level work contextualization was absent. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. For the indirect effects Z values from the Sobel tests are reported, t values are reported for all other effects.



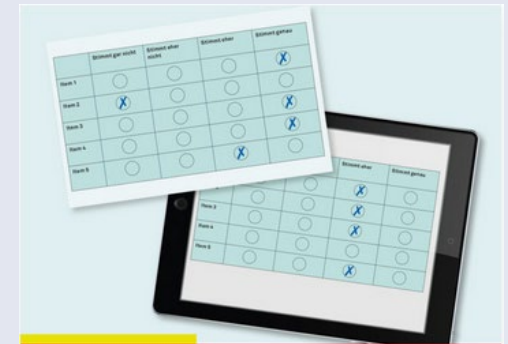
Discussion and Conclusion

- In laboratory settings, faking research typically uses a PSS to increase participants' motivation to fake
- However, for more than 20 years, researchers have argued that FOR effects may confound the findings from such studies (Birkeland et al., 2006; Robie, 2001)
- This concern has sparked doubts about the internal validity of faking studies and is far from trivial
- If FOR and faking are indeed confounded, the findings of decades of faking research may have been biased
- For example, changes in participants' scale mean scores could have been falsely attributed only to faking when these changes had actually been due to both faking and FOR effects
- With this Registered Report, we disentangled the effects of FOR and faking while controlling for the FOR
- The current study demonstrates that the internal validity of faking research is *not threatened* by confounding FOR effects

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Thank you very much for your attention!

Want to know more about
faking behavior?



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Phänomene der
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<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195387476.003.0011>

Results of the Two-Way Repeated-Measures ANOVAs on the Adoption of a Work FOR and on the Mean Scores of the Self-Report Personality Measure for Each Personality Trait

Adoption of a work FOR						
Scale	Effect	<i>F</i> (1, 308)	<i>p</i>	<i>Partial</i> η^2	95% CI (bootstrapped)	
					<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Conscientiousness	I	11.97	.001	.04	.01	.09
	C	20.20	<.001	.06	.02	.12
	I \times C	0.18	.668	.00	.00	.01
Emotionality	I	9.99	.002	.03	.01	.08
	C	160.86	<.001	.34	.28	.40
	I \times C	2.69	.102	.01	.00	.04
Honesty-Humility	I	11.77	.001	.04	.01	.09
	C	83.29	<.001	.21	.15	.27
	I \times C	0.09	.766	.00	.00	.00

Mean scores of the self-report personality measure						
Scale	Effect	<i>F</i> (1, 308)	<i>p</i>	<i>Partial</i> η^2	95% CI (bootstrapped)	
					<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Conscientiousness	I	103.65	<.001	.25	.18	.32
	C	103.36	<.001	.25	.17	.33
	I \times C	0.35	.555	.00	.00	.01
Emotionality	I	46.73	<.001	.13	.07	.20
	C	226.29	<.001	.42	.36	.49
	I \times C	0.64	.424	.00	.00	.02
Honesty-Humility	I	13.76	<.001	.04	.01	.09
	C	43.12	<.001	.12	.06	.19
	I \times C	1.64	.201	.01	.00	.03

Note. *N* = 309. I = main effect of instructions (GIs vs. PSS). C = main effect of full item-level

work contextualization (absent vs. present). I \times C = interaction effect. CI = confidence

interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.