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FEATURE ARTICLE

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Willingness to fake: Examining the impact of competitive climate and hiring situations

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Abstract

Applicants may be willing to fake in job interviews with the aim of creating a positive impression. In two vignette-based experiments, we examined if a competitive—versus noncompetitive—climate (Study 1) and hiring situation (Study 2) increased participants' willingness to fake. We also examined if Honesty–Humility and Competitive Worldviews moderated the relation between willingness to fake and how competitive participants believed they must be in order to secure the job. Results demonstrated that a competitive climate and hiring situation increased willingness to fake. Honesty–Humility and Competitive Worldviews were related to willingness to fake, but these relations did not change substantially at different levels of perceived need for competitiveness. Overall, results lend some theoretical support to propositions about applicant faking.

KEYWORDS

competition, Competitive Worldviews, deceptive impression management, faking, Honesty–Humility, personnel selection

1 | INTRODUCTION

It is common to see the labor or job market described as "tough" or "competitive." Likewise, for job seekers or students finishing their education, hiring can be described as "competitive" or forecasted to be "getting more competitive." There is also an abundance of advice and strategies online for job seekers to make them more "competitive" in the selection process (e.g., Corfield, 2009). Ultimately, increased competition means that there are more applicants for fewer jobs, which can increase the demands and pressures for applicants to stand out in order to be selected.

To increase their chances of standing out and securing a job, applicants may use impression management (IM) tactics during their job interviews (Barrick, Shaffer, & DeGrassi, 2009). IM tactics are behaviors intended to influence the images that others form of them (Schlenker, 1980), such as promoting one's work accomplishments or emphasizing fit with an organization (Ellis, West, Ryan, & DeShon, 2002). Some applicants are also willing to use IM tactics that involve misrepresentation or the distortion of responses, which is a form of IM called *faking* (Levashina & Campion, 2006). Levashina and Campion (2007) determined that the four main types of faking include slight image creation (e.g., embellishing qualifications), extensive image creation (e.g., inventing fictional work experiences), deceptive ingratiation (e.g., pretending to share common values with an interviewer), and image protection (e.g., omitting negative events). Some forms of faking (e.g., extensive image creation), by definition, involve greater degrees of misrepresentation than others (e.g., slight image creation). Thus, faking can manifest in a wide variety of tactics that applicants might engage in during the selection process.

Some researchers have argued that faking is not necessarily a problematic behavior, and is instead a form of self-presentation and "legitimate behavior inevitably triggered by situational demands" (Marcus, 2009, p. 427). Indeed, Ingold, Kleinmann, König, and Melchers (2015) found evidence that participant faking was actually related to higher levels of supervisors' job performance ratings. These authors suggested that faking could be viewed as a socially adequate behavior and a useful skill on the job. Similarly, Lortie and Brooks (2018) found that faking in interviews was positively related

to organizational citizenship behaviors on the job. In contrast, other researchers have expressed concerns that applicant faking can be problematic for organizations (e.g., in cases where less-qualified applicants successfully make themselves look more qualified than they are, and are then subsequently hired; Donovan, Dwight, & Schneider, 2014). Because the selection process is often competitive, where one applicant gets hired and a large number do not, it may be the case that qualified applicants were passed over at the expense of less-qualified candidates who faked. Research has also found that applicant faking is related to poorer performance during training and on the job (Donovan et al., 2014; Schneider & Powell, 2017), and is positively related to counterproductive work behavior (Lortie & Brooks, 2018). If faking is a concern, a further challenge is the difficulty of accurately detecting whether a candidate is faking or not (Roulin, 2016; Roulin, Bangerter, & Levashina, 2015; Roulin & Ternes, 2019). Ultimately, the goal of the present research is to contribute a greater understanding of why people may be more or less willing to fake in job contests.

To understand faking, previous research and theory have examined the behavior from the applicants' perspective (e.g., Levashina & Campion, 2006; Marcus, 2009). However, organizations may also be contributing to applicants' willingness to fake. Specifically, organizational factors may work in conjunction with applicant characteristics to increase applicants' willingness to engage in faking behavior (Roulin, Krings, & Binggeli, 2016). In the present article, we contribute to our understanding of applicants' willingness to fake by empirically testing two propositions from Roulin's, Krings, and Binggeli (2016) "Dynamic Model of Applicant Faking." Specifically, we examine whether two organization-level factors—a competitive organizational climate and a competitive hiring situation—will affect applicants' willingness to fake. Furthermore, we investigate whether individual differences can moderate the relation between the perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake.

1.1 | Competition and applicants' willingness to fake

Competition involves several important characteristics: (a) a perceived scarcity of resources such as job positions, (b) uncertainty in the allocation of outcomes based on the relative performance of competitors, and (c) social comparison concerns about outperforming other competitors (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Organizations can be inherently competitive environments, ranging from employees competing for promotions and bonuses, to job applicants competing for scarce job positions (Deutsch, 1949). Previous research has even found that just being exposed to common business objects (e.g., boardroom tables) can increase the cognitive accessibility of competition in individuals (Kay, Wheeler, Bargh, & Ross, 2004). The typical hiring situation is, therefore, consistent with a competitive scenario: (a) there are few jobs and many applicants, (b) applicants do not know who will get the job or what combination of qualifications will be satisfactory, and (c) applicants are striving to outcompete each other. As a result, in a hiring situation, job applicants may be more concerned about distinguishing themselves from their competitors when competition is salient.

Examining why competition may impact applicants' willingness to fake can also be understood using recent applications of signaling theory (Roulin et al., 2016). In their framework of applicant faking, Roulin and colleagues proposed that interviewers do not have perfect knowledge or information about the applicants whom they are evaluating, and applicants may not send honest signals about themselves unless it improves their chances of being hired. Interviewers must interpret signals (e.g., qualifications, responses to interview questions) from applicants and hope that they are reliable indicators of applicants' knowledge, skills, and abilities. However, applicants and interviewers have conflicting interests, such that applicants may be willing to fake signals, such as their qualifications and responses to interview questions, in order to make a positive impression (Bangerter, Roulin, & König, 2012). Applicants may have little incentive to be completely honest if they perceive that sending authentic signals, or truthful information about themselves, will result in them being outcompeted for the job. For this reason, Roulin et al. (2016) proposed in their model of faking that applicants are more willing to fake signals when they perceive greater competition to outperform others for jobs.

1.2 | Situational aspects of competition

There is little existing research on how *situational* aspects of competition may increase applicants' willingness to fake in selection contexts. For instance, Buehl and Melchers (2018) found no effect of competition (operationalized as the selection ratio and necessary grade point average for admittance to a Master's program) on willingness to fake in employment interviews. Conversely, Ho, Powell, Barclay, and Gill (2019) found that, when considering both the selection ratio and the number of competitors, a combination of a small selection ratio with few competitors increased willingness to fake. There are still gaps in this literature that need to be addressed, however. For instance, the samples used in the above two reviewed studies were relatively young in age (M_{age} = 22.65 in Buehl & Melchers, 2018; M_{age} = 19.01 with on average, less than 1 year of full-time work experience in Ho et al., 2019). The young age of these samples could be a limitation given that younger individuals may be more willing to fake due to having less work experience to draw from (Levashina & Campion, 2006). Moreover, it is possible that hiring organizations may not even tell applicants what the selection ratio is and/or how many applicants are competing for the job. Thus, it is still unclear how perceived competition in hiring situations—when cues such as the selection ratio are *not* available to applicants—would impact willingness to fake.

Roulin et al. (2016) proposed that a competitive organizational climate would be another form of competition that increases applicants' willingness to fake. Roulin and Krings (2020) recently tested this argument in a set of six studies, where they proposed that applicants would fake in response to a competitive organizational culture by distorting

their scores on specific personality traits corresponding to competitiveness. The authors predicted that applicants would fake in order to fit the "ideal" profile of an employee working in a competitive culture, specifically by aiming to appear lower on both Honesty–Humility (because less honest and humble individuals may fare better in competitive cultures) and agreeableness (because less agreeable individuals are more willing to argue with and cooperate less with others). Indeed, the authors found support for these arguments, as participants applying to an organization with a competitive culture tended to fake in ways that enhanced their cultural fit (i.e., trying to fit the personality profile of a competitive individual). However, it is still unclear how—and if—a competitive climate would increase willingness to fake to the same extent as competition in hiring situations. For instance, are applicants more willing to fake on selection tests when: 1) An organization emphasizes competition as one of its core values, or 2) When competition for the job itself is fierce? Investigating other operationalizations of competition (e.g., a competitive climate and a generally competitive hiring situation) is, therefore, needed to shed light on competition and willingness to fake in job contests.

1.2.1 | Competitive climate

One way that applicants can get information about the degree of competition in the hiring context is through the competitiveness of the climate of the hiring organization. Climate refers to individuals' perceptions of what an organization is like in terms of practices, policies, procedures, routines, and rewards (Rentsch, 1990). According to Brown, Cron, and Slocum (1998), a *competitive* climate refers to: "the degree to which employees perceive organizational rewards to be contingent on comparisons of their performance against that of their peers" (p. 89). Individuals may perceive a competitive climate if rewards and recognition are based on frequent comparisons among coworkers, or there is communication to employees that competition is necessary for obtaining desired outcomes (e.g., "My manager frequently compares my performance with that of my coworkers;" Fletcher, Major, & Davis, 2008). A competitive climate can be viewed as an individual's perceptions of the competitiveness of their work environment, or their perceptions of the competitiveness of the organization's policies and practices. Individuals tend to form perceptions of the climate upon entering an organization, through aspects such as the attitudes displayed by other employees and the treatment of visitors and new employees (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2011).

Some organizations also emphasize competition over cooperation within the workplace (Beersma et al., 2003). A job applicant who is visiting an organization for an interview or other selection purpose might infer what it would be like to work there, based on their interactions with interviewers, recruiters, or current employees. For instance, if an applicant is told by an interviewer that employees at the organization are always concerned with being the top performer in order to be rewarded, or if they hear that performance rankings are an extremely important concern for employees, they may interpret these as signals that the organization has a competitive climate. Individuals who perceive a competitive climate might, therefore, believe the hiring organization is signaling that competition is necessary for success in this workplace, or that the hiring organization encourages competition.

1.2.2 | Competitive hiring situations

In addition to the climate of the hiring organization, organizations may have policies or practices that make competition more salient during the selection process. Some organizations may highlight the competitiveness or selectivity of their hiring process, through means such as highlighting a small selection ratio or the number of applicants. Similarly, job boards on websites such as LinkedIn highlight competition by offering job seekers the option of gaining "competitive intelligence about other applicants" (e.g., an estimated ranking based on their skills within a pool of competitors). Organizations that advertise the competitiveness of their hiring process could increase the salience of competition by drawing attention to the scarcity of jobs, hence increasing applicants' willingness to fake as an adaptive strategy in response to competition (Roulin et al., 2016). However, organizations may not always make competition salient by revealing the exact number of applicants or available job positions. Some organizations might emphasize the "zero-sum" nature of their selection process and the importance of beating other applicants through other types of cues (e.g., an interviewer describing the work climate as being competitive).

Some organizations may also select applicants based on tougher and more competitive requirements, or might potentially stimulate competition among applicants via promises of highly attractive job offers. (Rynes, Orlitzky, & Bretz, 1997). Consequently, organizations that are highly attractive, with positive reputations, may have objectively more competitive hiring situations, through securing larger pools of applicants competing for increasingly scarce job offers (Collins & Han, 2004; Turban & Cable, 2003). An organization that implements competitive hiring situations might thus increase applicants' willingness to fake signals by increasing perceived competition for the job or the salience of competition during the selection process (Roulin et al., 2016). Job applicants may be more willing to fake signals as a means of distinguishing themselves from their competitors, because such a strategy offers at least *some* chance of success (Mishra, Barclay, & Sparks, 2017).

Based on the above rationale, we expect that:

Hypothesis 1 *A competitive climate will lead to greater willingness to fake than will a noncompetitive climate.*

Hypothesis 2 *A competitive hiring situation will lead to greater willingness to fake than will a noncompetitive hiring situation.*

1.3 | Individual differences

Theories of both applicant faking (e.g., Roulin et al., 2016) and competition (Garcia, Tor, & Schiff, 2013) have highlighted the importance

of considering individual difference characteristics when making predictions about individuals' willingness to make decisions. Within the signaling theory framework, Roulin et al. (2016) proposed that applicants differ in their willingness to send dishonest signals because of individual differences in personality and attitudes. For example, some individuals have attitudes that reflect a preference for competition over cooperation (McClintock & Allison, 1989). Some individuals might be willing to send dishonest signals to beat the competition, whereas others might prefer to cooperate and refuse to fake even when there is fierce competition. However, a gap in the existing faking literature is that there is little examination of how situational aspects of competition and individual differences in competition may interact. We examine two theoretically relevant individual differences for understanding competition and applicants' willingness to fake: Honesty–Humility and Competitive Worldviews.

1.3.1 | Honesty–Humility

Researchers have proposed that applicants who are high in integrity and honesty, and who value authenticity may be less willing to respond to competition by faking, in comparison to applicants who are low in those attributes (Roulin et al., 2016). Honesty–Humility, a personality trait from the HEXACO model of personality that reflects individual differences in sincerity, modesty, greed avoidance, and fairness (Lee & Ashton, 2004), has a strong theoretical alignment with applicants' willingness to fake. Low levels of are characterized by manipulativeness, self-serving behavior, and a belief of superiority compared to others, whereas high Honesty–Humility is characterized by sincerity and a value for genuine interactions with others (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Indeed, research has shown that low Honesty–Humility is associated with a greater willingness to engage in selfish decision-making, particularly when there are no ramifications for doing so (Hilbig & Zettler, 2009). It is therefore unsurprising that low Honesty–Humility has been shown to predict higher levels of willingness to fake on selection tests (e.g., Law, Bourdage, & O'Neill, 2016).

Although Honesty–Humility appears to be a direct antecedent of applicants' willingness to fake in interviews, there is a strong theoretical rationale for why Honesty–Humility would play the role of a moderator variable as well. Low Honesty–Humility individuals, given their greater willingness to manipulate others in order to meet their needs, may be more willing to fake in a selection context that is competitive and where they see a need to outperform their competitors. In contrast, because high Honesty–Humility individuals are less likely to manipulate others and engage in unethical behavior (Lee, Ashton, Morrison, Cordery, & Dunlop, 2008), they may not be willing to fake even when they see a benefit of doing so. High Honesty–Humility applicants may also have a lower willingness to fake in response to competition, because they have negative attitudes toward faking or see it as being unethical (Ajzen, 1991).

Research by Ho et al. (2019) found that Honesty–Humility did not interact with perceived competition to predict willingness to fake. However, low Honesty–Humility is particularly relevant when considering willingness to fake *not only* in anticipation of competition to secure the job, but also in the workplace as well (i.e., in a competitive climate). For instance, Bourdage, Wiltshire, and Lee, (2015) found that low Honesty–Humility is the common core underlying IM behaviors in the workplace. Honesty–Humility may thus moderate the relation between one's perceived need to be competitive and their willingness to fake in job contests. Specifically, low—compared to high—Honesty–Humility individuals may be more willing to fake when they expect that they must be competitive in order to secure the job. We propose the following:

Hypothesis 3 *Honesty–Humility will moderate the relation between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake, such that the relation will be stronger when Honesty–Humility is low compared to when Honesty–Humility is high.*

1.3.2 | Competitive Worldviews

In addition to personality traits, social world views are another type of individual difference characteristic that may impact the relationship between perceived competition and willingness to fake. A social world view is defined as a coherent set of beliefs about the nature of the social world, specifically about what people are like, how they are likely to behave to oneself, and how they should be responded to and treated by others (Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, & Birum, 2002). Competitive Worldviews describe the belief that the social world is a competitive jungle characterized by a ruthless, amoral struggle for resources and power in which might is right and winning is everything, versus a view of the social world as one of cooperative harmony in which people care for, help, and share with each other (Duckitt et al., 2002). Individuals who are high in Competitive Worldviews tend to perceive their social environment as a struggle for resources (e.g., scarce job positions), and believe that they must secure such resources through whatever means necessary, before they are lost to others. Indeed, research has shown that individuals who are higher in Competitive Worldviews are more willing to fake in selection contexts such as job interviews (Roulin & Krings, 2016). This may be the case because Competitive Worldviews tend to be activated in competitive situations, ultimately leading to perceptions of particularly fierce competition and a greater willingness to fake in order to meet one's needs.

Because applicants who are high in Competitive Worldviews view competition as being a necessary contest for resources, they may be more willing to fake (compared to applicants who are low in Competitive Worldviews) as a strategy for outperforming others in a job competition. Competitive Worldviews may, therefore, moderate the relation between one's perceived need to be competitive and their willingness to fake in job contests. Specifically, individuals who are high in Competitive Worldviews may be especially driven to secure resources (e.g., limited job positions) through means such as faking when they expect a strong need to be competitive.

Conversely, individuals who are low in Competitive Worldviews may be less willing to respond to their expected need to be competitive with faking, as they would be less likely to view the selection process as a struggle for resources. We therefore propose the following.

Hypothesis 4 *Competitive Worldviews will moderate the relation between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake, such that the relation will be stronger when Competitive Worldviews is high compared to when Competitive Worldviews is low.*

1.4 | Overview of studies

We tested our hypotheses in two experimental studies. In Study 1, we examined the effect of a competitive climate on willingness to fake (Hypothesis 1) and if Honesty–Humility moderated the relation between the perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake (Hypothesis 3). Based on our rationale for Hypothesis 1, individuals should be more willing to fake when they perceive a competitive climate than when they perceive a noncompetitive climate. We also examined whether Honesty–Humility, because of its nature of deceitfulness and manipulative tendencies (Lee & Ashton, 2004), would affect how willing individuals were to fake based on their expected need to be competitive. Specifically, we expected that low Honesty–Humility individuals should be especially willing to fake when there is a greater need or pressure to outperform other applicants—in other words, when the competition is fierce. In Study 2, we tested if a competitive hiring situation would increase willingness to fake (Hypothesis 2) and if Competitive Worldviews moderated the relation between the perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake (Hypothesis 4). We also aimed to demonstrate the generalizability of the above relations by testing them in different cultural contexts, namely the United States (Study 1) and the United Kingdom (Study 2). We conducted these experiments in the context of employment interviews, because of their common use as a selection tool (Huffcutt & Culbertson, 2011).

2 | STUDY 1

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Power analysis

We used two methods of determining our necessary sample size, using an estimated effect size of d = 0.26 for the main effect hypotheses, based off an average of effect sizes obtained from similar research (d = 0.21; Ho et al., 2019) and what is considered to be a median effect size in industrial-organizational psychological research (d = 0.32; Bosco, Aguinis, Singh, Field, & Pierce, 2015). First, we ran accuracy in parameter estimation (AIPE) analysis using the *MBESS* package in *R* (Kelley, 2016) to determine the sample size that is needed to achieve a confidence interval no wider than the predicted effect size (Brand & Bradley, 2016). The AIPE analysis determined that 918 participants were required. In addition to the AIPE analysis, we ran an a priori power analysis using the *pwr* package in *R* (Champely, 2018), which determined that 364 participants were required to achieve a power of 0.80.

2.1.2 | Sample

We used Amazon Mechanical Turk to recruit 1,160 adult participants (i.e., at least 18 years of age), which exceeded our AIPE analysis sample size. We then removed (in order): 135 cases where participants did not complete the study (e.g., data saved from people who clicked on the study link and exited prematurely) and 121 cases where participants incorrectly answered at least one instructed response item (e.g., "Please select option 3—To a moderate extent"). This resulted in a final sample size of 904 participants, which surpassed the estimate determined by our power analysis, hence achieving statistical power above 0.80.

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 82 years (M = 33.77, SD = 9.98), and 57.52% identified as male. The majority (53.54%) of participants reported their ethnicity as White/European, 26.22% as South Asian, and 20.24% of participants comprising other ethnicities. Participants had an average of 8.76 years of full-time work experience (SD = 9.76).

2.1.3 | Procedure

We used a two-group between-subjects experimental design where participants completed a study online using Qualtrics survey software. Participants were asked to imagine that they had an upcoming interview for an attractive job. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (competitive climate or noncompetitive climate) where they were presented with a transcript of an opening statement being read by an interviewer. Next, participants rated their perceived need to be competitive in the scenario, reported their willingness to fake, answered a manipulation check item, then completed demographic items and an Honesty–Humility scale (completed in that order).

2.1.4 | Materials

We created two different vignettes with employment interview scenarios, which included transcripts of an opening statement by an interviewer. We manipulated competitive climate in these vignettes.

The first vignette depicted an organization with competitive policies and practices. We developed this competitive climate vignette by incorporating language from the items in Fletcher et al.'s (2008) competitive climate scale. For example, two items from this scale are: "Everybody is concerned with being the top performer" and "My

manager frequently compares my performance with that of my co-workers." Thus, we incorporated phrases in the transcript such as "We do regular performance evaluation and let you know how you are stacking up relative to your co-workers… As such, we go out of our way to recognize and reward only top performers." This competitive vignette, therefore, included core aspects of competition such as a scarcity of resources and frequent social comparisons (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). The second vignette depicted a noncompetitive climate. We developed this vignette by ensuring that no core aspects of competition nor any construct related to competition were highlighted in the transcript, and emphasized other aspects of the organization such as cooperation (e.g., "We try to hire self-motivated people who value cooperation… We like to send out regular communication about our team's progress towards our goals"). See Appendix A for the vignettes that were used in Study 1.

2.1.5 | Measures

Participants completed measures of their perceived need to be competitive in order to secure the job, willingness to fake, Honesty–Humility, and a manipulation check.

Perceived need for competitiveness

Participants indicated their behavioral expectations toward the self of how competitive they must be in order to secure the job, with one item adapted from Ho et al. (2019): "Based on all of the information presented about the workplace, how competitive do you think you must be in this interview to get this job?" Responses were indicated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all competitive*; 5 = *extremely competitive*).

Willingness to fake

Participants rated their willingness to fake on a 5-point scale (1 = *to no extent*; 5 = *to a very great extent*) using the 16-item Short Interview Faking Behavior Scale (IFB-S; Bourdage, Roulin, & Tarraf, 2018). The IFB-S items were modified to reflect willingness to fake (e.g., "I told fictional stories prepared in advance of the interview to best present my credentials" became "I would tell fictional stories prepared in advance of the interview to best present my credentials"). Internal consistency reliability for the IFB-S in the current study was 0.94.

The IFB-S was also used to measure the four types or subscales of interview faking (slight image creation, extensive image creation, deceptive ingratiation, and image protection), which we had specified no a priori hypotheses for. Internal consistencies for these subscales in the current study were: 0.89 for slight image creation, 0.92 for extensive image creation, 0.84 for deceptive ingratiation, and 0.82 for image protection.

Honesty–Humility

Participants also completed the 32-item Honesty–Humility scale from the HEXACO-200 personality inventory (Lee & Ashton, 2004, 2006). Responses were made on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*), and a sample item is "If I want something from a person I dislike, I will act very nicely toward that person in order to get it." Internal consistency reliability for the Honesty–Humility scale in the current study was 0.93.

Manipulation check

We also included a categorical manipulation check item ("Please select one of the core values mentioned by the interviewer") to assess whether participants were more likely to associate competition with the competitive climate condition, and cooperation with the noncompetitive climate condition. "Competition" was the correct response for the competitive climate condition, whereas "Cooperation" was the correct response for the noncompetitive climate conditions. "Initiative" was a distractor option that was included in this manipulation check.

2.1.6 | Analytic approach

We first calculated descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations among study variables, which are displayed in Table 1.

To evaluate our hypothesis that a competitive climate would lead to greater willingness to fake than would a noncompetitive climate, we used an independent-samples, one-tailed *t* test to compare the mean levels of willingness to fake across the competitive climate and noncompetitive climate groups. To evaluate our hypothesis that Honesty–Humility would moderate the relation between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake, we ran a moderated regression analysis, which included perceived need for competitiveness, Honesty–Humility, and the interaction term (the cross-product of perceived need for competitiveness and Honesty–Humility scores) as predictors and willingness to fake as the outcome.[1] Perceived need for competitiveness and Honesty–Humility scores were mean-centered prior to creation of the cross-product terms in order to limit the effects of multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991).

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Manipulation check

To determine whether participants were more likely to associate competition with the competitive climate condition and cooperation with the noncompetitive climate condition, we used tests of significance (i.e., χ^2*s*), descriptive statistics (i.e., percentages), and effect sizes (i.e., odds ratios). A chi-square test of independence demonstrated that study condition was significantly related to participants' response to the manipulation check item: χ^2 (1, N = 904) = 167.28, p < .001. Descriptive statistics demonstrated that 71.49% of participants in the competitive climate group correctly indicated that competition was highlighted by the interviewer, whereas only 18.30% of participants in the noncompetitive climate

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals for study variables in study 1 (N = 904)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	33.77	9.98									
2. Gender	1.43	0.50	0.16** [.10, 0.22]								
3. Manipulation check	2.33	0.69	−0.01 [−0.08, 0.05]	−0.04 [−0.10, 0.03]							
4. Perceived need for competitiveness	4.16	0.85	0.09** [.02, 0.15]	0.00 [−0.06, 0.07]	0.18** [.12, 0.24]						
5. Overall willingness to fake	2.83	0.91	−0.30** [−0.36, −0.24]	−0.20** [−0.27, −0.14]	0.06 [−0.00, 0.13]	0.08* [.02, 0.15]					
6. Willingness to use slight image creation	2.90	1.08	−0.30** [−0.36, −0.24]	−0.17** [−0.24, −0.11]	0.09** [.03, 0.15]	0.15** [.08, 0.21]	0.89** [.88, 0.90]				
7. Willingness to use extensive image creation	2.32	1.22	−0.33** [−0.38, −0.27]	−0.25** [−0.31, −0.19]	0.03 [−0.04, 0.09]	−0.00 [−0.07, 0.06]	0.86** [.84, 0.87]	0.71** [.67, 0.74]			
8. Willingness to use deceptive ingratiation	3.18	0.98	−0.21** [−0.27, −0.14]	−0.13** [−0.19, −0.06]	0.01 [−0.06, 0.08]	0.08* [.01, 0.14]	0.81** [.79, 0.83]	0.67** [.63, 0.70]	0.55** [.50, 0.59]		
9. Willingness to use image protection	2.92	1.01	−0.17** [−0.23, −0.10]	−0.12** [−0.19, −0.06]	0.08* [.01, 0.14]	0.07* [.00, 0.13]	0.82** [.80, 0.84]	0.63** [.59, 0.67]	0.59** [.55, 0.63]	0.57** [.53, 0.62]	
10. Honesty–Humility	3.40	0.69	0.31** [.25, 0.37]	0.28** [.22, 0.34]	0.03 [−0.04, 0.09]	0.07* [.00, 0.13]	−0.64** [−0.67, −0.60]	−0.54** [−0.58, −0.49]	−0.65** [−0.69, −0.61]	−0.46** [−0.51, −0.40]	−0.48** [−0.53, −0.43]

Note: *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation. Gender was coded as 1 = Male, 2 = Female. Manipulation check was coded as 1 = Initiative, 2 = Cooperation, and 3 = Competition. Correlations with Age were based on N = 903. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval.

*p < .05; **p < .01.

group selected competition as their response. The odds ratio was 71.49/18.30 = 3.91, meaning that participants in the competitive climate group were 3.91 times as likely to associate competition with the competitive climate scenario compared to participants in the noncompetitive climate group. Meanwhile, 70.31% of participants in the noncompetitive climate group correctly indicated that cooperation was highlighted by the interviewer, whereas only 12.94% of participants in the competitive climate group selected cooperation as their response. The odds ratio was 70.31/12.94 = 5.43, meaning that participants in the noncompetitive climate group were 5.43 times as likely to associate cooperation with the noncompetitive climate scenario compared to participants in the competitive climate group. Overall, the manipulation check indicates that the manipulation was successful.[2]

3.2 | Hypothesis tests

Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants would have higher willingness to fake in the competitive, relative to noncompetitive climate condition. We found support for this hypothesis as participants in the competitive climate condition (M = 2.90, SD = 0.91) had significantly greater willingness to fake than did participants in the noncompetitive climate condition (M = 2.76, SD = 0.90); $t(902) = 2.45$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.16$, *95% CI*[.03, 0.29].

Hypothesis 3 predicted that Honesty–Humility would moderate the relation between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake, such that this relation would be stronger when scores on Honesty–Humility are lower. To test this hypothesis, we regressed willingness to fake on perceived need for competitiveness, Honesty–Humility and their interaction. Together, perceived need for competitiveness, Honesty–Humility, and their interaction term predicted 42.3% of the variance in participants' willingness to fake, $F(3, 900) = 220.1$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.42$, *95% CI*[.38, 0.46]. Perceived need for competitiveness was found to uniquely predict 2% of the variance in participants' willingness to fake, $t(900) = 5.23$, $p < .001$, $sr^2 = 0.02$, *95% CI*[.00, 0.03], $\beta = 0.13$. Honesty–Humility was found to uniquely predict 41% of the variance in participants' willingness to fake, $t(900) = -25.05$, $p < .001$, $sr^2 = 0.41$, *95% CI*[.36, 0.46], $\beta = -0.64$. There was a significant moderation effect of Honesty–Humility on the relation between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake, $t(900) = -2.04$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.00$, $\beta = -0.05$, $p = .04$. Specifically, the relation between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake is slightly stronger for those with low Honesty–Humility. The full regression results are displayed in Table 2.

3.3 | Exploratory tests

We did not have a priori hypotheses, but explored how perceived need for competitiveness was related to participants' willingness to engage in each of the four interview faking tactics: slight image

TABLE 2 Regression results using overall willingness to fake as the criterion in study 1 (N = 904)

Predictor	*b*	*b* 95% CI [LL, UL]	*β*	*β* 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	*r*	Fit	Difference
(Intercept)	2.83**	[2.79, 2.88]							
Perceived need for competitiveness	0.14**	[.08, 0.19]	0.13	[.08, 0.18]	0.02	[.00, 0.03]	0.08*		
Honesty–Humility	−0.85**	[−0.91, −0.78]	−0.64	[−0.69, −0.59]	0.41	[.36, 0.46]	−0.64**		
								$R^2 = 0.42$**	
								95% CI[.37,0.46]	
(Intercept)	2.83**	[2.79, 2.88]							
Perceived need for competitiveness	0.14**	[.09, 0.20]	0.13	[.08, 0.18]	0.02	[.00, 0.03]	0.08*		
Honesty–Humility	−0.84**	[−0.90, −0.77]	−0.64	[−0.69, −0.59]	0.40	[.35, 0.45]	−0.64**		
I (Perceived need for competitiveness × Honesty–Humility)	−0.07*	[−0.15, −0.00]	−0.05	[−0.10, −0.00]	0.00	[−0.00, 0.01]			
								$R^2 = 0.42$**	$\Delta R^2 = 0.00$*
								95% CI[.38,0.46]	95% CI[−0.00, 0.01]

Note: A significant *b*-weight indicates the *β*-weight and semi-partial correlation are also significant. *b* represents unstandardized regression weights. *β* indicates the standardized regression weights. sr^2 represents the semi-partial correlation squared. *r* represents the zero-order correlation. *LL* and *UL* indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

creation, extensive image creation, image protection, and deceptive ingratiation. Perceived need for competitiveness was most strongly related to willingness to use slight image creation (r = 0.15, p < .001), but not to extensive image creation (r = −0.00, p = .52). Meanwhile, perceived need for competitiveness had weak relations with willingness to use image protection (r = 0.07, p = .02) and deceptive ingratiation (r = 0.08, p = .01) tactics.

4 | DISCUSSION

Overall, the results of Study 1 supported Hypothesis 1. That is, a competitive climate led to greater willingness to fake compared to a noncompetitive climate. These results suggest that applicants were slightly more willing to fake in an interview when they perceived that competition was a prominent aspect of an organization or workplace, which provides theoretical support for Roulin et al.'s (2016) proposition that a competitive climate would increase willingness to fake. The results of Study 1 also provided some support for Hypothesis 3, in that the relation between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake was slightly stronger for low Honesty–Humility participants. We note, however, that the interaction between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake was very small. Further, the incremental variance explained by this interaction may be negligible and vanish when corrected for overdetermination.[3]

5 | STUDY 2

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Sample

Participants in the present study were adults (i.e., at least 18 years of age) from the United Kingdom and were recruited in two phases. In phase 1, we recruited 609 participants from Prolific Academic (ProA), an online research platform (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017). We removed 10 cases where participants incorrectly answered an instructed response item that served as an attention check (e.g., "Please mark option 2 in order to answer this item correctly"), leaving 599 cases remaining. These 599 participants were invited to participate in phase 2 of the study, of which 548 responded. We then removed four cases where participants incorrectly answered an instructed response/attention check item. This resulted in a final sample of N = 544 participants. Estimated power based on an effect size of d = 0.21 (Ho et al., 2019) was 0.79.

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 73 years (M = 37.46, SD = 10.66), and 66.90% identified as female. The majority (93.75%) of participants reported their ethnicity as White/European and 6.25% of participants as other. About 63.42% of participants were full-time workers, 28.86% were part-time workers, and 7.72% were unemployed and job seeking. Participants had an average of 14.55 years of full-time work experience (SD = 10.33).

5.1.2 | Procedure

Participants completed both phases of the experiment online using Qualtrics survey software. In phase 1, participants completed the Competitive Worldviews and demographic items. In phase 2 (2 weeks later), participants who completed phase 1 were invited to participate in another study. We used a two-group between-subjects experimental design (competitive hiring situation and noncompetitive hiring situation) for participants in phase 2. Participants were asked to imagine that they had an upcoming interview for a job that they considered to be attractive and were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions where they were presented with their respective vignette. Next, participants rated their perceived need for competitiveness, willingness to fake, and answered a manipulation check item about the competitiveness of the interview situation (completed in that order).

5.1.3 | Materials

We created two different vignettes with employment interview scenarios, which included transcripts of an opening statement by an interviewer. We manipulated the competitiveness of the hiring situation in these vignettes. The first vignette depicted an interviewer who emphasized the competitiveness of the selection process. We developed this vignette by incorporating language about competition from Roulin et al.'s (2016) model of applicant faking (e.g., "Few candidates are expected to make the cut… Our hiring process involves a fierce competition taking place among the elite") in the interviewer's opening statement. Just as in our previous study, we incorporated core aspects of competition in the competitive vignette, such as a scarcity of resources or limited job positions (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). The second vignette depicted an interviewer who did not emphasize any core aspects of competition, nor any construct related to competition in the selection process. We developed this vignette by incorporating phrases that did not signal fierce competition such as, "Our hiring process aims to identify candidates who have the right skills and abilities to do the job… We hope that you will feel comfortable while you're here." See Appendix B for the vignettes that were used in Study 2.

5.1.4 | Measures

Participants completed measures of their perceived need for competitiveness, willingness to fake, Competitive Worldviews, and a manipulation check.

Perceived need for competitiveness

Participants indicated their behavioral expectations toward the self of how competitive they must be in order to secure the job, using one item adapted from Ho et al. (2019): "How competitive do you think you must be in order to get this job?" Responses were made on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all competitive*; 5 = *extremely competitive*).

Willingness to fake

Participants reported their willingness to fake on a 5-point scale (1 = *to no extent*; 5 = *to a very great extent*) using the same version of the IFB-S and its subscales (Bourdage et al., 2018) from Study 1. Internal consistency reliabilities in the current study were 0.92 for the IFB-S, 0.83 for slight image creation, 0.90 for extensive image creation, 0.82 for deceptive ingratiation, and 0.78 for image protection.

Competitive Worldviews

Participants also completed the 10-item Competitive Worldviews scale (Perry, Sibley, & Duckitt, 2013). Responses were made on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*), and a sample item is "It's a dog-eat-dog world where you have to be ruthless at times." Internal consistency reliability in the current study was 0.75.

Manipulation check

We included a manipulation check item that asked participants "How competitive was the earlier interview situation?" in order to determine whether the participants in the competitive hiring situation perceived the interview as being more competitive than did the participants in the noncompetitive hiring situation. Responses were made on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all competitive*; 5 = *extremely competitive*).

5.1.5 | Analytic approach

We first calculated descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations among study variables, which are displayed in Table 3. We used the same analytic approach as in Study 1, using an independent-samples, one-tailed *t* test to test Hypothesis 2 and a moderated regression analysis to test Hypothesis 4.

6 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 | Manipulation check

The manipulation check indicated that the participants in the competitive hiring situation rated the interview (M = 4.65, SD = 0.69) as being more competitive than did the participants in the noncompetitive hiring situation (M = 3.57, SD = 0.97), $t(542)$ = 15.01, d = 1.29, *95% CI*[1.10, 1.47], $p < .001$.

6.2 | Hypothesis tests

Hypothesis 2 predicted that participants in the competitive hiring situation would have greater willingness to fake than would participants in the noncompetitive hiring situation. We found support for this hypothesis, as participants in the competitive hiring situation (M = 2.88, SD = 0.86) had significantly greater willingness to fake than

TABLE 3 Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals for study variables in study 2 (N = 544)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	37.46	10.66									
2. Gender	1.67	0.47	−0.02 [−0.11, 0.06]								
3. Manipulation check	4.11	1.00	0.08 [−0.01, 0.16]	0.06 [−0.03, 0.14]							
4. Perceived need for competitiveness	4.28	0.84	0.10* [.02, 0.18]	0.06 [−0.02, 0.14]	0.75** [.72, 0.79]						
5. Overall willingness to fake	2.76	0.82	−0.06 [−0.14, 0.03]	0.00 [−0.08, 0.09]	0.21** [.13, 0.29]	0.23** [.15, 0.31]					
6. Willingness to use slight image creation	2.89	0.95	−0.08 [−0.17, 0.00]	0.00 [−0.08, 0.09]	0.22** [.14, 0.30]	0.22** [.14, 0.30]	0.89** [.88, 0.91]				
7. Willingness to use extensive image creation	2.11	1.09	−0.10* [−0.18, −0.02]	−0.01 [−0.10, 0.07]	0.11** [.03, 0.19]	0.14** [.06, 0.22]	0.83** [.81, 0.86]	0.67** [.62, 0.71]			
8. Willingness to use deceptive ingratiation	3.16	0.92	−0.03 [−0.12, 0.05]	0.06 [−0.03, 0.14]	0.21** [.13, 0.29]	0.23** [.14, 0.30]	0.78** [.75, 0.81]	0.68** [.63, 0.72]	0.48** [.41, 0.54]		
9. Willingness to use image protection	2.87	0.97	0.03 [−0.05, 0.11]	−0.04 [−0.13, 0.04]	0.17** [.08, 0.25]	0.20** [.12, 0.28]	0.81** [.77, 0.83]	0.63** [.58, 0.68]	0.57** [.52, 0.63]	0.47** [.40, 0.53]	
10. Competitive Worldviews	2.18	0.53	−0.08 [−0.17, 0.00]	−0.16** [−0.24, −0.07]	−0.07 [−0.15, 0.02]	0.04 [−0.04, 0.13]	0.25** [.17, 0.32]	0.21** [.12, 0.29]	0.28** [.20, 0.36]	0.16** [.07, 0.24]	0.16** [.08, 0.24]

Note: M = mean, *SD* = standard deviation. Gender was coded as 1 = Male, 2 = Female. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

did participants in the noncompetitive hiring situation (M = 2.64, SD = 0.75); $t(542) = 3.45$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.30$, *95% CI*[.13, 0.46].

Hypothesis 4 predicted that Competitive Worldviews would moderate the relation between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake, such that this relation would be stronger for individuals who are higher in Competitive Worldviews. Together, perceived need for competitiveness, Competitive Worldviews, and their interaction term predicted 11.1% of the variance in participants' willingness to fake, $F(3, 540) = 22.44$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.11$, *95% CI*[.06, 0.16]. Perceived need for competitiveness was found to uniquely predict 5% of the variance in participants' willingness to fake, $t(540) = 5.50$, $p < .001$, $sr^2 = 0.05$, *95% CI*[.02, 0.08], $\beta = 0.22$. Competitive Worldviews was found to uniquely predict 6% of the variance in participants' willingness to fake, $t(540) = 5.82$, $p < .001$, $sr^2 = 0.06$, *95% CI*[.02, 0.09], $\beta = 0.24$. A hierarchical regression indicated a nonsignificant moderation effect of Competitive Worldviews on the relation between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake; $t(540) = 0.34$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.00$, $\beta = 0.01$, $p = .74$. Thus, Hypothesis 4, that Competitive Worldviews would moderate the relation between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake, was not supported. The full regression results are displayed in Table 4.

Overall, the results of Study 2 provided support for Hypothesis 2. Specifically, a competitive hiring situation led to greater willingness to fake compared to a noncompetitive hiring situation. These results suggest that applicants are more willing to fake in an interview when competition is salient within a hiring situation or selection process. Moreover, these results provide theoretical support for Roulin et al.'s (2016) model of faking: that a competitive hiring situation would increase willingness to fake. On the contrary, the results of Study 2 did not provide support for Hypothesis 4. Competitive Worldviews did not affect the strength of the relationship between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake.

6.3 | Exploratory tests

We did not have a priori hypotheses, but again explored how perceived need for competitiveness was related to participants' willingness to engage in each of the four interview faking tactics. Results indicated that perceived need for competitiveness was related to willingness to use all four faking tactics: slight image creation (r = 0.22, $p < .001$), extensive image creation (r = 0.14, $p < .001$), image protection (r = 0.20, $p < .001$), and deceptive ingratiation (r = 0.23, $p < .001$).

7 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

In two experimental studies, we examined how two sources of competition—perceptions of a competitive organizational climate (Study 1) and a competitive hiring situation (Study 2)—would affect applicants' willingness to fake during employment interviews. Study 1 found that perceptions of a competitive organizational climate led

TABLE 4 Regression results using overall willingness to fake as the criterion in study 2 (N = 544)

Predictor	*b*	*b* 95% CI [LL, UL]	*β*	*β* 95% CI[LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	*r*	Fit	Difference
(Intercept)	2.76**	[2.69, 2.82]							
Perceived need for competitiveness	0.22**	[.14, 0.29]	0.22	[.14, 0.30]	0.05	[.02, 0.08]	0.23**		
Competitive Worldviews	0.36**	[.24, 0.49]	0.24	[.16, 0.32]	0.06	[.02, 0.09]	0.25**		
								R^2 = 0.11**	
								95% CI[.06,0.16]	
(Intercept)	2.76**	[2.69, 2.82]							
Perceived need for competitiveness	0.22**	[.14, 0.30]	0.22	[.14, 0.30]	0.05	[.02, 0.08]	0.23**		
Competitive Worldviews	0.36**	[.24, 0.49]	0.24	[.16, 0.32]	0.06	[.02, 0.09]	0.25**		
I (Perceived need for competitiveness × Competitive Worldviews)	0.02	[−0.12, 0.17]	0.01	[−0.07, 0.09]	0.00	[−0.00, 0.00]			
								R^2 = 0.11**	ΔR^2 = 0.00
								95% CI[.06,0.16]	95% CI[−0.00, 0.00]

Note: A significant *b*-weight indicates the *β*-weight and semi-partial correlation are also significant. *b* represents unstandardized regression weights. *β* indicates the standardized regression weights. sr^2 represents the semi-partial correlation squared. *r* represents the zero-order correlation. *LL* and *UL* indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

to greater willingness to fake than did perceptions of a noncompetitive climate. Study 2 found that a competitive hiring situation led to greater willingness to fake than did a noncompetitive hiring situation. These findings make theoretical contributions to the applicant faking literature by supporting a core proposition from Roulin et al.'s (2016) model of faking: perceived competition for the job, specifically at the organization-level, increases applicants' willingness to fake. As well, our findings provide some initial support for propositions from theories predicting that individuals upregulate their preference for risk (e.g., sending dishonest signals) when there is a great perceived need to outperform competitors (Barclay, Mishra, & Sparks, 2018; Mishra et al., 2017).

One key component of Roulin et al.'s (2016) model of faking is that it assigns a prominent role to different forms of competition as an explanatory factor of applicants' willingness to fake. Our findings support this idea because competition stemming from both the organizational climate and the hiring situation increased participants' willingness to fake. However, it should be noted that different forms of competition may have similar directionality, but differing magnitude of effects on the willingness to fake.[4] The effect size of competitive climate on willingness to fake was d = 0.16 in Study 1, which is smaller than that found in Ho et al. (2019), where applicants were given information about the selection ratio before a hypothetical interview—and a small selection ratio led to greater willingness to fake than did a large selection ratio (d = 0.24). In contrast, the corresponding effect size of competitive hiring situations (Study 2) was larger in magnitude (d = 0.30). It may be the case that for applicants, the hiring situation or interview is a more proximal factor compared to the climate within the workplace or information about the hiring process given beforehand. Thus, although the interview is more proximal, our findings highlight that applicants may be willing to fake more not only when they must outcompete each other for the job, but even when they anticipate having to work in a competitive climate.

We also note that a competitive climate may have differential effects on willingness to fake based on factors such as the perceived attractiveness of the job. Past research has found that perceived attractiveness can lead to greater willingness to fake (Buehl & Melchers, 2018). Thus, it is possible that even though we instructed participants to think of an organization that they very much wanted to work for, the competitive climate might have been viewed as unattractive and may have discouraged some individuals from faking. For instance, Roulin and Krings (2020) found that when applicants were given a list of organizations that varied in the competitiveness of the culture, there was some evidence of self-selection that occurred. The authors found that applicants who were lower on Honesty–Humility and higher on Competitive Worldviews were more likely to select an organization with a more competitive (as opposed to a less competitive) culture as the one they would be most interested in working at. In the present research, there might also have been greater variability in perceived attractiveness within the competitive climate group relative to the noncompetitive group, based on individual difference characteristics of the participants. For instance, Fletcher et al. (2008) found that in a competitive work climate, individuals who were lower in trait competitiveness were less satisfied and experienced higher levels of stress at their jobs. Participants in our study who were low in trait competitiveness may have seen a competitive climate as being a stressful—and thus unattractive—place to work. For these participants, the relation between competition and willingness to fake could have been weaker compared to participants who are high in trait competitiveness and more attracted to working in a competitive climate. Overall, competition seems to increase willingness to fake, but perhaps to a larger extent when individuals are attracted to the prospect of competition within the workplace.

In both studies, we also conducted exploratory analyses to examine if participants were more willing to use certain faking tactics to different extents in a competitive climate (Study 1) versus a competitive hiring situation (Study 2). In Study 1, the perceived need for competitiveness in the interview was most strongly related to willingness to use slight image creation (r = 0.15; e.g., exaggerating past work experiences or embellishing qualifications), but was not related to extensive image creation (r = −0.00; e.g., outright fabrication). One explanation for these findings is that presenting participants with a competitive climate led them to imagine what behaviors they would actually engage in once on the job. For instance, participants may be willing to use slight image creation to impress an interviewer because these tactics could easily translate to success in a competitive workplace (e.g., exaggerating work accomplishments to a supervisor). Participants may have also been unwilling to use extensive image creation in the interview (e.g., outright fabrication, lying) because these tactics would lead to negative outcomes in the workplace (e.g., it is likely difficult to somehow fabricate good job performance to one's supervisor). In Study 2, however, perceived need for competitiveness was related to willingness to use all four faking tactics (rs = 0.14 to 0.23). Here, participants were only led to imagine what strategies they would use to impress the interviewer, without any priming of what they might do on the job. This could explain why participants were willing to use extensive image creation when the emphasis was on securing the job rather than on competition in the workplace. Thus, willingness to use interview faking tactics may differ based on where competition is highlighted (i.e., during the selection process versus in the workplace).

We also examined whether two individual differences—Honesty–Humility and Competitive Worldviews—would interact with perceived need for competitiveness to predict willingness to fake. In Study 1, Honesty–Humility was found to moderate the relation between perceived need for competitiveness and willingness to fake. In Study 2, Competitive Worldviews was not a significant moderator. There are various potential explanations for these results, which we discuss below.

First, we may have found a significant moderation effect of Honesty–Humility because it is a central factor underlying IM (Bourdage et al., 2015). In line with the idea of faking being a risky decision, research has demonstrated that low Honesty–Humility is linked to higher risk-taking (e.g., de Vries, de Vries, & Feij, 2009;

Weller & Thulin, 2012) and is associated with both greater expected benefits and less perceived risk or danger for engaging in risky behavior (Weller & Tikir, 2011). As we noted in our discussion of Study 1 results, however, the small moderation effect of Honesty–Humility only explained 0.3% of additional variance in willingness to fake, and may have just been a statistical artifact. Nonetheless, the relations between Honesty–Humility and overall willingness to fake (r = −0.64) as well as with each of the four dimensions of interview faking (rs ranging from −0.46 to −0.65) were relatively strong, which replicates past findings (e.g., Bourdage et al., 2018; Law et al., 2016). Overall, Honesty–Humility seems to be related to willingness to fake in interviews, but this relation may not change substantially at different levels of perceived need for competitiveness in order to secure the job.

The positive relations between Competitive Worldviews and willingness to fake also replicate past findings (e.g., Roulin & Krings, 2016). However, we found that Competitive Worldviews did not interact with perceived need for competitiveness to predict willingness to fake. One possible explanation is that Competitive Worldviews highlights the dangers or threats associated with risks such as faking, which discouraged participants from wanting to do so. Duckitt et al. (2002), for instance, found that individuals who view the social world as a competitive jungle tend to also view the world as more dangerous and threatening. Therefore, individuals who are high in Competitive Worldviews may be highly motivated to win contests and secure resources, but might be simultaneously held back by the dangers of potentially getting caught faking.

7.1 | Strengths, limitations, and future directions

The present research had numerous strengths. First, we utilized an experimental design in both of our studies, such that we randomly assigned participants to two different conditions (i.e., a competitive climate/hiring situation and a noncompetitive climate/hiring situation). This experimental design thus strengthens the internal validity of these two studies. A second strength of the present research is that the interviewer transcripts that were used in our study conditions were representative of the theoretical propositions that we aimed to test and were developed using an empirical typology of competition (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). For instance, our competitive climate/hiring situation vignettes directly adapted items from a competitive climate scale that has produced valid and reliable data (Fletcher et al., 2008), as well as statements from researchers that are believed to trigger perceptions of strong competition in the selection process (e.g., "few applicants are expected to make the cut;" Tett & Simonet, 2011, p. 310; "a fierce competition is taking place among the elite to get hired," Roulin et al., 2016, p. 152). These competitive vignettes also incorporated Johnson and Johnson's (1989) primary characteristics of competition: a perceived scarcity of resources, an inherent uncertainty of outcomes resulting from a focus on the relative performance of competitors, and social comparisons. We also developed our noncompetitive climate/hiring situation vignettes using this typology of competition, by ensuring that the vignettes did not include phrases that would signal these aspects of competition. In summary, the strengths of our study designs and applied theoretical frameworks may give us greater confidence in any conclusions that could be drawn from our findings.

One limitation of the present research pertains to the comparison of effects across a competitive climate versus competitive hiring situation. Specifically, there could have been spillover effects from the organizational climate to the hiring situation and vice versa because we did not manipulate or keep the competitiveness of the climate (hiring situation) constant when testing the effects of the hiring situation (climate).[5] Participants in the competitive hiring situation may have also imagined the organizational climate to be more competitive than participants in the noncompetitive hiring situation. Similarly, participants who were presented with a competitive organizational climate may have imagined the hiring situation to be more competitive than participants who were shown a noncompetitive climate. Ultimately, the designs of Studies 1 and 2 cannot allow us to disentangle the effects of a competitive climate versus hiring situation without accounting for these potential spillover effects.

The present research also does not permit an inference of what the long-term implications of applicants' willingness to fake are. Study 1 found that participants increased their willingness to fake even when anticipating competition in the workplace (i.e., a competitive climate). Thus, willingness to fake might not only lead to faking behavior during selection, but also potentially on the job. Research using a laboratory task has found that winners of competitions tend to later behave more dishonestly (e.g., lie and cheat) compared to competition losers (Schurr & Ritov, 2016), which might be similar to the idea of faking in an interview, and then, acting dishonestly or misrepresenting oneself on the job. Moreover, research has demonstrated that there is cross-situational consistency of faking across personnel selection tests, such that faking is not an isolated incident and may perpetuate in situations where there is strong competitive pressure (Ingold et al., 2015). Overall, future research could examine how competition may impact the long-term outcomes of applicants' willingness to fake, such as counterproductive work behavior and job performance.

Although the present research advances our understanding of the role of competition in applicants' willingness to fake, a limitation is that we examined individual manipulations of competition separately in two studies rather than together at once. Competition can manifest in various forms ranging from perceptions of competition in situations, to competitive traits and attitudes, and it is unclear how multiple forms of competition that are presented simultaneously in a selection situation may impact willingness to fake. That is, although we found that a competitive hiring situation can increase willingness to fake, applicants could also perceive competition in the form of company values and mission statements, job advertisements, or via word-of-mouth from current and past employees. Future research could investigate whether the effect of multiple forms of competition in selection situations is additive (i.e., applicants are consistently

more willing to fake as they encounter a higher number of cues signaling competition) or curvilinear (i.e., applicants are only willing to fake up to a certain extent, regardless of increasing competition). Similarly, it would be interesting to determine if *too much* competition can have a negative influence on faking, such as if overwhelming competitive pressure would increase interview anxiety and hinder interview performance. Future studies could answer these questions by using more complex, multivariate designs to examine the simultaneous effects of numerous forms of competition in selection situations, or use policy-capturing methodologies that permit an assessment of the relative contributions of these individual cues on willingness to fake.

Finally, we only measured participants' willingness to use *deceptive* tactics, and did not assess participants' willingness to engage in honest IM tactics (Bourdage et al., 2018). Our results suggest that individuals fake more in response to competition, but they might also become more motivated to use strategies such as honestly self-promoting their accomplishments to the interviewer. In addition, competition might increase willingness to fake more than it increases willingness to use honest tactics (and vice versa). Future research could, therefore, shed light on these questions by measuring and comparing individuals' willingness to engage in both faking and honest tactics.

7.2 | Practical implications

The present research has implications for organizations and practitioners. Our findings suggest that employers might be able to decrease applicants' willingness to fake by deemphasizing competition in the hiring process and when describing their organizational climate. We note, however, that effects on willingness to fake can be considered small for both a competitive climate (d = 0.16) and competitive hiring situation (d = 0.30) based on effect size benchmarks in industrial-organizational psychology (Bosco et al., 2015). Furthermore, because willingness to fake is a more proximal criterion than actual faking behavior, our obtained effect sizes may be even smaller if measuring actual faking behavior. Thus, organizations could highlight characteristics such as cooperation and growth to applicants as a method of decreasing applicants' willingness to fake, but this strategy will not completely eliminate faking.

8 | CONCLUSION

The present research included two experiments that tested theoretical propositions on the impact of competition on willingness to fake in employment interviews. Our findings suggest that although competition may be an inherent part of any job contest, increasing the salience of competition can drive applicants' willingness to fake to a greater extent. Indeed, our findings reveal that applicants are more willing to fake not only when the selection process is difficult, but also even when they view that competition is a crucial part of the work environment. Applicants may, therefore, be willing to fake more as an adaptive strategy to obtain successful outcomes in situations where competition is salient. Overall, this research adds novel contributions to the applicant faking literature by shedding light on the effects of competition on individuals' willingness to fake.

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ENDNOTES

[1] As a robustness check, we tested Hypothesis 3 (Study 1) and Hypothesis 4 (Study 2) with the inclusion of age, gender, and full-time work experience as control variables in the moderated regressions. The results were nearly identical when control variables were included. We refer readers to the online supplemental material for these findings.

[2] We also ran our analyses with removal of cases where participants incorrectly answered the manipulation check (N = 641 remaining) and found the same pattern of results for each hypothesis. These results are available from the authors upon request.

[3] We thank an anonymous reviewer for noting this.

[4] We also considered sample differences (e.g., age, unemployment rate) as potential explanations for the difference in effect sizes across studies, as competition could be differently relevant for United States versus United Kingdom job applicants. However, we note that our samples were comparable in age (M_{Study1} = 33.77 vs. M_{Study2} = 37.46) and may not have significant cultural differences that would influence their willingness to fake. For instance, the United States and the United Kingdom are both classified under the same Anglo societal cluster (Gupta & Hanges, 2004). It is also possible that the unemployment rate in each country contributes to faking (e.g., König, Wong, & Cen, 2012). However, the unemployment rates for each country were quite similar in 2018 (3.9% in the United States and 4.0% in the United Kingdom; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019), which was the year of data collection for both of our studies.

[5] We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this helpful suggestion.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional Supporting Information may be found online in the Supporting Information section.

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APPENDIX A

STUDY 1 VIGNETTES

Competitive climate

Please imagine that you have been invited for an interview at a company that you would very much like to work for. You know for a fact that your chances of obtaining the job depend only on how well you do on the interview.

Please read the following transcript of what the interviewer says:

> *"Hello, go ahead and take a seat and we'll get started. So, let me tell you a bit about the workplace. Our core values are excellence, commitment, and competition, and we always try to keep those values in mind.*
>
> *We've got a great team here because we value results. We do regular performance evaluation and let you know how you are stacking up relative to your co-workers.*
>
> *Our employees all strive to be top performers. As such, we go out of our way to recognize and reward only top performers.*
>
> *Excellence is important in everything we do here, so we try to hire self-motivated people with a competitive spirit that drives them to try to be the top performer.*

We like to very open about results, and keep them posted in a public place so people can regularly compare their performance with each other.

We feel that those values make this a great place to work. That said, let's get started with the interview."

Noncompetitive climate

Please imagine that you have been invited for an interview at a company that you would very much like to work for. You know for a fact that your chances of obtaining the job depend only on how well you do on the interview.

Please read the following transcript of what the interviewer says:

"Hello, go ahead and take a seat and we'll get started. So, let me tell you a bit about the workplace. Our core values are excellence, commitment, and cooperation, and we always try to keep those values in mind.

We've got a great team here because we value growth and try to develop our employees' skills. We do regular performance evaluation and let you know how you're doing to help you grow and develop.

Excellence is important in everything we do here, so we try to hire self-motivated people who value cooperation.

We like to be very open, and we like to send out regular communication about our team's progress towards our goals.

We feel that those values make this a great place to work. That said, let's get started with the interview"

APPENDIX B

STUDY 2 VIGNETTES

Competitive hiring situation

Please imagine that you have been invited for an interview at a company that you would very much like to work for. You know for a fact that your chances of obtaining the job depend only on how well you do on the interview.

Please read the following transcript of what the interviewer says:

"Hello, go ahead and take a seat and we'll get started. So, let me tell you a bit about our hiring process and how we determine which candidates will receive job offers.

First, keep in mind that few candidates are expected to make the cut, as we are extremely selective about who we hire. Our hiring process involves a fierce competition taking place among the elite, so in order to get the job, you really have to stand out from the other candidates. So, please ensure that you impress us during this interview. We feel that this approach allows our organization to hire the top candidates.

In this interview, you are going to be asked five questions so we can get to know you, and also about your past work experiences. That said, let's get started with the interview."

Noncompetitive hiring situation

Please imagine that you have been invited for an interview at a company that you would very much like to work for. You know for a fact that your chances of obtaining the job depend only on how well you do on the interview.

Please read the following transcript of what the interviewer says:

"Hello, go ahead and take a seat and we'll get started. So, let me tell you a bit about our hiring process and how we determine which candidates will receive job offers.

Our hiring process aims to identify candidates who have the right skills and abilities to do the job. So, please try your best during this interview and we hope that you will feel comfortable while you're here. We feel that this approach allows our organization to hire good candidates.

In this interview, you are going to be asked five questions so we can get to know you, and also about your past work experiences. That said, let's get started with the interview."