

APA Response to Dr. Frank Horvath

Meta-Analytic Survey of Criterion Accuracy of Validated Polygraph Techniques. Report Prepared For The American Polygraph Association Board of Directors, Nate Gordon, President (2010-2011), *Polygraph*, 40, 4, 193-305.

Raymond Nelson

Thank you for taking the time to read and respond to the report from the APA ad hoc committee on validated polygraph techniques, in your letter of February 14, 2012. Your concerns are factually detailed, and are of interest to the APA Board of Directors, the APA Research & Development Committee (which has subsumed the work of the ad hoc committee on validated techniques), and the APA membership. In addition to your critical analysis of the factual content of the meta-analysis report, you have offered an argument in support of recognition of a variant of the Reid technique, as used in published and replicated studies conducted at Michigan State University.

Other members of the APA, in addition to yourself, have expressed concern regarding the absence of the Reid technique from the meta-analysis. Although the meta-analysis is not intended to represent an official list nor the official view of the APA, the Board of Directors has adopted and published online a list of Frequently-Asked-Questions in which it is explicitly stated that the Reid technique is supported by multiple published studies that will undoubtedly be referred to by field examiners faced with the need to defend the selection and use of the Reid technique with published and replicated research. As noted in the appendix of the meta-analysis report, studies on the Reid technique provide an accuracy estimation that seems to have endured among the most realistic and credible estimates of polygraph accuracy. Indeed those studies portray an accuracy level that is consistent with both the most recent meta-analysis and all other independent systematic reviews of the scientific literature regarding polygraph accuracy.

The Reid technique, along with testing principles developed and taught by John Reid and Reid and Associates, sits at the core of polygraph field practices and principles used by field examiners nationwide and worldwide, regardless of where they are trained. It is unfortunate that the studies on the Reid technique were not able to be included in the ad hoc committee's report. Whether the design and report of the meta-analysis was flawed for not including important polygraph techniques like the Reid technique, Relevant-Irrelevant technique, and others, is less important at this time than determining the correct response to the requests and needs of APA members and other professionals regarding the validation status of these techniques.

Members of the APA Board, Research & Development Committee and ad hoc committee are in general agreement with the notion that continued emphasis on named techniques offers no advantage or difference in test performance in field settings, and no real advantage to field examiners other than the ability to easily identify and defend their methods with published and replicated studies for which the results can be argued to generalize to their field methods. Regardless of whether performance differences in named polygraph techniques are real or merely unsupported hypotheses, you have provided a cogent argument that the two studies conducted by researchers from Michigan State University (Horvath, 1988; Horvath & Palmatier, 2008), though perhaps not a strict application of the Reid technique, appear to anchor and describe the validity of that technique through publication and replication in a manner that does satisfy the APA definition and requirement for validated techniques.

Members of the APA research committee have already initiated a project to increase the visibility and meaning of the published and replicated studies that describe the Reid technique. There is no doubt that the publication and replication status of the variant of the Reid technique used in the

MSU studies is of importance to the polygraph profession and of interest to the APA membership. The identification of the technique as the MSU-MGQT is perhaps best left to yourself or other proponents and adherents of the technique and procedures. In consideration of the fact that there appear to be no real differences in field performance of various polygraph techniques, introduction of another named polygraph technique at the present time is a somewhat surprising proposition. However, identification of the method as the MSU-MGQT may be appropriate in that it honors and illustrates the academic efforts that led to the published studies. Regardless of the name of the technique, the APA Board of Directors does have both the ability and obligation to publish and disseminate, in print and online, information regarding those techniques that conform to established requirements for published and replicated empirical validity.

Thank you for your attention to the details of this matter, and for the factual manner in which you have brought it to the attention of the APA ad hoc committee and Board of Directors. In consideration of your arguments, and with consideration for the fact that no argument can be made to the contrary, published and replicated studies conducted at Michigan State University do appear to employ a method that satisfies the APA definition for validated technique. The APA Board of Directors will be advised accordingly and necessary actions will be determined to make this information available and visible to the APA membership.

Finally, please accept our humble apology for the delay in providing you this written response to your letter of February 14. Members of the APA Research & Development Committee contacted you via email during March 2012 with the understanding that a formal response had already been formulated. It is with deep regret that I offer this response to your February 14 letter at this late date.

Raymond Nelson
Chair, APA Research & Development Committee