EMPLOYEE DECEPTION IN A DISCOUNT STORE

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EMPLOYEE DECEPTION IN A
DISCOUNT STORE

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By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There exists in each person a capacity to deceive in many ways throughout the range of social interactions. This is certainly true in on-the-job situations. Social interaction is inevitable while an individual is working with other persons, and it is important that deception in social interaction be recognized as a real element within the social structures of any group or organization. If its presence is recognized then group leaders or management will more adequately be able to deal with the problems of social interaction. The study of deception in the social psychological area is a relatively new endeavor. In fact, the major portion of experimentation has been done within the last few years.

The earliest studies examined the phenomena of deception in its most basic manifestations. Harold Mager (9, p. 196) reported in 1931 that deception was an emotion evoked by an antagonistic motor stimulus of inferior intensity to the subject. He also concluded that lying was a psychological phenomenon which he described as "pathologic, psychophysiological, and psychosociologic phenomenon" (9, p. 184). The fact of individual dishonesty, or lying, as it might be called, has not been studied in depth at all in psychological
research. In fact, only two studies were found which touched on the area of individual deception at all.

Hartshorne and Maye (13) did research in deception in the thirties and early forties. Their studies included several different ones of individual honesty and deception in social situations. Their studies concluded that there were no general traits of honesty. Consistency of behavior from one situation to another was due quite simply to similarities in situations. Benussi (9, p. 189), in describing human deception, reported that there definitely was an "internal excitement within the individual" which was caused by lying.

The findings summarized in the above paragraph are also borne out in a study which examined the honesty of the public at large in an experiment in which several persons found, supposedly accidently, tokens which were of financial value. The results of this experiment indicated that sample trustworthiness of the public in a situation involving financial honesty seemed to range between 80 and 90 per cent of those who responded in some form to the found token. Of these 80 to 90 per cent who showed an altruistic attitude, the experimenters judged that 55 per cent were intrinsically honest. Under the effects of financial gain, the striking effects of honesty are many and varied (3, p. 93).

Since 1960, the use of deception as an effective tool in psychological experimentation has been rapidly increasing. For example, in 1964 390 articles in four selected journals--
Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Journal of Personality, Journal of Social Psychology, and Sociometry describe 457 separate studies based on original data for human subjects; eighty-three of these articles contained a total of eighty-eight studies in which deception was used in some form of the experiment. Those studies which employed deception represented an overall 19.3 per cent of all the articles reported (13, p. 13).

Stricker (13, p. 13) reported that deception has become an integral part of psychological research. Another 1967 article (7, p. 379) claimed that certain kinds of studies routinely use some form of deception and that deception is a widely used tactic in current psychological research. Stricker (13, p. 13) further believes that deception per se, has become a prestigious methodological device. He also reported that guidelines to evaluate those investigations that use deception for effective procedures are badly needed (13, p. 19).

Burton (2, p. 492) maintains that there is some underlying generality in honest behavior. He says that the predictability of one's moral behavior from one situation to another depends on the number of identical elements which the settings share. In addition, he notes that one may conclude that there is an underlying trait of honesty which a person brings with him to a resistance to temptation situation.

Kelman (8, p. 1) asserts that deception is built into most of our measurement devices. In examining the ethical
usage of deception procedures, he maintains that whether or not a study uses deception is not nearly so important as the amount and type of deception. Also the question must be asked whether or not the amount and type of deception are justified as by the significance of the study as well as the unavailability of alternative procedures (8, p. 3). Kelman (8, p. 6) presents the following implications of the use of deception:

1. There are strong ethical implications.
2. There are methodological implications such as the problem of naive subjects.
3. There are far-reaching implications for all social and applied psychological research.

In order to deal with these implications, the experimenters must insure an active awareness of the study in terms of justifying the value of an experiment against its questionable or harmful effects. Kelman (8, p. 10) also stressed that any negative effects of the use of deception must be counteracted and at the most minimized. Finally, he emphasized that a final way of dealing with deception studies must include a development of new techniques such as role-playing, which do not need deceptive techniques but retain the flexibility and versatility of the technique.

Deception and the Polygraph

Another important consideration in the use of deception in research is the problem of measuring deception in a manner in which differences and significances may be accurately determined. Probably the main way of detecting lying or verbal
deception is the use of the polygraph machine, which measures galvanic skin responses, respiratory rates, and cardiovascular reactions. The use of the polygraph machine in terms of individual deception situations is not widely reported at all. However, its usage throughout the entire realm of experimentation in social and applied psychology is becoming more and more widespread.

Most of the earliest work with the polygraph machine was done with criminals in an attempt to solve crimes or to determine if a suspect in a crime were guilty or not, as measured by polygraphic means. A 1938 article (12, p. 51) noted that although there were sharp individual differences in the interpretation of test results, in the hands of an expert psychologist the technique of polygraph detection should prove valuable. In this article the point was also emphasized that only those who can see beyond actual scores and interpret these scores in the frame of the individual mental life are competent to pass judgments (12, p. 58).

Trovillo (14, p. 341), whose work in the area of the polygraph machine was quite extensive, reported in 1942 that the accuracy of the polygraph results should never be doubted. A study he conducted showed that over 85 per cent of all polygraph tests administered in the Chicago area in criminal cases provided accurate and correct results. A much later study in 1955 provided some firm foundations for expanding the usage of the polygraph machine into psychological experimentation.
Burack (1, p. 414), in an attempt to analyze the theory, method, and limitations of the lie detector or polygraph machine, claimed, "No machine exists which detects lying." What is detected, according to Burack, is the "arousal of emotion which may be measured as physiological changes." He further reported that the machine is extremely accurate with regard to detecting the several physiological functions and sudden changes. However, he added, the problem is in the interpretation of test results (1, p. 421). He summed up his assertions by maintaining that all such instruments lead to diagnoses, and such diagnoses are only references from which to begin the real detection of deception (1, p. 423). The polygraph machine is definitely a psychological tool in deception experimentation. This is particularly true in terms of providing a reference point from which to measure the physiological changes which accompany deception.

An adequate description of the literature concerning the polygraph machine and detection of deception must report a series of studies done by Gustafson, Orne, and Thackray (4, 5, 6, 10) between 1963 and 1967. These gentlemen attempted to measure the effectiveness of detection of deception by GSR techniques in terms of controlled criteria. They studied the effects of heightened motivation, verbal responses, perceived role and role success, and the effectiveness of group GSR techniques. In terms of the group GSR technique, the experimenters report that detection of deception is possible only to the extent that physiological
responses to significant critical stimuli clearly differ from responses to irrelevant stimuli (10, p. 816). In assessing the effects of verbal responses on detection of deception, Gustafson and Orne (6, p. 12) maintain that the emission of verbal response and the nature of that response have significant effects on the rate of detection of deception. According to the two experimenters (6, p. 13), the results of this experiment demonstrate that psychological variables are the basic determinants of detection of deception, and it is through alterations of basic psychological responses that detection of deception is possible.

In terms of the effects of perceived role on the detection of deception, Gustafson and Orne (5, p. 416) stipulate that the demand characteristics of the perceived role significantly affect the rate of detection. In addition, it was also pointed out in this article that there are many subtle motivational variables which affect what often has been assumed to be a relatively mechanical procedure such as role-playing and individual perception of role (5, p. 416). The fourth experiment tested the effects of heightened motivation, and this study reported that there was an apparent causal relationship between classes of verbal stimuli and physiological responses (4, p. 408). The results of this study also seemed to indicate that highly motivated subjects were detected far more rapidly than mere chance occurrence supports (4, p. 411).
Statement of the Problem

The problem to be examined in this study is whether or not deception concerning general morale and attitude toward management is prevalent among hourly female employees at a large discount store in a city of approximately 30,000 population.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study stipulates that if general morale conditions are measured among hourly female workers at a large discount store in a city of approximately 30,000 population, then there will be a significant amount of deception on a verbal measure as compared to a written measure.
children. The parents of the latter did not object to such behavior and often considered it a sign of manhood for their children to fight with the racial adversary.5

The lower class Negro children were often punished but were seldom rewarded. For this reason, the child was not encouraged to defer gratification, but rather to gratify his impulses. A lower class Negro boy of Natchez told the interviewer he had failed the fifth grade twice. He said, "Everytime I gits home from school, my papa says I ain't goin' to be nothin' nohow, but he whips me jes' the same."6

In another study of lower and middle class families Dollard participated in the social life of "Southerntown" in order to study his Negro subjects as they lived in the community and to record information concerning the life histories of a sample of them. Most of the information was gained through indirect interrogation; none was acquired by asking set questions in a mechanical way. Powerlessness was again defined in terms of frustration toward the American white caste system which kept the Negro community in a dominated position.7

Impulsive behavior among lower class Negroes was traced back to the days of slavery. It was learned that white

5Ibid., p. 240. 6Ibid., p. 267.

7John Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town (New Haven, Conn., 1937), p. 267.
masters had encouraged such behavior as a means of compensating the Negroes for their many deprivations.

Negroes . . . have been adequately trained to irresponsibility through the slavery system and its lineal descendent, the plantation-share-crop system. . . . The human organism is such a thing that . . . it will accept the immediate pleasure gain and avoid the rigors of impulse renunciation . . . This dependence of Negroes is . . . a straight gratification continuing without break from childhood on.8

Aggression was again cited as an example of impulsive behavior. Aggression was used by the Negro as a response to the frustration he repeatedly experienced. He often expressed this aggression by diverting it from the white caste to the Negro group itself. One reaction of the Negro took the form of sexual jealousy, often ending in violent action.9

Dollard concluded that the caste system of the south seemed to keep Negroes from learning mature forms of impulse control and granted them essentially "infantile" types of freedom from responsibility.10

Davis and Havighurst conducted a study of child-rearing practices among samples of middle class white and Negro mothers and lower class white and Negro mothers. They found greater differences between social classes than between races, although they also found consistent differences at both levels.

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8 Ibid., p. 401.  
9 Ibid., p. 269.  
10 Ibid., p. 404.
CHAPTER II

RESEARCH METHOD

Subjects

Subjects of this experiment were eighteen female subjects who are employees of a large discount store. The eighteen female employees represented all the full-time hourly female employees at the time of the first administration.

Apparatus

The piece of equipment used in this experiment was a standard Keeler Polygraph machine. The standard polygraph instrument is composed of three major units. These units are the cardiosphygmograph, which measures heart rate and blood pressure, the phuemograph, which measures respiratory patterns, and the galvanograph, which records galvanic skin responses. A fourth unit of the machine is the kymograph, which houses the motor assembly that operates the chart paper mechanism.

Measuring Instrument

The measuring instrument used in this experiment was The Tear Ballot for Industry, by Willard A. Kerr, published by Psychometric Affiliates. The revised edition was published in 1962.
The Tear Ballot consists of ten general items and one "special problem" item. The manual states that the ballot is a practical measure of, (a) the job satisfaction of regular workers, (b) the general causes of discontent of terminating workers and, (c) the relationships between morale and personal characteristics, wage systems, and new company policies. The chief value of the instrument is its brevity, which makes administration easy. The validity studies reported in the manual range from .36 to .82, with a different criterion being used in each study. The range of reliability coefficients as reported was from .65 to .88, by use of split-half techniques.

Procedure

The initial step in the experimental procedure was to administer The Tear Ballot for Industry. Subjects completed the instrument individually, and all subjects completed the instrument the same day while on company time. Each subject was instructed prior to taking the test that results would be anonymous and that there would be no way of determining which person answered which particular instrument. However, the tests were numbered, and the number was recorded as each subject completed the instrument. Which subject completed which instrument was essential to the experiment, as individual written answers were compared with individual verbal answers. However, it was also necessary that subjects be led to believe that the instruments were totally anonymous
and that individual answers were not known. This was necessary in order that subject responses be as honest and forthright as possible.

After a period of one month, subjects were then given a polygraph test in which items on The Tear Ballot for Industry were asked verbally, and subjects' responses were made verbally. In this study only the pneumograph measure of the polygraph machine was recorded. Interpretation of the findings was based on the magnitude of the response above the base line response.
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CHAPTER III

STATISTICAL RESULTS

The statistical procedure employed in this study consisted of an examination of the difference between the mean score on the oral and the written administration. The difference between the means was then checked by means of a statistical $t$ test to see if there were a significant change in the two administrations. The intent of the statistical analysis was to test the hypothesis as to whether or not the hourly female employees studied did present a significantly different picture in regard to their general morale level. The lie factor in these differences was also measured by the use of a polygraph machine. However, the results of this factor, as reflected in the data, did not indicate a sufficient amount of deception to merit a statistical analysis. A summary of the statistical data which was found in the study is included in Table I below:

TABLE I

SUMMARY OF THE STATISTICAL TEST OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MEANS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written Administration Mean of Scores</th>
<th>Oral Administration Mean of Scores</th>
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<th>$p$</th>
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<tr>
<td>42.22</td>
<td>42.77</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>N.S.</td>
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$t = -.45$
It would require a $t$ score of 2.29 to be significant at the .05 level of confidence. So it can be readily observed that the difference between the two scores was very far below even the minimum level of acceptability in terms of significance.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The statistical test of the significance between the oral measure and the written measure did not indicate a significant difference between the two factors. Neither did the lie factor measured in the oral responses produce any significant results. On the basis of these results, the hypothesis as stated in Chapter I must be rejected.

In dealing with the rejection of the hypothesis, several factors would seem to have produced the insignificant results of this study. A very important factor in the examination of any hypothesis is the measuring instrument used in the study. The Tear Ballot Sheet for Industry which was examined in this study was designed over twenty years ago as a method for studying the general morale level of workers in an industrial plant. The questions in the test are of a general nature and cover a broad range of morale indicators such as attitude toward management, attitude toward fellow workers, personal reaction toward one's job, attitude toward the company, and the need fulfillment within a job. Any measure of morale in a work situation must of necessity be of a generalized nature in order to allow the worker to fully respond to that which is being measured. The concept of morale itself is one which does not normally lend itself
to any specific definition or evaluation. Guion (2) notes in an article that he can personally list seven working difficulties of morale which are useful today. Each of these approaches the specific nature of morale from a different point of view. He defines it as "the extent to which an individual's needs are satisfied and the extent to which the individual perceives that satisfaction as stemming from his total job situation" (2, p. 304). He further describes high morale as being characterized by little aggressive conflict, by fairly well-adjusted employees who can become ego-involved in their work, by many favorable attitudes, and by the cohesiveness which comes from finding personal need satisfactions within a group (2, p. 304). Stagner (3) presents another definition of morale. He defines morale as "an index of the extent to which the individual perceives his own motives through cooperation with the group." According to Stagner, "Obviously then, there is no such phenomenon as morale in general" (3, p. 305). All of the literature reviewed which deals with morale emphasized the point that morale was not a general factor at all but rather had a specific nature which was made up of selective aspects of the job situation.

It would seem then that the questions in The Tear Ballot Sheet for Industry were of such a general nature that there were not enough discriminating elements to produce any significant morale difference in the two administrations. This
factor concerning the lack of specific elements in the measurement of morale might be considered to be one aspect in the rejection of the hypothesis of this study.

A second factor which could have affected the insignificant results of the study is the nature of the population. The population for which this study was designed includes hourly female workers at a large discount store. Referring again to the measuring instrument used, Kerr's morale measure was intended for industrial applications in a single plant structure. Within the make-up of the typical industrial work force there is a broad range of job duties, hourly wages, shift schedules, union affiliations, and opportunities for advancement as well as age and social class factors. These variables within the work force would positively enhance the discriminative power of a general morale measure.

However, the make-up of the work force in a retail setting such as a discount store would be very different from that of an industrial plant. First of all, in the discount store studied, there is not a great deal of difference in the actual job duties performed. Virtually all hourly female workers would be doing work of the same general nature, with the only difference being the nature of merchandise dealt with such as shoes, hardware, sporting goods, or health and beauty aid products. In terms of wage differences, the wage structure for female workers in a discount
store normally begins at the minimum wage level, with very little difference throughout the entire female work force. In the sample studied, the maximum amount of hourly wage differences was ten cents per hour, which would seem to not be a large enough amount to create a significant variable. The wage differential factor, which is a significant variable among industrial workers, would not seem to make any difference at all in terms of a general morale measure in the population of this study. The extremely similar factors within the jobs of hourly female workers concerning duties and wages would be considered to be two other aspects which could have affected the lack of any significant findings in this study.

In addition to these factors affecting the rejection of the hypothesis, there would seem also to be factors concerning the lack of differences in the age groupings, the similarity of social class factor, the lack of opportunity for advancement within the job structure in a discount operation, and the overall generalized type of person who works in a discount operation.

There were several raw score point differences between the written measure and the oral measure among the younger group, ages 18 to 30. But these differences cancelled out statistically because of the fact that as many increased as decreased, thus almost equally affecting the mean score. The fact that there was a wider range of differences among the younger group would seem to indicate that the younger female
workers would be more likely to change their morale level over a period of time, although these changes would be of such a generalized nature that no specific conclusions could be drawn concerning these changes. It should also be added that it is a generally accepted fact among management and personnel people that in retail job situations an older female employee, particularly over forty years of age, is much more satisfied and seems to have a higher morale level than do younger female workers. However, this generalization has never been supported through any specific morale surveys which are now available.

In terms of social factors, there is probably very little difference in the socio-economic level of all the workers tested in this study. This would seem to be supported by the responses on both the oral and written measure to question number six, which asks, "Do you think your income is adequate for your living needs?" Out of the thirty-six responses to this question, thirty-three answered with the following: just enough for average comfort. The other three responses were the next point value above the above response, and that answer is "slightly above average." The socio-economic level of the hourly female workers in the discount store studied would not seem to be different enough to add a significant variable which might affect a general morale survey.
Another factor which would seem to have affected the insignificant results of this study is the fact that within the job structure of the workers studied, there is very little opportunity for advancement beyond that job level at which the worker is initially employed. As was stated earlier, The Tear Ballot Sheet for Industry was designed for industrial use among a single plant's workers. In such a work situation there exists a broad range of job levels and hierarchies through which a worker may progress during his employment period. However, in a discount store in which virtually all female workers do essentially the same jobs throughout their period of employment, there is simply no opportunity for advancement to a higher job level or for any type of job duty change different from all other female workers. There would seem then to be no particular reason for an hourly female worker's morale to change. The morale level of the worker would appear to make very little difference in terms of job satisfaction or progressing within the organization; therefore, one wonders if any morale measure is worth while under the circumstances of their job situation.

A final factor in the population which might be considered as affecting the insignificant results of this study involves taking a look at the overall characteristics of the typical female worker in a discount store. A married woman who works in a discount store usually does so for one primary
reason—the additional income which her job adds to the total family income. This factor limits the amount of job satisfaction or high morale level which a female worker is interested in in her job. Several other factors, such as accessibility to the job, scheduling which will accommodate her school children and husband, and, to some degree, the type of work done, are much more important to this type of worker than the general factors normally included in a typical morale survey such as the one employed in this study. It can be said, then, that the type of woman who works in a discount store is mostly interested in getting a job, keeping it for as long as she needs it, and drawing her pay. She simply is not concerned to any great degree with those factors which are normally examined in a morale survey. Therefore, it would seem that the measuring instrument used in this study was inadequate in terms of measuring those factors which would in reality affect the general morale level of hourly female workers in a discount store.

When the written measure was taken, subjects had all the time needed to respond to the questions as there was no time limit enforced. However, during the oral measure while subjects were also being measured by the polygraph apparatus, almost all subjects answered very quickly, without any thought or hesitation. This was in direct contrast to the written measure, during which most subjects spent a considerable amount of time on each question. The differences in the
amount of time taken by subjects to respond to the oral questions as compared to the written ones, would seem also to be a contributing factor to the rejection of the proposed hypothesis. The reason for this difference would seem to be a matter of subjects' not giving as much thought to oral answers as to the written ones. In several instances, written answers were considered for almost twice as long as the oral answers.

Another administrative variable which affected the findings of the study was the use of the polygraph machine to detect deception among the hourly female workers. Due to the fact that all of the employees in this particular discount store are administered polygraph tests at regular intervals for store security checks, it would appear that there were very few attempts to deceive concerning private feelings on the questions used in the study. Out of 180 questions asked in the oral administration, there were only nine discernible lies as measured by the polygraph machine. This conceivably could be traced to the fact that the workers were aware, due to having taken polygraph tests before, that any attempted deceptions would more than likely be picked up by the polygraph machine. In addition to this consideration, there was probably a much lower anxiety level among the subjects than would normally be expected in a polygraph administration. This could also be credited to subjects' having been familiar with the apparatus used.
Thus it would seem that subjects did not attempt any more deceptions than were attempted because prior to being administered the questions orally they would have already concluded that detection would be likely. This would eliminate anything which might be gained by deceiving their private feelings.
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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Although the hypothesis of this study must be rejected, this would not necessarily invalidate any conclusions concerning the morale level of the workers tested. In general, it would seem likely that the morale level of the employees was fairly consistent. This was indicated by the fact that the two different indices measured were separated by a month's time. This in itself would seem to indicate a consistently high morale level.

However, during this time period between administrations, the store conducted an intensive eleven-day sales promotion during which employees were subjected to unusually pressured working conditions. In addition, the amount of stress under which the store management people were working undoubtedly affected the way in which they treated employees on the job in their interpersonal job relations. Therefore, the seemingly high level of morale as indicated would appear to be particularly significant in the light of unusually stressful on-the-job relations which occurred during the sales promotion period. Following the promotion period, the employees took a store-wide inventory which also created stressful working conditions. The oral administration of the test occurred two days after the inventory period ended.
Despite the fact that the anticipated deception among the workers did not occur to a significant degree, of the lies which were detected, all but one occurred in response to three questions. The questions were the following:

1. Do you have confidence in the good intentions of the management?
2. Do you have confidence in the good sense of management?
3. How do you rate your superior in comparison to other superiors under which you've worked in terms of supervisory ability?

It should also be pointed out that in only two instances did any subject have more than one detected lie. But these two subjects accounted for six of the total number which were detected. It is also significant that these two employees worked in the same department. This fact would appear to indicate a relatively weak morale spot in the store's organization which management should react to.

The conclusions, then, in terms of the deception level among the female employees studied, could possibly indicate those problem areas which the store management should attend to in order to prevent a weakening of the indicated high morale level. However, a previously discussed weakness of the measuring instrument used does prevent the store management from pin-pointing any specific areas or particular situations from which the morale problems might arise. This would hinder any discernible conclusions other than the broad area concerning the female worker's attitude toward management and their supervisors. The main advantage
of being able to draw this non-specific conclusion would be simply that management would be aware of the problem and would, in turn, work harder to obtain a level of interpersonal relations between employees and himself which would be totally satisfactory to all the hourly female workers.

A final conclusion must reflect on the value of any general morale measure within the framework of a retail discount operation. Certainly the validity of any measure must be questioned unless it is able to present and predict accurately a morale picture which truly captures the essence of an employee's attitudes and responses to management's personnel efforts. With the instruments presently in use the worth of such a morale measure is certainly doubtful. For any measure to be really adequate, it must deal in a specific way with those variables which interact within the framework of retail employer-employee relationships. Therefore, it might be concluded that in any particular retail situation, the management of the store should develop its own ways of measuring employee morale as well as recognizing employee deception where it exists.
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