



# The Influence of Competition on Motivation to Fake in Employment Interviews

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**Abstract:** Many applicants fake, or intentionally misrepresent information, in employment interviews. Recent theories of faking propose that applicants may fake more when there are situational cues that signal intense competition for the job. We tested this proposition by manipulating the number of competitors and selection ratio in selection scenarios, and assessed individuals' faking intentions. We also examined whether Honesty-Humility moderated the relation between competition and faking intentions. Hypotheses were tested using a between-subjects study with 775 participants. Results show that faking intentions increased with few competitors and a small selection ratio. Honesty-Humility did not moderate the relation between competition and faking intentions. Findings support competition as a situational predictor of faking intentions, lending support to models of faking.

**Keywords:** faking, impression management, employment interviews, competition

Many job applicants intentionally misrepresent themselves in employment interviews, to increase their chances of getting the position (Levashina & Campion, 2007); this misrepresentation is referred to as *deceptive impression management* (IM), or *interview faking* (Levashina & Campion, 2006). Although its purpose is to create a positive impression in the interview, interview faking can be problematic for organizations for several reasons. First, faking could negatively impact the validity of the interview as a selection tool, if truly qualified applicants are selected out. Indeed, interview faking has been related to poorer job performance and lower confidence in performing the job (Schneider, 2015). Even more problematic is that interviewers, regardless of their level of interviewing experience, are largely incapable of accurately detecting faking in interviews (Roulin, Bangerter, & Levashina, 2015). Given the near ubiquity of interviews for making hiring decisions (Huffcutt & Culbertson, 2011), finding ways to reduce faking in the interview is a vital issue for organizations.

To date, research has aimed to understand interview faking primarily by identifying its dispositional antecedents (e.g., personality characteristics; Roulin & Bourdage, 2017), with the potential of screening out applicants with such traits. However, situational factors that increase faking have remained understudied. Roulin, Krings, and Binggeli (2016) posited that perceptions of competition may play a role in motivating applicants to fake. In the present study, we examine whether situational cues that signal competition

for the job will increase individuals' intentions to fake in an interview.

## Theoretical Background

We tested Roulin et al.'s (2016) theoretical model of job applicant faking, which proposes that applicants and organizations have imperfectly aligned interests due to the competitive nature of the hiring process. Whereas organizations hope to obtain accurate information from applicants, being entirely truthful is not in applicants' best interests if they believe it would hinder their chances of securing the job relative to competitors. Applicants may strive to outperform or distinguish themselves from their competitors to increase their chances of getting hired. Indeed, applicants may perceive that not faking could leave them at a competitive disadvantage, because competing applicants could prepare "faked" responses before the interview (Martin & Pope, 2008). Relying solely on honest strategies may thus be insufficient to secure the job, and a competitive situation may promote the use of deceptive IM tactics to impress the interviewer.

Because most job application processes involve applicants competing against each other for limited resources (i.e., job positions), the salience of this competition may lead applicants to become more willing to fake in order to appear more qualified, relative to others. In the present

study, we empirically tested Roulin et al.'s framework that applicants will have greater intentions to fake when they perceive fierce competition for the job.

## Situational Antecedents of Faking Intentions: Number of Competitors and Selection Ratio

If the perceived competitiveness of a selection process increases intentions to fake, then it is important to explore which situational factors might make a selection situation appear more competitive to applicants. We propose that two situational features that are inherent in job contests may promote perceptions of competitiveness: the number of competitors and the selection ratio. The number of competitors refers to the absolute number of individuals applying for a given job, whereas the selection ratio refers to the proportion of applicants who are hired within an applicant pool. A small selection ratio (e.g., 1/100) entails a small proportion of applicants being hired and hence a selective, or competitive, situation. We chose to examine these two situational factors because they are likely ubiquitous across selection (i.e., one can assume that obtaining a job entails competing against other applicants, and that only a subset of the applicant pool will receive job offers).

We also examined both the number of competitors and the selection ratio simultaneously because they can be directly related. That is, increasing the number of applicants, holding the number of available positions stable, will decrease the selection ratio. The number of competitors and selection ratio can also be confounded. For example, Buehl and Melchers (2018) compared two selection scenarios: one where 100/1,100 were hired (9% of applicants selected) and one where 100/200 were hired (50% of applicants selected); these two conditions confounded the absolute number of competitors (1,100 vs. 200) with the selection ratio (9% vs. 50%). In the present study, we investigated selection ratio and absolute number of applicants, allowing us to examine how specific combinations of these cues may affect faking intentions.

### Number of Competitors

Our propositions about why the absolute number of competitors may affect faking intentions are drawn from the social comparison literature. Social comparison is the tendency to self-evaluate by comparing oneself to others (Garcia, Tor, & Schiff, 2013). Social comparison theory proposes that individuals are driven to improve their performance in tasks while reducing discrepancies between theirs and others' levels of performance, which manifests as competitiveness – or the desire to achieve/maintain a position

that is superior relative to others (Festinger, 1954). In their social comparison model of competition, Garcia et al. (2013) proposed that a phenomenon dubbed the *N-effect* leads to an *increase* in competitive behavior as the number of competitors *decreases*. This phenomenon may seem counterintuitive, because having fewer competitors is an objectively less competitive situation. However, the *N-effect* occurs because, when competing against few individuals, people naturally engage in social comparison, and may attempt to compete with their comparison others. However, when competing against many individuals, social comparison concerns become diffused by the large number of competitors. Using social comparisons as a source of information is actually less viable with many competitors. Therefore, comparing oneself to a large number of other competitors actually decreases motivation to compete (Garcia & Tor, 2009). This effect has been found even when the other "competitors" were not actually present (when participants were merely told they were competing to be in the top 20% of either 10 people or 100 people; Garcia & Tor, 2009). In other words, individuals tend to lose interest in comparing their performance to others' and become less motivated to compete (e.g., may give up) when a large number of competitors reduces comparison concerns.

The *N-effect* has been supported across various competitions and games (e.g., Pillutla & Ronson, 2005), and across different experimental methodologies (Garcia & Tor, 2009). Evolutionary psychology research has suggested that individuals are more concerned about relative comparisons and are more willing to negatively impact their competitors' chances of success when competing against fewer individuals (Barclay & Stoller, 2014; Barker & Barclay, 2016). A willingness to negatively impact one's competitors may be similar to the idea of faking to get ahead in an interview. In this study, we tested whether the *N-effect* translates to competitions within the labor market, such that people are more likely to fake when there are fewer competitors. We propose that, within either a small or large selection ratio, few competitors will lead to greater faking intentions than will many competitors.

*Hypothesis 1:* Few competitors will lead to greater faking intentions than will many competitors, at both (a) a small selection ratio and (b) a large selection ratio.

### Selection Ratio

Selection ratio refers to the proportion of applicants who are hired; objectively, a situation where 10% of people are hired is a more competitive situation than one where 50% of people are hired, assuming that applicants are aware of the selection ratio. Buehl and Melchers (2018) found that their selection ratio manipulations (9% vs. 50%) did not affect faking intentions; however, each of

their selection ratios was tested in the context of rather large  $N$ 's (1,100 and 200), so it is unclear if selection ratio affects people's faking intentions when the  $N$  is also considered, and in particular when  $N$  is small. A strength of the present study, therefore, is that we controlled for both the number of competitors and the selection ratio, allowing us to test whether the selection ratio affects faking intentions across scenarios with few and many competitors. We propose that, with either few or many competitors, a small selection ratio will lead to greater faking intentions than will a large selection ratio.

*Hypothesis 2:* A small selection ratio will lead to greater faking intentions than will a large selection ratio, at both (a) few competitors and (b) many competitors.

## Perceived Competition as the Mechanism Driving Faking Intentions

We next propose that perceived competition will act as the mechanism underlying the relation between cues to competition (number of competitors and selection ratio) and faking intentions. In other words, knowledge of the number of other applicants competing for the same job position or the selection ratio may promote faking intentions, through signaling the level of competition in a selection scenario (Roulin et al., 2016).

*Hypothesis 3a:* Perceived competition will mediate the relation between number of competitors and faking intentions.

*Hypothesis 3b:* Perceived competition will mediate the relation between selection ratio and faking intentions.

## Personality: Honesty-Humility as a Moderator Variable

Although competition may be perceived, to varying degrees, by all applicants, there may be individual differences in how applicants will behave in response to competition. Applicants with high levels of integrity and honesty, or who have negative attitudes toward faking, may be more likely to reject faking as a method of adapting to fierce competition. Applicants with these traits may value authenticity throughout the selection process even if it means failing to obtain a job offer. Conversely, applicants with low levels of integrity and honesty, or positive attitudes toward faking may be more willing to fake in response to fierce competition (Roulin et al., 2016). Applicants with these traits may

see faking as an appropriate or necessary strategy for obtaining the job. Individual differences, such as personality and attitudes, may thus help to shed light on how competition may promote faking intentions in some applicants more than others.

We examined a trait from the HEXACO model of personality called Honesty-Humility, which is defined as individual differences in sincerity, fairness, modesty, and greed (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Given Honesty-Humility's close theoretical alignment with traits such as honesty and integrity, we propose that Honesty-Humility would moderate the relation between competition and faking intentions, such that low Honesty-Humility individuals will be more willing to fake in order to outperform their competitors.

*Hypothesis 4:* Honesty-Humility will moderate the relation between perceived competition and faking intentions, such that perceived competition will more positively predict faking intentions when Honesty-Humility is low.

We tested our hypotheses using a 2 ("few" vs. "many" competitors)  $\times$  2 ("small" vs. "large" selection ratio) between-subjects experimental design, in which participants read a vignette and reported their intentions to fake.

## Method

### Power Analyses

We ran a priori power analyses for each hypothesis using the *psych* package in *R* (Revelle, 2018) to determine the necessary sample size for achieving a power of .80. We assumed median-sized relations (e.g.,  $r = .16$ ) based on effect size benchmarks within industrial-organizational psychology (Bosco, Aguinis, Singh, Field, & Pierce, 2015). Power analyses determined a necessary sample size of 488, which we achieved.

### Participants

We recruited 1,294 undergraduate students at a Canadian university from a psychology research participation pool ( $n = 955$ ) and a marketing and consumer studies research participation pool ( $n = 339$ ). After removing cases where participants responded with insufficient effort (e.g., failed attention check items), we had 775 useable cases.

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 48 years ( $M = 19.01$ ,  $SD = 2.14$ ), 66.06% of participants identified as female, they had completed an average of 3.35 previous employment interviews and had, on average, 20.53 months of

part-time work experience, and 6 months of full-time work experience. Most (73.29%) participants identified as being White/European, 8.13% as Southeast Asian, 6.19% as South Asian, and 12.39% as other. Most (66.84%) participants were in the first year of their degree.

## Materials

We created four different vignettes, adapted from similar studies in the faking and social psychology literatures (Garcia & Tor, 2009; Roulin & Krings, 2016). We manipulated the number of competitors and the selection ratio in each vignette in order to alter perceptions of competition.<sup>1</sup> To determine the specific number of competitors and selection ratios to use for these vignettes, we referred to a study by Collins and Han (2004) that examined applicant recruitment among a large and representative sample of organizations. The authors found that on average, organizations invited about 10 applicants to be interviewed. We therefore selected 10 applicants as being our “few competitors” manipulation, and used 5 times that number (50) as being “many competitors.” Moreover, it seemed unlikely that many organizations would interview more than 50 applicants, unless they were quite large and were able to invest the necessary resources. See the Electronic Supplementary Material (ESM 1) for the full vignettes.

## Measures

### Perceived Competition

We measured perceived competition with 1 item, adapted from Study 4 of Garcia and Tor (2009): “As you wait alone for your interview, you notice another applicant exiting their interview. Based on all of the information given to you, how competitive would you feel toward that other applicant?”. Responses were made on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all competitive*; 5 = *extremely competitive*).

### Faking Intentions

We measured faking intentions with the 16-item ( $\alpha = .88$ ) Short Interview Faking Behavior Scale (IFB-S; Bourdage, Roulin, & Tarraf, 2018). We modified the items to reflect intentions (e.g., “I would tell fictional stories prepared in advance of the interview to best present my credentials”); responses were made on a 5-point scale (1 = *to no extent*; 5 = *to a very great extent*). The IFB-S contained four subscales – slight image creation ( $\alpha = .78$ ), extensive image creation ( $\alpha = .86$ ), deceptive ingratiation ( $\alpha = .82$ ),

**Table 1.** Selection ratios in the four experimental conditions

	Few Competitors (10)	Many Competitors (50)
Small Selection Ratio (10%)	1/10	5/50
Large Selection Ratio (50%)	5/10	25/50

and image protection ( $\alpha = .78$ ) – which we do not specify any hypotheses for.

### Honesty-Humility

We measured Honesty-Humility using the 32-item ( $\alpha = .87$ ) Honesty-Humility scale from the HEXACO-200 personality inventory (Lee & Ashton, 2004, 2006). A sample item is: “I want people to know that I am an important person of high status”; responses were made on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*).

### Instructed Response and Attention Check Items

An instructed response item (“Please select option C”) was included within the IFB-S and Honesty-Humility items to screen participants who responded with insufficient effort. We also included two attention check items: “Including yourself, how many people are applying for this job?”, and “Out of everyone applying, how many people are being hired for this job?”

## Procedure

We used a 2 (number of competitors: few, many)  $\times$  2 (selection ratio: small, large) between-participants experimental design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions, where they were shown one of four vignettes (see Table 1). After reading the vignette, participants completed the questionnaire, which asked about perceived competition and faking intentions. Participants from the psychology pool completed the Honesty-Humility items at an earlier point in the semester before participating in the study (because this option was available for that participant pool), whereas participants from the marketing pool completed the Honesty-Humility items at the end of the study.

## Results

The two samples did not differ on the main outcomes, faking intentions ( $d = .03$ , 95% CI [-.13, .19],  $t(773) = 0.39$ ,  $p = .70$ ) and perceived competition ( $d = -.08$ , 95%

<sup>1</sup> We considered a control condition where the scenario did not provide any information about the number of competitors or selection ratio. However, Garcia et al. (2013) argued that uncertainty (e.g., a lack of information about the number of positions available) is a situational factor that can potentially increase comparison concerns and competitiveness.

**Table 2.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals among study variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Perceived Competition	3.82	0.95												
2. Faking Intentions	2.69	0.62	.19**											
3. Slight Image Creation	3.14	0.76	.17**	[.12, .25]										
4. Extensive Image Creation	1.81	0.86	.13**	[.06, .19]	.78**									
5. Deceptive Ingratiation	3.16	0.83	.16**	[.09, .22]	.75**	[.72, .78]								
6. Image Protection	2.64	0.84	.11**	[.04, .18]	.74**	[.70, .77]	.40**							
7. Gender	1.67	0.48	.04	[-.03, .11]	[-.12, .02]	[-.08, .06]	[-.13, .01]	-.06	-.02	-.05				
8. Age	19.01	2.13	-.00	[-.11**]	[-.10**]	[-.03	-.03	-.13**	-.07*	-.12**				
9. Year in Program	1.51	0.88	-.05	[-.07, .07]	[-.18, -.04]	[-.17, -.03]	[-.11, .04]	[-.20, -.06]	[-.14, -.00]	[-.19, -.05]				
10. Number of past interviews	3.35	3.41	-.05	[-.12, .02]	[-.12, .02]	[-.19, -.05]	[-.19, -.05]	[-.15, -.01]	[-.15, -.01]	[-.16, -.02]	[-.26, -.12]	[.34, .46]		
11. Months of part-time work experience	20.49	18.04	-.02	[-.09, .05]	[-.09, .05]	[-.09, .05]	[-.09, .05]	-.02	-.01	-.01	-.03	-.11**	.41**	.26**
12. Months of full-time work experience	5.99	12.82	-.02	[-.09, .05]	[-.11, .03]	[-.13, .01]	[-.06, .08]	[-.08, .06]	[-.10, .04]	[-.18, -.04]	[-.35, .46]	[.19, .33]		
13. Honesty-Humility	3.28	0.49	-.05	[-.14, .04]	[-.31, -.14]	[-.25, -.08]	[-.24, -.06]	[-.31, -.13]	[-.25, -.07]	[-.22, .38]	[-.12, .06]	[-.17, .01]	[-.11, .08]	[-.17, .01]

Note. *N* = 775. Correlations between Honesty-Humility and other variables are *N* = 466. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval (CI) for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation. \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01.

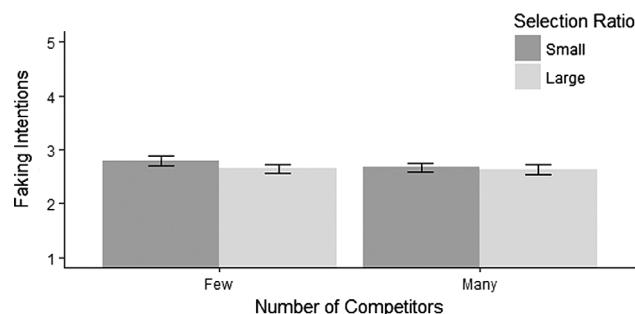
CI [-.24, .07],  $t(773) = -1.05$ ,  $p = .30$ ), but differed on Honesty-Humility ( $d = .88$ , 95% CI [0.69, 1.07],  $t(464) = 9.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, we pooled these data for analyses, but further tested Hypothesis 4 separately within each sample. See Table 2 for intercorrelations among study variables.

## Situational Cues Associated With Faking Intentions

There was a main effect of selection ratio,  $\eta^2_p = .01$ , 95% CI [.00, .02],  $F(1, 771) = 4.13$ ,  $p = .04$  on faking intentions, but no main effect of number of competitors,  $\eta^2_p = .00$ , 95% CI [.00, .01],  $F(1, 771) = 2.50$ ,  $p = .11$ . Because the overall omnibus test was significant,  $F(1, 771) = 14,636.95$ ,  $p < .001$ , we proceeded with our planned contrasts. See Figure 1 for comparisons of faking intentions among study cells.

### Number of Competitors

Hypothesis 1 proposed that few competitors would lead to greater faking intentions, within both (a) a small and (b) a large selection ratio. We tested these hypotheses using planned contrasts. With a small selection ratio, there was a significant and somewhat weak effect of the number of competitors on faking intentions (Few Competitors/Small Selection Ratio:  $M = 2.80 \pm SD = 0.61$ ; Many Competitors/Small Selection Ratio:  $M = 2.67 \pm SD = 0.61$ ),  $d = .21$ , 95% CI [.02, .42],  $t(391) = 2.12$ ,  $p = .02$ , Benjamini-Hochberg adjusted  $p = .03$  (i.e., an adjustment for multiple comparisons with a false discovery rate of .05; Benjamini & Hochberg,

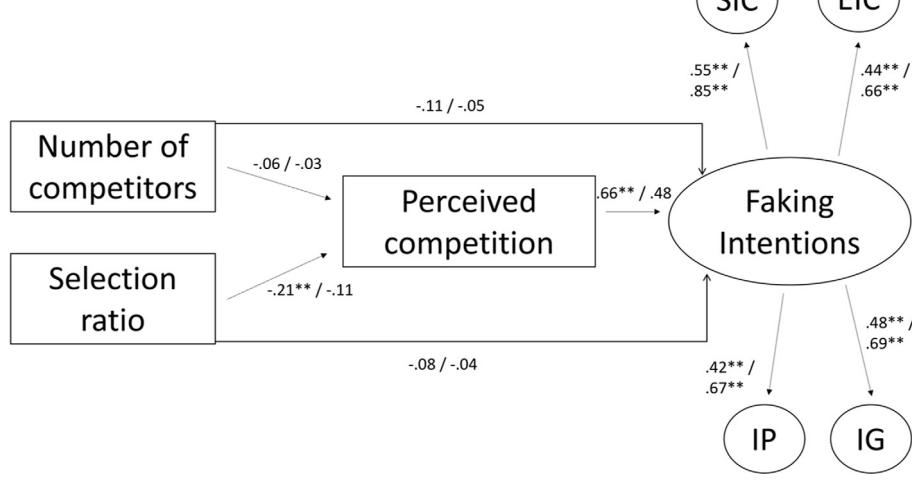


**Figure 1.** Comparison of faking intentions as a function of a 2 (number of competitors: few, many)  $\times$  2 (selection ratio: small, large) design. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the mean. Faking intentions measured on a 5-point scale (where 1 = to no extent and 5 = to a very great extent).

1995). In other words, few competitors led to greater faking intentions than did many competitors, within the Small Selection Ratio condition. With a large selection ratio, there was a nonsignificant and near-zero effect of the number of competitors on faking intentions (Few Competitors/Large Selection Ratio:  $M = 2.65 \pm SD = 0.62$ ; Many Competitors/Large Selection Ratio:  $M = 2.64 \pm SD = 0.64$ ),  $d = .02$ , 95% CI [-.18, .22],  $t(380) = 0.16$ ,  $p = .44$ . In other words, few competitors did not lead to greater faking intentions than did many competitors, within the Large Selection Ratio condition.

### Selection Ratio

Hypothesis 2 proposed that a small selection ratio would lead to greater faking intentions, when there are (a) few



**Figure 2.** Structural model of the relations between number of competitors, selection ratio, perceived competition, and faking intentions ( $N = 775$ ). Values to the left of the slash are unstandardized path estimates; values to the right of the slash are standardized path estimates. Fit estimates:  $\chi^2(146) = 507.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $CFI_{Robust} = .92$ ;  $RMSEA_{Robust} = .060$ , 90% CI [.054, .065];  $SRMR = .07$ . Also not shown are the indirect paths from number of competitors to faking intentions ( $a \times b = -.04$ , 95% CI [-.12, .05],  $p = .40$ ) and from selection ratio to faking intentions ( $a \times b = -.12$ , 95% CI [-.21, -.04],  $p = .003$ ). SIC = Slight image creation, EIC = Extensive image creation, IP = Image protection, IG = Deceptive ingratiation. \*\* $p < .01$ .

or (b) many competitors. We tested these hypotheses using planned contrasts. With few competitors, there was a significant and somewhat weak effect of the selection ratio on faking intentions (Few Competitors/Small Selection Ratio:  $M = 2.80 \pm SD = 0.61$ ; Few Competitors/Large Selection Ratio:  $M = 2.65 \pm SD = 0.62$ ),  $d = .24$ , 95% CI [.04, .44],  $t(387) = 2.41$ ,  $p = .01$ , Benjamini-Hochberg adjusted  $p = .03$ . In other words, a small selection ratio led to greater faking intentions than did a large selection ratio, within the Few Competitors condition. With many competitors, there was a nonsignificant and near-zero effect of the number of competitors on faking intentions (Many Competitors/Small Selection Ratio:  $M = 2.67 \pm SD = 0.61$ ; Many Competitors/Large Selection Ratio:  $M = 2.64 \pm SD = 0.64$ ),  $d = .05$ , 95% CI [−.15, .25],  $t(384) = 0.48$ ,  $p = .32$ . In other words, a small selection ratio did not lead to greater faking intentions than did a large selection ratio, within the Many Competitors condition.

Overall, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported; knowledge of competing against few applicants for a job can increase faking intentions when there is a small selection ratio. Hypothesis 2 was also partially supported, suggesting that a small selection ratio can increase faking intentions when there are few competitors.

## Perceived Competition as the Mechanism Driving Faking Intentions

Hypotheses 3a and 3b were tested using a structural equation model (SEM), with the path diagram depicted in Figure 2. We performed a SEM analysis based on data from 775 participants using the *lavaan* package in *R* (Rosseel et al., 2017), on the 16 questions from the IFB-S (Bourdage et al., 2018), the one question measuring perceived competition, and the two exogenous variables in our study: number of competitors and selection ratio. We could not include the Honesty-Humility items in our SEM model because those data were not available for 40.64% of participants ( $n = 466$  remaining) due to technical issues with the online psychology pool. We used maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors as our estimator, because the data did not meet the assumption of multivariate normality (Rosseel et al., 2017). The hypothesized model yielded an acceptable fit to the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999):  $\chi^2(146) = 507.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $CFI_{\text{Robust}} = .92$ ;  $RMSEA_{\text{Robust}} = .060$ , 90% CI [.054, .065];  $SRMR = .07$ . We did not conduct post-hoc modifications because of the acceptable fit of the data to the model.

Overall, the specification of the model that we tested includes: (1) negative direct effects of number of competitors and selection ratio on both perceived competition and faking intentions, (2) a positive direct effect of

perceived competition on faking intentions, and (3) negative indirect effects of number of competitors and selection ratio on faking intentions, via perceived competition.

Hypothesis 3a posited that perceived competition would mediate the relation between number of competitors and faking intentions. The indirect path ( $a \times b = -.04$ , 95% CI [−.12, .05],  $p = .40$ ) was not statistically significant. Thus, the relation between number of competitors and faking intentions was not mediated by perceived competition, and Hypothesis 3a was not supported.

Hypothesis 3b posited that perceived competition would mediate the relation between selection ratio and faking intentions. The indirect path ( $a \times b = -.12$ , 95% CI [−.21, −.04],  $p = .003$ ) was statistically significant, indicating a negative indirect effect of selection ratio on faking intentions, via perceived competition. There was no direct effect ( $c = -.08$ , 95% CI [−.27, .10],  $p = .39$ ) found from selection ratio to faking intentions once perceived competition was included in the model, and the proportion of the total effect accounted for by the indirect effect was 60.19%, suggesting partial mediation. Thus, the relation between selection ratio and faking intentions was mediated by perceived competition, and Hypothesis 3b was supported.

## Honesty-Humility as a Moderator

To test Hypothesis 4, that Honesty-Humility would moderate the relation between perceived competition and faking intentions, we used a multiple linear regression, which included perceived competition, Honesty-Humility and the interaction term (the cross-product of mean-centered perceived competition and Honesty-Humility scores) as predictors and faking intentions as the outcome. We tested this within the overall sample, as well as separately within the psychology pool sample ( $N = 251$ ) and the marketing pool sample ( $N = 215$ ).

In the overall sample, competition, Honesty-Humility, and the interaction term together predicted 6.8% of the variance in participants' faking intentions,  $F(3, 462) = 11.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .07$ , 95% CI [.03, .11]. Perceived competition uniquely predicted 2 percent of the variance in participants' faking intentions,  $t(462) = 2.77$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $sr^2 = .02$ , 95% CI [−.01, .04],  $\beta = .12$ . Honesty-Humility uniquely predicted 5% of the variance in participants' faking intentions,  $t(462) = -4.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $sr^2 = .05$ , 95% CI [.01, .09],  $\beta = -.22$ . The interaction between perceived competition and Honesty-Humility uniquely predicted 0 percent of the variance in participants' faking intentions,  $t(462) = 0.07$ ,  $p = .95$ ,  $sr^2 = .00$ , 95% CI [−.00, .00],  $\beta = .00$ . Thus, Honesty-Humility did not moderate the relation between competition and faking intentions in the overall sample, suggesting that competition had a similar effect on faking

**Table 3.** Regression results using faking intentions as the criterion

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i> 95% CI [LL, UL]	$\beta$	$\beta$ 95% CI [LL, UL]	$sr^2$	$sr^2$ 95% CI [LL, UL]	<i>r</i>	Fit	Difference
Step 1									
(Intercept)	2.67**	[2.62, 2.73]							
Perceived Competition	0.08**	[0.02, 0.14]	0.12	[0.04, 0.21]	.02	[-.01, .04]	.14**		
Honesty-Humility	-0.29**	[-0.40, -0.17]	-0.22	[-0.31, -0.13]	.05	[.01, .09]	-.23**		
								$R^2 = .067^{**}$	
								95% CI [.03, .11]	
Step 2									
(Intercept)	2.67**	[2.62, 2.73]							
Perceived Competition	0.08**	[0.02, 0.14]	0.12	[0.04, 0.21]	.02	[-.01, .04]	.14**		
Honesty-Humility	-0.29**	[-0.40, -0.17]	-0.22	[-0.31, -0.13]	.05	[.01, .09]	-.23**		
I (Perceived Competition x Honesty-Humility)	-0.01	[-0.11, 0.12]	0.00	[-0.09, 0.09]	.00	[-.00, .00]			
								$R^2 = .067^{**}$	$\Delta R^2 = .00$
								95% CI [.03, .11]	95% CI [-.00, .00]

Note. *N* = 466. A significant *b*-weight indicates the  $\beta$ -weight and semi-partial correlation are also significant. *b* = unstandardized regression weights,  $\beta$  = standardized regression weights,  $sr^2$  = semi-partial correlation squared, *r* = zero-order correlation. \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01.

intentions, regardless of individual differences in Honesty-Humility.<sup>2</sup> See Table 3 for complete regression results.

Within the psychology pool sample, the interaction between competition and Honesty-Humility uniquely predicted 1 percent of the variance in participants' faking intentions,  $t(247) = -1.36$ ,  $p = .18$ ,  $sr^2 = .01$ , 95% CI [-.01, .02],  $\beta = -.08$ . Within the marketing pool sample, the interaction between competition and Honesty-Humility uniquely predicted 0 percent of the variance in participants' faking intentions,  $t(211) = 0.01$ ,  $p = .99$ ,  $sr^2 = .00$ , 95% CI [-.00, .00],  $\beta = .00$ . Thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported when tested separately within each sample.

## Discussion

This study empirically supports the role that competition can have in increasing faking intentions in employment interview scenarios, and in turn, Roulin et al.'s (2016) theoretical model of applicant faking. We examined two situational features of selection (number of competitors and selection ratio) and found that faking intentions only increased when few competitors and a small selection ratio were presented. Thus, individuals may be increasingly motivated to fake or engage in competitive behavior when there is both a small chance of obtaining the job and the performance of other applicants becomes more salient due to increased comparison concerns.

We also found support for perceived competition as a mediator of the relation between selection ratio and faking

intentions. This suggests that perceived competition can act as a mechanism that drives the relation between at least one situational cue in a selection scenario and faking intentions. Conversely, competition did not mediate the relation between number of competitors and faking intentions. The path between number of competitors and faking intentions ( $a = -.11$ ,  $p = .26$ ) was in the expected direction, however, which is consistent with previous research on the *N*-effect (Garcia et al., 2013). One plausible explanation for why this effect was small and nonsignificant could be that the manipulation of few (10) and many (50) may not have been strong enough. Perhaps a stronger manipulation of, for instance, several hundred competitors might have yielded a stronger effect. Future research should use a higher number of competitors to examine its effect on faking intentions.

Another plausible explanation for why the number of competitors did not indirectly affect faking intentions is that the number of competitors and selection ratio may operate through different mechanisms. Garcia et al. (2013) noted that competitive behavior may be driven by not solely competitive feelings, but other attitudinal indicators such as comparison concerns. In the present study, participants were asked *how competitive* they would feel toward another applicant competing for the same position. However, the number of competitors may drive *comparison concerns* (e.g., how inclined someone is to compare their interview performance to other applicants' performance) rather than competitive feelings (Garcia & Tor, 2009). Future studies could examine how different situational cues may trigger different attitudes (e.g., comparison concerns) that increase faking intentions.

<sup>2</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that we examine whether each of the Honesty-Humility facets (sincerity, modesty, fairness, and greed avoidance) moderated the indirect effect of selection ratio on faking intentions. We test this as exploratory analyses that are provided in ESM 1.

Whereas the number of competitors may drive comparison concerns, the selection ratio may operate by conveying the risk (i.e., small chances of success) that is involved in a competition. Evidence suggests that humans try to avoid losses whenever possible (Kühberger, 1998), and that when the chances of winning a competition are unlikely (e.g., when one is competitively disadvantaged or perceives having a low chance of success), individuals tend to opt for alternative means of beating the competition (Mishra, Barclay, & Lalumière, 2014). Thus, it is possible that a competitive interview situation could be perceived as being a risky or difficult-to-win scenario (i.e., because of the small selection ratio), and that the motivation to avoid losing the job outweighed comparison concerns (i.e., from the number of competitors). Future research should explicitly measure individuals' perceptions of risk and their comparison concerns in order to examine how these different mechanisms may be associated with the number of competitors and selection ratio.

We also found that when either the number of competitors was large (i.e., an objectively more competitive, but *subjectively less* competitive situation because of the *N*-effect) or the selection ratio was large (i.e., a less selective and hence less competitive situation), faking intentions remained similarly low. This may represent a boundary condition of the influence of either of these factors: many competitors could offset the influence of a small selection ratio on faking intentions, and a large selection ratio could also offset the influence of few competitors on faking intentions.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in the Buehl and Melchers (2018) paper, which found no support for the competition manipulation, they had a relatively large *N* in both selection ratio conditions (1,100 and 200), which may be why they did not find an effect for their selection ratio manipulation. Thus, the results of the present study may help to elucidate how individuals perceive an interview situation and their intentions about how to succeed when presented with various competitive cues.

In our study, the vignettes informed participants that they would be competing for the job against similarly, but not higher-qualified, applicants. The correlation between competition and faking intentions might have been larger if participants were told that they were also competing against higher-qualified applicants. This is because less-qualified applicants may perceive that they are at a greater competitive disadvantage when competing against higher qualified applicants, and hence may take additional risks to win (Mishra et al., 2014). Mathematical models have suggested that increasing the competitive pressure in a job contest (i.e., increasing the ratio of high to low quality applicants) should increase faking in interviews, because

less qualified applicants may recognize that unless they fake desired qualities, they have minimal chances of success (Midjord, 2012, 2013). Therefore, the extent to which individuals fake in interviews may depend on the quality of other applicants, which was held constant in our study.

We also hypothesized that Honesty-Humility would moderate the relation between perceived competition and faking intentions, but this hypothesis was not supported. This suggests that competition might have a relatively similar influence on individuals, despite their level of Honesty-Humility. However, there may be other personality traits that would have yielded the hypothesized moderation effect, which we did not examine. For instance, de Vries, Tybur, Pollet, and van Vugt (2016) proposed that Emotionality may play a role in situations that could be perceived as involving insecurity (e.g., the job applicant scenarios in the present study could be characterized by insecurity, given the uncertain outcome of the job interview). Overall, an appropriate strategy for minimizing faking intentions could be to make efforts not to emphasize the competitive nature of the selection process (Roulin et al., 2016).

## **Limitations and Future Directions**

The main limitation of the present study was that we only examined intentions to fake, not actual faking behavior. That is, faking intentions have been found to be positively associated with, but of course is not a perfect predictor of interview faking behavior (Law, Bourdage, & O'Neill, 2016). Another limitation of this study is our use of a student sample. However, the use of a student sample may present certain advantages over using a field sample. For instance, real job candidates who are competing for a job position could potentially be unwilling to admit that they would be willing to fake in an interview. Nonetheless, confidence in our findings can be further enhanced by conducting field studies with real interviews and applicants.

Another limitation of this study was the use of a cross-sectional design. Common method variance was a potential issue because our outcome variables were measured on the same occasion. However, both Harman's single-factor test and a common latent factor test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) revealed that common method variance was not problematic in this study.

Future research should also examine other situational cues that may signify competition and increase faking intentions. Other situational cues that might increase perceptions of competition are perceptions of a competitive

<sup>3</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that given this boundary condition, the number of competitors may be more accurately conceptualized as a moderator. We test this as exploratory analyses that are provided in ESM 1.

climate or culture (Roulin et al., 2016), the prestige or reputation of the organization along with the desirability of the job, or knowledge of a competitive disadvantage relative to other applicants (Mishra et al., 2014).

## Conclusion

This study examined perceived competition as a situational antecedent of faking intentions in employment interviews. We investigated two situational variables that signify competition (the number of competitors and the selection ratio), and how knowledge about them would influence faking intentions. On a broader level, this study suggests that perceiving fiercer competition in a selection scenario is related to greater faking intentions, which contributes to the applicant faking literature by shedding light on how situational factors can affect the strategies that individuals may use during selection. It is vital to conduct further research on what other situational factors may motivate faking, as organizations have the capability to redesign their selection process in a way that discourages the use of deception.

## Electronic Supplementary Material

The electronic supplementary material is available with the online version of the article at <https://doi.org/10.1027/1866-5888/a000222>

**ESM 1.** Study vignettes and exploratory analyses (.pdf).

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