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Effects of commitment to preinterview impressions in employment interviews

Guadagno, Norman Scott, M.A.

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EFFECTS OF COMMITMENT TO PREINTERVIEW IMPRESSIONS
IN EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWS

by

NORMAN SCOTT GUADAGNO

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Robert L. Dipboye, Professor of Psychology, Director

William C. Howell, Professor of Psychology

Craig A. Anderson, Associate Professor of Psychology

Houston, Texas
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IN EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWS

by

Norman Scott Guadagno

Abstract

The interview is one of the most widely used instruments of selection available, yet it has been shown to have both poor reliability and validity. Numerous models of the interview process have attempted to both explain and improve these reliabilities and validities. One model, the Process Model (Dipboye, 1982; 1985), appears to hold promise as such a tool. Focusing on one prediction of the Process Model, the present project investigated the hypotheses that interviewer commitment to preinterview information will effect the impressions formed about candidates and the memory for information from the interview. Commitment was manipulated at three levels by varying the explicitness of inferences made about candidates during the preinterview phase. Subjects viewed interviews with three candidates and then completed a series of postinterview impression and memory measures. Commitment was found to effect postinterview impressions, but failed to show any effect on postinterview recognition and recall. Implications for the Process Model and the interview are discussed.
Acknowledgements

I can only try to express my gratitude to everyone that made this thesis possible. Bob Dipboye made sure that I got everything right in this project and in this Thesis, no matter how many times I had to do it. For that I am grateful, and I know that this research is much better because of it. Likewise my appreciation goes to my other committee members, Bill Howell and Craig Anderson, for their advice as needed. Special thanks must go to Rosalind Kermode—who was always eager, cheerful, and insightful—and without whom I could not have completed this project on time. My final thanks must go to my wife, Grace, who always gives me the support I need, and keeps pointing to the light at the end of the tunnel.
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EFFECTS OF COMMITMENT TO PREINTERVIEW IMPRESSIONS
IN EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWS

The interview is one of the most widely used, but least understood, methods of selection/recruitment in organizational settings. Even in the face of instruments shown to have greater reliability and validity (e.g., paper and pencil tests) the interview continues to enjoy widespread acceptance and use among personnel managers and related professionals. In light of this near universal acceptance of the interview as a primary selection/recruitment tool, researchers have begun to explore new methods of explaining, and ultimately improving, the process.

One current model that holds some promise as such an explanatory tool is Dipboye's Process Model of the interview (Dipboye 1982; 1985). This model views the interview in terms of three interconnected phases: the preinterview, the interview itself, and the postinterview. The central concern of the model is the flow of information and events from one phase to the next, and the impact of such on the behavior of both the interviewer and interviewee. The analysis of the whole process allows the model to make predictions about the outcomes of the interview at a very early stage. This model avoids explaining the interview as a singular event, devoid of any precursors and inherent biases on the part of interviewers and interviewees.

Several studies (Dipboye, Fontenelle, & Garner, 1984; Dipboye, Stramler, & Fontenelle, 1984; Macan & Dipboye, 1988; Philips & Dipboye, 1987) have supported various components of Dipboye's model and its propositions, although some predictions
have not been fully supported (Macan & Dipboye, 1988). The present project aims to provide both further support for the model, and greater understanding of interviewer behavior, by testing one specific proposition of the Process Model as described below.

The Interview

In their 1982 review of the employment interview, Arvey and Campion suggested that “...one direction industrial psychologists should move toward is that of...applied guidelines for interviewers and interviewees” (p. 317). Their review, however, described research that generally approaches the interview in a static and piece-meal fashion; research that does not easily lend itself to broad guidelines for the behaviors and decision making processes of the interview participants. Thus, it may be a more reasonable goal for researchers to focus their attention on improved understanding of the complex interrelationships that exist between interviewers and interviewees before attempting to develop general guidelines for their behavior.

One such attempt has been made by Dipboye (1982; 1985) through the use of a Process Model of the interview. The process described in the model is the flow of information, impressions, cognitions, and behaviors from the time before the actual interview (preinterview) through the interview itself, and finally to the time after the interview (postinterview). Figure 1 outlines the model more explicitly.

Focusing on the preinterview phase, the model hypothesizes that interviewers form impressions about prospective interviewees based on the information they commonly receive before the interview, such as application forms (biodata), academic records, and recommendations. Likewise, interviewers also hold certain implicit theories about
individuals who apply for certain jobs (Jackson, Peacock, & Holden, 1982). For example, an interviewer might believe that applicants for the job of Salesperson would be both sociable and persistent, while applicants for the job of librarian might be intellectually curious and orderly. These implicit theories add to the impressions the interviewers form before they ever meet the candidates face to face.
A PROCESS MODEL OF THE SELECTION/RECRUITMENT INTERVIEW

PREINTERVIEW PHASE

Interviewer's Implicit Theories

Information on the Interviewee

Interviewer's Preinterview Evaluation of the Interviewee's Qualifications

INTERVIEW PHASE

Interviewer's Conduct of the Interview

Interviewee's Perception of the Interviewer's Opinion of his or her Qualifications

Interviewee's Performance in the interview

Interviewer's Processing of Information from the Interview (recognition, recall, causal attributions)

POSTINTERVIEW PHASE

Interviewer's Final Decisions on the Interviewee

Interviewer's Postinterview Evaluation of the Interviewee's Qualifications

+ denotes a positive causal relationship between two variables

(from Dipboye, 1985)
Dipboye's model hypothesizes that these preinterview impressions will affect the conduct of the interview and the judgments of the interviewer, as well as the the behavior of the interviewee.

Previous studies have focused on specific aspects of the model. Dipboye, Stramler, and Fontenelle (1984) examined the effects of preinterview information on recall of information from the interview. The results of those studies indicated that candidates with poor preinterview qualifications were seen as performing poorer overall in the interview. Additionally, the information recalled from the interview was less favorable for poorly qualified candidates. Dipboye et al. (1984) concluded that although preinterview impressions were biasing recall of information from the interview, the hypotheses formed by the interviewers and the organization of the information recalled were still unknown. Subjects in the Dipboye et al. studies did not make any judgements about the candidates before seeing them in interviews. Likewise, subjects were dealing with only one or two candidates at a time, so very few inter-candidate comparisons were being made.

Macan and Dipboye (1988) addressed some of the unresolved issues in the Dipboye et al. (1984) studies. Specifically, the question of whether the effects found by Dipboye et al. were due to halo bias or the use of a specific schema by the subjects was investigated. Additionally, candidates whose qualifications spanned the levels from low to high were used instead of two candidates from opposite ends of the qualification spectrum. Macan and Dipboye found that candidates that were highly qualified on paper were predicted to exhibit more characteristics that were congruent with the job in question (Salesperson), as well as being perceived as performing better in the interview itself. Furthermore, subjects
were better able to recognize statements made by the highly qualified candidate (on paper) than by the moderately and low qualified candidates (on paper).

These studies (Dipboye et al., 1984; Macan & Dipboye, 1988) supported several of the predictions of the Process Model. They were, however, focused on the effects of preinterview information presented without the subject directly acting on it. In other words, the subjects in these studies were passive recipients of the preinterview information, rather than active participants in the process. The Process Model revolves around the idea that interviewers are not passive, and that information is acted upon in some fashion.

The concerns of the present study are the active judgements of the interviewer. More specifically, the model makes two explicit propositions concerning the effects of preinterview impressions:

**Proposition 1:** The more favorably that interviewers evaluate an applicant's qualifications before the interview, the more favorably they tend to evaluate the applicant's qualifications after the interview.

**Proposition 1a:** The more favorably that interviewers evaluate an applicant's qualifications before the interview the more favorably they tend to evaluate the applicant's performance in presenting his or her job qualifications during the interviews. (p. 7, Dipboye, 1985)
These effects, however, may be moderated by other factors, such as the confidence of the interviewers in their impressions, the confidence of the interviewees, the structure of the interview, and the commitment of the interviewers to their preinterview impressions. The focus of the present study is on the last of these, commitment. Dipboye (1985) states that "...the effects of preinterview impressions...will increase in strength as the commitment of interviewers to these impressions increases" (p. 13). In other words, the greater the commitment of an interviewer to preinterview impressions, the greater the likelihood that those impressions will bias later phases of the interview process. Before testing this hypothesis, however, the meaning of the term commitment needs to be clarified.

**Commitment**

Kiesler (1971) suggested that commitment to a behavior implies that the cognitions representing that behavior are more resistant to change than cognitions underlying behaviors to which a commitment has not been made. Furthermore, Staw (1976; 1981) and Kiesler (1971; Kiesler and Sakumura, 1966) proposed that individuals who commit to an act in an explicit and seemingly voluntary way proceed to justify that decision through subsequent behaviors. One explanation for this phenomenon has been dissonance theory (Kiesler, 1971; Staw, 1981)—i.e., to change behavior away from those cognitions already committed to would imply an error in judgment and create dissonance between thought and action, an unpleasant state that most individuals wish to change (e.g., Festinger, 1957; Brehm & Cohen, 1962). Under this assumption we would predict that post-commitment behaviors would be in line with the commitments made in order to reduce dissonance.
The phenomenon of cognitions that are resistant to change has also been investigated in the social psychology literature under the label of perseverance (e.g., Anderson, 1981; Anderson, Lepper, & Ross, 1980; Anderson, New, & Speer, 1985; Ross & Anderson, 1982; Ross & Lepper, 1980). Perseverance has been discussed as clinging to beliefs without prior commitment to those beliefs being made (Anderson et al., 1985). Research (Anderson et al. 1980) has also found that these beliefs are also adhered to in the presence of discrediting information. The perseverance phenomenon has been explained using the availability heuristic (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973)--that is, individuals construct explanations for an event based on the availability of causal arguments (Anderson et al., 1985; Anderson et al., 1985). The perseverance effect may come into play in certain interviewing situations, but can not serve as an explanation for effects of preinterview impressions on postinterview information when some commitment has been made to that information.

Much of the research in the organizational behavior literature on commitment has focused on the phenomenon known as escalating commitment (Staw, 1976; 1981; see also Whyte, 1986). Escalating commitment occurs when individuals commit some amount of their resources to an endeavor and then become aware that they have made an error. Instead of changing their behavior away from the evidently incorrect course of action, these individuals will continue to commit resources to that course. One widely accepted explanation for this is that because individuals face extreme cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) they must maintain the illusion that they have not made an error at all. Likewise, people will also cognitively distort the negative consequences of their actions in
order to make them appear more favorable. Staw (1981) provides several examples of this phenomenon from various domains. He also presents a socio-motivational process model of commitment that delineates the various inputs into commitment to a certain course of action.

The definition of commitment provided by Kiesler (1971) makes the tacit assumption that prior to committing to some set of behaviors, and hence the cognitions underlying them, some information must be encoded by the individual. In other words, committing to one course of action over another demands that some inferences about those actions, their precedents, and their outcomes must be made by the individual making that commitment. Given the nature of decisions made in the interview process, the focus of commitment must shift to these inferences and the impressions they support.

Research in impression organization has focused on the memory for inferences about those impressions. Traditionally, this research has shown that inferences prior to the presentation of stimulus material affect the interpretation of those inferences (Bartlett, 1932; Hastie & Kumar, 1979). It has also been shown that making inferences concurrently with the presentation of stimulus material may also influence later recall and impressions (Lingle, Geva, Ostrom, Leippe, & Baumgardner, 1979; Ostrom, Lingle, Pryor, & Geva, 1980). The interview situation, however, involves making inferences before, during, and after the presentation of the relevant information. A paradigm utilizing inferences made after stimulus presentation was used by Carlson (1980), who conducted a set of experiments that showed subjects used their recalled inferences about traits and events as
sources of information in decision making after the stimulus material was presented and withdrawn.

Carlston found that those subjects who made positive judgments between the original stimuli and final impressions recalled more positive material and provided more positive descriptions of all episodes actually recalled than those subjects who had made negative judgments when given a memory test. These subjects also had more positive impressions of the original stimulus material than those who made negative judgments. This evidence leads us to believe that interviewers who make inferences about the preinterview information of a candidate before the actual interview along a positive/negative continuum will be, in effect, satisfying the operational definition of commitment suggested above. These inferences would be more resistant to change by virtue of their being more likely to be recalled.

To operationalize commitment within the context of an interview research paradigm requires going beyond simple dissonance explanations and incorporating memory for inferences as well. This is because of the difficulties involved in getting subjects to commit to decisions in which they have no real personal investment, such as we may expect in interview simulations. In other words, a seemingly explicit commitment by a subject placing him- or herself in the role of an interviewer may not be a true cognitive commitment (a commitment the subject believes internally as well as exhibits externally). Without true cognitive commitment, the type that would be expected in the actual interview situation, any manipulation used may fail to have the effect predicted. Thus, a more useful method of testing the hypothesized relationship between strength of commitment and the effects of
preinterview impressions is to view commitment as any explicit inference about interviewee traits made after that information has been given to the interviewer, but before the actual interview, with the associated strength of that commitment a function of the accountability of the subject.

Tetlock and his associates (e.g., Tetlock, 1983a; 1983b; 1985; Tetlock & Kim, 1987) define accountability as “...social pressures to justify one's views to others...” (p.700). Tetlock has found that making subjects accountable for their decisions creates changes in the cognitive impressions they form as a result of those decisions, as well as their memory for the object of the decision. More specifically, accountability creates greater vigilance in subjects, and more thorough and self-critical information processing (Tetlock & Kim, 1987). By considering inferences about candidates, along with associated accountability we may make stronger predictions about subjects' behaviors and cognitions. This is done, of course, under the assumption that accountability serves to strengthen the commitment effect without changing the basic predictions surrounding it.

Commitment can now be created at varying levels of intensity for the purposes of this project. The strongest level of commitment would involve both making an explicit inference about a job applicant as well as being held accountable for that inference by virtue of including a written justification for it. This is intensified even more when the subjects believe they may have to justify their decisions again at a later time. Note, also, that having to justify a judgment has been shown to provide greater consistency in making those judgments (Hagafors & Brehmer, 1983). Caldwell and O'Reilly (1982) provided evidence that subjects may attempt to justify a failure by changing the information they
provide to others concerning that event. Likewise, Rozelle and Baxter (1981) found that subjects held accountable for their descriptions of another individual were more likely to accurately describe characteristics of that target instead of the perceptually biased descriptions provided by those not held accountable (with the bias reflecting the “perceiver”). Bazerman, Beekun, and Schoorman (1982) found that prior commitment to a ratee in a performance appraisal situation, as defined by previous promotion of the ratee, led to more positive ratings than if prior commitment had not been made.

The commitment manipulation in the present project may be weakened somewhat by omitting the justification and just having subjects make explicit inferences about stimulus material. Similarly, commitment may be eliminated to a large degree by presenting information about which no explicit inferences whatsoever are made. By incorporating both the work done in memory for inferences and accountability, commitment to a decision -- as expressed in the Process Model of the Interview -- is no longer just the simple paradigm used in escalating commitment research (e.g., Staw, 1981), but is a true cognitive state that shows its effects on subjects in both memory tasks and inference tasks. Escalating commitment may be called “simple” because it both fails to involve any memory effects and places no onus of accountability on individuals. These two additional cognitive factors can not be explained via dissonance effects (Festinger, 1957) as is done with the behaviorally based escalating commitment effect, and so lead us to seek other explanations for a more complex phenomenon.
Experimental Design

The present experiment was designed to assess the effect of interviewer commitment to preinterview impressions on post-interview impressions and memory for information from the interview. The investigation of commitment within the Process Model is a logical extension of the work done previously by Dipboye et al. (1984) and Macan and Dipboye (1988), and the present study utilizes many of the same materials and manipulations of that previous work in order to maintain methodological continuity in investigations of the model. Subjects, serving as interviewer surrogates, were provided with preinterview information (paper credentials) to review, watched and listened to interview simulations, and completed post-interview ratings and memory tasks. Commitment was manipulated at three levels with a preinterview task. High commitment involved ranking and rating the six candidates along with being held accountable via written justifications for those rankings and ratings. Moderate commitment was the same as high commitment, except no justifications were elicited. Low commitment involved no preinterview tasks, thus eliminating any explicit inferences. A control condition changed the names on three of the six applications (those that would be seen in the interview) so that subjects had no information about the candidates they would see in the interviews, and thus should have no prior commitment to them.

Two major hypotheses were tested. First, it was predicted that commitment would moderate the relationship between the initial impressions of a candidate (preinterview) and the postinterview impressions of that candidate. Specifically, subjects' impressions of preinterview qualifications will be more resistant to modification by interview performance as commitment to those impressions increases. This tests Propositions 1 and 1a of the
Process Model (Dipboye, 1982; 1985) as stated above. This was tested with a set of measures of impressions formed about the candidates and their interview performance administered after the interview.

The second hypothesis predicted that subjects' memory for information from the interview would be affected by the level of commitment to preinterview impressions. It is predicted that subjects in low commitment conditions will remember less information overall and the information that they do remember will contain more negative traits and impressions for the Sales position in question. On the other hand, subjects in the high commitment conditions will remember more information overall and that information will contain more positive traits and impressions for the Sales position. This hypothesis follows from the focus of the Process Model on memory for factual information as well as subjective impressions. Both recall and recognition of information from the interview were tested during the postinterview phase. Additionally, trait ratings on the candidates were included to assess the effect of commitment on overall impressions of candidates.

Candidate qualifications were manipulated via paper credentials before the interview phase. There were six levels of qualification provided initially, with 3 of the candidates (high, moderate, low), the target candidates, being seen in interviews. The interviews were constructed in such a fashion (Macan & Dipboye, 1988) that each candidate appears to be equally qualified for the Sales position based on interview performance alone.
Method

Subjects

Seventy-six undergraduates who received class credit for their participation served as subjects for this study. Subjects were run in small groups of 3-5 people. There were 21 subjects in the high commitment condition, 19 in the moderate commitment condition, and 18 in both the low commitment and the control groups. There were 37 males and 39 females in the study. All subjects were assigned to groups randomly. The entire experimental procedure lasted approximately 1.5 hours for each group.

Procedures

Subjects were told that their participation would help to determine which type of selection procedure is most effective for selecting the best individuals for particular jobs. They were provided with six sets of paper credentials for the position of Sales Representative at a major firm that manufactures and sells chemicals. Subjects were also given a brief job description for the position of Sales Representative, Chemicals (see Appendix A). It was also mentioned that these six applicants were chosen from a much larger pool of individuals who had applied for the job. The applications and job description were essentially the same as those used by Macan and Dipboye (1988).

All subjects were given 15 minutes to read the six sets of credentials. Each set contained an application form and two letters of reference. The applications and references had been constructed to portray one of six levels of qualification for the job of Sales Representative. Two of the candidates were considered “highly” qualified, two “moderately” qualified, and the remaining two “poorly” qualified. The highly qualified candidate, for instance, had a college Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.84/4.00, a degree in
Marketing with a minor in Accounting, three previous sales positions, and outstanding recommendations. The low candidate, on the other hand, had a GPA of 2.23/4.00, a major in Physical Education, clerk and cook experience, and fair recommendations. If the six candidates were ranked from 1 (highest) to 6 (lowest) in terms of overall qualification, then candidates 1, 4, and 6 were the target candidates, the ones seen in the interviews.

**Commitment manipulation**

The three experimental groups received the same sets of credentials, while the control group received a set in which the names of the three target candidates had been changed to other names in order to provide no preinterview information. After reading the six sets of credentials, five of the groups (21 subjects), the high commitment condition, were instructed to complete four tasks. First, they were told to rank order the six candidates (by name) from the individual they felt was most qualified for the job (rank 1) to the individual they felt was least qualified for the job (rank 6) on a form provided. On the same form they were also asked to write, in a few words or a sentence, their justification for making each one of the six rankings. Next, the subjects had to rate each applicant on a 7 point Likert-type scale (1-very poor, 7-very good) for the question “Overall, how would you rate (candidate name) qualifications for the job of Sales Representative?” Below each rating the subjects again provided a written justification for their rating. Moreover, subjects were warned that they would be asked to defend their rankings, ratings, and justifications at a later time.

The moderate commitment condition (5 groups, 19 subjects) were asked to make the same rankings and rating as the high commitment condition, but without the additional
justifications. Likewise, no mention was made, either, of having to defend their rankings and ratings at a later time.

Both the low commitment condition (4 groups, 18 subjects) and the control condition (4 groups, 18 subjects) did not complete any preinterview tasks. They went straight from reading the paper credentials to the interview phase. Given this format it was assumed that no explicit inferences about the candidates would be made by the subjects in these two conditions.

**Interview**

After reading the applicant credentials and completing the preinterview tasks (high and moderate commitment), or immediately after reading the credentials (low commitment and control conditions) the subjects viewed three interview simulations. The subjects in the experimental conditions were instructed that the interviews were with three of the candidates whose applications they had just reviewed. The control group was informed that the interviews were with three additional individuals applying for the job of Sales Representative. All subjects were instructed to keep in mind the position being applied for (Sales Representative) as they watched and listened to the interviews. Additionally, all subjects were told that they would be asked to evaluate the candidates after the interviews.

The interviews consisted of photographic slides accompanied by audiotapes. These interviews were the same as those used by Macan and Dipboye (1988). The male applicants spent approximately seven minutes answering questions from a male interviewer with self-descriptive statements. The statements were either consistent, inconsistent, or
neutral with regard to the traits believed to be indicative of a Salesperson (Macan & Dipboye, 1988; Jackson, Peacock, & Holden, 1982).

The traits found to be consistent with the position of Salesperson (Macan & Dipboye, 1988) were: sociable, supportive of others, dominant, attention seeking, ambitious, independent, approval seeking, orderly, aggressive, persistent, and willing to promote self (not meek). The opposite of each was considered an inconsistent trait. A statement that exemplifies the trait “dominant” was “I think I have a natural talent for influencing people.” The traits seen as neither consistent nor inconsistent with those characteristic of a Salesperson were defensive/non-defensive, intellectual/non-intellectual, thrill seeking/non-thrill seeking, and help seeking/non-help seeking. The statement “People consider me a little touchy” is an example of the trait “defensive”. Each of the three interviews represented a different, and unique, trait pattern as shown in Table 1. The interviews were constructed (Macan & Dipboye, 1988) so that each candidate presents an equal overall impression of qualification for the job. After all three interviews were shown, a single slide of each candidate was shown to the subjects as a memory aid. No notetaking was permitted during the interviews.

The names of the candidates were rotated among the three interviews in order to control for any effects of candidate name on later impressions or memory. Likewise, the photographic slides were rotated among the three audio taped scripts in order to avoid any one physical appearance being associated with a single script. These two rotations resulted in three names by three sets of slides by three unique scripts, or 27 name/slide/tape combinations being used.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait Profile of Interviews</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Trait</strong></td>
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<td>Supportive</td>
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<td>Help Seeking</td>
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<td>Defensive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectually Curious</td>
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<td>Thrill Seeking</td>
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(adapted from Macan & Dipboye, 1988)
Dependent measures

Recognition

Subjects were provided with a list of 30 statements possibly said by each candidate seen in the interview (see Appendix B). Fifteen of the statements were correct (actually said by the candidate) and 15 were incorrect. For each set of 15 (correct and incorrect) five represented consistent traits, five inconsistent, and five neutral. The statements were presented in random order. Subjects were instructed to check the 15 statements (and only 15) that they believed to be correct. Additionally, subjects were instructed to rate the favorability of each statement checked for the job in question using a 7-point scale (1-very unfavorable, 7-very favorable).

Traits and Impressions

After completing the recognition tasks for the three applicants, subjects were asked to rate each applicant on the 15 traits exhibited in the interviews using 7-point scales (1-low, 7-high). After each set of traits, five additional questions were asked as indicated in Table 2.
Table 2

Postinterview Questions

POST 16: How positive of an impression did the applicant make in answering the questions of the interviewer? (1-very negative, 7-very positive)

POST 17: Based on just the interview, how would you rate the applicant's qualifications for the job of Sales Representative? (1-very poor, 7-very good)

POST 18: Overall, how good a job did the applicant do in answering the interviewer's questions? (1-very poor, 7-very good)

POST 19: On the basis of the information you have seen, how would you rate this applicant's qualifications for the job of Sales Representative? (1-very poor, 7-very good)

POST 20: If you were the interviewer, would you hire this person? (1-definitely would not hire, 7-definitely would hire)

Other measures

Subjects were next asked to rank the three candidates seen in the interviews from the most qualified for the job (rank 1) to least qualified (rank 3) based on all the information that had seen. Subjects were then instructed to write down anything they recalled from the interviews or about the their qualifications for each of the three candidates. Recall was prompted with the candidate's name and sufficient space for writing several sentences.

Finally, subjects were asked two exploratory questions believed to be indicative of commitment (CHANGE and CONFIDENCE)--How easy it would be for them to change their minds about the candidates they had seen (1-very easy, 7-not easy) and about their confidence with their judgements about the candidates (1-very confident, 7-not confident).
In addition, subjects were asked to indicate what they believed the purpose of the project was. No subject correctly guessed the hypotheses.

Results

Paper credentials

Preliminary analyses indicated no differences due to sex in any of the effects, so all results reported are collapsed across sex.

Macan and Dipboye (1988) found that the levels of qualifications depicted in the paper credentials evoked strong initial judgements in subjects. This effect was replicated in the present study. A 3 x 3 mixed design ANOVA was performed on subjects' preinterview ratings, preinterview rankings, postinterview ratings (POST 19), and postinterview rankings of the three target candidates. Significant main effects for applicant qualification were found for all four dependent measures: $F(2,76)=1083.98, p<.0001$; $F(2,76)=1177.37, p<.0001$; $F(2,110)=28.02, p<.0001$; and $F(2,110)=12.20, p<.0001$, respectively. Likewise, for each measure, the high candidate was seen as being more qualified than the moderate candidate, who, in turn, was seen as being more qualified than the low candidate (see Table 3). There was also a significant main effect of applicant qualification on postinterview hiring decisions (POST 20), $F(2,109)=12.66, p<.0001$. 
Table 3

Qualifications Effects Across Conditions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification Level</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preinterview Rank *1</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preinterview Rating*2</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>6.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postinterview Rank**1,3</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postinterview Rating**2</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>5.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* based on high and moderate commitment conditions only
** based on all three experimental conditions
1 1=highest, 6=lowest
2 1=poor, 7=good
3 1=highest, 3=lowest

Postinterview impressions

In order to test the hypothesis that commitment would effect postinterview impressions, three questions were used as dependent measures: POST 16, POST 17, and POST 18. Separate 3 x 3 mixed design ANOVA's were performed for each question in turn. For both POST 16 and POST 18, the overall impression made in the interview and the quality of the candidate's answers to the interviewer's questions, a significant Commitment x Qualification interaction was found, F(4, 110)=2.49, p<.05 and F(4, 109)=2.75, p<.03, respectively. For both POST 16 and POST 18, a Dunnett's test failed to show any significant differences between the means for the experimental groups (collapsed across qualification level) and the control group. POST 17 failed to show any significant effects.
The pattern of means for POST 16, shown in Figure 2, indicated further analyses. A simple main effects analysis was performed for the Qualification dimension at each level of commitment. A significant effect was found only at the moderate level of commitment, \( F(2, 110) = 5.044, p < .009 \). This result indicates that the moderate commitment condition effected the subjects' perception of the interviews. A Scheffé analysis shows that at the moderate level of commitment, the mean score for the low qualified candidate (\( M = 3.05 \)) was significantly different from both the moderately qualified candidate (\( M = 4.53 \)) and the highly qualified candidate (\( M = 4.68 \)) at the 5% level of significance. The moderate and the highly qualified candidate were not significantly different from each other.
Figure 2
Mean Scores for Question POST 16

A similar pattern of results emerges for POST 18 (see Figure 3). Again a simple main effects analysis shows a significant effect of Qualification at the moderate level of commitment, $F(2, 109)=5.88, p<.009$. As above, a Scheffé test indicates differences between the low qualified candidate ($M=3.17$) and both the high candidate ($M=4.89$) and the moderate candidate ($M=4.79$) at the 5% level. The high and the moderate candidates were not significantly different from each other.
Memory for Applicant Information

In order to examine the effects of preinterview commitment on subjects' memory for the interview, two separate postinterview measures were used. The first was a recognition task for statements made in the interview, and the second was a free recall task.
Since the recognition task contained three types of statements (consistent, inconsistent, and neutral) the analyses were conducted separately for each type. Within each statement type both the true positive score (number correct that were actually checked) and the true negative score (number correct that were not checked) were analyzed. A Commitment x Qualification x Statement type (3 x 3 x 3) mixed design ANOVA yielded no relevant significant effects, indicating no differences in recognition due to either level of commitment or applicant qualification.

The free recall measure had subjects indicate anything they recalled from the interview for each of the three candidates. These statements were then classified into distinct conceptual units for each candidate and then these were classified into positive, negative, or neutral statements about the candidates based on the trait profile of a Salesperson as well as obvious positive statements (e.g., “He is the best one”) or negative statements (e.g., “Not suitable at all for the job”). Two judges independently scored the recall measure for all 76 subjects. The overall correlation between the two judges was .82, which indicated the viability of using the average of the two scores for further analyses. This procedure yielded nine scores for each subject (3 candidates x 3 statement types). Two dependent measures, the ratio of positive statements to the total number of statements recalled (RATIO), and the difference between positive and negative statements recalled (RECALL SCORE, a favorability measure) were computed for each candidate (see Table 4).

ANOVA's were computed for each of these dependent variables (RATIO, RECALL SCORE) as well as the original positive, negative, and neutral statements. No significant effects were found, indicating that there were no significant differences in recall among the
subjects. However, it is interesting to note that the pattern of means indicates that subjects in the moderate commitment condition were recalling appreciably, if not significantly, more positive statements than the other conditions. The present study may not have had enough power to detect this effect, so we may only speculate on its existence and implications.

Table 4

Means (and SDs) for Free Recall Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Positive*</th>
<th>Negative*</th>
<th>Neutral*</th>
<th>Recall Score&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Ratio&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Commit</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Qual</td>
<td>1.33(1.09)</td>
<td>0.83(0.99)</td>
<td>0.62(0.72)</td>
<td>0.50(1.52)</td>
<td>0.47(0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Qual</td>
<td>1.31(1.29)</td>
<td>0.86(0.83)</td>
<td>0.55(0.63)</td>
<td>0.45(1.74)</td>
<td>0.40(0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Qual</td>
<td>1.31(1.01)</td>
<td>0.62(0.85)</td>
<td>0.64(0.71)</td>
<td>0.69(1.52)</td>
<td>0.52(0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate Commit</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Qual</td>
<td>1.66(1.21)</td>
<td>0.74(0.81)</td>
<td>0.47(0.63)</td>
<td>0.92(1.78)</td>
<td>0.56(0.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Qual</td>
<td>1.61(0.95)</td>
<td>0.53(0.59)</td>
<td>0.47(0.74)</td>
<td>1.07(1.15)</td>
<td>0.65(0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Qual</td>
<td>1.03(0.66)</td>
<td>1.00(1.24)</td>
<td>0.63(0.68)</td>
<td>0.02(1.56)</td>
<td>0.49(0.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Commit</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Qual</td>
<td>0.86(1.05)</td>
<td>1.03(0.89)</td>
<td>0.50(0.59)</td>
<td>-0.17(1.56)</td>
<td>0.32(0.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Qual</td>
<td>1.47(1.32)</td>
<td>0.64(0.74)</td>
<td>0.50(0.69)</td>
<td>0.83(1.76)</td>
<td>0.53(0.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Qual</td>
<td>1.25(0.93)</td>
<td>0.91(0.94)</td>
<td>0.42(0.49)</td>
<td>0.33(1.50)</td>
<td>0.49(0.35)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* statement type
<sup>1</sup> recall score=positive-negative
<sup>2</sup> ratio=positive/(positive+negative+neutral)
Other Measures

During the postinterview phase the fifteen traits represented in the interview were rated for each candidate by the subjects on a 7-point scale (1-low, 7-high). Following the results reported by Macan and Dipboye (1988), these traits were combined into two aggregate measures prior to analysis: those traits that were consistent inconsistent (with the inconsistent scores reversed to form the combination) and those traits that were neutral for the position of Salesperson. These two measures were analyzed using a 3 x 3 ANOVA. No significant effects were found. This suggested that either the grouping of the traits was incorrect or that subjects were uncertain as to the presence or absence of these particular traits in the candidates they had seen in the interviews. Given this assumption, additional 3 x 3 ANOVA's were run for each of the 15 traits separately. Four traits: Ambitious ($F(2,109)=6.43$, $p<.003$), Independent ($F(2,110)=13.23$, $p<.0001$), Help Seeking ($F(2,110)=3.78$, $p<.03$), and Intellectually Curious ($F(2,110)=4.48$, $p<.02$) showed significant Qualification main effects (see Table 5). This suggests that subjects may have had their own model of the traits that are consistent with being a good Salesperson, since these significant traits were considered, a priori, both consistent (Ambitious and Independent), and neutral (Help Seeking and Intellectually Curious) for the position.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>5.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>5.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Seeking</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectually Curious</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* collapsed across all three experimental conditions

Two other variables, CHANGE and CONFIDENCE, measured after all the other sections of the postinterview task, were designed as exploratory to see if they would show any effects of the commitment manipulation. These two measures failed to show any significant effects in a 3 x 3 ANOVA, and there were no significant differences between the scores on these measures for the experimental groups and the control group.

**Discussion**

The present study investigated the effects of interviewer commitment to preinterview impressions on postinterview memory and impressions of the interview itself. More specifically, it was predicted that as commitment increases, the overall influence of preinterview information on the final impressions will increase and the amount of memory for information from the interview will also increase.

**Impressions**
Turning to the first prediction, that of impressions made by the candidate and performance in the interview, the evidence presented above suggests two things. First, the condition labeled “high commitment” may have introduced unwanted effects into the manipulation, and second, the commitment effect at the moderate level may have differential effects depending on the level of qualification of the candidate.

The high commitment condition led the subjects to believe that they would be held accountable for their judgements at a later time. This high degree of accountability may have resulted in what Tetlock (in Tetlock & Kim, 1987) calls preemptive self-criticism, a state in which subjects “…pay close attention to the evidence, are careful to refrain from judgement on the basis of incomplete information, and make persistent efforts to integrate contradictory or inconsistent information into their overall impression of the evidence.” (p.701). Increased accuracy of descriptions made under accountability demands were also found by Rozelle and Baxter (1981).

Under this assumption the subjects in the high commitment condition would be more likely to carefully consider the interviews themselves. Since the interviews were constructed so that all candidates appeared equally qualified, there was no objective reason for them to be rated differently based on the interview alone. The results of questions POST 16 and POST 18 show no significant differences among the three candidates for the high commitment subjects.

The high commitment condition can be interpreted as a multi-dimension construct that failed to satisfy the definition of commitment presented above. Because of this we may only speculate on what the results from this condition mean for the Process Model.
The story is a very different one when we turn to the moderate commitment condition. This condition involved the same explicit public commitment to candidates as the high commitment condition, but without the added accountability dimension. Subjects here may have a more resilient form of cognitive commitment to their impressions than in the other conditions. The evidence supports this contention when we see the dramatic differences among the ratings of interview performance. However, an alternate explanation is that subjects in the moderate commitment condition are especially prone to halo error (Cooper, 1981; Saal, Downey, & Lahey, 1980), while subjects in the high commitment condition avoid halo because they are paying closer attention to the preinterview qualifications as well as the interview itself. In fact, increasing rater familiarity with the ratee is one of the methods of halo reduction discussed by Cooper (1981).

In terms of designing future studies it is useful to examine the attenuation in the scores of the low qualified candidate on questions POST 16 and POST 18 in the moderate commitment condition. This implies that the commitment made by the subjects influenced their impression of the candidates' performance in the interview. The high and moderate qualified candidates were seen as having performed well in the interview, while the low candidate was seen as having performed at a much lower level. One explanation for this effect may be that the low qualified candidate may not have been perceived as qualified for the job at all, subjects expected (were committed to the expectation) that he would perform poorly in the interview. In fact, in this condition, subjects may have eliminated the low qualified candidate from the running before they ever saw the interview, possibly creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Contrast this to the high commitment condition where the added
accountability factor made the subjects carefully consider the evidence presented in the interview—evidence that the low qualified candidate had performed equally well. The high commitment condition, along with the low commitment condition, were able to see that low qualifications on paper did not really result in low performance in the interview; although they perceived this for different reasons.

Also of notable importance here is the striking similarity in the pattern of results between question POST 16 and POST 18 (see Figures 2 & 3). One possible explanation for the similarity in the results of these two questions is that subjects made some cognitive connection between the two and believed that one caused the other. Although there can be a causal connection between the two questions it need not be the case. For instance, it is very possible for a candidate to answer all the interviewer's questions with "good" or "appropriate" answers and still convey a very negative impression. Another possible explanation for this is that subjects failed to differentiate between the content of the two questions, although the predictions of the Process Model clearly indicate that these questions were directed at different domains of interview performance.

Overall, then, it would appear that the explicitness of interviewer's commitment to preinterview impressions (via paper credentials) may have a significant effect of the impressions formed of interview performance. Furthermore, the present study helps to clarify the predictions made in the process model of the interview by Dipboye (1982; 1985) concerning these initial impressions. The biasing effect appears to be related to both commitment and the added dimension of accountability. Simple commitment, as seen in the moderate commitment condition of the present study, biases perception of the
interview, while adding the dimension of accountability (as seen in the high commitment condition) may serve to maintain accuracy. However, it must be emphasized that the moderate commitment was the only one from which we may draw conclusions about the model's predictions. The high commitment condition was engendering a different effect altogether, and may not be seen as falling along the same continuum as the moderate commitment condition. They are qualitatively different from each other, and this must serve as the foundation for future studies.

Memory effects

The second hypothesis, that of memory effects due to commitment, was not supported by the data of the present study. Given the large amount of information presented to the subjects before and during the interview, it seems likely that the commitment manipulation was not strong enough to overcome the effects of normal memory overload. Professional interviewers usually take notes during the course of interviews as an aid to memory, and this has been shown to have significant effects on later recall (Macan & Dipboye, 1988). Future studies need to be aware of the potential for information overload, particularly with subjects not experienced as interviewers, and reduce the level of cognitive demands made on interviewers with either less information or more time to assimilate that information.

Previous investigations of the process model (Dipboye, Stramler, & Fontenelle, 1984; Macan & Dipboye, 1988) have, however, found memory to be effected by preinterview information. The question of central importance, then, is why those effects were not replicated in the present study. The answer is a combination of factors. Notably,
the pattern of means of information recalled (see Table 4) indicates that there were some memory effects, but that the present study did not have sufficient statistical power to detect them. This is because of the larger number of measures and, more importantly, candidates used in the present study as compared to previous research (Dipboye et al., 1984; Macan & Dipboye, 1988). This is a critical point, though, because in real-world interview situations the interviewer will often have to evaluate even greater numbers of candidates than any of the research on the process model has investigated. As the amount of information that the interviewer must remember increases we can predict that some combination of overall memory degradation and increased focus on specific candidates will occur.

How, then, can these factors be combined into studies that capture the memory effects postulated by the Process Model? Future emphasis must be placed on the specific schemas that interviewers use to construct their memories of interview performance. It may be that the preinterview information forces interviewers into a particular schema of interview behavior that serves to blind them to all the information being conveyed. This is in accord with the perseverance theory discussed above (Anderson, 1981; Anderson, Lepper, & Ross, 1980; Anderson, New, & Speer, 1985; Ross & Anderson, 1982; Ross & Lepper, 1980). The belief system implicit in the preinterview information and instructions may serve to dominate the type and amount of recall exhibited in the postinterview phase, although the present study failed to show this. Dipboye et al. (1984) suggested, in a very reserved fashion, that one method of improving the selection process is to conduct the interview before the interviewer sees the paper credentials. Dipboye et al. admitted the
resistance to such a method would be great, but some implementation of this idea needs to be investigated given the evidence of the present study.

The Process Model and the Interview

What, then, are the implications of the present study for both the process model (Dipboye, 1985) and the interview in general? They appear to be twofold. First, the predictions made by the Process Model of the biasing effect of commitment have been upheld when commitment is operationalized as simply having interviewers make explicit, public decisions about the level of qualification for the candidates based on paper credentials seen before the interview (as shown only in the moderate commitment condition of the present study). However, the added dimension of accountability, not discussed in previous formulations of the process model, may serve to reduce the bias due to commitment and ensure accuracy in perceptions of interview performance. Accountability, as demonstrated in the present study, may, however, create a completely different phenomenon than commitment, and must be addressed as such. Future research is needed to better define commitment within the interview situation and test its effects. Particular attention also must be paid to the accountability of interviewers for the decisions they make about job candidates.

The present study may have failed to create various levels of commitment because commitment itself appears to be a complex, multi-dimensional construct. The assumption that level of commitment may be varied by some quantitative change in behaviors or cognitions is almost certainly an erroneous one. The correct assumption is that commitment varies as the quality of behaviors and cognitions vary. The present study
served to provide some necessary parameters for these qualitative differences in commitment, and establish a preliminary base for future research.

The second implication of the present study is for improving the interview itself. The results of the present study suggest that having interviewers make explicit commitments to candidates before they see them in the interview itself can bias the perception of actual interview performance in a negative fashion. This certainly is a danger that must be accounted for in designing selection procedures. However, since it is the rare selection process that can prevent any preinterview commitments, then making interviewers accountable for their decisions may serve to lessen the bias inherent in commitment alone.

Furthermore, there are important practical implications of interviewers being able to accurately judge and recall information from the interview. If, as indicated by the results of the present study, the interview is biased by the information presented during the preinterview phase, then there is little incremental validity to be gained from the interview itself. This leads to two possible conclusions, either discontinue the interview since it has high costs and may be providing no benefits; or, control the biasing factors present during the preinterview as a method of improving the interview itself. Commitment was shown by the present study to be one such bias that selection procedures need to take into account. Dipboye (1985) mentions several factors in addition to commitment that may also bias perception of the interview, notably confidence of the participants and the structure of the interview itself. All of these issues need to be addressed in future research. Moreover, the interaction among all these biasing effects must be looked at in the context of the Process Model. Future emphasis must be placed on extracting the greatest amount of reliable
information from each phase in the process, and using that information to make the most accurate selection decision possible.

It is encouraging to note that recent research (e.g., Binning, Goldstein, Garcia, & Scattaregia, 1988; Dipboye, Fontenelle, & Garner, 1984; Dipboye, Stramler, & Fontenelle, 1984; Philips & Dipboye, 1987) has begun to break away from the perception and treatment of the interview as a static event and move toward a more process oriented view. Interviewers can no longer be relied upon to evaluate candidates in an unbiased manner when they have been exposed to prior information about those candidates. Likewise, it is not just exposure to that information but the behaviors and cognitions that accompany that exposure that impact on the eventual selection decisions made. As the Process Model developed by Dipboye (1982;1985) and other process models of the interview (e.g., Arvey & Campion, 1982; Herriot, 1981; Schmitt, 1976) gain further empirical support they can serve as guides for designing interview procedures that meet the highest standards of reliability and validity.
References


Appendix A

Job Description

Sales Representative, Chemicals

Sells industrial and agricultural chemicals to business and industrial establishments. Compiles lists of prospective customers for use as sales leads based on information from newspapers, business directories, and other sources. Travels through assigned territory to call on regular and prospective customers to solicit orders or talks with customers on sales floor by phone. Displays or demonstrates product, using samples or catalog, and emphasizes salable features. Prepares reports of business transactions and keeps expense accounts.
Appendix B

Recognition Task

The following list of statements contains items said by Dave Larsen in the interview. Please put a check to the left of each statement that you believe Dave Larsen said during the interview. There are only 15 correct statements among the 30 listed. To the right of each statement that you checked rate the extent to which that statement reflects favorably or unfavorably on the applicants' qualifications for the job using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

1. I don't mind having my mistakes pointed out to me. __0*
2. I often put in extra effort to make friends. __+*
3. I am often guilty of being disorganized. __-*
4. I seldom have a good time at parties. __-
5. I feel more comfortable in a social environment. __+
6. I never feel shy when I am the center of attention. __+
7. I don't believe in criticizing others too strongly. __0
8. I don't enjoy entertaining others at a party. __-*
9. I am uncomfortable when people want to talk to me about their personal problems. __-*
10. I like other people to fawn over me. __0
11. I feel uncomfortable directing others. __-
12. In an argument I usually win others over to my side. __+*
13. I prefer to face my problems by myself. __0*
14. I always make up my own mind on matters. __+*
15. I seldom concern myself with whether others are going to get the best of me. __-*
16. I tend to be a conformist in most matters. __-
17. I love to get involved in good hot arguments. __+
18. I seldom try to make people think highly of me. __-*
19. I don't like to read discussions of politics or art. __0
20. My social standing is very important to me. __+
21. When I was a child, I read every book in my house. __0*
22. It is quite easy for me to admit I am wrong. __0*
23. I don't think I would enjoy mountain climbing. __0
24. I never let people push me around. __+
25. Parachute jumping is a hobby that appeals to me. __0*
26. I seldom finish things that I commenced. __-
27. I would rather have work that I feel confident and relaxed doing. __-
28. If I run into difficulties I keep working. __+*
29. I enjoy difficult, challenging work. __+*
30. It is hard for me to admit that I am wrong. __0

(+ consistent) (- inconsistent) (0 neutral) (* correct)