

Biodata Phenomenology: Recruiters' Perceptions and Use of Biographical Information in Resume Screening

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Recruiters' phenomenological perceptions of biodata in resumes were examined along with their use of biodata for making applicant screening decisions. The thesis was that biodata were interpreted as indicating abilities and other attributes. Three complementary studies were conducted with 344 recruiters from 28 companies. Study 1 survey results indicated recruiters judged biodata to reflect both ability (language, math, physical) and other (interpersonal, leadership, motivation) attributes. Both types of attributes were judged with high interrecruiter reliability, and attributes judged to be reflected depended partly on the job considered. Study 2 experimental results indicated recruiters rated resumes more attractive to the degree that biodata in the resumes reflected attributes required by the jobs. Study 3 protocol analysis results confirmed that recruiters' considered these attributes with substantial frequency.

Numerous reviews have concluded that biographical data (biodata) are among the most effective predictors of job performance (Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Owens, 1976; Reilly & Chao, 1982), yet biodata research has long been criticized for lack of insight into the meaning of biodata (Mumford & Stokes, 1992; Schwab & Oliver, 1974). Similarly, biodata in the form of resumes and applications are probably the most commonly used information in personnel selection, yet fairly little is known about the meaning they hold for recruiting decision makers (Ash, Johnson, Levine, & McDaniel, 1989; Levine & Flory, 1975). The most recent review of personnel selection stated that research is needed on the constructs measured by procedures such as training and experience ratings (Schmidt, Ones, & Hunter, 1992).

The purpose of this study is to examine recruiters' use of biodata for making applicant screening decisions. Specifically, this study explores recruiters' phenomenology of biodata contained in resumes. Biodata in this context refer to work experience, education, activities, and other life history information contained in resumes and applications. Phenomenology involves recruiters' describing biodata as they perceive the phenomena. This descriptive approach is particularly appropriate in the current research because fairly little is known regarding recruiters' perceptions of biodata.

Studying biodata from a recruiters' perspective is important for two reasons. First, there is widespread use of resumes and application blanks for screening job candidates. Probably every selection decision includes an evaluation of this form of biodata. As far back as 1975, it was estimated that one billion resumes and applications were screened per year (Levine & Flory, 1975). Second, despite widespread use, fairly little is known about what inferences are drawn and how recruiters use this information. Most research on selection using biodata has focused on developing empirical techniques for maximizing the criterion-related validity of highly structured biodata questionnaires, but fairly little research has focused on recruiters' unstructured assessments of the biodata in resumes and applications.

The review below is divided into four sections, with each serving a different function in the conceptual development of the study. First, prior research on resume screening is reviewed to show the limited insight it provides into how recruiters interpret the meaning of biodata. Second, several areas of research are examined to show the "nonability" orientation of previous studies of biodata. Third, the central thesis of this article is developed, which is that biodata in the resume screening context are interpreted to reflect basic abilities as well as other attributes. Fourth, three studies testing this thesis with complementary methodologies are described.

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Review

Prior Research on Resume Screening

It has been suggested that biodata on resumes and applications are used to draw inferences about underlying attributes (Ash et al., 1989; Levine & Flory, 1975), but prior research has not been clear as to the precise nature of these inferences. Many of the previous studies were surveys of recruiters asking for simple ratings of the importance of either candidate biodata such as work experience or candidate traits such as personality (Dickinson, 1955; Hakel & Schuh, 1971; Kohn, 1975; Tschirgi, 1973), with some studies including a comparison with candi-

date surveys (Posner, 1981). Other studies were simulations that typically constructed resumes varying in biodata content and then had recruiters judge the employment suitability of the resumes (Gardner, Kozlowski, & Hults, 1991; Hakel, Dobbmeyer, & Dunnette, 1970; Levine & Flory, 1975; Taylor, 1988). Finally, other studies compared candidate biodata to recruitment outcomes (Campion, 1978; Carroll, 1966), or compared recruiter judgments of biodata importance to candidate reports of the topics addressed in screening interviews (Taylor & Sniezek, 1984). All but two studies were in the context of college recruiting (Hakel & Schuh, 1971; Levine & Flory, 1975).

This research has shown that recruiters distinguish among biodata on importance, and differences in biodata can influence judgments of employment suitability. However, previous research does not clearly indicate what inferences recruiters draw in terms of the underlying attributes represented by biodata or in terms of specific biodata-attribute linkages.

Nonability Orientation of Prior Research

Prior research in several related areas has predisposed a *non-ability* orientation on biodata. Throughout the article, the term *ability* attributes is used to refer to basic human capacities such as language, math, and physical attributes, while the term *other* attributes is used to refer to other nonability human qualities such as interpersonal, leadership, and motivational attributes. The latter may arguably have ability components, but their designation as other attributes is only meant to indicate that they are not usually included in lists of abilities used in traditional selection systems. The choice of these abilities and other attributes is described later.

Biodata research. Most research on biodata has focused on empirically validating biodata questionnaires. Although not the focus of the present study, this literature has influenced researchers' views of what biodata measures in four ways. First, there has been a heterogeneous range of research methodologies and item content that has led to ambiguity about the meaning of biodata. For example, biodata have been measured in very different ways, including weighted application blanks, which usually have factual open-ended items of limited scope (e.g., work experience; England, 1961) and biographical information blanks, which usually have both factual and perceptual closed-ended items covering a wide range of topics (e.g., life history events; Owens, 1976). Furthermore, there is great variation in biodata items, including historical versus hypothetical, external versus internal, objective versus subjective, first-hand versus second-hand, discrete versus summative, and verifiable versus nonverifiable (Mael, 1991).

Second, two influential research programs have focused attention on nonability interpretations of biodata. One program, by Owens, Mumford, Stokes, and their colleagues, sought to understand the influence of childhood life history on subsequent behavior (Mumford & Stokes, 1992; Owens, 1976; Owens & Schoenfeldt, 1979). Its developmental focus considered aspects of life history, such as family life and social relationships, which are typically not regarded as basic abilities in the usual sense (e.g., math and language). In fact, Owens (1976) stated "biodata is [sic] useful in appraising significant noncognitive characteristics among employees" (p. 611). Although

many factors underlying biodata in this research reflected achievement, and thus ability, there was a strong emphasis on other attributes. Another large research program, termed Army Project A, contributed to the notion that biodata indicate other attributes by developing an instrument that clustered with personality and temperament rather than ability measures (Peterson et al., 1990).

Third, the few theories in biodata research also seem predisposed to attributes other than abilities. The developmental-integrative model (Owens & Schoenfeldt, 1979) focuses on how patterns of differential development can be identified from life history experiences. The ecology model (Mumford & Stokes, 1992) focuses on how individuals attempt to maximize personal outcomes in a world of changing environmental opportunities. The social identity model (Mael, 1991) focuses on how people develop identities with social groups and then adopt the group's values, norms, and behaviors. These theories do not preclude the importance of abilities, but they seem to implicitly emphasize the other attributes reflected in biodata.

Fourth, summaries of the literature, such as textbooks and reviews, seem to presume that these other attributes are assessed by biodata. For example, a text on selection states that biodata may provide an indirect measure of motivational characteristics (Gatewood & Feild, 1990). Biodata have also been suggested as measures of interests, values, and preferences because they are products of life history experiences (Dawis, 1991). Finally, a recent review of selection research suggests that an interesting issue is whether biodata may be measuring personality traits (Schmidt et al., 1992).

Resume screening research. Attributes other than abilities are commonly represented in the candidate characteristics studied in previous research on resume screening. For example, attributes rated important by recruiters included conscientious and sociable (Dickinson, 1955), cooperative and trustworthy (Hakel & Schuh, 1971), sincere and positive attitude (Kohn, 1975), and mature and sense of humor (Posner, 1981). Likewise, research has found some biodata to be important that appear to reflect attributes other than abilities, such as interests and extracurricular activities (Gardner et al., 1991; Hakel et al., 1970; Posner, 1981; Taylor & Sniezek, 1984; Tschirgi, 1973). These studies also include biodata that appear to reflect abilities (e.g., grades), but the prevalence of attributes other than abilities is their noteworthy feature for the purposes of this study.

Other research. Two other literatures related to recruiting also seem to predispose an orientation toward attributes other than abilities. First, reviews of the interviewing research have speculated that the popularity of the interview, despite its low validity, may be because it can measure other attributes like motivation and interpersonal relations (Arvey & Campion, 1982). Second, research is emerging on the importance of a proper fit between candidates and the organization, and this may increase emphasis on attributes other than abilities for selection (e.g., personality and interests; Schneider, 1987).

Potential Ability Interpretation of Biodata

The thesis of this study is that recruiters perceive and use biodata as indicators of basic abilities as well as these other attributes. Recruiters are aware of the need for job-related abili-

ties and thus may use biodata to infer abilities when screening resumes. The thesis is based on five arguments. First, and most simply, many biodata items appear to assess abilities. For example, educational attainment, grades, some work experience (e.g., complex jobs), some honors (e.g., scholarships), and some hobbies and interests (e.g., foreign languages) appear related to ability. Research on training and experience ratings for selection (Ash et al., 1989; McDaniel, Schmidt, & Hunter, 1988) and college experience predictors of job performance (Howard, 1986) also assume such biodata are indirect measures of abilities.

Second, much successful prediction of performance has historically been through abilities. Cognitive ability tests are valid predictors of performance and training success in many jobs; alternatively, other attributes like personality are less robust predictors (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Reilly & Chao, 1982; Schmitt, Gooding, Noe, & Kirsch, 1984; Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991). Thus, if biodata in resumes are predictive of job performance, as the meta-analyses of training and experience ratings and grades would suggest (Hunter & Hunter, 1984; McDaniel et al., 1988; Reilly & Chao, 1982), then the explanation may be that such biodata also reflect abilities.

Third, biodata have been related to abilities in some studies. For example, Pannone (1984) found his biodata measure correlated .55 with ability test scores. On the other hand, the Project A research found little overlap between their measure of biodata and ability tests (Peterson et al., 1990). The relationship between biodata and ability is difficult to determine in many studies because correlations among predictors are not reported. It is likely that relationships depend on the type of biodata, with low relationships with temperament-oriented items (Peterson et al., 1990) and high relationships with skill-oriented items (Pannone, 1984). This interpretation is difficult to verify, however, because most studies do not report the content of proprietary biodata instruments. Nevertheless, for the types of biodata in the present study, an abilities link is tenable.

Fourth, research suggests recruiters use some ability information to make screening decisions. For example, studies asking recruiters what they look for when screening show ability-related criteria such as communication skills, grades, and intelligence (Dickinson, 1955; Gardner et al., 1991; Posner, 1981; Taylor & Sniezek, 1984; Tschirgi, 1973). Other studies examining factors predicting screening decisions show similar ability-related criteria such as grades and academic honors (Campion, 1978; Hakel et al., 1970).

Fifth, as noted, biodata may have been viewed as measuring primarily other attributes because of the predominant influence of research validating biodata questionnaires. Thus, the importance of abilities has not been fully explored.

Therefore, this study examines recruiters' perceptions of the abilities contained in biodata. *Ability* attributes are defined as language, math, and physical. These abilities were derived by reviewing and condensing previous research on abilities into a more parsimonious list that still reflected the range of abilities most often required by jobs. Math and language are two of the primary subtests of most selection test batteries (Schneider & Schmitt, 1986), and they are prominently represented in research on both taxonomies of work-related abilities (Fleishman

& Quaintance, 1984) and educational development scales (U. S. Department of Labor, 1972). Physical ability was also included because it is important to many jobs (Campion, 1983), and it completes the range of abilities in many taxonomies (Fleishman & Quaintance, 1984). Finally, math, language, and physical abilities are similar to data, people, and things dimensions that have been used for classifying thousands of jobs in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT; U. S. Department of Labor, 1977).

The study also examines recruiters' perceptions of information on other attributes contained in biodata for two reasons. First, previous research referenced above indicated that other attributes represented in biodata are substantial. Second, such information may help provide a fuller evaluation of the range of possible attributes that biodata reflect. *Other* attributes are defined in this study as interpersonal, leadership, and motivation. They were viewed as a short, but representative, list of the range of other attributes identified in previous research that has inventoried biodata content (Barge, 1988).

The Present Studies and Hypotheses

Summarizing to this point, fairly little is known about the inferences recruiters make about the attributes underlying biodata during the resume screening process. Prior research, primarily on biodata questionnaires, has predisposed an orientation away from abilities inferences. The thesis of this investigation is that recruiters see biodata as indicators of ability as well as other attributes. Three studies were conducted to test this thesis.

Study 1. Recruiters' perceptions of the content of biodata were examined in Study 1. Recruiters rated a representative sample of items on the degree the items reflected abilities and other attributes. They also rated the usefulness of items for screening applicants. Although the present study used a survey of recruiters like many previous studies (Dickinson, 1955; Hakel & Schuh, 1971; Kohn, 1975; Posner, 1981; Tschirgi, 1973), it differed in two ways. First, recruiters were not asked to judge the simple desirability of candidate characteristics but were instead asked to judge the attributes that the biodata represented. Second, the present study was hypothesis driven as described below.

Hypothesis 1a: Biodata will be judged to represent ability attributes.

This hypothesis is based on the arguments presented above. It is recognized that biodata are likely to also be judged to represent other attributes, but the hypothesis is stated to reflect the thesis of the study. In addition, this hypothesis allows for a descriptive examination of the meaning recruiters impart to the various types of biodata that appear on most resumes.

Hypothesis 1b: Recruiters will distinguish among biodata items in terms of the attributes represented.

As an assessment of discriminant validity, recruiters may differentiate between biodata in that some items will reflect an attribute more than others.

Hypothesis 1c: Recruiters' judgments of attributes represented in biodata will be reliable.

As an assessment of convergent validity, recruiters' judgments are expected to demonstrate interrater reliability. Previous research on reliability has found varying results, ranging from high (Hakel et al., 1970; Levine & Flory, 1975) to low (Taylor & Sniezek, 1984). Differences have also been observed between recruiter and candidate judgments (Posner, 1981), and between what recruiters say is important and what candidates report is covered in the interview (Taylor & Sniezek, 1984). The key to high reliability is a structured judgment situation (Hakel et al., 1970) and adequate information on the jobs (Langdale & Weitz, 1973), as is the case in the present study.

Hypothesis 1d: Recruiters will more reliably judge abilities attributes than other attributes of biodata.

If recruiters screen resumes based on job requirements, and if job requirements tend to focus on abilities (Harvey, 1991), then recruiters may more easily judge (and thus more reliably judge) abilities than other attributes. Also, valid selection based on attributes such as personality necessitates more specific linkages to job requirements than abilities (Tett et al., 1991), which may be difficult for recruiters to make. Furthermore, attributes such as personality may be subject to more idiosyncratic interpretations than abilities (Schneider & Schmitt, 1986).

Hypothesis 1e: The more biodata items are perceived to reflect either abilities or other attributes, the more those items will be judged useful for screening candidates.

Presuming attributes are related to job requirements to some degree, then the more items reflect the attributes, the more useful they will be for screening.

Hypothesis 1f: The attributes judged to be reflected in biodata items will differ depending on the job under consideration.

For example, for a job with high language ability requirements, recruiters will judge more biodata items to reflect language ability, and for a job with high math ability requirements, recruiters will judge more items to reflect math ability. This is based on the idea that recruiters may have implicit theories for candidates for each job, similar to implicit leadership theories people may have (Lord, Binning, Rush, & Thomas, 1978), or that they use configural cue processing when making selection decisions (Hitt & Barr, 1989). That is, recruiters may have different cognitive representations for the attributes required for each job that they use to guide their judgments. In this study, recruiters judged the biodata with respect to jobs in sales or accounting. Thus, some types of biodata (e.g., work experience, grades, etc.) may be judged to reflect more language ability for sales but more math ability for accounting. Previous research has also observed some differences between jobs on the candidate characteristics judged most important (Dickinson, 1955; Gardner et al., 1991; Hakel & Schuh, 1971; Taylor & Sniezek, 1984), but this study goes beyond the literature by showing that the actual interpretation of those biodata in terms of the underlying attributes they represent may differ based on the job.

Study 2. Study 2 complemented Study 1. Study 1 examined perceptions, so Study 2 tested how recruiters actually use bio-

data for making applicant screening decisions. An array of resumes was constructed to represent a range of abilities and other attributes based on information from Study 1. Recruiters' use of this information was assessed by having them judge the suitability of the resumes for jobs in sales and accounting. These jobs were chosen because they differ on key abilities, and because they are jobs for which recruiters in the study commonly seek applicants thus enhancing relevance. Simulations of the resume screening process have also been used in some previous studies (Gardner et al., 1991; Hakel et al., 1970; Levine & Flory, 1975; Taylor, 1988), but none have explored specific hypotheses regarding differences between jobs in how biodata are interpreted.

Hypothesis 2: For a job with high language ability requirements, recruiters will rate as more attractive resumes that are high on language ability biodata items; and for a job with high math ability requirements, recruiters will rate as more attractive resumes high on math ability biodata items.

Study 3. Study 3 complemented Study 2. It provided a protocol analysis on a subsample of recruiters from Study 2 to qualitatively assess their perceptions of biodata. Protocol analysis allows a more direct examination of decision processes than many other research approaches (Svenson, 1979). Respondents described their thoughts while making decisions in Study 2. The oral accounts were then content analyzed. Previous studies have not utilized qualitative methods to explore recruiter perceptions.

Hypothesis 3: Recruiters' spontaneous comments will indicate that judgments made in Study 2 were based on their assessment of abilities and other attribute information contained in biodata items.

Study 1

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to gain qualitative insight into the nature of the recruiting process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 47 recruiters from 23 companies. A standard set of questions was asked in 40-min interviews, and results were content analyzed. Information was gained on the role of the resume in the recruiting process, the assumptions recruiters held about the meaning of biodata in resumes, and the types of biodata used for making screening decisions. This information was used to help determine research methodology (e.g., instrumentation and procedures), as well as to evaluate the conceptual framework and hypotheses. The interviews were also used to solicit recruiters for participation in the research. The interviewees became the contact persons in their companies and solicited other recruiters to participate. As an inducement, all respondents received a report of study results that showed the types of biodata sought by other companies who competed for the same candidates.

Method

Sample. Respondents were 113 human resources recruiters or line managers involved in recruiting, from 17 organizations that hired management masters students at a Midwestern university. Sample members were typically between 31 and 50 years old (67%), had a bachelors (39%) or masters (49%) degree, and were male (64%). For Hypotheses 1a, 1b,

and 1f, statistical power exceeded 80% to detect a medium effect size (e.g., 0.50 *SD* difference between means; $p < .05$, one-tailed; Cohen, 1977). For Hypotheses 1c, 1d, and 1e, power was in excess of 90% to detect small effect sizes (e.g., $r = .10$), because analyses were at the judgment level and had sample sizes larger than 2,000 (as explained below).

Biodata categories. To derive an exhaustive list of items, several hundred items were amassed from previous research on resume screening, factors identified in biodata research, questionnaires used in biodata research, pilot study with recruiters, analysis of several dozen application blanks from a variety of organizations, and analysis of 249 actual resumes of recent candidates in this setting. Items were eliminated if they were duplicates, inappropriate to the selection context, potentially illegal (see Mael, 1991, for discussion), or atypical based on the advice of subject matter experts such as the placement director in this setting. Items were then categorized, and only categories with at least 5% of the items were retained. The result was 22 categories representing a wide range of biodata items typically encountered by recruiters. The items represented the three main sections of many resumes: education (6 categories), work experience (6 categories), and activities/interests/honors (10 categories). These three resume sections reflected the factors identified by Barge (1988) in his comprehensive aggregation of all factors from previous studies. These three sections also correspond closely to the sections of employment applications in major companies (Miller, 1980). Table 1 contains descriptive labels for the 22 categories.

Instrument. Biodata items were written as short statements (e.g., Has had a summer internship; Has supervised the work of others; Possesses job-related undergraduate degree; etc.). The content analysis of actual resumes described above was used to set realistic levels of the biodata items as needed. Examples include "increased profit by 140%," "participated in five college clubs," and "earned 90% of college expenses."

For each biodata item, respondents were asked to judge the amount of each of the attributes. Math was defined as the "capacity to perform mathematical manipulations (addition, multiplication, statistics)." Language was defined as the "capacity to read, write, and speak." Physical was defined as "physical strength and fitness." Interpersonal was defined as the "capacity to interact with and relate to others." Leadership was defined as the "capacity to direct, control, and coordinate others." Motivation was defined as "drive and level of energy." An *other* category, with space to write in the attribute, was provided to allow for attributes not included. The use of each biodata item for screening applicants was also judged. Judgments were made on a 5-point scale: *none* (1), *hardly any* (2), *small amount* (3), *moderate amount* (4), and *considerable amount* (5).

Recruiters were also asked about their experience at recruiting/screening applicants on a 5-point scale, ranging from *rarely or never* (1) to *currently full-time recruiter or have been at one time* (5) and whether they had ever screened applicants for the stimulus jobs (described below) or related jobs. Finally, they were asked about their education, age, and gender.

Each biodata item was judged with respect to each of the jobs. All items were rated for one job before being rated for the other job. Four forms of the questionnaire were created to allow the order of the jobs to be counterbalanced and to allow a reasonable questionnaire length. Each form had 11 biodata items (or half the 22 categories) for both jobs, thus 22 items. Recruiters judged the six attributes and use for each item, for a total of 154 judgments. Items were presented randomly. An effort was made to create parallel forms, with similar numbers of education, work experience, and activities/interests/honors items. Questionnaires were pretested on a sample of 57 masters students.

Stimulus jobs. Stimulus jobs were needed so that respondents would have common referents when making judgments and so that Hypothesis 1f could be tested. Two jobs, sales representative and cost accountant, were chosen for several reasons. First, they were entry-level

professional jobs for which recruiters hire from university settings. Recruiters are familiar with these jobs, either from recruiting experience or from general knowledge of their organizations. Moreover, the recruiters were solicited through a placement office that specializes in applicants for these and similar jobs.

Second, the jobs represented different ability requirements. Accounting requires a high level of math, whereas sales requires a high level of language. These relative differences were confirmed by worker function ratings in the DOT. With smaller numbers reflecting higher amounts, on the data function (representing math requirements) accountant was rated 1 (coordinating) compared with sales representative at 3 (compiling), and on the people function (representing language and interpersonal requirements) sales representative was rated 5 (persuading) compared with accountant at 6 (speaking-signaling; U. S. Department of Labor, 1977).

Finally, the jobs invoked different stereotypes regarding other attributes, such as salespersons higher than accountants on interpersonal. Sales performance may be more predictable than other jobs by measures of personality (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

Job descriptions were provided to recruiters to ensure comparable understanding. Descriptions were developed from actual placement office job announcements and information from the DOT. The descriptions were of similar length (46 vs. 50 words) and level of generality.

Procedure. Recruiters in the pilot study did not complete questionnaires because knowledge of the research goals could have influenced their responses. Likewise, those in Study 1 were not included in Studies 2 and 3. Recruiters from each company were distributed across studies to enhance generalizability. Forms of the questionnaire were randomly assigned to alphabetical lists.

Instructions explained that the purpose of the study was "to find out what factors recruiters use in making selection screening decisions." The questionnaires took about an hour to complete. Care was taken to enhance response rates (e.g., high quality printing, personalized letter, preaddressed and prestamped return envelope, assured confidentiality, and follow-up phone calls on late respondents). Questionnaires were distributed to 139 potential respondents, and 113 (81.3%) were returned from 17 companies representing a broad variety of industries including both manufacturing and service.

Results

The majority of respondents reported being at least moderately active (i.e., 3 rating or higher) in recruiting (70%). About half had screened for accounting (54%) and sales jobs (59%). Differences in recruiting experiences, as well as differences in company, questionnaire form, and demographics, explained less than 1% of the variance in the dependent variables on average, and thus did not represent important control variables.

Sample sizes were based on 113 recruiters, each judging 11 items for each of 2 jobs. Thus, analyses at the recruiter level were based on a sample of about 113, but analyses at the item level were based on samples over 2,000.

Descriptive statistics are in Table 2. No obvious range restriction or ceiling effects are apparent. Among abilities, language and math positively correlated, whereas physical was fairly independent. The other attributes also positively correlated, especially interpersonal and leadership. Abilities positively correlated with the other attributes, except math, which negatively correlated with interpersonal and leadership.

Hypothesis 1a predicted that biodata would be judged to represent ability attributes. Table 1 contains means showing which items reflected each attribute. The *t* tests assess whether the

Table 1
Means and t Tests on the Attributes for Each Biodata Item (Study 1)

Item and job	Attribute						
	Language	Math	Physical	Interpersonal	Leadership	Motivation	Use
Education item							
Job-related degree							
Sales	2.16	1.65	1.18	1.75	1.42	3.08	3.71*
Accounting	1.89	3.31*	1.13	1.47	1.31	3.25	4.09*
Grades in major							
Sales	3.50*	3.47*	1.13	2.13	2.08	4.46*	4.23*
Accounting	3.29	4.12*	1.22	2.04	2.16	4.51*	4.37*
Overall grades							
Sales	3.38*	3.31	1.44	1.89	1.98	4.62*	4.38*
Accounting	3.11	3.93*	1.40	1.96	1.84	4.73*	4.47*
Earned college expenses							
Sales	1.67	1.54	1.50	2.10	2.35	4.69*	3.92*
Accounting	1.61	1.59	1.49	2.15	2.45	4.65*	3.86*
Computer experience							
Sales	2.75	3.31	1.13	1.46	1.52	3.69*	3.40*
Accounting	2.73	3.59*	1.10	1.55	1.53	3.67*	3.73*
Foreign language							
Sales	4.29*	1.20	1.13	2.11	1.36	2.98	3.00
Accounting	4.35*	1.16	1.05	2.00	1.31	2.95	2.75
Work experience item							
Full-time work experience							
Sales	2.98	1.72	1.55	3.35*	1.91	3.59*	4.11*
Accounting	2.11	3.85*	1.25	1.80	1.56	3.22	4.09*
Supervised others							
Sales	2.55	1.53	1.15	3.63*	3.94*	3.51*	3.70*
Accounting	2.57	1.57	1.12	3.59*	3.98*	3.56*	3.78*
Individual job achievement							
Sales	2.24	2.19	1.33	2.81	2.94	4.42*	4.25*
Accounting	2.05	2.60	1.33	2.27	2.89	4.22*	4.25*
Summer internship							
Sales	2.31	1.73	1.19	2.74	2.19	3.85*	3.57*
Accounting	2.22	2.39	1.20	2.65	2.06	3.86*	3.44*
Worked in college							
Sales	1.73	1.28	2.38	2.41	2.11	4.64*	4.19*
Accounting	1.36	1.49	2.31	2.11	1.98	4.75*	4.15*
Dorm advisor							
Sales	2.72	1.36	1.43	3.92*	3.81*	3.81*	3.65*
Accounting	2.65	1.33	1.53	3.84*	3.55*	3.65*	3.31*
Activities/interests/honors item							
Professional society							
Sales	2.27	1.35	1.21	3.27	2.19	3.77*	3.28*
Accounting	1.98	1.98	1.14	3.06	2.14	3.65*	3.14
Elected offices							
Sales	2.69	1.18	1.67	4.35*	4.67*	4.40*	4.42*
Accounting	2.62	1.22	1.51	4.29*	4.58*	4.42*	4.13*
Varsity athletics captain							
Sales	2.09	1.13	4.65*	4.09*	4.67*	4.36*	4.05*
Accounting	1.96	1.07	4.40	4.07*	4.65*	4.44*	3.78*
Recreational sports							
Sales	1.52	1.15	4.08*	3.15	2.38	3.04	2.77
Accounting	1.31	1.17	4.08*	2.94	1.98	3.02	2.44
Community activities							
Sales	1.98	1.07	1.58	3.76*	2.89	3.96*	3.63*
Accounting	1.95	1.07	1.71	3.65*	2.82	4.05*	3.36*
College clubs							
Sales	2.33	1.11	2.00	4.13*	3.00	4.20*	3.93*
Accounting	1.98	1.67	1.87	4.13*	3.02	4.24*	3.76*
Social fraternity							
Sales	2.06	1.27	1.29	3.60*	2.15	2.69	2.73
Accounting	1.90	1.29	1.23	3.44*	2.06	2.59	2.47
Dean's list							
Sales	3.35*	2.94	1.44	1.98	2.04	4.48*	4.19*
Accounting	2.98	3.49*	1.35	2.04	1.85	4.55*	4.29*

Table 1 (continued)

Item and job	Attribute						
	Language	Math	Physical	Interpersonal	Leadership	Motivation	Use
Work awards							
Sales	2.73	1.71	1.23	3.25	3.17	4.44*	4.04*
Accounting	2.55	2.60	1.33	3.16	3.04	4.20*	3.88*
Scholarships							
Sales	2.98	2.58	1.29	2.60	2.83	4.21*	3.77*
Accounting	2.90	3.29	1.35	2.73	2.94	4.24*	3.96*

Note. *n* for each mean = 47 to 55 (total *N* = 113).

* Significantly greater than 3.0, i.e., greater than a “small amount of the attribute”; *p* < .05, one-tailed.

means are greater than 3.0, which was the “small amount of the attribute” anchor on the scale. The hypothesis was supported in that many items were judged to represent abilities. Relationships appeared quite logical. Language was indicated by grades, foreign language, and Dean’s list. Math was indicated by job-related degree, grades, computer experience, full-time work experience, and Dean’s list. Physical was indicated by varsity athletics and recreational sports.

Even more items were judged to represent other attributes. Interpersonal and leadership were indicated by supervising others, dorm advisor, elected offices, and varsity athletics captain. Interpersonal was also indicated by full-time work experience, community activities, college clubs, and social fraternity. Motivation was indicated by all but 4 of the 22 items. Exceptions were job-related degree, foreign language, recreational sports, and social fraternity. Overall, abilities were significantly indicated in 11% of the cases in Table 1, and other attributes were indicated in 44% of the cases.

All but 3 of the 22 items were judged high on the use rating. The exceptions were foreign language, recreational sports, and social fraternity.

Hypothesis 1b predicted that recruiters would distinguish among biodata items in terms of the attributes represented. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) assessed the effects of items, jobs, and their interactions on each attribute (Table 3). Main effects for items test this hypothesis. Results show significant effects for items for each attribute, thus supporting the hypothesis. Effect sizes were large, with an average omega-squared of .37.

Hypothesis 1c predicted that recruiters’ judgments of attri-

butes represented in biodata would be reliable. Reliability coefficients (intraclass correlations) showing the average interrater reliability between individual recruiters were large for all attributes, thus supporting the hypothesis: .62 for language, .72 for math, .70 for physical, .68 for interpersonal, .62 for leadership, and .76 for motivation. The use rating was also reliable (.72).

Hypothesis 1d predicted that recruiters would more reliably judge abilities than other attributes of biodata. The average coefficient was .68 for abilities and .69 for other attributes, *z*(130) = -0.14, *ns*, thus not supporting the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1e predicted that the more biodata items are perceived to reflect either abilities or other attributes, the more those items would be judged useful for screening candidates. The positive correlations between the use rating and the attributes in Table 2 support the hypothesis. Recruiters judged items as more useful to the extent they were perceived to reflect any of the attributes. The highest correlation was with motivation. The lowest correlation was with physical, which may reflect the lack of physical requirements for the stimulus jobs. Although supporting the hypothesis, these correlations should be interpreted cautiously because they share method variance (Williams & Brown, 1994).

Hypothesis 1f predicted that the attributes judged to be reflected in biodata items would differ depending on the job under consideration. The significant interactions in Table 3 supported this hypothesis for math and interpersonal. Follow-up *t* tests between jobs (not shown) indicated that more math was judged to be indicated by items such as job-related degree, grades, full-time work experience, and Dean’s list when considering accounting as opposed to sales. Conversely, more interpersonal

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among the Attributes (Study 1)

Attribute	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Language	2.47	1.43	—					
2. Math	2.02	1.40	.37	—				
3. Physical	1.67	1.23	.05	-.09	—			
4. Interpersonal	2.85	1.37	.17	-.18	.33	—		
5. Leadership	2.58	1.46	.18	-.05	.36	.66	—	
6. Motivation	3.95	1.10	.21	.22	.16	.23	.31	—
7. Use	3.75	1.01	.28	.34	.07	.18	.28	.56

Note. *n* = 2,274 judgments made by 113 recruiters. All correlations significant at *p* < .05, two-tailed.

Table 3
Analyses of Variance on the Attributes (Study 1)

Attribute and Source	df	MS	F	ω^2
Language				
Item	21	48.57	30.35*	.213
Job	1	21.88	13.67*	.004
Item \times Job	21	1.02	0.64	.000
Math				
Item	21	86.84	84.07*	.409
Job	1	109.47	105.98*	.025
Item \times Job	21	8.47	8.20*	.035
Physical				
Item	21	85.69	117.25*	.519
Job	1	0.78	1.07	.000
Item \times Job	21	0.28	0.39	.000
Interpersonal				
Item	21	78.44	69.45*	.382
Job	1	15.79	13.98*	.003
Item \times Job	21	3.22	2.85*	.010
Leadership				
Item	21	98.04	79.69*	.422
Job	1	4.20	3.42	.001
Item \times Job	21	0.43	0.35	.000
Motivation				
Item	21	38.45	44.14*	.286
Job	1	0.24	0.28	.000
Item \times Job	21	0.45	0.51	.000
Use				
Item	21	28.55	37.29*	.251
Job	1	2.50	3.27	.001
Item \times Job	21	1.13	1.48	.003

Note. $n = 2,274$ judgments made by 113 recruiters.
* $p < .05$.

was judged to be indicated by items such as full-time work experience when considering sales as opposed to accounting. Although the follow-up t tests between jobs for language were not significant, the significant job main effect in Table 3 suggested that slightly more language was indicated for sales as opposed to accounting when aggregating across items. Omega-squared values in Table 3 indicated that effect sizes for this hypothesis were not large.

In summary, most hypotheses were supported. Recruiters rated biodata as reflecting both ability and other attributes. They distinguished between items in terms of attributes represented. Attributes of biodata were judged reliably, and both ability and other attributes were judged with equal reliability. The amount of each attribute contained in biodata was correlated with the perceived usefulness of the biodata for screening. Finally, the attributes judged to be reflected in biodata differed depending on the job, with more language and interpersonal attributes perceived when considering sales jobs and more math perceived when considering accounting jobs.

Study 2

Study 2 complemented Study 1. Study 1 looked at perceptions, so Study 2 examined how recruiters used biodata to make decisions.

Method

Sample. A new sample of recruiters was drawn, different from those in Study 1. They consisted of 184 recruiters from 14 companies. They were usually between 31 and 50 years old (69%), had a Bachelors (46%) or Masters (47%) degree, and were male (71%). Statistical power was above 90% to detect small effect sizes (e.g., 0.10 SD differences between means; $p < .05$; Cohen, 1977), because analyses were at the judgment level and thus were on sample sizes near 3,000.

Design and instrumentation. Study 2 was a 2 (sales versus accounting) \times 2 (high versus low language) \times 2 (high versus low math) \times 2 (high versus low interpersonal) within-subjects design. Language and math were chosen because they were important abilities for sales and accounting, respectively. Interpersonal was included as an other attribute expected to be more important for sales than for accounting based on the results of Study 1.

Eight resumes were created for each job using the biodata items evaluated in Study 1. Items were selected to build a resume on each combination of levels of language, math, and interpersonal. Efforts were made to control irrelevant factors and yet enhance realism. For example, resumes were prepared in the exact format used by all candidates in the placement office. Each resume contained 8 to 10 items and was quality printed. They were labeled only with an identification letter to avoid extraneous sources of bias (e.g., sex, race, or age; cf. Dipboye, Arvey, & Terpstra, 1977). The 1-page resumes varied in length by less than an inch. Details such as summer internships, company names, job titles and duties, and so on were chosen from actual resumes. The resume screening simulation was very similar to actual recruiter practices based on input gained from pilot study interviews conducted prior to Study 1.

A complication in building resumes was that each biodata item contained information on many attributes (Table 1). When an item was included intending to influence one attribute, it also influenced others. For example, when grades were included to increase language, it also increased math. This made it hard to create some conditions. A computer program was written to calculate the level of attributes as items were included in a resume. Thus, the average level of each attribute could be calculated for any combination of biodata items that might constitute a resume. In this way, the combination of items could be manipulated to approximate each cell in the experiment.

Job descriptions used in Study 1 were provided to ensure a common referent for the two jobs. Recruiters assessed resumes on three scales suggested in the pilot study: "Interest in interviewing each candidate" (on a 4-point scale ranging from *definitely interview, near top of list to do not interview*); "Overall suitability of each candidate for the job" (on a 4-point scale ranging from *highly qualified to not qualified*); and "Rank order regarding their suitability for the job." Due to the high intercorrelations among the scales ($r_s = .75$ to $.82$), they were standardized and combined into an attractiveness composite ($M = 0.00$, $SD = 0.94$, internal consistency = $.90$), with larger values indicating greater attractiveness. Measures of recruiting experience and demographics described in Study 1 were also collected. Tests with graduate students and placement personnel confirmed manipulations and realism.

In summary, the fidelity of the simulation was considered high in key aspects. First, physical aspects were very similar to the activities performed by recruiters. Appearance of the resumes, content of the biodata, and manual sorting and judging of resumes were all identical to the process recruiters use for this or many other college placement centers. Second, mental aspects of examining a set of resumes with respect to a given type of job and determining which candidates to interview were identical to those that recruiters go through prior to visiting campus. The amount, detail, and complexity of the information, as well as the nature of the decision process itself, were the same as the actual screening process being simulated. Third, emotional aspects were similar in that resume screening is not a highly emotional event. In actual situations, recruiters are only deciding whom to interview during the initial

screening, so they are not making final hiring decisions. Also, there is usually a site visit with more interviews before an offer is made. The cost of an error in the screening process, and consequent emotional implications, are not as high as in a final hiring decision.

Procedure. Resume order and order of the stimulus jobs were randomized. Data collection was similar to Study 1. Recruiters completed the task within an hour. The 184 questionnaires represented an 86.4% response rate.

Results

Most respondents reported being at least moderately active in recruiting (65%). Less than half had screened for accounting (41%) or sales applicants (36%). Differences in recruiting experience, company, order of presentation, and demographics explained less than 1% of the variance in the dependent variables on average, and thus were not considered important control variables. Because analyses were at the judgment level, the 184 recruiters judging 16 resumes each created sample sizes near 3,000. The three items in the attractiveness composite showed no range restriction or ceiling effects.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that for a job with high language requirements, recruiters would rate as more attractive resumes high on language biodata items and that for a job with high math requirements, recruiters would rate as more attractive resumes high on math items. The ANOVA testing for effects of attributes, jobs, and interactions on attractiveness was significant, $F(10, 2912) = 226.47, p < .05$. Hypothesis 2 was supported by significant interactions in expected directions between job and language, $F(1, 2912) = 125.83, p < .05, \omega^2 = .02$, and between job and math, $F(1, 2912) = 679.64, p < .05, \omega^2 = .13$. Figure 1 shows that high language was very attractive for sales and low language was quite unattractive for sales. There was little effect of language on attractiveness for accounting. High math was very attractive for accounting, and low math was very unattractive for accounting, with little effect of math on attractiveness for sales.

The interaction between interpersonal and job was also significant, $F(1, 2912) = 110.37, p < .05, \omega^2 = 2\%$. Figure 1 shows that high interpersonal was more attractive than low interpersonal for accounting, but low interpersonal was slightly more attractive for sales. The latter effect was unexpected; it reflects a very small effect (0.15 *M* difference) and may be spurious.

Because resume conditions were only approximated, a supplemental analysis was conducted using regression with actual values of language, math, and interpersonal as predictors. The interactions with job were all significant and in the same directions as the ANOVAs. Plots using median splits of the data were mathematically equivalent to those in Figure 1.

Study 3

Study 3 was a manipulation check on Study 2 and a qualitative assessment of recruiters' interpretations of biodata. Protocol analyses were conducted via telephone interviews with a subsample while they were completing Study 2. Protocol analysis allows an investigation of decision making. Self-reported explanations of decision-making processes were collected by having recruiters verbalize their thoughts as they made decisions in Study 2. Simultaneous verbal protocol (Svenson, 1979), or

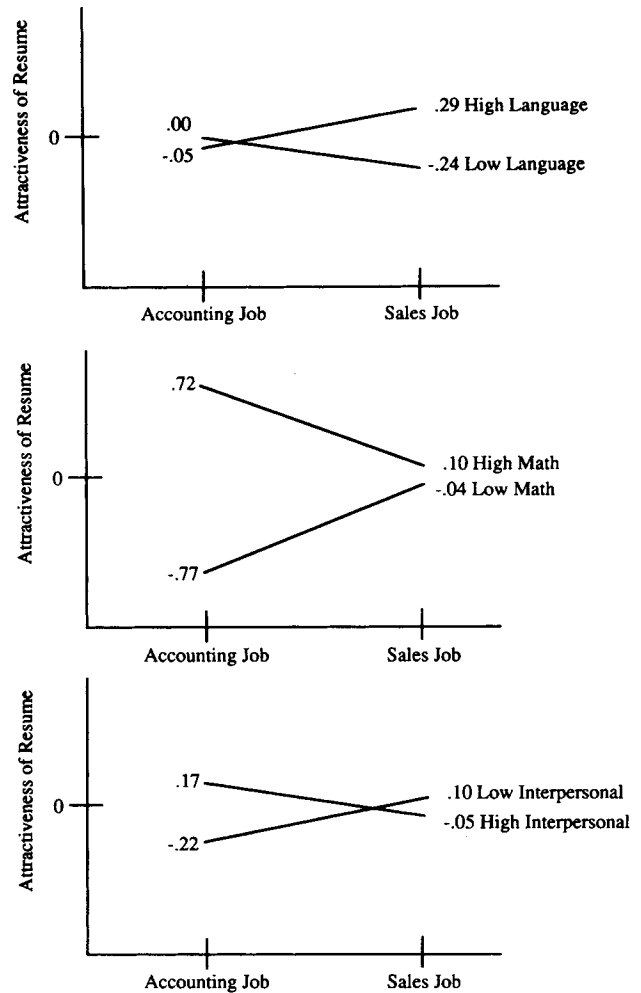


Figure 1. Plots of means showing interactions in Study 2: Differential attractiveness of resume attributes based on type of job.

gathering information while respondents are completing a task, yields a deeper understanding of their judgments.

Method

Sample. Study 3 participants were selected to represent a range of Study 2 participants and included 26 recruiters from 12 companies.

Procedure. Interviews were conducted by the first author, but precautions were taken to avoid demand effects or experimenter bias. Care was taken not to prompt respondents regarding study hypotheses or desired comments. Respondents were told there were no correct answers and they should "Think aloud as you go through the process of evaluating resumes. Describe each conclusion you make about a candidate and the resume information you're using to support your judgment." Recruiters then completed the simulation uninterrupted. Standard prompts generated a priori were used if recruiters failed to speak as they completed the simulation (e.g., "What are you thinking right now? What does that information mean to you?"). No other comments were made.

At the end, recruiters completed a manipulation check by judging the language, math, and interpersonal attributes required by each job on

Table 4
*Percentages of Comments Classified Into the
 Attributes (Study 3)*

Attribute	Total	Cost accountant	Sales representative	<i>z</i>
Language	.06	.05	.08	-1.02
Math	.12	.22	.03	15.57*
Physical	.00	.00	.00	0.00
Interpersonal	.22	.10	.33	-4.68*
Leadership	.15	.13	.15	-0.49
Motivation	.12	.10	.13	-0.79
Well-roundedness	.20	.25	.15	2.12*
Intelligence	.12	.13	.11	0.52
Other	.01	.01	.02	-0.68

Note. $n = 26$ recruiters making 286 comments.
 * $p < .05$, one-tailed.

the 5-point scale ranging from *none* to *considerable amount* described above. Recruiters were also probed on study realism and hypothesis guessing, as well as on any other comments they had on screening resumes. Interviews averaged 47 min ($SD = 20$). All nonrepetitive comments were recorded in writing.

Results

The manipulation check confirmed that the sales job was perceived as requiring higher levels of language ($M = 4.58$ versus 3.73, $t = 4.67$), lower levels of math ($M = 3.31$ versus 4.69, $t = -5.87$), and higher levels of interpersonal ($M = 4.73$ versus 3.62, $t = 4.98$) attributes than the accounting job ($df = 25$, $p < .05$). Probing revealed no evidence of hypothesis guessing, and recruiters felt the simulation was very realistic.

Comments were divided into 286 phrases and analyzed via Q sort. They were sorted into the six attributes and an other category. Comments in the latter were examined for commonality, and two categories emerged: well-roundedness and intelligence. Less than 5% of all comments then remained in the other category. To examine reliability, a naive coder resorted half the comments. Cohen's (1960) kappa, which shows the proportion of agreement above chance, was 96% for sales and 92% for accounting.

Hypothesis 3 predicted recruiters' spontaneous comments would indicate that judgments made in Study 2 were based on their assessment of abilities and other attribute information contained in biodata items. Table 4 shows the percentages of comments in each category. Math, language, and intelligence contained many comments, thus supporting the hypothesis for abilities. The hypothesis was also supported for all three other attributes and for well-roundedness. Percentages are higher for other attributes than for abilities (average = 17.2% versus 7.5%).

The proportion of math comments was significantly higher for accounting, and interpersonal was higher for sales, thus providing supplemental support for Hypotheses 1f and 2. Well-roundedness was also higher for accounting, because of concern about hiring candidates that were too quantitative according to one recruiter.

Discussion

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose was to examine recruiters' phenomenological perceptions of attributes that biodata reflect and their use of biodata for making applicant screening decisions. The thesis was that biodata in resumes are interpreted by recruiters as indicating ability as well as other attributes. Three field studies were reported, with complementary methodologies and a large sample of recruiters from a wide range of companies.

All three studies suggested biodata were interpreted as containing ability and other attribute information. Study 1 survey results showed biodata were judged to reflect both types of attributes, and recruiters distinguished among items in terms of the attributes; Study 2 experimental results showed resumes were more attractive to the degree they contained biodata reflecting attribute requirements of the jobs; and Study 3 protocol analysis results showed that recruiters actually considered these attributes with substantial frequency based on their spontaneous comments while evaluating resumes, and the specific attributes considered were consistent with the jobs. The results supported the thesis that ability attributes would be perceived by recruiters.

Studies 1 and 3 suggested biodata may reflect much more information on other attributes than on abilities attributes. This was especially true for motivation. Although this depends on the particular biodata items, the trend was very clear among the representative collection examined here. Recruiters may interpret biodata as containing substantial abilities information, consistent with the thesis of this study, but they interpret biodata as containing more information on other attributes.

These results were not unexpected, on the basis of the several types of previous literature suggesting a nonability orientation of biodata. This is also expected on the basis of the enduring belief that performance is a function of both ability and (other attributes like) motivation. To the degree biodata are a reflection of past performance, they reflect both components.

Results suggested that biodata may be reliably judged. Interrater reliabilities between individual recruiters ranged from .62 to .76. These levels are high compared with other components of the recruiting process, such as traditional unstructured interviews (cf. Campion, Pursell, & Brown, 1988). Perhaps organizations have achieved valid selection in the past without formalized procedures (e.g., tests), and despite unstructured interviews, because screening on biodata was based on reliable judgments of job-related attributes.

It was surprising that other attributes were so reliably judged, however. They were as reliable as abilities, suggesting resume screening may be a good way to assess other attributes. If biodata are somewhat resistant to faking (e.g., Ash et al., 1989; Becker & Colquitt, 1992), they may offer better measures of these other attributes than are personality and interest tests.

It was of interest that biodata were interpreted differently for different jobs. For example, job-related degree, grades, work experience, and Dean's list reflected more math when considering accounting as opposed to sales jobs. Such differences may reflect implicit theories recruiters have, or configural cues they use, for required characteristics of candidates for each job that guide their interpretation of the biodata.

Finally, the data gave a description of how recruiters interpreted biodata items. Logically, language and math abilities were seen mainly in education-related items, and physical ability was seen in sports-related items. Leadership and interpersonal attributes were seen in items that reflected having held positions of any authority (e.g., supervised others, dorm advisor, elected offices, etc.). Interpersonal was also seen in items reflecting activities of a social nature (e.g., clubs, fraternity, etc.). Nearly all items were thought to tell something about a candidate's motivation, and nearly all items were somewhat useful for screening. Exceptions were items of mainly a recreational nature (e.g., sports and fraternity) and foreign language. It might be speculated that the latter finding was due to the relatively large number of foreign students at this university. In those cases, ability to speak a foreign language is not a reflection of motivation and thus is less useful.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations were anticipated, and counteracting efforts were made. First, evaluating individual biodata items in Study 1 was unnatural and may have created reactivity. Recruiters might have judged items more carefully or differently than normal. Study 2 mitigated reactivity somewhat by using a naturalistic resume screening simulation. Recruiters also assessed many items concurrently in Study 2, similar to actual use of such biodata.

Second, although efforts were made to enhance realism in Studies 1 and 2, recruiters knew they were in a study and may have engaged in hypothesis guessing. Hypothesis guessing was specifically probed in the qualitative analysis of Study 3. Results indicated that recruiters were unaware of the hypotheses, and the study seemed quite real.

Finally, a manipulation check was not conducted in Study 2, to avoid the risk of sensitizing recruiters to study hypotheses. Instead, Study 3 provided the check. The manipulation was also supported by the results of Study 2.

Other limitations of the study can only be addressed by future research. First, the counterintuitive finding for interpersonal and the relatively small effect size for language in Study 2 may be due to the smaller than desired differences between the stimulus jobs on those requirements as evidenced by the DOT ratings. Future research should use jobs with larger differences in requirements. Second, the study suggests recruiters may believe biodata represent abilities and other attributes, but it sheds little direct light on the meaning of empirically validated biodata questionnaires. Future research should assess the meaning of these other forms of biodata. Third, future research on screening resumes and applications should examine relationships between recruiter perceptions and more objective measures of abilities and other attributes (e.g., cognitive ability and personality tests). Fourth, there may be other meanings that recruiters gain from biodata that were not captured in this study (e.g., social identity; Mael, 1991). Perhaps recruiters also interpret combinations of items in terms of profiles.

Other suggestions for future research include examining the validity of recruiter resume judgments for predicting job performance. Future research could examine implicit theories and cues recruiters use for making judgments, as well as correspond-

ing individual differences. Such research may explain the process underlying recruiter judgments and thus have implications for enhancing recruiter effectiveness. Finally, research on biodata screening by recruiters may bear on whether organizations select homogeneous groups of people that differ from those selected by other organizations (Schneider, 1987). Differences across companies explained less than 1% of variance in this study, but future research could provide a more direct test.

Screening resumes and applications is probably a part of all hiring decisions. Yet, with the exception of mostly unpublished research on training and experience ratings (summarized by Ash et al., 1989; and McDaniel et al., 1988), little research has been conducted on this process. This study suggests that resume screening may be an important but neglected topic.

Practical Implications

The study has potential practical implications for both organizations and job seekers. Organizations should probably attend to whether their recruiters share similar (and accurate) implicit theories about the requirements of jobs. Training or some other means of clarifying this information (e.g., Delphi or discussions) might be needed. Training could also address whether different biodata items may reflect the same attributes, which may be important in tight labor markets or when recruiting candidates from underrepresented groups. Reliability of recruiter judgments should be assessed, and the process could be structured if reliability is low. Organizations might require all relevant biodata be divulged by using structured questionnaires, rather than resumes that selectively report biodata, to enhance the completeness of evaluation.

Job seekers cannot rewrite their life histories, but to the extent possible, they can build resumes that better match the likely implicit theories recruiters have for jobs. In some cases, such information may be available through widely held stereotypes (e.g., math ability for accountants). In other cases, information on requirements might be less well known, but could be gained from the organization before submitting a resume. Job seekers should realize that different biodata items can convey information on the same attributes, thus attractive resumes can possibly be constructed even if they lack the typical prior experiences.

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