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Reciprocity or backfiring? Examining the influence of realistic job previews on applicants' willingness to self-disclose and use image protection tactics

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Abstract

Can employers use realistic job previews to encourage applicants to open up in job interviews? We draw on theories of self-disclosure to examine the association between realistic job previews and applicants' willingness to self-disclose and use image protection tactics. We also examine perceived competition for the job and Honesty-Humility as moderators. Results of a between-subjects 2 × 2 experimental study ($N = 396$) show that realistic job previews were associated with decreased willingness in applicants to self-disclose during the interview. This effect was stronger when applicants perceived high competition for the job. Organizational attractiveness and trust toward the employer mediated the effect. There were no direct effects of realistic job previews on image protection tactics. Furthermore, willingness to self-disclose and use image protection tactics was influenced by applicants' Honesty-Humility, but Honesty-Humility did not moderate the relation between job preview condition and willingness to self-disclose and use image protection tactics.

KEYWORDS

competition, defensive impression management, faking, Honesty-Humility, personnel selection, realistic job previews

Key points

- Realistic job previews refer to providing applicants with positive and negative job-related information.
- We conducted an online experiment to examine whether realistic job previews help or hinder applicants to open up during a job interview.
- Realistic job previews may decrease willingness in applicants to open up during the interview, especially when applicants perceive high competition for the job.

The interview is a setting that can evoke deception, response distortion, or faking among job applicants (Levashina & Campion, 2007), with faking being commonly defined as intentional misrepresentation in self-report to achieve personal goals (Holden & Book, 2011). Indeed, it is common for applicants to misrepresent themselves and distort their responses in job interviews (Melchers et al., 2020) because they depend on the interviewer's positive evaluation and because misrepresentation may create a competitive advantage (Dipboye et al., 2012). At the same time, research suggests that presenting oneself accurately and authentically makes both employers and employees successful in the long run. For example, interviewers value honest information from applicants because it allows them to make accurate evaluations (Dipboye et al., 2012). In addition, applicants who tend to present themselves accurately will likely perform better on the job, be more satisfied, and be less likely to leave (Cable & Kay, 2012; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Furthermore, research suggests that it can benefit applicants to openly reveal negative details about themselves to receive a job offer (Moore et al., 2017; Wilhelmy et al., 2020).

Given these desirable effects for employers and applicants, it seems important to understand *when* applicants are willing to self-disclose to interviewers, that is, verbally communicate something personal[1] that is generally unknown or available from other sources (Greene et al., 2006; Omarzu, 2000), and what employers can do to encourage applicants to do so. Scholars have speculated that the way employers communicate with applicants could be an important influencing factor (Cable & Kay, 2012). In this regard, Wilhelmy et al. (2020) suggested that "organizations could create settings in which candidates feel free to reveal honest information about themselves, even if this information is negative" and that interviewers "could deliberately reveal negative information about the job and the organization to create a space of trust in which candidates open up" (p. 441). However, these suggestions have not been empirically tested nor documented as to when realistic job previews might be effective in this regard.

Realistic job previews refer to providing applicants with favorable and unfavorable (i.e., positive and negative) job-related information (Phillips, 1998; Wanous, 1976). In this article, we examine whether they help or hinder applicants to open up in the interview. We draw on theories of self-disclosure (Jourard, 1971; Omarzu, 2000) to argue that disclosure from the employer (i.e., realistic job previews) should lead to reciprocal disclosure from the applicant in the form of willingness to self-disclose (i.e., sharing personal information that is not available otherwise), to use more honest image protection tactics (i.e., not hiding negative information and, e.g., explaining how one has learned from past mistakes to avoid a negative image), and to use less deceptive image protection tactics (i.e., hiding negative information to avoid a negative image). In addition, we examine whether these effects might be moderated by situational factors such as applicants' perceived competition for the job and personality factors such as Honesty-Humility.

Our work contributes to the literature in several ways. First, we address recent calls to identify practices that encourage applicants to openly share information and thus inhibit applicant deception in job interviews, especially if these practices can be influenced by employers (Bill et al., 2020; Melchers et al., 2020). Second, our work provides insights into the consequences of realistic job previews that go beyond applicant self-selection and expectation-setting (Baur et al., 2014). Unexpectedly, our work shows how realistic job previews may be counterproductive with regard to the employer's attractiveness, trust toward the employer, and applicants' willingness to disclose during the interview. Third, we contribute to a better understanding of when applicants are willing to share accurate information, examining the conditions under which realistic job previews may influence self-disclosure and image protection. Specifically, contextual differences such as perceived competition can increase the pressure on applicants to appear to fit the job by misrepresenting themselves and hiding unfavorable information (e.g., Ho et al., 2020), thus diminishing the influence of realistic job previews on applicant disclosure. With regard to individual differences, applicants high in Honesty-Humility have been found to misrepresent themselves less (e.g., Bill et al., 2020). This could make such applicants especially likely to reciprocate (i.e., disclose) when they receive realistic job previews.

From a practical point of view, it is important for employers to know whether they may unwittingly increase or decrease applicant disclosure as a by-product of using realistic job previews. Do employers need to worry about whether such previews may backfire, having negative effects on organizational attractiveness or applicant disclosure? In addition, understanding under which conditions applicants make themselves vulnerable can help researchers to develop recommendations for how to design job interviews in a way that they elicit unbiased information from applicants.

1 | REALISTIC JOB PREVIEWS

Realistic job previews provide applicants with both positive and negative information about a job and organization (Phillips, 1998; Wanous, 1976). The goal of realistic job previews is to set accurate expectations, enhance applicants' self-selection and thus decrease turnover (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Thus, they are a common practice of many organizations to actively discourage applicants who are likely to be misfits with the job (Landis et al., 2014). Realistic job previews are gaining additional relevance in today's globalized world. In a globalized labor market, poor hiring decisions and early turnover are expensive, both for organizations (e.g., applicant onboarding costs) and for applicants (e.g., who turn down other offers). Globalization therefore increases an organization's need to act openly and intentionally communicate negative qualities and attributes to reduce the risk of early turnover (Baur et al., 2014). Realistic job previews can, for example, be provided during job interviews (Phillips, 1998).

In past research, the main question was how effective realistic job previews are in terms of reducing turnover. This question was addressed in the 1980s and 1990s and led to the key takeaway that realistic job previews are a useful strategy to diminish turnover considering their low burden (e.g., Phillips, 1998). By now, a substantial literature has documented the beneficial effects of realistic job previews on turnover, and it has been acknowledged that realistic job previews can affect how honest organizations are perceived to be (Earnest et al., 2011). However, a recent review underscores an important remaining question: What happens when realistic job previews are presented and applicants remain interested in the job (Landis et al., 2014)? Specifically, do applicants disclose themselves in a job interview in return for the negative information that the employer discloses; or do they lose trust in the employer and therefore withhold critical information about themselves, or get a bad image of the employer and therefore are less engaged in how to present themselves?

2 | RECIPROCAL SELF-DISCLOSURE: POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF REALISTIC JOB PREVIEWS ON APPLICANTS' WILLINGNESS TO SELF-DISCLOSE AND USE IMAGE PROTECTION TACTICS

Self-disclosure[2] (often used interchangeably with disclosure) involves people disclosing facts about themselves, their opinions, attitudes, moods, or emotions. Disclosure can, but does not necessarily have to, involve the decision to reveal negative aspects (Kim & Dindia, 2011). A key dimension of disclosure is *depth*, which describes the intimacy level of the disclosed information. Disclosure is considered particularly intimate when it consists of potentially negative or embarrassing information (Howell & Conway, 1990), which is—by definition—the case for realistic job previews (Wanous, 1976). Decades of research on self-disclosure suggest that sharing meaningful personal information makes oneself vulnerable, which can help affiliate oneself and promotes feelings of closeness and liking (Collins & Miller, 1994; Cozby, 1972; Worthy et al., 1969). In addition, individuals may decide to share potential shortcomings to elicit sympathy or concern (Sinaceur et al., 2015).

One of the most reliable and strongest observed phenomena in the self-disclosure literature is the reciprocity effect (Omarzu, 2000). Disclosure reciprocity refers to the process by which one person's disclosure elicits another person's disclosure (e.g., Jourard, 1971). In other words, when receiving a disclosure, it is very likely that individuals will reciprocate the disclosure. A theoretical explanation for the occurrence of reciprocity in disclosure is the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). It is assumed that reciprocity is such a basic human motive that violations make interactions feel uncomfortable. Numerous laboratory and field studies have demonstrated that even in single encounters, individuals tend to self-disclose in response to others' self-disclosure (Hill & Stull, 1982). Reciprocation of a disclosure even happens when people feel little liking or attraction for the discloser (Derlega et al., 1973).

However, along with potential social rewards, revealing information about oneself to another involves social risks such as rejection by the listener or loss of control. People are therefore in a constant conflict between the need to withhold and the need to reveal information (Baxter, 2004). Situations vary in the degree to which there are clear expectations about what behaviors are most likely appropriate and will lead to positive consequences (Mischel, 1973), and the job interview often serves as an example of a social setting with particularly strong external influences and expectations of applicants (Dipboye et al., 2012).

Considering these high stakes that applicants face during job interviews, it may not be surprising that deception is common in this setting (Melchers et al., 2020), even if it is not desired by employers (Roulin et al., 2016). There have been opposing propositions about how realistic job previews influence applicant deception. On the one hand, Levashina and Campion's (2006) model of faking likelihood in the employment interview suggests that applicants' willingness to misrepresent themselves is influenced by realistic job previews such that applicants misrepresent themselves more when receiving realistic job previews. The assumed theoretical link is that with more knowledge about the job and organization (i.e., when applicants receive more job-related information) they learn about what the employer is looking for during the interview (i.e., applicants recognize more opportunities to fake) and learn what the best answers to interview questions might be (i.e., applicants have more capacity to fake). Applicants should thus be more willing to distort and tailor their answers to what the interviewers wish to hear.

On the other hand, some researchers have proposed that realistic job previews may evoke in applicants an urge to avoid deception and to reciprocate transparent communication (Cable & Kay, 2012; Moore et al., 2017; Wilhelmy et al., 2016; Wilhelmy et al., 2020). This assumption is based on the idea of reciprocity and social exchange within the social interaction. For example, in a study by Quattrone and Jones (1978), participants were asked to try to convince a director to cast them for a theater play. Indeed, participants were willing to reveal potentially negative information about themselves, particularly when they were told that their success of being cast depended solely on their interview with the director. In line with this, we postulate that applicants should perceive self-disclosure as an appropriate strategy in the interview context and should anticipate social rewards for it that outweigh potential social risks.

In addition to self-disclosure, we also draw from the impression management (IM) literature to consider other behavioral intentions on the applicants' side that may be equivalent to realistic job previews such as to not cover up weaknesses in their profile. IM is a broad class of self-presentation behaviors that individuals use to influence the impressions that others gain of them (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In particular, applicants can use IM to create a positive impression on the interviewer, and they can use defensive strategies like image protection tactics when they perceive a threat to their image (Rosenfeld, 1997). Honest image protection tactics (also referred to as honest defensive IM, Bourdage et al., 2018) involve giving honest accounts of past negative events and talking about how one learned from a mistake, or how mistakes would not be repeated (i.e., negative information is not hidden). Deceptive image protection tactics (also referred to as image protection, Bourdage et al., 2018) involve covering up, masking, and obscuring past negative events (i.e., negative information is hidden). Positive correlations between honest and deceptive image protection tactics suggest that both types of IM can be combined in the same interview (Bourdage et al., 2018). However, rather than being opposite poles, honest and deceptive image protection tactics seem to be conceptually related but separate dimensions.

What we know from the self-disclosure literature is that people tend to reciprocate the other person's level of disclosure, including the level of intimacy. Honest and deceptive image protection tactics differ in the degree of truth they are built upon. More specifically, honest image protection tactics entail revealing negative information, which corresponds with the level of intimacy of realistic job previews, where negative information is also revealed. In contrast, deceptive image protection tactics entail hiding negative information, which does not correspond with the level of intimacy of realistic job previews. Therefore, applicants may be more willing to use honest image protection tactics and less willing to use deceptive image protection tactics in the interview when they receive a realistic job preview. Taken together, the above arguments lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 – *compared to participants who receive only positive job preview information, participants who receive both positive and negative job preview information will report* (*a*) *more willingness to self-disclose*, (*b*) *more willingness to use honest image protection tactics*, *and* (*c*) *less willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics in the interview*.

3 | MODERATING INFLUENCE OF PERCEIVED COMPETITION

Beyond examining the relationship between realistic job previews and applicant disclosure, we posit that this relationship might depend on characteristics of the situation such as applicants' perceived competition. Understanding the conditions that influence reciprocal disclosure in job interviews is important because as described above, job interviews are a "strong" situation (Mischel, 1973) in terms of applicants being under pressure to create a favorable impression. Perceived competition may be a situational factor that makes the interview situation even "stronger." Competition "occurs when one person's gain comes at the loss of the other" (To et al., 2020, p. 910). This is the case when applicants compete for one job opportunity.

Drawing from existing research on applicants' willingness to fake, there are indications that perceived competition encourages applicants to deceive. Roulin et al.'s (2016) faking model highlights that applicants' behavior is (partly) an adaptive response to the fact that they compete with other applicants for the same job. The more competition applicants perceive, the more they believe that not deceiving could mean a competitive disadvantage for them, and that disclosing honest and accurate information about themselves could result in them being eliminated from the selection process (Griffith & McDaniel, 2006). Vignette studies on applicants' willingness to fake showed that perceived competition tends to increase applicants' willingness to fake in interviews (Ho et al., 2019, 2020). Buehl and Melchers (2018) did not find a main effect for competition (operationalized by selection ratio) on applicants' faking intentions in an interview simulation study, and Bill et al. (2020) found small effects of competition (using varying operationalizations but selection ratio was a common element) in one of three vignette studies. However, the authors note that the scenarios that they used might have implied competition across all conditions, which could have undermined the potential effects of their competition manipulation.

Developing these indications further, perceived competition could increase applicants' awareness of the possible risks involved in self-disclosure (Omarzu, 2000). When applicants perceive high levels of competition, they may believe that they need to cover up their skeletons in the closet and embellish themselves to not be outperformed by others. Applicants might therefore be less inclined to reciprocate disclosure because they are less willing to take the risk of openly disclosing themselves. In contrast, when applicants perceive low levels of competition, they might have more leeway to openly express themselves and reciprocate the interviewer's disclosure. Thus, we expect that the positive effect of realistic job previews on applicant disclosure should be mitigated when applicants perceive more competition, and should be stronger when applicants perceive less competition:

Hypothesis 2a – *the relationships between job preview information, willingness to self-disclose, and willingness to use honest or deceptive image protection tactics will be stronger when perceived competition is low*.

4 | MODERATING INFLUENCE OF HONESTY-HUMILITY

Individual difference variables may also explain variation in how different people respond to identical situational cues with disclosure (Omarzu, 2000). Thus, although realistic job previews may generally elicit reciprocal disclosure in applicants, there may be individual differences in applicants' responses. Honesty-Humility from the HEXACO model of personality refers to individual differences in sincerity, modesty, fairness, and greed (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Individuals high on Honesty-Humility prefer genuine interpersonal relations rather than ones that are based on manipulation, and are not willing to take advantage of others for personal gain (Ashton et al., 2014). Individuals low in Honesty-Humility have been found to be more willing to engage in faking (Bourdage et al., 2018; Buehl & Melchers, 2018; Law et al., 2016; Levashina & Campion, 2007). In addition, Bourdage et al. (2018) found that applicants with high levels of Honesty-Humility were less likely to use deception as a strategy to protect their image.

Furthermore, applicants with these traits may particularly value transparency and authenticity in the interview process and be particularly responsive to disclosures they experience during the interview. We would assume that applicants who are leaning toward accurate and open self-presentation anyway because they are high in Honesty-Humility would notice and appreciate realistic job previews more than applicants low in Honesty-Humility, more strongly reciprocate the openness they receive, and thus be more willing to self-disclose and use honest tactics to protect their image and less willing to use deceptive tactics.

Conversely, applicants who have low levels of Honesty-Humility may generally tend to protect themselves by being more cautious about revealing their true selves and be less willing to disclose and more willing to deceive. Even when receiving a realistic job preview, these individuals might not be responsive to such disclosures and not likely reciprocate. Put differently, applicants low in Honesty-Humility might be more unlikely to respond to realistic job previews with reciprocating disclosure. Thus, we predict:

Hypothesis 2b – *The relationships between job preview information, willingness to self-disclose, and willingness to use honest or deceptive image protection tactics will be stronger when Honesty-Humility is high*

We preregistered[3] these hypotheses and our methodological approach. To test our hypotheses, we first ran a pretest of our experimental job preview manipulation and then conducted a 2 × 2 between-subjects vignette-based online experiment.

5 | METHODS

5.1 | Power analysis

Assuming a 2 × 2 between-subjects design, an effect size of $f = .20$, an alpha level of .05, and a power of .80, G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) calculated a minimum sample size of 280 participants. Considering a dropout rate of 35% on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and an equal distribution across the four experimental conditions, we aimed for a starting sample of 432 participants (following recommendations by Keith et al. [2017]).

5.2 | Sample

We used the TurkPrime website (now CloudResearch) to recruit 432 adult participants (i.e., at least 18 years of age) on the MTurk crowdsourcing platform (Litman et al., 2017). To address potential concerns about the quality of MTurk data (Cheung et al., 2017; Chmielewski & Kucker, 2020; Mason & Suri, 2012; Sharpe Wessling et al., 2017), we took a number of precautions. First, MTurk workers could only participate in the study if they had a U.S. account, had completed at least 100 MTurk HITs, and had an approval rate of at least 95%. Second, we used MTurk participants' unique identification number to ensure that participants only filled out the survey once. Third, following suggestions in the literature (Curran, 2016; Huang et al., 2015), we included several categorical manipulations and knowledge check items (see below) to ensure that participants attentively read the instructions, and we removed 25 cases where participants incorrectly answered more than half of these items as specified in our preregistration protocol. Fourth, we included two attention check items (see below) and removed 11 additional cases where participants did not answer both items correctly (Aguinis et al., 2021). Finally, we included a honeypot question (i.e., an item at the end of the survey for which some response options were not visible to human participants to screen out potential responses from bots, following recommendations by Chmielewski & Kucker [2020]), but did not detect any cases to be removed. This resulted in a final sample size of 396 participants, which surpassed the recommendation determined by our power analysis.

Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 78 years ($M = 37.94$, $SD = 11.22$), and 55.80% identified as male. The majority (77.27%) of participants reported their ethnicity as White, 8.59% as Asian, 6.57% as Black, 5.56% as Hispanic, 0.51% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 1.52% as other. Participants had an average of 16.50 years of work experience ($SD = 10.54$), had participated in an average of 12.71 job interviews ($SD = 12.71$), and had submitted an average of 65.47 applications in their lifetime ($SD = 126.29$).

5.3 | Procedure

We used a 2 × 2 between-subjects experimental design where participants completed an 8-min online survey using Qualtrics software. Participants were asked to imagine that they were going into an interview for a sales manager job that was attractive to them (see details below and Appendix A). We chose the job of sales manager because it is generic, visible to the public, and easy for participants to imagine. Furthermore, we described the job and organization as attractive to keep perceived attractiveness constant across all experimental groups and thus rule out potential alternative effects of job previews on applicants' willingness to share information about themselves (e.g., applicants being less willing to self-disclose because they are less interested in the position and thus less engaged).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (positive vs. realistic job preview and high vs. low perceived competition) where they were presented with the opening statement of the interviewer. Next, participants rated how they would behave during the interview in terms of their willingness to self-disclose and to use honest and deceptive image protection tactics. They also rated their perceived trust toward the employer and perceived organizational honesty. They then completed an Honesty-Humility scale and demographic items and answered manipulation and attention check items.

5.4 | Pretest of job preview manipulation

We developed the job preview manipulation following Breaugh and Billings (1988) five key criteria of realistic job previews: (a) accuracy (i.e., the preview should convey accurate information), (b) specificity (i.e., the preview should help the applicant to make an informed decision), (c) breadth (i.e., the preview should cover a broad range of topics), (d) credibility (i.e., the preview should be credible from the viewpoint of the applicant), and (e) importance (i.e., the preview should contain information that is new to the applicant). Potential elements of our job preview manipulation (see Appendix B for these pretested elements in the order of how positively they were rated) were pretested using a separate sample of 200 participants (53% male, $M_{age} = 39.21$ years, $SD_{age} = 11.12$) recruited online via MTurk before the main study. Participants imagined having applied for the job of sales manager at the company *Drilling Machines Miller* (we used the same company name as Langer et al. [2019]) and receiving information about the job and organization at the beginning of their interview. The scenario and the job preview information were adapted from Langer et al. (2019). Participants were presented with 16 (8 presumably positive and 8 presumably negative) pieces of job preview information and rated each piece of information (1 = *extremely negative* to 7 = *extremely positive*).

In general, ratings on all pieces of information varied between 2.47 and 6.52, ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.54$). On the basis of participants' ratings, we selected the two most positively rated ("the salary for this job is above the market," $M = 6.52$, $SD = 0.80$, and "we offer more paid vacation days than our competitors," $M = 6.25$, $SD = 1.01$) and the two most negatively rated pieces of job preview information ("in this job, you will have a supervisor who some people describe as difficult," $M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.47$, and "you should be aware that we have been losing market share to our competitors over the last few years," $M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.29$) to maximize the strength of our experimental manipulation. On average, participants rated the two selected negative pieces of job preview information ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.20$) significantly more negative than the two selected positive pieces of job preview information ($M = 6.38$, $SD = 0.82$), $t(199) = -32.25$, $p < .0001$, Cohen's $d = -2.28$.

5.5 | Manipulation of job preview information and perceived competition in the main study

The main study followed a similar procedure as the pretest except that participants were randomly assigned to either the *positive* or the *realistic* job preview condition, and either the *high* or the *low* perceived competition condition (see Appendix A for the full experimental manipulations). In all four conditions participants were asked to imagine that they were applying for an attractive sales job at the company *Drilling Machines Miller* and were provided with information about the job and organization at the beginning of their interview. The realistic job preview was operationalized as a balanced combination of positive and negative job preview information (see Baur et al., 2014; Earnest et al., 2011; Landis et al., 2014). Specifically, participants in the positive job preview condition received the two pretested positive pieces of information about the job and organization, whereas participants in the mixed job preview condition received not only these two positive but also the two negative pieces of information about the job and organization. Note that we chose not to have a condition with only negative information about the job and organization because we could not imagine a realistic scenario in which that would be the case, which is also in line with past job preview research (e.g., Buckley et al., 2002). In addition, participants in the high perceived competition condition were informed that there was intense competition for the job ("you have heard that there is intense competition for this job") whereas participants in the low competition condition were informed that there was little competition for the job ("you have heard that there is little competition for this job").

5.6 | Measures

Unless noted otherwise, 7-point rating scales ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* were used in this study. All items and the original items from which they were drawn are listed in Appendix C. *Willingness to self-disclose* was measured using three items ($\alpha = .91$) adapted from Posey et al. (2010). We modified the items to fit the context of a job interview and to capture the willingness to show a specific behavior. *Willingness to use honest image protection tactics* was measured using four items ($\alpha = .79$) adapted from Bourdage et al. (2018). We modified the items to capture the *willingness* to use honest image protection tactics. *Willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics* was measured using four items ($\alpha = .87$) adapted from Bourdage et al. (2018). Again, we modified the items to capture the *willingness* to use the tactics.

To assess the distinctiveness of our three dependent measures (willingness to self-disclose, willingness to use honest image protection tactics, and willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics), we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). First, we specified a three-factor model where the items of the measurements of willingness to self-disclose, use honest image protection tactics, and use deceptive image protection tactics loaded on three separate latent factors. Second, we specified a two-factor model with self-disclosure items loading on one factor and all honest and deceptive image protection tactics items loading on a separate factor. Third, we specified a one-factor model with all items loading onto a single factor. The analysis was conducted using R version 3.6.0 (R Development Core Team, 2016) and the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). Results revealed that the three-factor model, $\chi^2(41) = 60.74$, $p < .05$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .99, Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) = .99, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .04, 90% confidence interval (CI) [.02, .05], standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .04, had a significantly better model fit than the two-factor model, $\chi^2(43) = 252.44$, $p < .001$, CFI = .88, TLI = .85, RMSEA = .11, 90% CI [.10, .12], SRMR = .13, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 25.80$, $p < .001$, and also than the one-factor model, $\chi^2(44) = 598.74$, $p < .001$, CFI = .68, TLI = .60, RMSEA = .18, 90% CI [.17, .19], SRMR = .13, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 59.46$ $p < .001$. These results suggest that willingness to self-disclose, to use honest image protection tactics, and to use deceptive image protection tactics are distinct variables.

Honesty-Humility was measured using ten items ($\alpha = .84$) from Ashton and Lee (2009). *Perceived organizational attractiveness* was measured using three items ($\alpha = .96$) adapted from Highhouse et al. (2003). The items were modified to refer to the specific job and organization of our scenario. We measured *trust toward the employer* using the one-item measure of Searle et al. (2011) and *perceived organizational honesty* using one item from Saks and Cronshaw (1990).

5.7 | Manipulation and attention checks

All manipulation and attention check items and response options are listed in Appendix C. We included a categorical manipulation check item to assess whether participants were more likely to associate intense competition with the job application in the high perceived competition condition than in the low perceived competition condition. We also included a categorical manipulation check item to assess whether participants were more likely to associate negative information with the opening statement of the interviewer in the realistic job preview condition than in the positive job preview condition.

Furthermore, we included knowledge check items (i.e., two items on the content of the positive job preview information for all participants and two items on the content of the negative job preview information for participants in the realistic job preview condition) to assess whether participants remembered the specific information they were provided in the manipulation. In addition, two attention check items (taken from Huang et al. [2015]) were included at the end of the survey. Furthermore, following recent recommendations to ensure the high quality of MTurk data (Chmielewski & Kucker, 2020), we included a honeypot question to screen out potential responses from bots.

6 | RESULTS

6.1 | Manipulation check

To determine whether the experimental manipulations worked as intended, we conducted Chi-squared tests. We found that perceived competition condition was significantly related to participants' response to the manipulation check item, χ^2 (2, $N = 432$) = 264.83, $p < .001$. Descriptive statistics demonstrated that 84.98% of participants in the high perceived competition condition correctly indicated that competition for the job was high, whereas only 19.18% of participants in the low perceived competition condition incorrectly selected this response or indicated that they did not remember. Furthermore, we found that the job preview condition was significantly related to participants' response to the manipulation check item, χ^2(2, $N = 432$) = 295.41, $p < .001$. Descriptive statistics demonstrated that 81.69% of participants in the realistic job preview condition correctly indicated that they had received negative information from the interviewer, whereas only 5.94% of participants in the positive job preview condition incorrectly selected this response or indicated that they did not remember. Overall, the manipulation check indicates that the manipulation of perceived competition and job preview was successful.

6.2 | Descriptive statistics

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables are shown in Table 1, and the means and standard deviations for the dependent variables in the different experimental groups appear in Table 2. Because of the potentially negative effect of negative job preview information (Buckley et al., 2002), we wanted to avoid participants automatically perceiving the job and organization as less attractive in the realistic job preview condition by telling all participants that the described job was attractive (see Appendix A). Attractiveness ratings were indeed generally high (indicating that participants were attentive to the instructions), but perceived organizational attractiveness was lower in the realistic job preview condition ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.49$) than in the positive job preview condition ($M = 6.38$, $SD = 0.68$, $t(256.42) = 9.01$, $p < .001$). In other words, our attempt to keep perceived organizational attractiveness constant across all experimental groups and thus rule out potential alternative effects of job previews through attractiveness was not successful. For this reason, all analyses included perceived organizational attractiveness as a control variable to examine whether realistic job previews elicit or diminish reciprocity when perceived organizational attractiveness is held constant. We also compared the realistic job preview and the positive job preview conditions with regard to trust toward the employer and perceived organizational honesty and found that the conditions did not significantly differ with regard to perceived organizational honesty ($t(394) = -1.92$, $p = .055$)—albeit barely above the conventional level of significance—but trust toward the employer was lower in the realistic job preview condition ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.17$) than in the positive job preview condition ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.03$, $t(394) = 4.16$, $p < .001$).

6.3 | Hypothesis tests

To test our hypotheses, we ran three separate hierarchical regression analyses. We regressed willingness to self-disclose, willingness to use honest image protection tactics, and willingness to use deceptive

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Job preview condition	0.47	0.50								
2. Perceived competition condition	0.49	0.50	−.02							
3. Honesty-Humility	4.69	1.25	−.08	−.05						
4. Willingness to self-disclose	5.15	1.33	−.16**	−.01	.19**					
5. Willingness to use honest image protection tactics	4.75	1.28	.03	−.04	.19**	.47**				
6. Willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics	4.19	1.45	−.01	.06	−.35**	−.41**	−.47**			
7. Perceived organizational attractiveness	5.87	1.26	−.43**	.02	.14**	.30**	.13**	−.10*		
8. Trust toward employer	5.11	1.12	−.21**	−.01	.07	.41**	.26**	−.24**	.36**	
9. Perceived organizational honesty	5.80	0.97	.10	.04	.09	.32**	.22**	−.18**	.22**	.59**

Note: $N = 396$; Job preview condition was coded as 0 = positive job preview, 1 = realistic job preview. Perceived competition condition was coded as 0 = low perceived competition, 1 = high perceived competition. All other variables were assessed on a 7-point rating scale.
*$p < .05$ (two-tailed); **$p < .01$ (two-tailed).

TABLE 2 Means and standard deviations for the dependent variables in the different experimental groups

Variable	Positive job preview: Low perceived competition M (SD)	Positive job preview: High perceived competition M (SD)	Realistic job preview: Low perceived competition M (SD)	Realistic job preview: High perceived competition M (SD)
Willingness to self-disclose	5.26 (1.27)	5.46 (1.09)	5.08 (1.27)	4.77 (1.59)
Willingness to use honest image protection tactics	4.72 (1.23)	4.72 (1.27)	4.88 (1.21)	4.68 (1.42)
Willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics	4.23 (1.36)	4.18 (1.51)	3.97 (1.35)	4.37 (1.55)

image protection tactics as outcomes, respectively, on job preview condition, perceived organizational attractiveness, competition condition, Honesty-Humility, and their interaction terms (the cross-product of job preview condition and Honesty-Humility and of job preview condition and competition condition, respectively).[4] See Table 3 for complete regression results.

6.3.1 | Effects of realistic job previews on willingness to self-disclose and use image protection tactics

We found a significant main effect of job preview condition on willingness to self-disclose ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .001$), but in the opposite direction than predicted: Willingness to self-disclose was lower in the realistic job preview condition ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.44$) than in the positive job preview condition ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.19$). The effect of job preview condition did not remain significant when including perceived organizational attractiveness in the regression analysis ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .417$), which was a significant predictor of willingness to self-disclose ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1a, that participants who received both positive and negative information would report more willingness to self-disclose, was not supported. These analyses suggest that participants who received negative job preview information reported less willingness to self-disclose in the interview (i.e., a backfiring effect of realistic job previews), but that this effect was mainly driven by reduced organizational attractiveness.

Contrary to our prediction, there was no significant main effect of job preview condition on willingness to use honest image protection tactics ($\beta = .03$, $p = .611$). In the realistic job preview condition, willingness to use honest image protection tactics ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.31$) was not higher than in the positive job preview condition ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.25$). The effect of job preview condition remained nonsignificant when including perceived organizational attractiveness in the regression analysis ($\beta = .10$, $p = .070$), which was a significant predictor of willingness to use honest image protection tactics ($\beta = .18$, $p = .002$). Thus, Hypothesis 1b, that participants who received both positive and negative information would report more willingness to use honest image protection tactics, was not supported.

Furthermore, contrary to our prediction, there was no significant main effect job preview condition on willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .780$). In the realistic job preview condition, willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.31$) was not lower than in the positive job preview condition ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.25$). The effect of job preview condition remained nonsignificant when including perceived organizational attractiveness in the regression analysis ($\beta = -.07$, $p = .216$), which was a significant predictor of willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics ($\beta = -.13$, $p = .021$). Thus, Hypothesis 1c, that participants who received both positive and negative information would report less willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics, was not supported.

6.3.2 | Moderating influence of perceived competition

In line with our prediction, we found a significant interaction effect of job preview condition and perceived competition condition on willingness to self-disclose ($\beta = -.10$, $p = .040$). However, the direction of the interaction was different from our prediction: Willingness to self-disclose was lower in the realistic than in the positive job preview condition, and this relationship was stronger when perceived competition was high instead of low (see Figure 1). Simple slope analyses revealed that the association between job preview and willingness to self-disclose was significantly negative when perceived competition was high, $t(395) = -3.68$, $p < .001$, but they were unrelated when perceived competition was low, $t(395) = -0.96$, $p = .338$. In other words, participants in the realistic job preview condition were less likely to indicate willingness to self-disclose during the interview when perceived competition was high. Furthermore, contrary to our prediction, there were neither significant interaction effects of job preview condition and perceived competition condition on willingness to use honest image protection tactics ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .394$) nor on willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics ($\beta = .07$, $p = .129$). We also found no significant main effect of perceived competition condition on willingness to self-disclose ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .844$), willingness to use honest image protection tactics ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .543$), and willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics ($\beta = .04$, $p = .436$). Thus, Hypothesis 2a, that the relationship job preview condition and willingness to self-disclose and to use honest or deceptive image protection tactics would be stronger when perceived competition was low, was not supported.

TABLE 3 Hierarchical regression results using willingness to self-disclose, willingness to use honest image protection tactics, and willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics as criteria

Measure	Willingness to self-disclose	Willingness to use honest image protection tactics	Willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics
Step 1			
Job preview condition	−.16**	.03	−.01
F	10.75**	0.26	0.08
R^2	.03	.00	.00
Step 2			
Job preview condition	−.04	.10	−.07
Perceived organizational attractiveness	.28***	.18**	−.13*
F	19.84***	5.20**	2.72
R^2	.09	.03	.01
ΔR^2	.07	.03	.01
Step 3			
Job preview condition	−.04	.10	−.08
Perceived organizational attractiveness	.26***	.15**	−.09
Perceived competition condition	−.01	−.03	.04
Honesty-Humility	.15**	.18***	−.34***
F	12.46***	6.07***	14.92***
R^2	.11	.06	.13
ΔR^2	.02	.03	.12
Step 4			
Job preview condition	−.05	.10	−.08
Perceived organizational attractiveness	.26***	.15**	−.09
Perceived competition condition	−.01	−.03	.04
Honesty-Humility	.15**	.18***	−.34***
Job preview condition X Perceived competition condition	−.10*	−.04	.07
Job preview condition X Honesty-Humility	.09	.00	−.01
F	9.88***	4.15***	10.36***
R^2	.13	.06	.14
ΔR^2	.02	.00	.01

Note: $N = 396$; Standardized estimates are presented. Degrees of freedom were 1/394 for step 1, 1/393 for step 2, 2/391 for step 3, and 2/389 for step 4. Job preview condition was coded as 0 = positive job preview, 1 = realistic job preview. We repeated all analyses with the full sample ($N = 432$) and found the same pattern of results except that the interaction effect of job preview condition and Honesty-Humility on willingness to self-disclose was significant ($\beta = .10$, $p = .030$). We also repeated step 4 with entering only one of the interaction terms at a time, respectively, and found the same pattern of results except that the interaction effect of job preview condition and Honesty-Humility on willingness to self-disclose was significant when considered individually ($\beta = .10$, $p = .038$).
*$p < .05$ (two-tailed); **$p < .01$ (two-tailed); ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

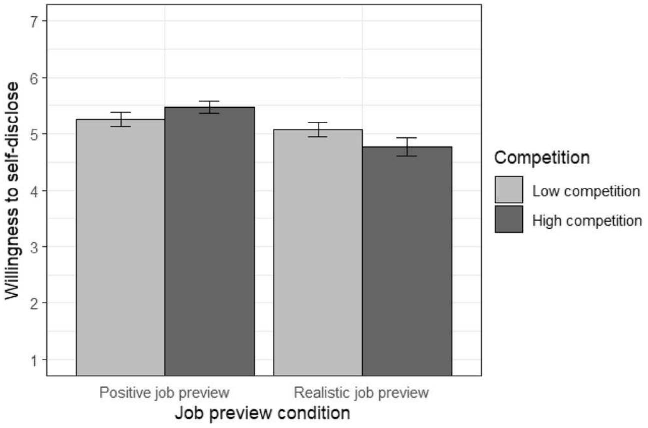

FIGURE 1 Graphical illustration of the interaction effect of job preview condition and perceived competition condition on willingness to self-disclose. The error bars represent standard errors

6.3.3 | Moderating influence of Honesty-Humility

Contrary to our Hypothesis 2b, that the relationship between job preview condition and willingness to self-disclose and willingness to use honest or deceptive image protection tactics would be stronger when Honesty-Humility was high, we did not find any significant interaction effects of job preview condition and Honesty-Humility, neither for willingness to self-disclose ($\beta = .09$, $p = .050$), for willingness to use honest image protection tactics ($\beta = .00$, $p = .999$), nor for willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .802$). However, we found significant main effects of Honesty-Humility on all three outcomes such that participants who were higher on Honesty-Humility reported more willingness to self-disclose ($\beta = .15$, $p = .003$), more willingness to use honest image protection tactics ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$), and less willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .001$).

6.4 | Exploratory analyses

In addition to our preregistered hypotheses, we wanted to explore how the unexpected finding that realistic job previews decreased rather than increased applicants' willingness to openly share information about themselves could be explained. For this purpose, we aimed to explore potential mechanisms that might explain this finding even though our study was not specifically designed to examine indirect effects. Specifically, we examined perceived organizational attractiveness and trust toward the employer—which both differed between the positive and realistic job preview conditions—, and perceived organizational honesty—which did not differ significantly between the conditions but the difference was barely below the conventional level of significance—as potential mediators of the relationships between job previews and willingness to self-disclose, willingness to use honest image protection tactics, and willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics. These supplemental, exploratory analyses were conducted using a path model and the lavaan package (Version 0.6-7) in the statistical environment R (Version 3.6.0, R Development Core Team, 2016).

When testing the model as a whole (i.e., multiple mediation model), we found that the realistic job preview condition had a significant negative indirect effect on willingness to self-disclose through perceived organizational attractiveness (see Table 4). We also found significant indirect effects of realistic job preview on willingness to self-disclose, use honest image protection tactics, and use deceptive image protection tactics through trust toward the employer. Hence, the exploratory analyses revealed that trust toward the employer mediated the effects of realistic job previews on all three outcomes, and organizational attractiveness served as an additional mediator regarding willingness to self-disclose (see Figure 2). Following recommendations by MacKinnon et al. (2012), we also tested the mediators and dependent variables individually in separate models. All significant path coefficients and indirect effects of the full model remained significant in the separate models.

7 | DISCUSSION

Do realistic job previews encourage applicants to open up in job interviews, or do they have the opposite effect? Do perceived competition and Honesty-Humility alter this relationship? To answer these questions, we drew on theories of self-disclosure (Jourard, 1971; Omarzu, 2000) to understand how and when realistic job previews might influence applicants' willingness to self-disclose and use image protection tactics. Using a vignette study, we experimentally manipulated whether applicants received positive or realistic (i.e., both positive and negative) job preview information at the beginning of an interview and whether they perceived high or low competition for the job. Job preview information influenced applicants' willingness to self-disclose, but in the opposite direction than expected: Applicants who received a realistic job preview were less willing to disclose themselves during the interview, and this was especially true for applicants who perceived high competition. In contrast, realistic job previews did not have an effect on applicants' willingness to use image protection tactics.

7.1 | Research implications

Our study has several implications for the research on realistic job previews and self-presentation. Prior research and theory assumed either that a realistic job preview would encourage applicants to disclose accurate information in the interview (Wilhelmy et al., 2016) or that it would encourage applicants to misrepresent themselves (Levashina & Campion, 2006). Our results challenge both of these assumptions: They suggest that realistic job previews discourage applicants from disclosing accurate information, but they do not necessarily encourage applicants to misrepresent themselves. We conducted exploratory analyses to examine potential mechanisms that might explain why realistic job previews decreased rather than increased applicants' willingness to openly share information about themselves. We found that decreased trust toward the employer mediated the effects of realistic job previews on all three outcomes (i.e., applicants' willingness to self-disclose, use honest image

TABLE 4 Path coefficients and indirect effects for mediators and outcome variables

Dependent variables and predictors	Estimate	*SE*	β
Org. attractiveness			
Job preview condition	−1.07***	.12	−.43
R^2	.18		
Trust toward employer			
Job preview condition	−.46***	.11	−.21
R^2	.04		
Org. honesty			
Job preview condition	.19	.10	.10
R^2	.01		
Willingness to self-disclose			
Job preview condition	−.16	.14	−.06
Org. attractiveness	.16*	.07	.15
Trust toward employer	.31**	.09	.26
Org. honesty	.18*	.09	.14
R^2	.20		
Willingness to use honest image protection tactics			
Job preview condition	.24	.13	.10
Org. attractiveness	.08	.06	.08
Trust toward employer	.23**	.08	.20
Org. honesty	.10	.08	.07
R^2	.08		
Willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics			
Job preview condition	−.22	.17	−.08
Org. attractiveness	−.05	.07	−.04
Trust toward employer	−.29**	.10	−.23
Org. honesty	−.04	.10	−.02
R^2	.06		
Indirect effects		**Estimate**	**BC 95% CI**
Job preview → Org. attractiveness → Willingness to self-disclose		−.17	−.337; −.029
Job preview → Org. attractiveness → Willingness to use honest image protection tactics		−.09	−.224; .034
Job preview → Org. attractiveness → Willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics		.05	−.091; .215
Job preview → Trust toward employer → Willingness to self-disclose		−.14	−.273; −.054
Job preview → Trust toward employer → Willingness to use honest image protection tactics		−.11	−.228; −.034
Job preview → Trust toward employer → Willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics		.13	.043; .276
Job preview → Org. honesty → Willingness to self-disclose		.04	.000; .117
Job preview → Org. honesty → Willingness to use honest image protection tactics		.02	−.006; .079
Job preview → Org. honesty → Willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics		−.01	−.066; .025

Note: *N* = 396; Unstandardized and standardized estimates are presented. SE = standard errors; Org. attractiveness = perceived organizational attractiveness; Org. honesty = perceived organizational honesty; CI = confidence interval; Job preview condition was coded as 0 = positive job preview, 1 = realistic job preview; Mediation results displayed are the unstandardized indirect effects and their bias-corrected (BC) confidence interval; 5000 bootstrap samples.

**p* < .05 (two-tailed); ***p* < .01 (two-tailed); ****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

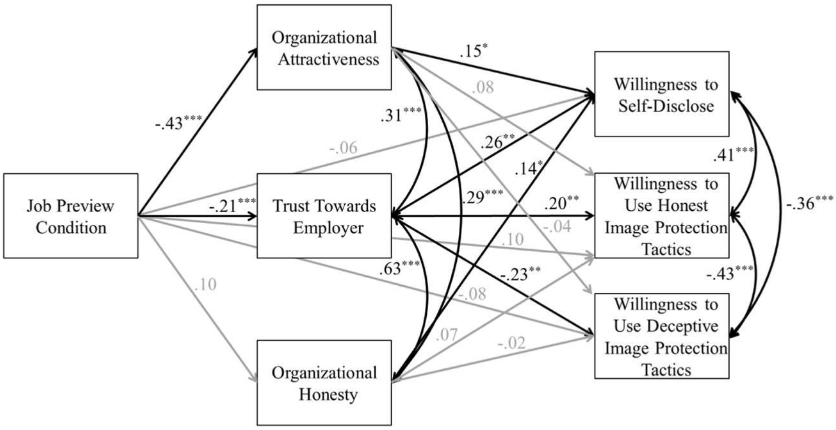

FIGURE 2 Standardized path coefficients for the full model. Significant paths are printed in black and nonsignificant paths are printed in gray. Job preview condition was coded as 0 = positive job preview, 1 = realistic job preview. All standardized and unstandardized path coefficients are presented in Table 4. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed)

protection tactics, and use deceptive image protection tactics). We also found that decreased organizational attractiveness served as an additional mediator between realistic job previews and willingness to self-disclose.

On the one hand, our finding of decreased organizational attractiveness is consistent with meta-analytic research that suggests that realistic job previews tend to make the job and organization less attractive (Earnest et al., 2011), which is also in line with the original idea of realistic job previews. This is basically about encouraging candidates who do not fit the job to self-select. On the other hand, our finding that trust toward the employer was the primary mechanism by which realistic job previews influenced applicants' willingness to openly share information about themselves is contrary to the assumption in the literature that realistic job previews make employers seem more trustworthy (Landis et al., 2014) and that information sharing enhances trust (e.g., Nifadkar et al., 2019). This leads to the question of whether the consequences of realistic job previews on perceptions of trust depend on the content of the negative information that employers disclose, or on the way realistic job previews are operationalized.

Specifically, organizations use realistic job previews primarily when there are downsides of the job that cannot be changed (e.g., long shifts). However, our job preview manipulation involved the information of a difficult supervisor, and it could be that participants penalized the employer for not addressing this issue and knowingly keeping disagreeable supervisors, signaling a psychologically unsafe workplace. Furthermore, an interviewer openly criticizing a colleague could have made a bad impression on participants, potentially signaling conflicts within the company and thus reducing attractiveness. According to the disclosure decision model by Omarzu (2000), people are more likely to self-disclose if there is a salient, attractive goal they want to achieve by self-disclosing (e.g., inducing liking in someone to get a job offer). Thus, even though attractiveness ratings were high across all conditions in our study, when participants perceived the organization as less attractive, it might have made the goal of getting the job less salient for them and thus reduced their willingness to self-disclose.

A possible explanation for our finding that applicants' willingness to use honest or deceptive image protection tactics was not affected by job previews, perceived competition, or the interaction of job previews with competition and with Honesty-Humility relates to the hypothetical nature of our study. Specifically, instead of actual behavior, we assessed willingness to use image protection tactics. However, applicants use defensive strategies like image protection only if they have to, that is, if their image is threatened or damaged. Thus, their willingness to use such strategies is not likely to be impacted if they do not perceive a threat to their image. Another explanation might be that honest image protection involves not only disclosing negative elements like mistakes or weaknesses, but also explaining what one has learned from them. Consequently, honest image protection involves more than simply reciprocating the employer's realistic job preview, which might make it less likely to be affected compared to, for example, self-disclosure.

In addition, a potential explanation for why we found neither reciprocal effects for self-disclosure nor for image protection tactics could be that people evaluate the situational context in which a disclosure takes place and are more likely to reciprocate disclosure when they feel that they personally have been chosen to receive it (e.g., Jones & Archer, 1976). In our study, participants in the realistic job preview condition might have assumed that every applicant was provided with negative job preview information by the interviewer and might therefore not have felt particularly special to have received it, which made it less likely for them to reciprocate.

We also found that contextual differences in the form of perceived competition for the job influenced applicants' responses to realistic job previews. Specifically, high competition for the job made it less likely for applicants to self-disclose after receiving a realistic job preview. This finding is generally in line with the assumption that perceived competition increases the pressure on applicants to hide unfavorable information to appear to fit the job (e.g., Ho et al., 2020). Furthermore, the interaction between perceived competition and job preview information could also be explained by the fact that the interviewer mentioned a difficult supervisor so that participants might have anticipated or feared that this supervisor would be involved in the interview process and hiring decision. This should involve feelings of subjective risk, making self-disclosure a risky strategy and resulting in less disclosure behavior, especially in a competitive hiring process (Omarzu, 2000).

In addition, our results showed that applicants high in Honesty-Humility tended to indicate that they would self-disclose no matter what information about the job and organization were presented. This direct influence is consistent with the finding that applicants high in Honesty-Humility tend to misrepresent themselves less (e.g., Bill et al., 2020). Our findings on Honesty-Humility should be replicated in future research with different operationalizations of realistic job previews.

We also found high mean scores of willingness to self-disclose across all experimental conditions ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.33$ on a 7-point rating scale). This is in line with past research by Wilhelmy et al. (2020) on self-verifying behavior, which also found high mean scores in applicants ($M = 5.65$ and $SD = 0.89$ in their Study 1), and similar findings by Charbonneau et al. (2021). It could be that presenting oneself accurately serves as a default strategy for applicants because it is easier to be oneself than to pretend. It could also be that applicants anticipate a competitive advantage through self-disclosure as a means to differentiate themselves from other applicants (Moore et al., 2017; Wilhelmy et al., 2020). Perhaps applicants tend to self-disclose unless the situation requires otherwise (e.g., competition is perceived to be high), or if the job is not perceived as attractive, such that risk of self-disclosure outweighs its benefits.

7.2 | Practical implications

Our findings offer insights for employers and interviewers. Our results suggest that realistic job previews are not necessarily an effective approach to help applicants open up and elicit unbiased information from them. Quite the contrary: Our findings suggest that employers should be aware of unintended consequences when using realistic job previews, such as decreasing organizational attractiveness and applicants' trust in the employer, which, in turn, may decrease applicants' willingness to self-disclose during the interview. In addition, perceived competition was found to exacerbate these unfavorable effects of realistic job previews on applicants' willingness to self-disclose; thus, employers should be wary of providing information to applicants that might increase the perception of competition (e.g., talking about low selection ratios).

7.3 | Limitations and directions for future research

Notwithstanding the contributions of our study, several limitations point to areas for future research. Our study used an operationalization of realistic job previews that may not fully reflect how they are often used in practice. Mildly negative information in realistic job previews might emphasize the act of disclosure (and thus lead to higher trust), whereas strongly negative information might emphasize the organization's weaknesses (and thus take away trust in the sense of "What else might be going wrong in this company?"). Specifically, as part of our realistic job preview manipulation, we provided participants with the information that their potential future supervisor had been described as being difficult by some people. This piece of negative information was pretested and selected to be particularly negative to increase the strength of the manipulation. However, this issue is one that could be fixed by the employer (e.g., by training the supervisor), and it might signal conflict within the organization. It is also focused on a very specific aspect of the job, the employee-supervisor interpersonal relationship. Future research should compare the effects of stronger and milder negative information and use negative information that cannot (easily) be changed by the employer, to not signal deeper, underlying problems in the organization such as the future supervisor.

Another limitation of this study is its hypothetical nature and the fact that we assessed willingness to self-disclose or use image protection tactics instead of actual behavior. This made it unlikely for applicants to feel the need to protect their image, and even less likely to report the willingness to do so. Because of the rather simplistic hypothetical setting of our study, the job preview information was also presented in the very beginning of the interview instead of later in the process, which would have been more realistic. Future research could use interview simulations to create a situation in which applicants need to defend or repair their image, show actual behavior, and are provided with realistic job previews later in the interview.

Furthermore, our findings suggest that attractiveness may play an important role for self-disclosure in the interview, but our study design does not allow us to examine the role of attractiveness. In future experimental studies, attractiveness could be manipulated, for example, by telling participants about the (un)attractiveness of the employer, or—as a more indirect manipulation—providing participants with positive versus negative employer reviews (e.g., Glassdoor or Kununu ratings). In real selection settings, applicants' perception of organizational attractiveness could be directly measured before and after the realistic job preview to analyze the role of reduced attractiveness to explain the relationship between job previews, self-disclosure, and image protection tactics.

An additional limitation of our study is that it was unclear to participants whether all applicants were provided with the same job preview information, or if the interviewer was doing them a personal favor. We encourage future research to examine the effect of feeling specifically chosen to receive a disclosure, for example, by using within-subject designs and manipulating whether a realistic job preview is perceived as being exclusive to the applicant versus uniform across all applicants.

In addition, the realistic job preview in our scenarios was given by the interviewer, but we did not specify whether the interviewer acted as a person or as an organizational representative. For example, information given by a specific individual may signal warmth to applicants and have a positive effect. Future research should examine who is actually disclosing information and about whom information is disclosed. For example, it might make a difference if an interviewer discloses negative information about themselves as a person (which should be highly relevant to the norm of reciprocity), or about the job and organization. It may also be important to examine whether it was done on their own initiative (which should also be relevant to the norm of reciprocity), or in the role of an organizational representative who simply follows standardized procedures (which may not activate the norm of reciprocity as much because the personal share of disclosure is missing).

8 | CONCLUSION

Existing research on realistic job previews has focused on how they can be used to enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover among those who are hired. However, whether they affect the willingness of interviewees to share accurate information has remained unexplored. In response, we examined whether disclosure from the employer in terms of realistic job previews would lead to reciprocal disclosure from the applicant in terms of willingness to self-disclose and use more honest and less deceptive image protection tactics. We found that realistic job previews were associated with less willingness in applicants to self-disclose during the interview, especially when they perceived high competition for the job. This effect was mediated by applicants' perceived organizational attractiveness and trust toward the employer. As such, by integrating research on realistic job previews, IM, and self-disclosure theories, this study broadens the scope of realistic job preview research.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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ENDNOTES

[1] A question of practical relevance is whether applicant self-disclosure in the interview is always desirable, particularly when it involves personal information that is not job related. For example, information about family life might evoke biases, and such information may also be legally prohibited in selection because of its potential to lead to discrimination (Shen et al., 2017).

[2] There is a strong similarity between self-disclosure and self-verifying behavior. Self-verifying behavior has only recently been introduced as a concept (Charbonneau et al., 2021; Wilhelmy et al., 2020) and is defined as "job candidates' sharing of unembellished self-related information that is in line with their self-views" (Wilhelmy et al., 2020, p. 431). The main difference we see is that willingness to self-disclose is primarily about disclosure in itself; willingness to self-disclose does not explicitly capture the intention with which personal information is disclosed. In contrast, self-verifying behavior could be considered to be a special kind of self-disclosure. It is more concerned with the impression one wants to make, particularly the intention of avoiding discrepancies between one's self-view and the impression one makes on others.

[3] This study was preregistered as an AsPredicted form #21058. For the full preregistration document, please refer to https://aspredicted.org/x4ca3.pdf.

[4] We also ran analyses of variance to test Hypothesis 1a–c and 2a, as specified in our preregistration, and found the same pattern of results.

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APPENDIX A

Experimental manipulations used in this study

Participants were randomly assigned to either the high or the low perceived competition condition, and either the positive or the realistic job preview condition.

High perceived competition condition

Please imagine that you are applying for a job as a sales manager at the company *Drilling Machines Miller*. No matter what information you might receive about the job and organization during the application process, this job and organization are very attractive for you. You do not necessarily need this job, but it would benefit your career. In addition, you have heard that there is intense competition for this job.

Low perceived competition condition

Please imagine that you are applying for a job as a sales manager at the company *Drilling Machines Miller*. No matter what information you might receive about the job and organization during the application process, this job and organization are very attractive for you. You do not necessarily need this job, but it would benefit your career. In addition, you have heard that there is little competition for this job.

Positive job preview condition

In the beginning of your interview at *Drilling Machines Miller*, the interviewer tells you the following: "Before we start with the actual interview, I first want to provide you with some information about the job and organization. The salary for this job is above the market. In addition, we offer more paid vacation days than our competitors."

Realistic job preview condition

In the beginning of your interview at *Drilling Machines Miller*, the interviewer tells you the following: "Before we start with the actual interview, I first want to provide you with some information about the job and organization. The salary for this job is above the market. In addition, we offer more paid vacation days than our competitors. At the same time, I want to be honest with you and share drawbacks of this job that you might not find ideal. In this job, you will have a supervisor who some people describe as difficult. In addition, you should be aware that we have been losing market share to our competitors over the last few years."

APPENDIX B

Positive and negative pieces of job preview information presented in the pretest.

Order based on pretest ratings, from lowest to highest	Presumed valence	Piece of job preview information
1	Negative	**In this job, you will have a supervisor who some people describe as difficult**.
2	Negative	**You should be aware that we have been losing market share to our competitors over the last few years**.
3	Negative	In this job, there is pressure to make a lot of sales.
4	Negative	During your first 5 years on this job, there will be few opportunities for promotion.
5	Negative	Our premises cannot be easily reached by public transportation.
6	Negative	During your first year on this job, your office will be located in a trailer because of ongoing renovations.
7	Negative	In this job, you will have to travel at short notice.
8	Negative	In this job, there will be periods during which you will be expected to work overtime.
9	Positive	Our company is located in a region with many recreational opportunities.
10	Positive	In this job, you will have the chance to travel to attractive destinations.
11	Positive	We have an on-site gym that is free for all employees.
12	Positive	In this job, each year you will receive products from our catalog for your private use worth $1000.
13	Positive	We are the market leader in our field worldwide.
14	Positive	In this job, you will have your own spacious office.
15	Positive	**We offer more paid vacation days than our competitors**.
16	Positive	**The salary for this job is above the market**.

Note: The two most positively and the two most negatively rated pieces of job preview information, which were selected for the main study, are in bold. The pieces of positive and negative job preview information were mainly adapted from Langer et al. (2019).

APPENDIX C

Survey items used in this study.

Item as used in this study	Item source and original item
Willingness to self-disclose	Posey et al. (2010): Self-disclosure – Depth
I would disclose who I really am in the interview.	I intimately disclose who I really am, openly and fully in my conversation online.
I would disclose things about myself in the interview.	I often disclose intimate, personal things about myself without hesitation online.
I would reveal myself in the interview.	Once I get started, I intimately and fully reveal myself in my self-disclosures online.
Willingness to use honest image protection tactics	Bourdage et al. (2018): Honest IM - Defensive
I would give an honest account of why I lacked control over past negative events.	I gave the interviewer an honest account of why I lacked control over past negative events that came up during the interview.
I would recount steps I had taken to prevent the recurrence of negative events or occurrences in my past.	I recounted to the interviewer steps I had taken to prevent the recurrence of negative events or occurrences in my past.
I would share past regrets about how I handled certain situations and how I would improve in the future.	I shared my past regrets about how I handled certain situations and how I would improve in the future.
I would give reasons why I felt I benefited positively from a negative event I was responsible for.	I gave reasons why I felt I benefited positively from a negative event I was responsible for.
Willingness to use deceptive image protection tactics	Bourdage et al. (2018): Deceptive IM – Image protection
When asked directly, I would not mention my true reason for quitting previous jobs.	When asked directly, I did not mention my true reason for quitting previous jobs.
When asked directly, I would not mention some problems I had in past jobs.	When asked directly, I did not mention some problems I had in past jobs.
I would cover up some "skeletons in my closet."	I covered up some "skeletons in my closet."
I would clearly separate myself from my past work experiences that would reflect poorly on me.	I clearly separated myself from my past work experiences that would reflect poorly on me.
Honesty-Humility	Ashton and Lee (2009): HEXACO-60 – Honesty-Humility
I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed.	I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed.
If I knew that I could never get caught, I would be willing to steal a million dollars. (reverse item)	If I knew that I could never get caught, I would be willing to steal a million dollars. (reverse item)
Having a lot of money is not especially important to me.	Having a lot of money is not especially important to me.
I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is. (reverse item)	I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is. (reverse item)
If I want something from someone, I will laugh at that person's worst jokes. (reverse item)	If I want something from someone, I will laugh at that person's worst jokes. (reverse item)
I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large.	I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large.
I would get a lot of pleasure from owning expensive luxury goods. (reverse item)	I would get a lot of pleasure from owning expensive luxury goods. (reverse item)
I want people to know that I am an important person of high status. (reverse item)	I want people to know that I am an important person of high status. (reverse item)
I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me.	I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me.
I'd be tempted to use counterfeit money, if I were sure I could get away with it. (reverse item)	I'd be tempted to use counterfeit money, if I were sure I could get away with it. (reverse item)
Organizational attractiveness	Highhouse et al. (2003): General attractiveness

Item as used in this study	Item source and original item
This company would be a good place for me to work.	For me, this company would be a good place to work.
This company is attractive to me as a place for employment.	This company is attractive to me as a place for employment.
This job at this company is very appealing to me.	A job at this company is very appealing to me.
Trust toward employer	Searle et al. (2011): Trust in the employer
Overall, to what extent do you trust this organization?	Overall, to what extent do you trust your organization?
Perceived organizational honesty	Saks and Cronshaw (1990): Organization honesty
The organization was direct and open in dealing with me as a prospective employee.	The organization was direct and open in dealing with me as a prospective employee.
Categorical manipulation check items	
How much competition is there for this job? (response options: "Intense competition," "Little competition," and "I don't remember")	Self-developed
Have you received any negative information about this job? (response options: "Yes," "No," and "I don't remember")	Self-developed
Knowledge check items	
Is the salary for this job above the market? (response options: "Yes," "No," and "I don't remember")	Self-developed
Does this company offer more paid vacation days than its competitors? (response options: "Yes," "No," and "I don't remember")	Self-developed
In this job, would you have a supervisor who some people describe as difficult? (response options: "Yes," "No," and "I don't remember")	Self-developed
Has this company been losing market share to its competitors over the last few years? (response options: "Yes," "No," and "I don't remember")	Self-developed
Attention check items	Huang et al. (2015)
I eat cement occasionally.	I eat cement occasionally.
I can run 2 miles in 2 min.	I can run 2 miles in 2 min.
Honeypot item	
I have a sister. (visible response options; "Yes," "No," and "I don't know;" invisible response options: "Strongly disagree," "Somewhat disagree," "Somewhat agree," and "Strongly agree")	Self-developed based on Chmielewski and Kucker (2020)

Note: Unless noted otherwise, 7-point rating scales ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* were used.