

20 November 2019

Good day Ms Charlene Rolls, I trust this letter finds you well.

I am writing in my capacity as the President of the Southern African Polygraph Federation referring to an article published in You magazine on 24 October 2019 entitled "LIAR, LIAR" and authored by Amit Katwala.

It is with disappointment that we were made aware of this article being published without us; the largest self-regulatory professional body representing the industry, or, to our knowledge, without any of the professional organizations representative of the industry being consulted. An oversight that is aggravated by the numerous misrepresentations and inaccuracies presented in the article as statements of fact. Whether it was a conscious decision to print the article without proper due diligence, or a lapse in judgement, I fear that this article has undoubtedly caused severe harm to the reputation of the polygraph industry and the relevant practitioners, and will likely lead to similar harm for the reputation of You magazine and its affiliates as the misrepresentations and falsehoods represented as facts will have to be addressed.

To cite some of the more critical inaccuracies, on page 82 the author declares: **"The only problem was that the polygraph didn't work. In 2003, the US National Academy of Sciences published a damning report that found evidence on the polygraph's accuracy across 57 studies was "far from satisfactory."** This statement as read by the common man would be interpreted that there was a conclusive study 'proving' that polygraph testing does not work. Despite the definitive statement made by the author, the actual finding of the National Academy Sciences report did not reflect the narrative that the author is trying to illustrate. On the contrary, the report stated that polygraph testing, although not perfect, was able to differentiate between a person telling a truth or a lie on a level above chance and accepted that accuracy of polygraph testing was between 80 and 90 percent based on the research available at that time. The report found that polygraph examinations would not be satisfactory in being used for a specific governmental function, which was the initial reason the report was commissioned. Furthermore, the report in itself was not a study on the validity nor reliability of polygraph testing, and instead was a critique on a selected number of research projects conducted in the years leading up to the report. Unfortunately, it appears that the author decided to only make use of a specific section of the report and distorted the facts to fit their opinion, rather than attempting to present something as mundane as the truth.

Furthermore, the article completely ignored the vast array of validity research that was conducted and all subsequent scientific papers. Had the author decided to investigate subject they would have found that there is a common consensus in the scientific community that the research and development in the polygraph industry had greatly improved, partly as a result of historical criticism such as the above mentioned report, and consensus regarding the validity and reliability of the different examination techniques. Unfortunately, this again leads one to the conclusion that the author was not interested in any actual figures or statistics, and only cared for the dated information

that suited their personal bias. As an additional thought on this point, had the author contacted any of the professional organizations while writing the article, they would have access to all the research and statistics available on the subject.

A particular section that illustrates how facts are sacrificed in exchange for sensation is the paragraph stating that **“History is littered with examples of known criminals who evaded detection by cheating the test.”** A statement proceeded ironically by the author referring to the two notorious cases commonly paraded as the penultimate nail in the proverbial coffin. While the case of the KGB double agent is certainly exciting, anyone familiar with some of the intricacies of the matter would be able to point out that it hardly serves as an example of what would be considered normal operating procedures or conditions. Considering the author then refers to the case of Mr Fay, who according to the article was convicted in 1979, one has to question why there was not any reference made to cases that didn't occur before cellular phones became commercially viable, especially since history is “littered with examples” in the words of the author? The reason is most likely that the polygraph industry had implemented active monitoring devices and methods a long time ago to combat attempted manipulation of the examinations. Some of the devices is as simple as motion sensors and the use of which is obligated in accordance to the international standards of practice. In short, had the author had a conversation with a polygraph examiner, they would have known that the issue had been addressed over a century ago. On episode 24 of season 5 of popular television show Mythbusters, which aired on 5 December 2007, we see the eager team members trying to use these “common” means to cheat the test. They were not successful.

Entertaining as that may have been, it is all a moot point, as when it comes to scientific validity, we know that anecdotal evidence is simply irrelevant. In the article, the author makes the following claim: **“Ever since its creation, it's been attacked for its questionable accuracy, and for the way it's been used as a tool of coercion. But the polygraph's flawed science continues to cast a shadow over lie-detection technologies today.”** The poetic irony is that the continued shadow is a result of sensational and anecdotal articles fixated on the flaws in the history of polygraph (such as this one), combined with a general ignorance of the empirical work that had been conducted following the 2003 National Academy of Sciences report. When looking at the professional application of polygraph testing in the modern era, we find that it is still the most widely used detection of deception method globally. It has been accepted as evidence in the court of law in some of the states of the U.S. and is the cornerstone for the Post Conviction Sex Offender Testing programs designed to assist in rehabilitation and curb recidivism in sexual offenders (a program being adopted in England as a result of the historical success). To put it bluntly, polygraph testing is gaining favorable ground due to the fact that the decision-makers tend to read and familiarize themselves with the empirical research and statistics, which helps them to understand and implement the tests effectively.

While I could dissect the numerous inaccuracies and misrepresentation for pages on end, I think the point is rather simple. This article is a monument to ignorance and only serves as a platform for an author, either out of malice or naivety, to bolster the common misconceptions of the entire profession. As mentioned in my introduction, I fear that this article will only succeed in harming the reputation of our industry, and possibly the reputation of the media.



We humbly request that the representatives of YOU magazine contact the organization in the future regarding matters pertaining to polygraph testing as a means of avoiding a similar incident.

We will be releasing media statements shortly regarding the article in the hope of addressing some of the misconceptions and falsehoods stated in the article. We would also like to cordially invite representatives of YOU magazine to attend one of the training sessions that we present to the public regarding the implementation of polygraph testing.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards

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