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## Validity of Polygraph Procedures: Postmodernist and Strict Constructionist Approaches

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Abstract. This article critiques the most common scientific psychological critique of the validity of polygraph procedures.

The most damning scientific psychological critique of polygraph procedures is that something called reactivity is being measured as opposed to deception. That is, degrees of change in respiration, blood pressure, and other alleged psychophysiological indicators can suggest some special meaning--but that special meaning may not have a bearing on someone's sincere belief as to the truth and falsity of an answer to a question, let alone whether the answer has a factual relationship with some event in the world separate from someone's perception. The rationale for this critique comprises at least several research traditions in the behavioral and social sciences including the deception of self; the unconscious and preconscious; demand characteristics; expectations; belief systems; and the asymmetry of concurrent, proximal, and distal psychological and physiological phenomena. This critique is termed strict constructionist because it jettisons polygraph procedures for not conforming to a contemporary scientific paradigm--irrespective of the relevance of that paradigm for polygraph procedures and the rise and fall of scientific paradigms.

In contract, many polygraphers and their allies attest to high levels of accuracy in detecting deception with various systematic polygraph procedures. They also cite very many case histories in which an individual "confesses" and provides information that can be verified as supporting allegations--during, after, and before undergoing a polygraph procedure. Is all of this merely an example of self-serving bias observed in those with a vested interest in continued polygraph practice and the will to coerce and exploit polygraph victims? Not necessarily.

The key to resolving controversy about polygraph procedures may lie in relabeling them, not as detectors of deception, but purely as constructors of comprehensive narrative. Reactivity "on the polygraph" might merely suggest that an individual is not correctly or comprehensively--from the individual's own perspective--answering questions that form part of a narrative. Polygraph procedures might then become a collaborative effort to develop the authentic narrative. An attractive feature of this proposal is that it avoids or renders moot many of the epistemological questions and proposed answers that have existed throughout intellectual history--often distorted by or unknown to many scientists and polygraphers alike--that underpin the current controversy and concern the nature of reality and the human relationship to it.

Interestingly, postmodernist initiatives in the social sciences that are so often attacked as subverters of truth, of moral values, and of ethics might lead to defusing a controversy about truth by transcending truth that results in truth. (See Furedy, J.J. (1996). The North America polygraph and psychophysiology: Disinterested, uninterested, and interested perspectives. *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, 21, 97-105; Iacono, W.G., & Lykken, D.T. (1997). The validity of the lie detector: Two surveys of scientific opinion. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82, 426-433; Sakamoto, S., Nameta, K., Kawasaki, T., Yamashita, K., & Shimizu, A. (1997). Polygraphic evaluation of laughing and smiling in schizophrenic and depressive patients. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 85, 1291-1302; Yankee, W.J. (1995). The current status of research

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in forensic psychophysiology and its application in the psychophysiological detection of deception.  
Journal of Forensic Sciences, 40, 63-68.)(Keywords: Deception, Polygraph, Postmodernism.)