

How I Failed My Polygraph Exam

by Gary Smith

Polygraph exams are very controversial. If you have any doubts about that, just do a Google search on “accuracy of polygraph exam.” Within a very few minutes you will discover that the *claimed* polygraph accuracies range from “not accurate at all” to 98% accurate. I believe that there are two groups of people when it comes to the polygraph exam. The first group consists of those who *believe* that the polygraph exam is fairly accurate. The second group consists of those who *know* that the polygraph exam is not accurate. In the first group of *believers*, there are those who want to believe that the polygraph exam is accurate because they financially benefit from it. They are either involved in the manufacture, distribution, or use of polygraph equipment for profit. These people desperately want to believe—and want you to believe—in the accuracy of polygraph equipment for obvious reasons. The rest of the people in the first group are the unknowing public. They have been led to believe in the accuracy of the polygraph exam by either Hollywood or the media. They however have no firsthand knowledge of the accuracy or inaccuracy of the polygraph exam. They just believe and don’t really give it a second thought. The second group, the *knowers*, probably at one time were part of the unknowing public and believed in the accuracy of the polygraph exam. What changed? Quite simply, they have been there, and they have done it. They got burned by the inherent inaccuracies of the polygraph exam. They are now the *knowers*: those who know the truth! They went in to take a polygraph exam, knew they were innocent, and believed that if they told the truth, they would pass, and life could continue as they knew it. They got a wake up call, and now they know the truth.

I was once part of the unknowing public who believed that the polygraph exam was fairly accurate. I was married in November 2001, and in the last several years, my wife began to accuse me of infidelity. I denied these charges, and I knew that she had no way to prove these claims because, quite simply, they were not true. How could you prove something that is not true? Recently, my wife announced that she wanted me to take a polygraph exam to prove my fidelity. I felt that this would be a good way to ease her concerns and allow us to get on with our lives. Using the yellow pages, my wife located an investigation company called International Counterintelligence Services, Inc. and called them and inquired as to who they used for polygraph exams. They told her that they used a company called Pro Tec located in Scottsdale, Arizona. She then called Pro Tec and talked to the owner/operator, Bill Dunbar, and made arrangements for a polygraph exam for infidelity. The polygraph exam was scheduled for the evening of August 11, 2006.

The examination room was a spare bedroom of Bill Dunbar’s house. When we arrived, we were ushered into the examination room and talked briefly with Mr. Dunbar. I was then taken into another room so that Mr. Dunbar and my wife could discuss the questions to be asked. Since my wife did not bring any specific questions, Mr. Dunbar then decided to use the questions that he typically uses on infidelity exams with only slight modifications. I was then ushered into the examination room, and my wife was taken to another room so that her presence would not interfere with the exam. While we were getting set up, I engaged in casual conversation with Mr. Dunbar. I asked him about the accuracy of the polygraph exam. He informed me that the polygraph was claimed to be 98% accurate, however it was really more accurate than that. I asked him if he did a lot of testing for infidelity, and what the failure rate for this test was. He told me that he did a lot of testing for infidelity, and the failure rate was approximately 80%. He

then volunteered that he was one of only 19 people in Arizona who are certified for testing pedophiles. He also mentioned that he was flying out on Saturday morning to test a pedophile in Detroit. He seemed rather pleased with himself that he was one of only a handful of people certified for testing pedophiles. I assume that this conversation was meant to ease my concerns about the polygraph exam and his credentials as an examiner. I now understand that the 98% accuracy claim made by Mr. Dunbar is greatly disputed by the scientific community.

My polygraph exam consisted of 10 questions, and a computer was used for evaluating the results. Before the test, we went over the questions, and Mr. Dunbar had me answer them as I would for the exam. Mr. Dunbar then connected me to the polygraph equipment, and we commenced the exam. He asked me all the questions with a pause of approximately 30 seconds between each question; we then stopped, and he asked me all the questions again for a second time. After we completed the second round of questions, he disconnected me from the equipment and brought my wife in for the results. I was nervous during the exam, but confident that since I had answered all the questions honestly, I had nothing to worry about. Mr. Dunbar then informed us that I had failed the exam. The polygraph equipment indicated that I was unfaithful to my wife, that deception was strongly indicated, and that the probability of deception was greater than 99%. To say that I was shocked would be a gross understatement. How is it possible that I could be 100% faithful to my wife and answer all the questions on the polygraph exam honestly and fail it with a probability of deception greater than 99%? After I got home that night, I began my research on polygraph exams. What I have learned about polygraph exams since that night is truly shocking. If I had known before what I now know about polygraph exams, I never would have subjected myself to one.

Despite the claims of polygraph examiners, there is no machine that can detect lies with any degree of accuracy. The polygraph does not measure truth telling: it measures changes in blood pressure, breathing rate and perspiration rate, but those physiological changes can be triggered by a wide range of emotions such as anger, sadness, embarrassment, and fear. In addition, a variety of medical conditions such as colds, headaches, and neurological and muscular problems can distort the results. As an American Medical Association expert testified during public hearings before Congress, "the [lie detector] cannot detect lies much better than a coin toss." Even the courts have acknowledged this, as Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas noted in his majority opinion in the 1998 case *U.S. v. Scheffer*, "there is simply no consensus that polygraph evidence is reliable." In recent years, computers have begun to be used in place of the chart recorder; however, the computerization of polygraph exams has not made the underlying procedure "scientific" any more than the computerization of astrological chart reading had made astrology "scientific."

As stated above, there were 10 questions on my polygraph exam. I am attaching the four pages showing the results of my polygraph exam and labeling them A1, A2, A3, and A4. There were two questions that were totally irrelevant, and these are considered as distractors. These are not even evaluated. These are numbered 1 and 2 on page A2. There were two "symptomatic questions," and these are not evaluated unless the polygraph exam is determined to be inconclusive. These are numbered E3 and E8 on page A2. Since my polygraph exam was not determined to be inconclusive, E3 and E8 were never evaluated. There were three "control questions" on my exam. Control questions are intended to elicit a lie or at least concern by posing a vague question covering possible minor misdeeds from a person's past. It is *assumed* by the examiner that these questions will provide an example of what your physiological reactions to a lie look like. These are numbered C4, C6 and C9 on page A2. There were also three

“relevant questions” on my exam. These questions have directly to do with the matter at hand. These are the questions that the examiner wants to have answered. These are numbered as R5, R7 and R10 on page A2.

Since the results of my polygraph exam are based on the “control questions” and the “relevant questions,” I will examine these two types of questions on my exam and show how they were used or misused to produce a totally erroneous result.

Control Questions

As stated before, a “control question” is asked to determine how I respond when I lie. Mr. Dunbar had already *assumed* that I would lie when I am asked the control questions. These questions will provide an example of what my physiological reaction to a lie will look like. Below is a detailed breakdown of the control questions on my polygraph exam:

#	1	2	Mean	Question
C4	-.64	-.99	-.82	Did you lie about not having any sexual contact with anyone since November 2001 other than Melody?
C6	-.68	.94	.13	Have you seen or touched any nude body parts such as tits, ass, vagina other than Melody since November 2001?
C9	-.34	-.68	-.51	Did you lie about finding your wife attractive and inviting?

How could Mr. Dunbar possibly call these control questions? Since control questions are questions he believes that I will lie about, he proves here that he was already biased, presuming that I was unfaithful and would lie about my fidelity before the test even began. The truth is that he cannot know with any degree of certainty know that I would lie on these questions. Of all the questions asked on the test, I showed the lowest stress on question C4. This would have worked in my favor if he would have called question C4 a relevant question instead of a control question. Since control questions establish the baseline for when a person is lying, question C4 doomed me for failure from the very beginning. Question C4 should have actually been a relevant question and not a control question.

Question C9 was another set-up question. Over the past several years, my wife has been accusing me of not finding her attractive. Every time she made this accusation, I assured her that I did find her attractive. My wife told Mr. Dunbar that I did not find her attractive, and he used this question as another control question, which further assured my failure. If he would have used C9 as a relevant question instead of a control question, this would have proved that I do find my wife attractive. However, since Mr. Dunbar chose to use this as a control question, it just provided added assurance that I would fail this polygraph exam since question C9 was the second least stressful question on the exam. Since C4 and C9 were the two least stressful questions on my polygraph exam, these questions established my baseline for lying so low that it looked like I lied on all the other questions on the polygraph exam.

Question C6 is an interesting question to use since it could be interpreted several ways. During the pre-exam questioning and the first round of monitored questions, I gave this question very little thought and assumed that since this was an exam on fidelity, this question wanted to know if I had *personally* “seen or touched any nude body parts such as tits, ass, vagina” other than my wife’s. The first round of questions I scored -.68 on this question. However, in the second round

of questions, it suddenly occurred to me that this could be a trick question, and he wanted to know if I had seen any of these nude body parts on television or a movie screen. For a brief second, I began to analyze this question and decided that this could not be the case because obviously seeing a bare breast at the movies should not be a concern when dealing with fidelity. With the movies the way they are today, seeing a bare female breast is fairly common. However, this brief uncertainty appears to have registered, and I scored a .94 this time around for this question. I would think that a wide discrepancy such as going from -.68 to +.94 should have at least raised a question in the mind of the examiner. Mr. Dunbar apparently did not notice and the computer just averaged the two together and came up with a mean average of .13.

Overall, because of the control questions that Mr. Dunbar chose to use, my failure on this polygraph exam was a certainty.

Relevant Questions

As stated before, a “relevant question” is asked to determine what the examiner really wants to know. Below is a detailed breakdown of the relevant questions on my polygraph exam:

#	1	2	Mean	Question
R5	-.15	-.28	-.22	Have you had sexual intercourse with anyone other than Melody including oral, anal, finger/handjob or dryhumping since 2001?
R7	.27	-.30	-.01	Have you had sexual intercourse with anyone other than Melody since November 2001 at home or away from home?
R10	.28	-.02	.13	Did you lie to me on this test or during the interview?

While the test shows that I found these questions a little more stressful than the control questions, I believe that most people would find this language and these questions stressful, especially while hooked up to a polygraph machine. Even though I found these questions more stressful than the control questions, I still showed less stress on these offending questions than questions like, “Is today Friday?” or, “Is there something else you are afraid I will ask you a question about on this test, even though I said I wouldn’t?” Also as can be seen on page A1, the highest stress point on the whole test was XX which was, “This ends the test.”

I believe there are serious questions about the way my test was conducted and the way it was graded to make a claim that I have been unfaithful to my wife and that the “[p]robability of deception is greater than .99.”

I now understand that by using the control questions Mr. Dunbar chose to use, he established my baseline for lying so low that my failure of the polygraph exam was a certainty. I do not know if Mr. Dunbar set me up to fail the exam or the failure was due to his incompetence, however, I can state with 100% certainty that I have been faithful to my wife, and I answered the questions on the polygraph exam honestly. My faithfulness to my wife and honesty to the questions on the exam did not help me pass this polygraph exam.

Conclusions

After learning what I have about polygraph exams, I’m not sure why anyone would voluntarily submit themselves to a polygraph exam. I guess in today’s society there are situations in which

persons are coerced into taking a polygraph exam. For those who find themselves in this situation, I have the following recommendations:

- Go to www.AntiPolygraph.org and utilize the vast wealth of free information available on this website.
- Download and study the free book, *The Lie Behind the Lie Detector* by George W. Maschke and Gino J. Scalabrini which is available at AntiPolygraph.org.
- Document as much as you can about the polygraph exam. If possible, obtain a copy of the questions and test results.

My polygraph exam is over, and there is very little I can do about what has happened to me except warn others about the inaccuracies of the polygraph exam and the possibility of errors committed by the examiner. Mr. Dunbar has been paid \$300.00 for administering the exam, my wife and I are now seriously discussing divorce, and my wife's plans for retiring in 3 years are probably up in smoke. What's done is done. All that I can hope for is that my experience can be beneficial to others and save them from the misery of having to go through what I have endured.

.XX THIS ENDS THE TEST
1 IS TODAY FRIDAY?
E8 IS THERE SOMETHING ELSE YOU ARE AFRAID I WILL ASK YOU A QUESTION ABOUT
.... ON THIS TEST, EVEN THOUGH I SAID I WOULDN'T?
R10 DID YOU LIE TO ME ON THIS TEST OR DURING THE INTERVIEW?
C6 HAVE YOU SEEN OR TOUCHED ANY NUDE BODY PARTS SUCH AS TITS,ASS,VAGINA
.... OTHER THAN MELODY SINCE NOVEMBER 2001?
X THE TEST WILL NOW BEGIN.
R7 HAVE YOU HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WITH ANYONE OTHER THAN MELODY SINCE
.... NOVEMBER 2001 AT HOME OR AWAY FROM HOME?
R5 HAVE YOU HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WITH ANYONE OTHER THAN MELODY
.... INCLUDING ORAL, ANAL, FINGER/HANDJOB OR DRYHUMPING SINCE 2001?
2 REGARDING THE TRUTHFULNESS OF YOUR ANSWERS ABOUT FIDELITY
.... DO YOU INTEND TO ANSWER EACH QUESTION TRUTHFULLY ABOUT THAT?
E3 ARE YOU NOW CONVINCED I WILL NOT ASK YOU A QUESTION ON THIS TEST THAT
.... HAS NOT BEEN REVIEWED?
C9 DID YOU LIE ABOUT STILL FINDING YOUR WIFE ATTRACTIVE AND
.... INVITING?
C4 DID YOU LIE ABOUT NOT HAVING ANY SEXUAL CONTACT WITH ANYONE SINCE
.... NOVEMBER 2001 WITH ANYONE OTHER THAN MELODY?

P O L Y S C O R E

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DECEPTION STRONGLY INDICATED--Probability of Deception Greater Than .99

ZONE ZONE

The following charts were used:

\$\$61#VBP Chart 1 08/11/:6 18:52 GARY LANE SMITH BRD FIDELITY B13568867 08/17
 \$\$61#VBP Chart 2 08/11/:6 19:00 GARY LANE SMITH BRD FIDELITY B13568867 08/17

\$\$61#VBP 08/11/:6 18:52 GARY LANE SMITH BRD FIDELITY B13568867 08/17

Spot/Vertical Scores (ZONE)

Prob	Question
0.80 R10	DID YOU LIE TO ME ON THIS TEST OR DURING THE INTERVIEW?
0.74 R7	HAVE YOU HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WITH ANYONE OTHER THAN MELODY SI
0.42 R5	HAVE YOU HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WITH ANYONE OTHER THAN MELODY

Channel Contributions (ZONE)

Weight	Channel
-0.11	Electrodermal
+0.00	Pulse
-0.14	Respiration
-0.76	Blood Volume

\$\$61#VBP Chart 1 08/11/:6 18:52 GARY LANE SMITH BRD FIDELITY B13568867 08/17

Prob	Type	Question
		X THE TEST WILL NOW BEGIN.
		1 IS TODAY FRIDAY?
		2 REGARDING THE TRUTHFULNESS OF YOUR ANSWERS ABOUT FIDELITY
		E3 ARE YOU NOW CONVINCED I WILL NOT ASK YOU A QUESTION ON TH
	C	C4 DID YOU LIE ABOUT NOT HAVING ANY SEXUAL CONTACT WITH ANYO
0.59	R	R5 HAVE YOU HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WITH ANYONE OTHER THAN ME
	C	C6 HAVE YOU SEEN OR TOUCHED ANY NUDE BODY PARTS SUCH AS TITS
0.87	R	R7 HAVE YOU HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WITH ANYONE OTHER THAN ME
		E8 IS THERE SOMETHING ELSE YOU ARE AFRAID I WILL ASK YOU A Q
E	C	C9 DID YOU LIE ABOUT STILL FINDING YOUR WIFE ATTRACTIVE AND
0.88	R	R10 DID YOU LIE TO ME ON THIS TEST OR DURING THE INTERVIEW?
		.XX THIS ENDS THE TEST

\$\$61#VBP Chart 2 08/11/:6 19:00 GARY LANE SMITH BRD FIDELITY B13568867 08/17

Prob	Type	Question
		X THE TEST WILL NOW BEGIN.
		1 IS TODAY FRIDAY?
		2 REGARDING THE TRUTHFULNESS OF YOUR ANSWERS ABOUT FIDELITY
		E3 ARE YOU NOW CONVINCED I WILL NOT ASK YOU A QUESTION ON TH
	C	C4 DID YOU LIE ABOUT NOT HAVING ANY SEXUAL CONTACT WITH ANYO
0.91	R	R5 HAVE YOU HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WITH ANYONE OTHER THAN ME
	C	C6 HAVE YOU SEEN OR TOUCHOED ANY NUDE BODY PARTS SUCH AS TITS
0.95	R	R7 HAVE YOU HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WITH ANYONE OTHER THAN ME
		E8 IS THERE SOMETHING ELSE YOU ARE AFRAID I WILL ASK YOU A Q
E	C	C9 DID YOU LIE ABOUT STILL FINDING YOUR WIFE ATTRACTIVE AND
0.94	R	R10 DID YOU LIE TO ME ON THIS TEST OR DURING THE INTERVIEW?
		.XX THIS ENDS THE TEST