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**WOULD YOU LIE TO A COMPUTER?
COMPUTER INTERVIEWING MAKES JOB
APPLICANTS MORE HONEST**

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Would you lie to a computer?

Job seekers interviewed by computer are more honest about their qualifications than applicants questioned in traditional face-to-face interviews, researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology have found.

But the research, believed the first to examine the validity of computerized job interviewing, found limits to the technology. Applicants for management-level positions expect to meet with human interviewers and may resent being interviewed by a computer instead, said Dr. Dennis Nagao of Georgia Tech's College of Management.

Conducted by Nagao and Dr. Christopher Martin of Louisiana State University, the research measured honesty among student volunteers asked about their grade point averages and Scholastic Aptitude Test scores during a mock job screening interview. The students were questioned by one of four techniques: a friendly interviewer, a "cold" interviewer, paper-and-pencil application forms, or a computer.

The researchers compared their answers to student records on file, and used a standard test to measure how much the volunteers were trying to make a good impression.

"We got a lot of exaggeration, but the exaggeration was much stronger in face to face situations than in the computerized or the paper-and-pencil situations," Nagao explained. "The non-social interview conditions -- paper-and-pencil and computer -- resulted in more honest responding."

Making good hiring decisions is often hampered by what researchers call "socially desirable responding." Applicants tell interviewers what they think the interviewers want to hear -- and what they think will get them hired -- sometimes regardless of the truth.

Computerized interviewing may reduce that problem by removing much of the social pressure inherent in a face-to-face interview: "You don't feel the pressure to make a good impression with the interviewer," said Nagao.

The computer interviewing may also introduce other factors, including one Nagao called the "Big Brother Effect."

"There is a sense that the computer may be tied into an overall computing system and that there might be an instantaneous check of the information," he said. "Most people do not want to be in a situation of being caught in a lie."

The students were divided into two groups, one interviewing for an entry level clerk job, and the second seeking employment as a management trainee. Nagao and Martin found important differences in how the two groups responded to computer interviewing.

"When the people being interviewed for the management trainee position were interviewed with the paper-and-pencil or computer tests, they expressed a greater degree of resentment about their interview," he said. "This implies that there are some bounds to the usefulness of computerized interviewing."

Nagao and Martin suggest that job applicants anticipate what will happen in their interview. When the experience fails to live up to expectations, there can be resentment.

"For low-level kinds of jobs, this kind of computerized interview will not seem inappropriate," he explained, "but people who are interviewing for jobs at a higher level expect to merit a personal, face-to-face interview."

Companies may defuse that resentment by having applicants meet with company officials before the computer interview, or by explaining the value of the technique.

But for companies using the increasingly popular computer interviewing technique, the findings point out potential pitfalls in replacing human interviewers with machines. Nagao suggests companies be careful that the technological solution is appropriate for the situation.

"It certainly pays to know what kind of behavioral effects this technology may have on people. If applicants are resentful of the interview, that could hurt the company's recruiting efforts and keep them from hiring the best candidates."

What about the computer phobia that appears to plague many persons? Student volunteers questioned in the research use computers regularly, but Nagao admits fear of computers may pose problems for other groups of applicants.

The study results, said Nagao, point out the need to consider behavioral factors in technological issues.

"The emphasis has typically been on the technology itself and less on how people respond to the technology," he argued. "But people are an essential part of the system."

The results were published in the Journal of Applied Psychology.