Deception as competence: The effect of occupational stereotypes on the perception and proliferation of deception

Brian C. Gunia⁎, Emma E. Levine

⁎ Corresponding author at: Johns Hopkins Carey Business School, 100 International Drive, Baltimore, MD 21202, United States.
E-mail address: brian.gunia@jhu.edu (B.C. Gunia).

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ABSTRACT

Deception is common but widely condemned. The current research examines why. Integrating theories of selling, stereotypes, and negotiation—and challenging much research and rhetoric on deception—we document that perceivers do not always disapprove of deceivers. Instead, they conclude that deceivers will be competent in certain occupations: those in which a selling orientation (SO) is stereotypically seen as integral to the job. We first introduce SO as an occupational stereotype and distinguish between occupations stereotyped as high vs. low in SO (HISO vs. LISO). We then demonstrate (across six studies; two preregistered; total N = 1584) that deception is perceived to signal a person’s ability to engage in SO, and thus their competence in HISO occupations. Finally, we show that this perception may lead to the hiring of deceptive individuals. These results identify occupations as a moderator of deception-related reactions, helping to explain persistent deception and highlight possible interventions.

1. Introduction

Sell:

1. Deliberate deception: cheat, hoax, imposition…
   – Definition #4, Merriam-Webster’s Third New International Unabridged Dictionary.

Self-interested deception, defined as explicitly transmitting information that intentionally misleads others for the purpose of personal gain (Boles, Croson, & Murnighan, 2000; Gino & Shea, 2012; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015), emerges frequently in organizational settings (Gneezy, 2005). For example, 39% of people around the world consider corrupt and deceptive practices widespread in their own countries (EY Global Fraud Survey, 2016), and much of that deception occurs within and against organizations (Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, 2018).

Despite the prevalence of self-interested deception (hereafter just “deception”) and related forms of unethical behavior, though, psychological research consistently suggests that perceivers react negatively to deceivers. For example, deception elicits anger, disliking, punishment, and perceptions of low trustworthiness (e.g., Boles et al., 2000; Croson, Boles, & Murnighan, 2003; Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004; Kim, Dirks, & Cooper, 2009; Mayer & Davis, 1999; Schweitzer & Croson, 1999; Schweitzer, Hershey, & Bradlow, 2006; Tyler, Feldman, and Reichert, 2006). Importantly, recent research also suggests that deception and other forms of unethical behavior signal incompetence (Stellar & Willer, 2018)—a finding broadly consistent with meta-analytic results suggesting that signals of competence and integrity are positively correlated (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007).

If deception elicits such a wide array of negative reactions, and especially the perception of incompetence, why do we continue to see so much of it in real organizations? An economic explanation would suggest that the benefits outweigh the costs—that deceivers, on average, gain more than they lose (Gneezy, 2005). We offer a complementary, social-psychological explanation—that perceivers do not entirely disapprove of deceivers. Instead, perceivers conclude that deceivers will be competent in particular occupations. Why might this happen? In which occupations? How might the perception that deception is competent contribute to the proliferation of deception? Our research seeks to answer these questions.

To answer the first two questions, we integrate research on selling (e.g., Saxe & Weitz, 1982) and occupational stereotypes (e.g., Babin, Boles, & Darden, 1995) to propose that people stereotype occupations as relatively high vs. low in selling orientation (HISO vs. LISO). That is, they stereotypically believe that selling orientation (SO)—or the use of high-pressure persuasion tactics to elicit immediate, self-interested economic transactions—represents a more integral part of the job in some...
occupations than others. Based on the finding that individuals conflate deception with self-interested persuasion in negotiation (e.g., Schweitzer, DeChurch, & Gibson, 2005), we predict that people will conflate deception with SO more broadly. Thus, deception will signal an individual’s ability to engage in SO, which will signal their competence in occupations that stereotypically require SO (i.e., HISO occupations).

How might the perception that deception signals competence contribute to the proliferation of deception? We consider one possibility: that perceivers, guided by this perception, will select (i.e., hire) deceptive individuals into HISO occupations at elevated rates (Schneider, 1987). Evidence for this possibility may help to explain why deception proliferates in certain occupations in the real world. Six studies support our predictions, suggesting that deception systematically signals competence in and contributes to people’s selection into HISO occupations.

We believe that this research makes important theoretical contributions. First, by demonstrating occupational variation in perceptions of deception, it complements the implicit assumption and frequent finding that deception is evaluated negatively (e.g., Aquino & Reed, 2002, Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006, but see Levine & Schweitzer, 2014, 2015). In particular, we identify a boundary condition of the link between deception and incompetence (Stellar & Willer, 2018), suggesting that this relationship may reverse in HISO occupations. Thus, this work responds to the call for more and more nuanced research on the consequences of dishonesty (e.g., Wiltemuth, Newman, & Raj, 2015).

Additionally, by introducing the idea that SO can function as an occupational stereotype and demonstrating the potentially insidious effects of this stereotype, the current research deepens our understanding of deception’s persistence. In particular, it helps to explain the continued prevalence of deception in numerous, seemingly diverse occupations. Thus, we go beyond prior work that conceptualizes SO as restricted to salespeople—as well as work conceptualizing deception as a product of either the banking occupation in particular (Cohn, Fehr, & Marechal, 2014) or business careers in general (e.g., Kennedy & Kray, 2014). Instead, our results suggest that deception may persist in any occupation stereotyped as HISO.

Finally, our research complements recent behavioral ethics work conceptualizing unethical behavior as a consequence of situational pressures and cognitive biases (e.g., Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011; Chugh, Bazerman, & Banaji, 2005; Kern & Chugh, 2009; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004; Zhong, 2011). Without disputing these important conclusions, our focus on broadly-held occupational stereotypes, highlights several more macro-level processes that may create the micro-level conditions conducive to deception (Coleman, 1990). Beyond these theoretical implications, we believe that the findings hold some important practical implications, particularly by suggesting that organizations could reduce the hiring of deceptive individuals by deemphasizing the HISO aspects of their jobs. In sum, we believe that this research holds new and important implications, both theoretical and practical, about deception-related beliefs and behavior.

2. Selling orientation

Occupations have been defined as “traditionally recognized professions...as well as other career tracks that are similarly characterized by specific knowledge and well-defined standards of behavior” (Leavitt, Reynolds, Barnes, Schilpzand, & Hannah, 2012: 1318). Different occupations involve differing knowledge and standards of behavior because their members engage in different types of activities. Here, we focus on one type of activity common across many occupations: selling. Yet, we suggest that a particular mode of selling—selling orientation (SO)—is seen as more integral to the job in certain occupations than others, and that this belief directly influences perceptions of deceivers. Specifically, we suggest that perceivers will see deceivers as likely to be competent in occupations stereotyped as high in SO (HISO).

2.1. Selling orientation in sales

The construct of SO comes from the marketing literature, which has studied salespeople and identified SO and customer orientation (CO) as two prototypical approaches to selling (e.g., Saxe & Weitz, 1982; also see Michaels & Day, 1985; Thomas, Soutar, & Ryan, 2001). Grounded in basic theories of human motivation (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1964, 1970a), CO and SO reflect different degrees of focus on a person’s own (i.e., the salesperson’s) vs. other people’s (i.e., customers’) outcomes.

CO involves the use of problem-solving behaviors to uncover and satisfy true customer needs (e.g., Frank & Parke, 2006; Michaels & Day, 1985; Saxe & Weitz, 1982; Thomas et al., 2001). Salespeople following this approach seek to maximize “long-term customer satisfaction rather than short-term sales” (Franke & Park, 2006: 693). Since CO could hamper sellers’ short-term sales but help their long-term sales, it reflects a high focus on both self and others (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). SO, in contrast, involves the use of high-pressure persuasion tactics to elicit immediate, self-interested sales (Blake & Mouton, 1970b; Saxe & Weitz, 1982; Thomas et al., 2001). This approach reflects a high focus on the salesperson’s own outcomes and a low focus on customers’ outcomes (Saxe & Weitz, 1982), and its two separate but necessary dimensions—persuasion and self-interest—make it a multidimensional construct (Edwards, 2001). Importantly, SO emphasizes selling tactics that are self-interested but not necessarily deceptive. The original 12-item SO scale (Saxe & Weitz, 1982: 346), for example, focuses on behaviors like “[trying] to sell as much as I can rather than to satisfy a customer” and “[beginning] the sales talk for a product before exploring a customer’s needs with him.” Indeed, only one of the scale items likely meets the above definition of deception (“It is necessary to stretch the truth in describing a product to a customer”). This focus on self-interest rather than deception probably reflects the many self-interested but non-deceptive persuasion tools at sellers’ disposal (Matsson, 2009). For example, real salespeople can adopt any of Cialdini’s (1993) six persuasion techniques (scarcity, liking, social proof, etc.), none of which inherently involves deception, as well as many other tactics (e.g., using complicated jargon, criticizing the buyer’s alternatives, vividly describing a product’s benefits). In sum, while SO does not entirely preclude deception, it emphasizes self-interested persuasion rather than deception per se.

The selling literature clearly indicates that salespeople are stereotypically perceived to rely on SO more than CO. That is, when asked to consider what real salespeople do, perceivers consistently highlight behaviors indicative of SO rather than CO, indicating that they consider SO more integral to the job (e.g., Adkins & Swan, 1982; Babin et al., 1995; DeFries, 2017; McMurray, 1961; Pink, 2013; Thompson, 1972). Indeed, Pink (2013) recently published an entire book on this idea, showing that individuals characterize salespeople as “pushy” and “manipulative.” Numerous popular articles have made the same point (e.g., DeFries, 2017), as have decades of surveys and empirical research. A survey with nearly 1000 respondents, for example, revealed people’s widespread belief that: “selling benefits only the seller,” and “one must be arrogant and overbearing to succeed in selling” (Sales Management, 1962; reported in Thompson, 1972). Similarly, empirical investigations have repeatedly documented the link between selling (e.g., Adkins & Swan, 1982)—especially car selling (Babin et al., 1995)—and self-interested persuasive behaviors.

1The original work on these two approaches (Saxe & Weitz, 1982) implies that SO and CO represent opposite ends of a scale, but it also shows that they load onto two orthogonal factors, suggesting that they may represent different dimensions. We adopt the latter interpretation. Additionally, although we recognize that recent work has used the term “selling orientation” to connote “the motivational inclination to attract another person during an interpersonal meeting” (Marr & Cable, 2014: p. 624), we anchor our definition in the work cited above.
Since the view that selling primarily involves SO omits the possibility of CO and mischaracterizes the behavior of many real salespeople (Pink, 2013; Mattson, 2009), it represents a stereotype. In general, stereotypes are “widely held assumptions about certain types of people that are represented cognitively as extensive, well-organized categories or schemata” (Andersen, Klatzy, & Murray, 1990: 192). Though stereotypes need not present an accurate picture of a group, they are relatively consistent across perceivers, perhaps because they contain a “kernel of truth” (Bodenhausen, 1990). For example, the stereotypical association between selling and SO may reflect the pushy car dealer that many people occasionally encounter (Babin et al., 1995).

Fig. 1 (Panel A) illustrates the possible and stereotypical approaches to selling as well as their relationship with deception. SO and CO are depicted as alternative, mutually-exclusive approaches to selling; stereotypically, however, selling involves SO alone. Within SO, Section I represents the many selling tactics that involve self-interested persuasion but not deception, and Section II represents selling tactics involving deceptive, self-interested persuasion. Section III represents the many forms of deception that are not intended as a selling tactic (e.g., that are intended to undermine someone else, evade a tough question, exploit a loophole, etc.).

2.2. Selling orientation across occupations

Thus far, research has treated SO as a stereotypical image of salespeople. But is the stereotype really confined to salespeople—is salesperson the only occupation in which SO is seen as integral to the job? We break new ground by suggesting that SO may apply to numerous occupations—that perceivers may see SO as an integral component of jobs other than sales. Fundamentally, the idea that SO represents a pervasive stereotype builds from the fact that selling itself is pervasive across occupations (Pink, 2013). That is, almost any job involves some degree of selling. For example, advertisers, marketers, and consultants all sell products; investment bankers, doctors, and accountants all sell services; even teachers sell ideas.

Additional support for the generality of SO comes from the negotiation literature, which suggests that the behaviors and motivations associated with SO arise in many selling contexts. In particular, negotiation research has long documented the widespread use of distributive negotiation strategies (e.g., Weingart, Thompson, Bazerman, & Carroll, 1990), which fundamentally involve persuading a counterpart to accept a self-interested offer (Gunia, Brett, Nandkeolyar, & Kamdar, 2011) and reflect a high concern for oneself and low concern for others (Gelfand et al., 2001; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). The fact that SO-like behaviors and motivations arise in many selling situations suggests that people may see SO as a general approach to selling situations rather than an approach specific to salespeople.

Thus, we propose that SO, defined cross-occupationally as the use of high-pressure persuasion tactics to elicit immediate, self-interested economic transactions, may represent an occupational rather than a salesperson-specific stereotype. In other words, people may perceive many occupations as reliant on SO. Yet, we also suggest that laypeople are likely to perceive SO as more integral to some occupations than others. In other words, they may stereotype occupations as relatively high in SO (HISO) or low in SO (LISO). The obvious question is which occupations are which. Given the lack of prior research on this topic, we fundamentally treat it as an empirical question.

At the same time, the definition of SO does appear more consistent with some occupations than others. In particular, SO would seem less applicable to occupations in which practitioners’ selling is not stereotypically motivated by self-interest (e.g., nonprofit management, healthcare, teaching) and/or whose jobs do not stereotypically emphasize interpersonal persuasion (e.g., accounting, sports). Conversely, SO would seem more applicable to occupations widely seen as engaging in frequent self-interested persuasion (e.g., advertising, marketing, investment banking, consulting, politics)—as reflected, for example, in many recent movies and television shows emphasizing self-interested persuasion in these types of occupations (e.g., Mad Men, The Big Short, The Wolf of Wall Street, House of Lies, House of Cards). Our pilot studies investigate many of the aforementioned occupations and others, empirically examining SO as an occupational stereotype and thus providing novel insights about the activities stereotypically associated with various occupations.

3. Deception, SO, competence, and hiring

The association between particular occupations and SO holds direct implications for that way perceivers react to deceivers. Since deception sends the clear signal that the deceiver is more focused on their own outcomes than honesty (Gunia, Wang, Huang, Wang, and Murnighan, 2012), perceivers generally make many negative inferences about deceivers (e.g., that they are untrustworthy: Kim et al., 2004). Yet, the small overlap between SO and deception (Fig. 1, Panel A, Section II) begins to suggest that perceivers, seeing SO as integral to HISO jobs, may not entirely disapprove of deceivers.

In particular, some selling tactics do involve deceptive, self-interested persuasion. For example, an individual might exaggerate a product’s benefits to persuade someone to buy it. Since this form of deception actually serves as a self-interested, persuasive selling tactic (i.e., overlaps with SO), it may provide a positive indication of the individual’s ability to engage in SO in general, including its many self-interested but non-deceptive forms. The ability to engage in SO, in turn, should signal the deceptive individual’s likely competence in occupations stereotyped as reliant on SO (i.e., HISO occupations). Put differently, deceptive behaviors related to selling (Fig. 1, Panel A, Section II) should signal that the deceiver has the qualities necessary to competently complete the job in HISO occupations (e.g., their competence as
an investment banker). Since research has documented positive interpersonal reactions to prosocial (Levine & Schweitzer, 2015) but not self-interested deception (as far as we know), we consider this an interesting possibility on its own.

Even more interesting and the focus of the current research, though, is the possibility that people may form positive judgments of an individual’s ability to engage in SO based on deceptive behaviors that are not intended as selling tactics (Fig. 1, Panel A, Section III). For example, an individual may deceive to evade difficult questions from their boss (e.g., "Are you on track to finish that project by Friday?"). Since this type of deception is not directly related to selling (i.e., does not overlap with SO), it should not provide information about SO. However, an important stream of the negotiation literature suggests that it may. In particular, negotiators tend to conflate a variety of deceptive behaviors with distributive negotiation strategies (Boles et al., 2000; Schweitzer et al., 2005), seeing them as essentially the same thing despite theoretical distinctions between the two (e.g., Shell, 1999; Thompson, 2001). Building on this finding, we suggest that individuals may conflate various forms of deception with SO (Fig. 1, Panel B).

If people conflate various forms of deception with SO, then they may see deception unrelated to selling as indicative of an individual’s ability to engage in SO. The ability to engage in SO, in turn, should signal the deceptive individual’s competence in occupations stereotyped as reliant on SO (i.e., HISO occupations). In sum, and in spite of the substantial research and rhetoric documenting uniformly negative interpersonal reasons to deception, we predict that deception will send substantially more positive signals about an individual’s competence in HISO than LISO occupations:

**Hypothesis 1.** Perceivers will rate people who engage in deception unrelated to selling as more competent in HISO than LISO occupations.

**Hypothesis 2.** The extent to which an occupation is stereotyped as HISO will mediate the effect of the occupation on the perceived occupational competence of a deceiver.

Although we primarily compare perceptions of deception across HISO and LISO occupations, our theory also hints that deception may, in some circumstances, signal: 1) more competence than honesty within HISO occupations, and 2) competence in absolute terms within HISO occupations. Several of our studies test and support these provocative possibilities. Our main prediction, however, compares perceptions of deception across HISO and LISO occupations (since the precise level of competence signaled by deception probably depends on many factors outside the scope of our research; e.g., the type and target of lie, reputation of liar).

Finally, we explore one way in which the association between deception and competence may contribute to the proliferation of deception: through the selection (i.e., hiring) of deceptive individuals into HISO occupations. Schneider’s (1987) Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model suggests that individuals get selected for positions, in part, because their skillset seems to fit the relevant job requirements (also see Kim et al., 2004). If deception signals the ability to engage in SO, and if SO is seen as integral to HISO occupations (H1-H2), then deceivers should seem to fit well in HISO occupations, leading perceivers to actively hire them into such occupations in organizations.

**Hypothesis 3.** Individuals who engage in deception will be hired into HISO more often than LISO occupations.

Again, we primarily compare the hiring of deceptive individuals across HISO and LISO occupations, but we also investigate the interesting possibility that deceptive individuals are hired more than honest individuals into HISO occupations (and are hired at greater than chance rates).

If deceivers are hired into HISO occupations at elevated rates, then these occupations may eventually become populated with individuals who are willing to bend ethical standards. This possibility has some troubling corollaries. First, since many of the presumably HISO occupations (e.g., investment banking, advertising) are also associated with high pay (Smith, 2015), deception may come to be seen as a prerequisite for pay, further contributing to societal confusion about the value of deception. Second, deceivers who are hired into HISO occupations may not restrict their deceit to selling contexts. Instead, they may commit various acts of deception, some that harm their organization (e.g., embezzling, padding expenses). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, our predictions suggest that deception may proliferate in HISO occupations even though deception is condemned in other contexts. Thus, our research not only provides a framework for thinking about the occupations in which deception may signal competence and a theoretical explanation for why that happens. It also connects directly to the puzzle at the outset of the paper, suggesting that deception may persist because deceivers do not always react as negatively as research or rhetoric suggest.

### 4. The current research

Six studies investigate the predictions across multiple populations and paradigms. Pilot Studies A-B explore the occupations stereotyped as HISO vs. LISO and validate our Selling Orientation (SO) Scale. Studies 1–2 use scenarios to document occupational variance in the perceived competence of a deceiver (H1-H2; Study 1), and to explore perceptions of deceivers vs. honest and neutral individuals (Study 2). Studies 3–4 use laboratory paradigms to document that people not only perceive deception as a signal of competence in HISO occupations; they also hire deceptive individuals into these occupations at elevated rates (H3). Overall, the results support all three hypotheses, suggesting that deception signals competence in HISO occupations, leading to the selection of deceptive individuals into HISO occupations. Across all studies, the target sample size or length of data collection was determined in advance, and we report all measures and conditions collected. We preregistered Studies 2 and 4 at AsPredicted.org.

### 5. Pilot studies

We conducted two pilot studies to explore which occupations people stereotype as HISO vs. LISO and to develop a reliable measure of perceived SO. As an initial test of the premise that occupations vary in SO, Pilot A prompted participants to read seven statements characterizing SO and rate the extent to which these statements collectively describe each of 32 occupations from O*Net: an exhaustive database of occupations developed by the U.S. Department of Labor and described as “the nation’s primary source of occupational information” (www.onetonline.org). We predicted that occupations would vary in SO. Pilot B then validated the seven items as an SO Scale and tested the scale’s convergent and divergent validity across six target occupations. We predicted that our SO Scale would converge with traditional indicators of SO and diverge from related but differentiable constructs.

#### 5.1. Pilot A methods

**5.1.1. Participants**

We intended to recruit 200 Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants. We ended up with a final sample of 204 participants (112 Men; M age = 35 years, SD = 10, M work experience = 14 years, SD = 10) who participated in this study for $0.75. All discrepancies between intended and actual sample sizes are due to unintended over-recruitment (e.g., because participants started the study before learning that the quota had been met). Compared to undergraduates, MTurk has been characterized as more diverse and representative, and at least as reliable (e.g., Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011).

**5.1.2. SO**

Because the original items used to measure SO (Saxe & Weitz, 1982) focused specifically on an approach that a salesperson might use to sell
5.2.1. Predictions and analyses

We expected participants to perceive occupations as varying in SO, with some above and some below the scale midpoint (3). To compare multiple discrete observations, the current study orders the occupations from highest to lowest in SO and compares each occupation’s mean SO to the midpoint.

5.2.2. Results

Fig. 2 shows participants’ mean SO ratings along with standard errors. Results suggest substantial heterogeneity across occupations but notable agreement within occupations (small standard errors). In line with our expectations, occupations like salesperson, advertiser, and investment banker were rated significantly above the scale midpoint in SO, whereas occupations like accountant, nonprofit manager, doctor, and engineer were rated significantly below the midpoint. Additionally, the results indicate that the two occupations extracted from the same O*NET career cluster (e.g., accounting and investment banking) were sometimes rated quite differently in SO, suggesting that our scale was not derivative of career cluster. These results, which are consistent with our assumptions, suggest that occupations are perceived to vary systematically and predictably in SO.

5.3. Pilot B methods

5.3.1. Participants

We intended to recruit 300 MTurk participants. We ended up with a final sample of 334 Amazon MTurk participants (190 Men; M age = 36 years, SD = 11, M work experience = 15 years, SD = 10) who participated in this study for $0.75.

5.3.2. Design and procedure

We randomly assigned participants to evaluate one of six occupations from Pilot A (investment banker, salesperson, advertiser, consultant, nonprofit manager, or accountant), using a between-subjects design. These occupations were selected for this and later studies because Pilot A suggested that they vary in SO (p < .007 for all paired comparisons). Additionally, these occupations are relatively similar in required education and well-represented in our Study 3 and 4 samples. This approach allowed us to examine a core set of occupations and establish convergence, while capturing occupational variation. Although consultant was rated unexpectedly low in SO in Pilot A, it was close to the mean across all studies. Thus, we consider consulting to be a quasi-control condition in Studies 1, 2, and 3.

Participants in Pilot B were asked to think very carefully about their one assigned occupation and answer a series of questions about it. First, participants responded to each of the seven items from Pilot A, which comprised our SO Scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree; see Appendix A lists all seven items.

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a physical product to a customer (e.g., “If I am not sure a product is right for a customer, I will still apply pressure to get him to buy”), we could not readily use them to measure SO as a cross-occupational stereotype. Thus, we constructed a new scale to portray SO as a selling approach relevant to a variety of occupations (later called the “SO Scale”). Guided by the original conception of SO (e.g., Saxe & Weitz, 1982; Thomas et al., 2001) as well as the underlying motivational theory (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1970b), we wrote seven items capturing the two dimensions of the multidimensional SO construct: persuasion (e.g., “People in this occupation spend much of their time convincing others to make a purchase”) and self-interest (e.g., “Successful members of this occupation achieve outcomes that benefit themselves and their own organization more than outcomes that benefit others.”). Appendix A lists all seven items.

5.1.3. Occupations

Before validating our SO Scale and evaluating its convergent and divergent validity (Pilot B), we sought to test the basic premise that occupations are perceived to vary in SO. Accordingly, we presented the seven items comprising the prospective scale, asking participants to evaluate how well they collectively described a variety of occupations. To generate these occupations, we extracted two common occupations from each of the 16 career clusters in the exhaustive and widely used O*NET database. In some cases, O*NET refers to common occupations using uncommon names (e.g., “management analysts” for “consultants”), so we relabeled these occupations, typically by replacing the given name with one of the “sample of reported job titles” listed within the occupation. Fig. 2 lists all 32 occupations.

5.1.4. Design and procedure

This study did not include any manipulated variables. Rather, participants first read the seven items intended to comprise our SO Scale, described as “a list of statements that describe some occupations better than others.” Participants then rated the extent to which the statements collectively described each of 32 occupations using a five-point scale (1 = Above statements DO NOT describe this occupation well, 5 = Above statements DO describe this occupation well). Participants concluded by answering some demographic questions.

5.2. Pilot A results and discussion

5.2.1. Predictions and analyses

Participants in Pilot A were asked to think very carefully about their one assigned occupation and answer a series of questions about it. First, participants responded to each of the seven items from Pilot A, which comprised our SO Scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree; see
Appendix A). Next, we sought to establish the scale’s convergent and divergent validity vis-à-vis related constructs. Because our scale was inspired by the SO items from Saxe and Weitz (1982), we expected it to show a large positive correlation with those items but a smaller or non-significant relationship with the customer orientation (CO) items.

Additionally, we sought to establish divergent validity from two personality measures that could plausibly apply to occupations and overlap with SO: Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970) and the Honesty-Humility dimension of the HEXACO Scale (Ashton, Lee, & de Vries, 2014). Given SO’s focus on persuading customers to make immediate self-interest purchases, it is possible that people perceive HISO practitioners as Machiavellian (“manipulating others for personal gain, often against the other’s self-interest”; Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996: 285) or low in honesty and humility. However, we expected divergence (as indicated by smaller or non-significant correlations) because SO has a narrower focus than Machiavellianism (on selling-specific behaviors) and is not synonymous with dishonesty or a lack of humility (despite the conflation process described above). Participants indicated how most members of their assigned occupation would react to the 20 items in the Machiavellianism and 10 items in the Honesty-Humility scales (1 = Most would strongly disagree, 5 = Most would strongly agree), and then answered some demographic questions.

5.4. Results and discussion

5.4.1. Predictions and analysis

We expected our SO items to form a reliable SO Scale on which occupations predictably varied. We also expected our SO Scale to converge with the SO items from Saxe and Weitz (1982) and diverge from the scale’s CO items as well as Machiavellianism and Honesty-Humility. Since we were validating our SO Scale for the first time, we initially conducted an exploratory factor analysis to get a sense of its factor structure. We then conducted a one-way between-subjects ANOVA, with occupation as the factor, to test for occupational variance in SO, supported by comparisons against the scale midpoint. Finally, having validated our scale’s statistical properties, we conducted a correlation analysis and confirmatory factor analysis to examine convergent and divergent validity vis-à-vis other validated scales.

5.4.2. Scale reliability

An exploratory factor analysis on the seven items intended to comprise our SO Scale yielded one factor with Eigenvalue greater than one, explaining 63.24% of the variance. Thus, all seven questions were averaged to form a SO Scale (α = 0.90). Factor analyses also indicated that the items within the original SOCO scale (Saxe & Weitz, 1982) loaded best onto separate SO and CO scales (α = 0.96 and 0.84), and also that the Machiavellianism and Honesty-Humility items loaded onto reliable single-factor scales (α = 0.92 and 0.86).

5.4.3. Occupational variance in SO

A one-way ANOVA on our SO Scale revealed a significant effect of occupation, F(5,328) = 79.85, p < .001, η² = 0.55. Table 1 lists the descriptive statistics for each occupation. In accordance with Pilot A and our expectation that the six occupations would be perceived to vary systematically in SO, advertiser, salesperson, and investment banker were rated significantly higher than the scale midpoint of three (p < 0.001), consultant marginally higher than the midpoint (p = .09), and nonprofit and accountant significantly lower than the midpoint (p < 0.001). This establishes the HISO and LISO occupations used in the rest of this research, with consultant treated as a quasi-control condition.

5.4.4. Convergent and divergent validity

As expected, our SO Scale showed a strong positive correlation with the SO items from Saxe and Weitz’s (1982) original scale (r = 0.85, p < .001), suggesting convergence between our SO Scale and SO as conceived for salespeople. Despite this strong correlation, a confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the SO Scale and original SO items fit better as two separate factors (χ² = 215.74; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.096) than one factor (χ² = 552.70; CFI = 0.88; TLI = 0.85; RMSEA = 0.17). This makes sense since the SO Scale measures an occupation- rather than individual-level construct. This also supports our use of a new scale.

In terms of divergent validity, the SO Scale showed no correlation with the CO items from Saxe and Weitz (r = −0.02, p = .71) and smaller albeit still-significant correlations with Machiavellianism (r = 0.51, p < .001) and Honesty-Humility (r = −0.46, p < .001). Collectively, these results suggest that our SO Scale, developed to measure SO as an occupational rather than a salesperson-specific stereotype, is consistent with SO as conceived for salespeople. However, our scale does not appear derivative of the original SO items nor plausibly related constructs. Together with the results of Pilot A, these results suggest that SO represents an occupational stereotype on which occupations are perceived to vary systematically. Our next several studies test the consequences of the SO stereotype.

6. Study 1: Deception across occupations

Study 1 provides an initial test of H1-H2. Specifically, we manipulate occupation to examine whether deception is seen as more competent in some occupations than others, and whether an occupation’s SO can explain these differences. We expect deception to signal greater competence in HISO than LISO occupations.

6.1. Methods

6.1.1. Participants

We set the a priori goal of recruiting 300 adults from Amazon MTurk and ended up with a final sample of 327 participants (193 Men; M age = 33 years, SD = 10, M work experience = 13 years, SD = 10), who completed this study in exchange for $0.75. Four participants did not correctly identify the occupation of the practitioner in the scenario below, and one additional participant failed the attention check. Although we report analyses for the full sample, results do not change if these individuals are excluded.

6.1.2. Design and procedure

We randomly assigned participants to read about a practitioner named Julie from one of six occupations (investment banker, salesperson, advertiser, consultant, nonprofit employee, or accountant).2

After learning the practitioner’s occupation, participants either read a scenario about Julie’s behavior and assessed her occupational competence, or rated her occupation’s SO (order counterbalanced). The scenario indicated that Julie went on a work trip and received a blank receipt for a taxi ride. When filing for reimbursement, she recalled that the ride cost $40 but requested and received a $50 reimbursement (see Appendix B for the scenario and all scale items). Note that this deception, by design, did not involve the core selling components of her job (i.e., came from Fig. 1, Panel A, Section III), and was costly for the company. After reading the scenario, participants answered six questions about Julie’s occupational competence; e.g., “Julie will be competent in her career as [a/an] occupation” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). A factor analysis indicated that they loaded onto a single factor explaining 81% of the variance; they were averaged to form an Occupational Competence Scale (α = 0.95).

Participants also completed the SO Scale from Pilot Study B,

2 Whereas the pilot and subsequent studies referred to a nonprofit “manager,” we used the term “employee” in this study to make sure an unintended status difference was not driving our effects. We find no systematic differences across studies.
The occupations classified as HISO (salesperson, advertiser) involve getting people to buy things. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; see Appendix B). A factor analysis indicated that this item for consistency with other studies.

Note. This table is sorted in descending order on the SO Scale. Significant differences are denoted with superscripts. Letters denote significant differences vs.: advertiser (a), salesperson (b), investment banker (c), consultant (d), nonprofit manager (e), accountant (f).

### 6.2. Results

#### 6.2.1. Predictions and analyses

We predicted that the deceiver would be considered more competent in the HISO occupations (investment banker, salesperson, advertiser) than the LISO occupations (nonprofit employee, accountant); we were agnostic about consultant. We tested this prediction in two ways, by running: (1) a one-way between-subjects ANOVA on our dependent variables, using occupation as the factor (6 levels), and (2) a one-way between-subjects ANOVA on our dependent variables, using HISO/LISO as the factor (2 levels, with investment banker, salesperson, and advertiser coded as HISO and nonprofit employee and accountant coded as LISO). For the sake of brevity and clarity, we present the second set of analyses in the main manuscript and the occupation-level analyses in the supplemental online material (SOM 1.1). For completeness, we also present the means and standard deviations for each scale, by occupation, in Table 2. We follow a similar protocol in Studies 2 and 3.

We also predicted that the SO Scale would mediate the relationship between occupation and the perceived competence of a deceiver. We test this prediction using a bootstrap test for mediation with 10,000 samples (Hayes, 2013; SPSS Macro PROCESS), with HISO/LISO occupation as the independent variable, the SO Scale as the mediator, and the Occupational Competence Scale as the dependent variable.

---

### Table 1

Pilot B descriptive statistics by condition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>SO Scale (range = 1-5)</th>
<th>SO from SOCO (Saxe &amp; Weitz, 1982) (range = 1-9)</th>
<th>CO from SOCO (Saxe &amp; Weitz, 1982) (range = 1-9)</th>
<th>Machiavellianism (range = 1-5)</th>
<th>Honesty-humility (range = 1-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Advertiser</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Mean 4.39</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Salesperson</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Mean 4.32</td>
<td>7.07</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Investment Banker</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Mean 3.73</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Consultant</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Mean 3.19</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Nonprofit Manager</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Mean 2.51</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Accountant</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Mean 2.49</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>Mean 3.48</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### Table 2

Study 1 descriptive statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>SO Scale (range = 1-5)</th>
<th>Occupational competence scale (range = 1-7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Salesperson</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Mean 4.22</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Advertiser</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Mean 4.12</td>
<td>5.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Investment Banker</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Mean 3.61</td>
<td>4.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total HISO</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>Mean 3.99</td>
<td>5.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(combining a, b, c</td>
<td></td>
<td>SD 0.62</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Consultant</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Mean 3.10</td>
<td>4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Nonprofit Manager</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Mean 2.69</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Accountant</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Mean 2.39</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LISO</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>Mean 2.54</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(combining e, f</td>
<td></td>
<td>SD 0.73</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>Mean 3.36</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 6.2.2. Initial analyses

Responses to the open-ended question generally revealed no awareness of the study’s purpose. Question order had no effects and is not discussed further.

#### 6.2.3. Manipulation check

Consistent with the intent of our manipulation, participants recognized that the practitioner lied ($M = 5.59, SD = 1.13$; greater than the scale midpoint of four; $t(326) = 25.49, p < .001$).

#### 6.2.4. SO Scale

Consistent with the pilot studies, a one-way ANOVA on the SO Scale revealed a significant effect of HISO/LISO, $F(1,272) = 308.94, p < .001$. The occupations classified as HISO (salesperson, advertiser, investment banker) were rated higher on the SO Scale than the occupations classified as LISO (nonprofit employee, accountant; see Table 2).

#### 6.2.5. Occupational competence

H1 predicted that deception would signal more occupational competence in HISO than LISO occupations. In support, a one-way ANOVA
on the Occupational Competence Scale revealed a significant effect of HISO/LISO occupation, \(F(1,272) = 32.56, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.11\): As shown in Table 2, the deceiver was rated as more competent in the HISO than the LISO occupations.

### 6.2.6. Mediation results

H2 predicted that the effect of occupation on the perceived competence of a deceiver would be mediated by the SO Scale. In support, a bootstrapped mediation test (Hayes, 2013; SPSS Macro PROCESS using 10,000 samples, as described above) revealed that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of the SO Scale did not include zero, C.I. = [0.44, 1.10]. In other words, the SO Scale mediated the effect of HISO/LISO occupational category on the deceiver’s perceived occupational competence.

### 6.3. Discussion

In addition to revealing consistent occupational differences in SO, Study 1 supported H1-2 by demonstrating that a deceptive practitioner is seen as more competent in HISO than LISO occupations, and that SO mediates this difference. The next study sought to remedy some weaknesses of Study 1 and compare perceptions of deceptive vs. honest and neutral individuals across HISO and LISO occupations.

### 7. Study 2: Deception and honesty across occupations

Study 2 included a condition in which the focal individual acted honestly and a neutral control condition. The inclusion of these conditions allowed us to isolate any positive signals associated with deception from any main effects of occupation. We also sought to replicate the Study 1 results in a different context. This study was preregistered at aspredicted.org (https://aspredicted.org/gf5a7.pdf).

#### 7.1. Participants

We set the a priori goal of recruiting 300 adults from Amazon MTurk and ended up with a final sample of 313 participants (180 Men; \(M\) age = 35 years, \(SD\) = 10, \(M\) work experience = 14 years, \(SD\) = 10), who completed this study in exchange for $1.00.

#### 7.2. Design and procedure

We randomly assigned participants to condition using a 6(Occupation: Investment banker, salesperson, advertiser, consultant, nonprofit manager, or accountant) × 3(Statement: Deception, honesty, or control) mixed within-between subjects design; the first factor was manipulated within- and the second factor between-subjects. A mixed design was used due to ensure sufficient power, given the large number of conditions.

Participants read about a practitioner named James who was “considering entering a new occupation.” Before answering questions about his new occupation, however, participants learned some information about his behavior in a past job. Specifically, participants learned that James had worked for a boss who loved sailing, but James did not. One day, James’s boss asked whether he liked sailing. In response, James “said that he did” (deception condition), “said that he did not” (honesty condition), or simply “answered” (control condition; see Appendix C).

Participants were then reminded that James was considering a career in a new occupation and were asked to answer a set of questions about each of the six focal occupations, presented in a random order. Specifically, participants rated James’ occupational competence within each occupation, using the same items as in Study 1 (for each occupation, \(\alpha > 0.96\)). Participants also rated each of the six occupations on the SO Scale from Pilot Study B (for each occupation, \(\alpha > 0.86\)). They concluded by answering a manipulation check question asking whether the practitioner had lied (1 = definitely not, 5 = definitely), along with some demographic questions.

#### 7.3. Results

##### 7.3.1. Predictions and analyses

As preregistered, we predicted that deceivers would be perceived as more competent in the HISO than LISO occupations. We also used this study to compare the competence of those who deceive vs. those who are honest or make a control statement, across HISO and LISO occupations.

Thus, our main analysis was a 6(Occupation) × 3(Statement) mixed within-between subjects ANOVA, with the first factor within- and the second factor between-subjects, on the Occupational Competence Scale and SO Scale. Our secondary analysis was a 2(HISO/LISO) × 3(Statement) mixed within-between subjects ANOVA. Per our preregistration, this analysis classified occupations into HISO and LISO categories as in Study 1. For the sake of brevity, clarity, and consistency with Study 1, we present the results of the secondary analysis in our main manuscript. For completeness, we also present the occupational-level means and standard deviations for each of our scales in Table 3, and we present occupation-level analyses in the online supplement (SOM 3.1). We conducted a one-way ANOVA (using Statement as the factor) to examine perceived deception (the manipulation check).

### Table 3

Study 2 descriptive statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Deception (range = 1–5)</th>
<th>Occupational competence scale (range = 1–7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deception Honesty Control Total</td>
<td>Deception Honesty Control Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Salesperson</td>
<td>Mean 4.44 4.40 4.38 4.41</td>
<td>Mean 5.59 4.08 4.82 4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 0.70 0.57 0.71 0.66</td>
<td>SD 1.12 1.48 1.37 1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Advertiser</td>
<td>Mean 4.37 4.31 4.23 4.31</td>
<td>Mean 5.40 4.18 4.91 4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 0.72 0.65 0.74 0.70</td>
<td>SD 1.15 1.19 1.20 1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Investment Banker</td>
<td>Mean 3.65 3.60 3.67 3.64</td>
<td>Mean 4.65 4.50 4.91 4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 0.90 0.80 0.86 0.85</td>
<td>SD 1.37 1.07 1.15 1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total HISO</td>
<td>Mean 4.15 4.10 4.09 4.12</td>
<td>Mean 5.21 4.26 4.88 4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(combining a, b, c above)</td>
<td>SD 0.59 0.52 0.62 0.58</td>
<td>SD 0.96 1.04 1.08 1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Consultant</td>
<td>Mean 2.91 2.92 2.88 2.90</td>
<td>Mean 4.59 4.59 5.12 4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 0.92 0.89 0.99 0.93</td>
<td>SD 1.27 1.11 1.08 1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Nonprofit Manager</td>
<td>Mean 2.28 2.57 2.54 2.46</td>
<td>Mean 4.37 4.58 4.97 4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 0.85 1.01 0.95</td>
<td>SD 1.34 1.15 1.11 1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Accountant</td>
<td>Mean 2.20 2.27 2.33 2.26</td>
<td>Mean 4.33 4.89 5.02 4.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 0.91 0.93 0.98 0.94</td>
<td>SD 1.36 1.06 1.07 1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LISO</td>
<td>Mean 2.24 2.42 2.44 2.36</td>
<td>Mean 4.35 4.73 4.99 4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(combining e, f above)</td>
<td>SD 0.78 0.83 0.89 0.84</td>
<td>SD 1.22 1.00 0.97 1.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We also predicted that the SO Scale would mediate the relationship between occupation and the perceived competence of a deceiver (H2). As preregistered, we tested this hypothesis by limiting our analysis to the Deception condition and testing for mediation using the MEmORE macro (Montoya & Hayes, 2017). Specifically, we tested whether the (within-subjects) difference in SO between HISO and LISO occupations would mediate the (within-subjects) difference in the perceived competence of deceivers between HISO and LISO occupations.

7.3.2. Manipulation check

A one-way ANOVA on the manipulation check question with Statement as the factor was significant, $F(2,310) = 201.18, p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.73$. As intended, participants recognized that the practitioner lied more in the deception condition ($M = 4.60, SD = 0.99$) than the control ($M = 2.52, SD = 1.18$) or honesty conditions ($M = 1.55, SD = 1.22$), all of which differed from each other ($ps < 0.001$). This suggests that the manipulation was successful.

7.3.3. SO Scale

Consistent with Study 1, a $2 \times 3$ mixed-within-subjects ANOVA on the SO Scale revealed only a main effect of HISO/LISO, $F(1,310) = 823.08, p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.73$: The occupations classified as HISO were rated higher in selling orientation than the occupations classified as LISO (see Table 3). There was no main effect of Statement, $F(2,310) = 0.72, p = .99$, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$, nor a HISO/LISO × Statement interaction, $F(2,310) = 1.80, p = .17$, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$.

7.3.4. Occupational competence

A $2 \times 3$ mixed-within-subjects ANOVA on the Occupational Competence Scale revealed a significant main effect of Statement, $F(2,310) = 6.39, p = .002$, $\eta^2_p = 0.04$, such that the control statement signaled the greatest occupational competence, and honesty signaled the lowest occupational competence. There was no main effect of HISO/LISO, $F(1,310) = 2.00, p = .16$, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$.

Importantly, these effects were qualified by a significant Occupation × Statement interaction, $F(2,310) = 41.53, p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.21$. This interaction reflected the fact that, in support of H1, deceivers were considered more competent in HISO than LISO occupations, $t(109) = 7.04, p < .001, d = 0.78$ (see Fig. 3 and Table 3); however, honest individuals were considered more competent in LISO than HISO occupations, $t(100) = 4.03, p < .001, d = 0.46$. Competence ratings in the control condition were similar across occupations.

Additionally, planned comparisons indicated that honesty was rated as significantly more competent than deception in LISO occupations, $t(209) = 6.93, p < .001, d = 0.95$. Finally, and interestingly, we noticed that the extent to which the practitioner was seen as lying (in the manipulation check question) correlated negatively with their competence in LISO occupations ($r = -0.25, p < .001$) but positively in HISO occupations ($r = 0.31, p < .001$). Taken together, these findings provide consistent evidence that deception signals competence in HISO occupations, supporting and extending H1.

7.3.5. Mediation results

Finally, and in support of H2, the (within-subjects) difference in SO between HISO and LISO occupations mediated the (within-subjects) difference in the perceived competence of a deceiver between HISO and LISO occupations: The 95% confidence interval around the indirect effect of SO did not include zero, C.I. = [0.68, 1.48], suggesting that deceivers were considered more competent in advertising, banking, and sales than nonprofit or accounting because of the former occupations’ perceived reliance on SO.

7.4. Discussion

This study provided convergent evidence that deception leads to perceptions of occupational competence in HISO occupations. The inclusion of honesty and control conditions allowed us to isolate the effects of deception itself. The results indicate that practitioners in HISO occupations are not simply seen as more competent than practitioners in LISO occupations. Rather, deception within HISO occupations is seen as more competent than deception within LISO occupations. Additionally, deception within HISO occupations is often seen as more competent than honesty within HISO occupations. The perceived competence of HISO deceivers, in turn, is explained by the occupation’s stereotypical reliance on SO. Notably, since this study examined the effects of deception in a prior job, it continues to support our reasoning that perceivers may conflate deception with current SO-related selling ability. We note that we also replicated the main results of this study with a sample of participants who actually aspired to enter the occupations under investigation; the results are reported in our supplemental materials (SOM 4).

8. Study 3: Deception and hiring

Study 3 sought to deepen our findings by studying perceptions of deception in a more controlled context (the lab) and broaden them by studying selection (H3) as a potential contributor to the proliferation of deception. Participants observed another individual deceive or act
In Studies 3 and 4, participants also rated how successful the Sender would be during a three-day laboratory session, from a paid subject pool at a Northeastern U.S. university. We ultimately ended with 196 participants (69 Men; M age = 20, SD = 3.09). Participants were paid $10 for participation in a one-hour laboratory session. This study was the first in the session.

8.1. Methods

8.1.1. Participants

We set the a priori target of recruiting as many participants as possible during a three-day laboratory session, from a paid subject pool at a Northeastern U.S. university. We ultimately ended with 196 participants (69 Men; M age = 20, SD = 3.09). Participants were paid $10 for participation in a one-hour laboratory session. This study was the first in the session.

8.1.2. Design and procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions from a 2-cell (Statement: deception or honesty) between-subjects design. They learned that the study was about evaluating others, and they believed they were observing a participant in a past study who had been assigned to the role of Sender in the deception game (Erat & Gneezy, 2012; Levine & Schweitzer 2014, 2015). The Sender had been paired with another participant in the role of Receiver and was asked to send the Receiver a message indicating the outcome of a random number generator; the Receiver was then asked to report that outcome to the experimenter, who would pay both parties based on the Receiver’s report. If the Receiver reported the correct number, the Sender would receive $1.75, and the Receiver would receive $1. If the Receiver reported an incorrect number, the Sender would receive $2, and the Receiver would receive $0. Thus, the Sender would likely earn $2 by lying (thereby prompting the Receiver to report the wrong number), whereas the Sender would likely earn $1.75 by telling the truth (thereby prompting the Receiver to report the right number). In short, the Sender had a $.25 incentive to lie.

After reviewing this information, current participants completed a comprehension check to ensure they understood the game. Participants who failed this check were automatically kicked out of the study. (All analyses include only the 196 participants who completed the whole study; 19 participants began the study but did not pass the check). The remaining participants learned that the random number generator had produced the number 4, and the Sender had either lied (indicating: “The number picked was 2”) or told the truth (“The number picked was 4”).

Participants were then asked to act as a hiring manager tasked with hiring the Sender into one of the six occupations from our previous studies (investment banking, salesperson, advertiser, consultant, nonprofit manager, or accountant). First, participants were asked to select and hire the Sender into one of the six occupations. Next, participants were asked to rate their likelihood of hiring the Sender into each of the six occupations (1 = not at all likely, 7 = very likely), regardless of their initial hiring choice. Then, participants rated the Sender on his/her occupational competence in all six occupations, using three items from Study 1: “This person will...be successful in his/her career as an [occupation], make a good [occupation], do what it takes to get his/her job done in his/her career as an [occupation]” (α for every occupation > .90). We used a shortened scale to reduce participant burden.

Finally, participants completed a four-question manipulation check of perceived deception: “This person lied...be deceptive, displayed low integrity, told the truth (reverse-scored)” (α = 0.97; 1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree). Participants concluded the study by answering some demographic questions, including their own intended occupation.

In Studies 3 and 4, participants also rated how successful the Sender would be in HISO occupations, using an adaptation of our SO Scale. For brevity, and per feedback from our review team, we report the scale and its results in the supplemental materials (SOM 5.2 and 6.1).

8.2. Results

8.2.1. Predictions and analyses

We predicted that deceivers would be considered more competent in, and hired more often into, HISO than LISO occupations. As in Study 2, we also explored judgments of deceptive (versus honest) individuals in HISO and LISO occupations.

We conducted analyses at both the occupation and the HISO/LISO level, as in Studies 1–2. As in those studies, we focus on the HISO/LISO level results in the main manuscript, classifying the occupations the same way. We present the occupation-level means and standard deviations in Table 4, and the occupation-level ANOVA results in the supplemental materials (SOM 5.1).

We conducted a one-way ANOVA (using Statement as the factor) to examine perceived deception (the manipulation check). Since participants rated the deceptive or honest Sender’s competence in, as well as their likelihood of hiring the deceptive or honest Sender into each occupation, we used mixed within-between subjects ANOVAs to examine the effects of Statement (between-subjects) and HISO/LISO (within-subjects) on these variables. We use a chi-square test of proportions to examine whether Senders were hired into HISO or LISO occupations with different frequencies, depending on whether they lied.

8.2.2. Manipulation check

A one-way ANOVA on perceived deception revealed a significant effect of Statement: Consistent with the intent of the manipulation, the Sender in the deception condition was seen as more deceptive (M = 5.85, SD = 0.94) than the Sender in the honesty condition (M = 1.52, SD = 0.69); F(1,194) = 1345.28, p < .001, η² = 0.87.

8.2.3. Occupational competence

A mixed within-between subjects ANOVA, using HISO/LISO as the within-subjects factor and Statement as the between-subjects factor, revealed a marginal effect of HISO/LISO, F(1, 194) = 3.79, p = .053, η² = 0.019, such that Senders were perceived to be somewhat more occupationally competent in HISO occupations than LISO occupations, and a significant effect of Statement, F(1,194) = 22.51, p < .001, η² = 0.10, such that Senders were perceived to be more competent when they were honest than when they lied.

Importantly, and more relevant to our hypotheses, these effects were qualified by a significant HISO/LISO × Statement interaction, F (1,194) = 260.57, p < .001, η² = 0.57. The interaction reflected the fact that, in support of H1, deceivers were rated as more competent in HISO than LISO occupations, t(97) = 13.15, p < .001, d = 1.63 (see Table 4); however, honest individuals were rated as more competent in LISO than HISO occupations, t(97) = 9.77, p < .001, d = 1.37.

Additionally, planned comparisons indicated that honesty was rated as significantly more competent than deception in the LISO occupations, t(194) = 13.52, p < .001, d = 1.74, but deception was rated as significantly more competent than honesty in the HISO occupations, t (195) = 6.69, p < .001, d = 0.88. Finally, it is worth noting that deceptive Senders were rated as competent in HISO occupations in absolute terms (t(97) = 9.10, p < .001, compared to the scale midpoint of four), and ratings of the Sender’s deception correlated negatively with their competence in the LISO occupations (r = −.72, p < .001) but positively in the HISO occupations (r = 0.44, p < .001. These results support H1, replicating and extending the results of Studies 1–2.

8.2.4. Hiring intentions

H3 predicted that deceptive individuals get hired into HISO more often than LISO occupations. A mixed within-between subjects ANOVA on hiring intentions revealed a main effect of HISO/LISO, F (1,194) = 4.90, p = .028, η² = 0.025, such that Senders were more likely to be hired into HISO occupations than LISO occupations, and a significant effect of Statement, F(1,194) = 68.95, p < .001, η² = 0.26,
such that Senders were more likely to be hired when they were honest than when they lied.

Importantly, and more central to H3, these effects were qualified by a significant HISO/LISO × Statement interaction, \( F(1,194) = 291.66, \ p < .001 \). Participants intended to hire deceivers into the HISO occupations more often than the LISO occupations; \( t(97) = 13.83, \ p < .001, \ d = 1.71 \) (see Table 4); however, they intended to hire honest individuals into the LISO occupations more often than the HISO occupations; \( t(97) = 10.37, \ p < .001, \ d = 1.43 \).

Additionally, planned comparisons indicated that participants preferred to hire honest vs. deceptive individuals into LISO occupations, \( t(194) = 17.49, \ p < .001, \ d = 2.50 \), but they preferred to hire deceptive vs. honest individuals into HISO occupations, \( t(195) = 4.64, \ p < .001, \ d = 0.65 \). Finally, deceptive individuals were hired in absolute terms into the HISO occupations (\( t(98) = 5.80, \ p < .001 \), compared to scale midpoint of four), and ratings of the Sender’s deception were negatively associated with hiring intentions for the LISO occupations (\( r = -0.82, \ p < .001 \)) but positively for the HISO occupations (\( r = 0.30, \ p = .001 \)). These results support and extend H3.

8.2.5. Hiring choice

We also found that participants were significantly more likely to hire Senders who had lied into HISO occupations (91.9% of deceptive Senders) than LISO occupations (71.1%; 1% were hired into consulting, our quasi-control occupation). Conversely, they were more likely to hire Senders who had told the truth into LISO occupations (63.3% of honest Senders) than HISO occupations (15.3%; 21.4% were hired into consulting); \( \chi^2 = 97.21, \ p < .001 \). Fig. 4 depicts these results and the hiring patterns for each occupation individually.

8.3. Discussion

This study replicated H1 in the lab, showing that deceivers are regarded as competent HISO practitioners. Additionally, it provided support for H3, indicating that deceptive individuals are more often hired into HISO than LISO occupations. Indeed, deceivers were hired more often than honest individuals into HISO occupations, and they were considered attractive hires in absolute terms. This suggests that deception can provide a positive signal of competence and career potential in HISO occupations, despite reflecting low integrity.

In reaching these conclusions, we recognize that the sparseness of the context and within-subjects manipulation of occupation may have produced some demand effects (particularly with respect to hiring choice). Yet, the fact that deception was lauded in comparison to honesty (and in absolute terms) suggests that there is a strong association between deception and competence in HISO occupations, even absent any comparison with LISO occupations. It is also worth noting that the majority of participants (57.2%) in this study were business students who intended to join the occupations we studied. We found no evidence that participants’ intended occupation altered our results, suggesting that organizational newcomers may import these beliefs into their organizations. As noted in the General Discussion, we encourage future research into this idea.

9. Study 4: Deception, hiring and HISO vs. LISO framing

Study 4 sought to further test H3 and extend Study 3’s findings in three ways. First, we used an incentive-compatible hiring measure. Second, we manipulated rather than measured SO, attempting to establish its mediating role through a moderation-of-process approach (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). Third, we described the HISO or LISO features of an occupation in abstract terms rather than referring to specific occupations to provide a direct test of our theory. This study was preregistered at as-predicted.org (https://aspredicted.org/35m8c.pdf).

9.1. Methods

9.1.1. Participants

We set the a priori target of recruiting 200 undergraduate and/or graduate students from a Midwest U.S. university. We ultimately ended up with 210 participants (105 Men; M age = 32.4, SD = 12.9). Participants were paid $1.25 plus the chance to receive a bonus. Participants were recruited through the on-campus laboratory (which allows for walk-in participants) and through direct recruitment in the university’s common areas.

9.1.2. Design and procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to condition in a 2(Workplace task: HISO or LISO) × 2(Statement: Deception or honesty) between-subjects design. Specifically, participants were told that they would learn some information about another participant (the “employee”) and decide whether to hire that participant to complete a “workplace task.” In the HISO condition, current participants learned that the workplace task entailed “persuading another person to make a purchase.” If hired, the employee would be evaluated “based on their ability to persuade

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>HSO Mean</th>
<th>Deception</th>
<th>Honesty</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>LSO Mean</th>
<th>Deception</th>
<th>Honesty</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Salesperson</td>
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<td>4.67</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Advertiser</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Investment Banker</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Consultant</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>4.23</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Nonprofit Manager</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Accountant</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>4.23</td>
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<td>Total HSO (combine a, b, c above)</td>
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<td>3.96</td>
<td>4.46</td>
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<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.12</td>
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<td>Total LSO (combine e, f above)</td>
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<td>5.41</td>
<td>4.09</td>
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</table>
another person to buy goods or services, and their ability to make money for themselves…” In the LISO condition, current participants learned that the task, “entails understanding the true needs of another person who is considering making a purchase.” The employee would be evaluated “based on their ability to uncover a potential customer’s true needs, and their ability to maximize the potential customer’s satisfaction…” In other words, we manipulated whether the workplace task was described in stereotypically HISO or LISO terms. The exact materials used to describe the workplace task appear in Appendix D.

Importantly, participants’ hiring choice in the workplace task was incentive-compatible: Their hiring choice influenced how many tickets they earned for a $10 raffle. If participants chose not to hire the employee, they would earn three lottery tickets. Alternatively, if participants chose to hire the employee, the number of lottery tickets they earned would depend on the employee’s performance: If the employee performed in the top half of all employees, they would earn six lottery tickets, but if the employee performed in the bottom half, they would earn one. We designed this task to parallel a risky hiring decision. Not hiring the employee was riskless: It yielded three lottery tickets with certainty. Hiring the employee was risky: It could lead to either more or fewer lottery tickets, depending on the employee’s performance.

After learning about the workplace task and completing a comprehension check, participants learned more about the employee they could hire. Specifically, they learned that the employee had completed a prior study involving “The Number Game,” which was identical to the deception game from Study 3. Participants had to pass a second comprehension check on “The Number Game” and then learned that the employee, acting as Sender, had sent either a deceptive (deception condition) or honest (honesty condition) message. Then, participants were reminded about the HISO or LISO nature of the workplace task and asked: “In light of [the participant’s] behavior in The Number Game...Would you like to hire the participant you just learned about to complete the workplace task?” (Yes or No).

Additionally, participants judged the employee’s occupational competence in the workplace task using the questions from Studies 1–2 (α = 0.95). Participants also rated the employee’s deception using the four manipulation check items from Study 3 (α = 0.93). Participants concluded the study by answering some demographic questions.

9.2. Results

9.2.1. Predictions and analyses

The manipulation check scale was analyzed using a 2 × 2 between-subjects ANOVA. As preregistered, our main predictions were that perceivers would rate deceivers as more competent in, and more often hire deceivers into, the HISO- vs. the LISO-framed workplace task. As in the prior two studies, we also explored perceivers’ competence judgments about, and choices to hire, those who deceived vs. were honest. We tested the competence predictions by running a 2(Workplace task: HISO or LISO) × 2(Statement: Deception or honesty) between-subjects ANOVA on the Occupational Competence Scale. Our main hypothesis test (H1) was a planned contrast between the HISO- and LISO-framed workplace task, within the Deception condition. To examine hiring choices, we first conducted a logistic regression using Workplace task, Statement, and their interaction as predictors. Our main hypothesis test (H3) was a chi-square test of proportions comparing the frequency with which employees were hired to complete HISO vs. LISO tasks, within the Deception condition.

9.2.2. Manipulation check

A 2 × 2 between-subjects ANOVA on perceived deception produced a main effect of Statement, F(1,206) = 243.44, p < .001, η² = 0.54. Consistent with the intent of the manipulation, the individual who lied was seen as more deceptive (M = 5.30, SD = 1.41) than the individual who told the truth (M = 2.21, SD = 1.47). Neither the main effect of Workplace task, F(1,206) = 1.76, p = .19, η² = 0.01, nor the Workplace task × Statement interaction, F(1,206) = 1.95, p = .16, η² = 0.001, was significant.

9.2.3. Competence

A 2 × 2 between-subjects ANOVA did not reveal significant main effects of Statement, F(1,206) < 0.001, p = .99, η² < 0.001, or
Workplace task, $F(1, 206) = 2.96, p = .09, \eta^2_p = 0.01$. However, it revealed a significant Workplace task × Statement interaction, $F(1, 206) = 25.04, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.11$. The deceptive individual was rated as more competent to complete the HISO- ($M = 5.60, SD = 1.43$) vs. the LISO-framed workplace task ($M = 4.30, SD = 1.44$); $t(105) = 4.68, p < .001, d = 0.91$. However, the honest individual was rated as more competent to complete the LISO- ($M = 5.27, SD = 1.02$) vs. the HISO-framed workplace task ($M = 4.63, SD = 1.64$); $t(101) = 2.36, p = .02, d = 0.47$.

Additionally, planned comparisons indicated that honesty was considered significantly more competent than deception for the LISO-framed workplace task, $t(106) = 3.99, p < .001, d = 0.78$, but deception was considered significantly more competent than honesty for the HISO-framed task, $t(100) = 3.19, p = .002, d = 0.63$. Finally, we observed that the deceptive individual was considered competent for the HISO-framed workplace task in absolute terms (versus the scale midpoint of four, $t(50) = 8.03, p < .001$, and ratings of the individual’s deception correlated negatively with their competence for the LISO-framed task ($r = -0.52, p < .001$) but positively with their competence for the HISO-framed task ($r = 0.35, p < .001$). These results offer further support for H1 and H2: manipulating the level of SO associated with a task causally influences perceptions of a deceiver’s competence to complete that task.

9.2.4. Hiring

Hiring choices followed a similar pattern (see Fig. 5). There was a main effect of Statement, $B = -1.93, SE = 0.43$, Wald $\chi^2 = 19.90$, OR = 0.15, $p < .001$, such that participants were less likely to hire the deceptive than the honest individual overall, as well as a main effect of Workplace task, $B = -1.22, SE = 0.43$, Wald $\chi^2 = 8.16$, $p < .001$, OR = 0.30, such that participants were less likely to hire the individual into the HISO-framed workplace task than the LISO-framed task overall.

Importantly, these effects were qualified by a significant Workplace task × Statement interaction, $B = -3.73, SE = 0.64$, Wald $\chi^2 = 33.58$, $p < .001$, OR = 0.024: Deceivers were hired significantly more often for the HISO- (84.31%) than the LISO-framed workplace task (30.36%; $\chi^2 = 31.55, p < .001$), but honest individuals were hired significantly more often for the LISO- (75.00%) than the HISO-framed task (47.06%).

Additionally, planned comparisons indicated that the honest individual was hired significantly more often than the deceptive individual for the LISO-framed workplace task ($\chi^2 = 21.52, p < .001$), whereas the deceptive individual was hired significantly more often than the honest individual for the HISO-framed workplace task ($\chi^2 = 15.70, p < .001$). Finally, we observed that the deceptive individual was hired for the HISO-framed workplace task with greater than chance frequency ($\chi^2 = 13.51, p < .001$), and ratings of the individual’s deception were negatively associated with whether they would be hired for the LISO-framed task ($r = -0.66, p < .001$) but positively associated with their hiring for the HISO-framed task ($r = 0.33, p = .001$). These results support and extend H3.

9.3. Discussion

Study 4 provides causal evidence that perceivers see deception as a signal of competence within HISO occupations and make hiring decisions accordingly (H1 and H3). Importantly, our use of an incentive-compatible hiring task suggests that people do not just cognitively associate deception with specific HISO careers (like investment banking and sales); they are actually willing to stake money on their beliefs that deceivers will perform well in HISO-framed tasks. Additionally, since we described the task in abstract HISO or LISO terms rather than referring to specific occupations, the results support our overall theory about the centrality of SO.

Notably, these results also begin to suggest an intervention that might dampen the association between deception and competence: framing occupations in a LISO vs. HISO fashion. By highlighting the LISO nature of a HISO occupation (e.g., by emphasizing that investment bankers need to satisfy long-term client needs), leaders might mitigate perceivers’ tendency to regard deceivers positively and hire them into HISO careers—and thus stem the proliferation of deception. An exploratory study in the supplemental materials (SOM 7) provides initial evidence that framing an occupation (in this case, consulting) as LISO vs. HISO can indeed shift perceptions of deception within the occupation. We encourage future research into this idea.

10. General discussion

Despite widespread rhetoric and research condemning deception, examples of deceit in organizational settings abound. The six studies in the current research highlight a potential reason why: because perceivers do not entirely disapprove of deceivers. Instead, they interpret deception as a signal that the deceiver will be competent in occupations stereotyped as HISO (e.g., sales, investment banking, advertising). Indeed, they not only anticipate that deceivers will be more competent in HISO than LISO occupations (e.g., accounting, nonprofit; H1-H2), they also regard deceivers as more competent than honest individuals in HISO occupations—as well as competent in absolute terms. As one consequence, perceivers hire deceivers into HISO occupations at elevated rates (H3), potentially contributing to the proliferation of deception. These findings have important theoretical and organizational implications.

10.1. Theoretical implications

The current research extends the deception literature by adding a wrinkle to numerous findings indicating that deception is condemned...
by those who observe it. In particular, our results respond to the call for more nuanced research on the consequences of deception (e.g., Wiltermuth et al., 2015) by suggesting that deception may send more or less favorable signals depending on the judgment context. When a perceiver is assessing a target’s competence in a HISO context, for example, the target’s deception sends substantially more positive signals than when a perceiver is assessing a target’s competence in a LISO context. By extension, a perceiver may also draw different conclusions from a target’s deception when assessing their competence in general vs. in HISO occupations. Indeed, this suggestion is consistent with Stellar and Willer’s (2018) conclusion that unethical behavior generally demonstrates incompetence, in tandem with their isolated finding (in Study 1) that this relationship is stronger for teachers and researchers (presumably LISO) than investment bankers (presumably HISO). By providing a theoretical framework that systematically explains occupational variance in judgments of deception, our work allows for the possibility that deception is generally seen as incompetent—but competent in the specific context of HISO occupations. Other judgment contexts that could moderate the link between deception and competence are well-worth examining.

Another theoretical contribution relates to the specific aspect of occupational context we study: the degree to which an occupation is stereotyped as reliant on Selling Orientation (SO). By introducing the idea that SO can function as an occupational in addition to a salesperson-specific stereotype and providing evidence that occupations are stereotyped as high vs. low in SO, we move toward a fine-grained understanding of the occupations in which deception is most likely to persist. In particular, our findings implicate neither single occupations like bankers (vs. non-bankers; Cohn et al., 2014) nor broad sectors of the economy like businesspeople (vs. non-businesspeople; Kennedy & Kray, 2014). Rather, we suggest that any occupation stereotyped as HISO, and potentially any job perceived to require SO, could be vulnerable to deception-supportive beliefs and behaviors. Future research that extends our conception of SO even more broadly (e.g., to encompass selling in non-economic transactions such as teachers selling ideas) could be particularly fruitful.

Additionally, our findings on SO highlight the fact that relatively macro-level forces like occupational stereotypes may exacerbate the many documented micro-level drivers of deception (Coleman, 1990). In other words, we suggest that widely-held stereotypes about occupations deserve attention alongside the individual forces that scholars have so persuasively documented. Future research that examines the influence of other, even more macro-level forces like institutional logics or isomorphism on deception could be particularly fruitful.

At the broadest level, our research suggests that stereotypical beliefs about SO may influence the proliferation of deception across occupations, as deceptive individuals are actively selected for HISO occupations and jobs. Rather than shunning deceivers, as research typically suggests they should, perceivers seem to seek out deceivers to complete HISO-oriented tasks. Indeed, we suspect this selection process is but one of several ways deception may proliferate in HISO occupations. For example, deceptive individuals may be attracted to HISO occupations based on their perceived fit (Schneider, 1987). Even if deceptive individuals are not disproportionately drawn to HISO occupations, the activation of a HISO occupational identity could lead individuals entering these occupations to engage in heightened deception (Cohn et al., 2014), and social forces like pluralistic ignorance (Prentice & Miller, 1993) could lead HISO practitioners to deceive to comply with the norm. Initial data, originally collected for this paper but now intended for future research, provide preliminary support for these troubling possibilities.

10.2. Organizational implications

Collectively, we view our results as theoretically interesting and organizationally worrisome. Our findings suggest that many organizations, particularly those employing many individuals in HISO occupations, could be perpetuating low-integrity behaviors through their own cultures and stereotypes. Armed with the knowledge that deception signals incompetence in such occupations, these organizations may wish to explicitly deem deception incompetent. Witnessing deceptive behavior in action, they may also wish to publicly admonish it and thus reinforce the need for deception-free competence, potentially supplementing such messages with training in alternative approaches like customer orientation (CO). Finally, and especially in light of Study 4, organizations may wish to deemphasize the SO aspects of their employees’ jobs, and instead reframe those jobs as more consistent with LISO stereotypes. This reframing could help to sever the link between deception and competence.

10.3. Limitations, moderators, and future directions

Our research has inevitable limitations that future research could remedy. First, we studied members of the general public as well as students, typically using experimental methods. We did not study people currently employed in HISO and LISO occupations. Although many of our student participants aspired to join these occupations, and our methods allowed us to isolate the effects of occupation in a controlled way that field studies might preclude, we recognize the tradeoffs in terms of external validity. Thus, we would welcome field studies of current occupational members, which could produce some interesting and important findings. For example, we suspect that experienced consultants might regard their occupations as more HISO than laypeople do, and we wonder whether current investment bankers (or other finance professionals) would consider their occupations less HISO. In addition, field studies could tease apart various mechanisms, beyond hiring, that lead to the proliferation of deception in HISO occupations. Finally, such studies could empirically unpack the above-noted possibility that individuals hired partially on the basis of their deception may eventually engage in deception that harms their organizations (e.g., by embezzling). For all of these reasons, we welcome future research that examines occupational members in the field.

Additionally, it may be fruitful to examine how various parties view deception within HISO occupations. We focused on third-party judgments, but would a victim of deception consider the deceiver competent? Probably not, as the deceiver’s low integrity would likely loom larger. What about another individual complicit in a focal individual’s deception? We suspect that a co-conspirator might consider deception especially competent, given their need for cognitive consistency.

Finally, we wonder whether prosocial deception—deception intended to benefit the recipient rather than the self (Levine & Schweitzer, 2014, 2015)—might seem more occupationally competent in LISO than HISO occupations. Consider physicians who might deceptively tell patients that, “It won’t hurt a bit.” Future research could usefully examine whether the effect might flip such that prosocial deception signals competence in LISO occupations like physician. We believe that research into these and additional issues at the nexus of deception and competence could seed much interesting research.

10.4. Conclusion

The current research suggests that deception is not universally condemned. The same conduct seen as unethical and incompetent in LISO occupations (and in general) appears to function as a sign of occupational competence in HISO occupations, unethical signals notwithstanding. We hope these findings begin to explain the persistence of deception, charting a path that eventually severs the link between deception and competence.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful for feedback and advice from Maurice Schweitzer and seminar attendees at the University of Maryland, Rice University,
Appendix A. SO Scale

1. People in this occupation spend much of their time convincing others to make a purchase
2. This occupation involves getting people to buy things
3. Persuading people to make a purchase is a key component of this job
4. Successful members of this occupation achieve outcomes that benefit themselves and their own organization more than outcomes that benefit others
5. Getting people to do things that aren’t really in their own interest is a key component of this job
6. The primary goal of people in this occupation is to make as much money as possible for their organizations and themselves
7. Success at work in this occupation depends on how people present information to others more than it depends on the accuracy of that information

Appendix E. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.02.003.

References


