

A close-up portrait of Robert Hogan, an older man with a balding head and a serious expression. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a light-colored checkered shirt, and a red and gold patterned tie. The background is a dark, textured grey.

# Robert Hogan

AND THE REVIVAL OF PERSONALITY THEORY AND ASSESSMENT

by Rob Kaiser, Ph.D.

## To understand how a poor kid from rural California revived and redefined the field launched by his intellectual hero, Sigmund Freud, you need to understand his story.

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**E**very now and then a scientific discipline moves forward. You can usually trace the advance to an iconoclast whose bold ideas and relentless commitment to them eventually prevail against the headwinds of orthodoxy. The personality theorist, Robert (Bob) Hogan, is one such iconoclast.

Today personality is everywhere—beyond social psychology and organizational psychology to most subdisciplines, and even in other disciplines like economics, history, and political science. Personality assessment is commonplace in the corporate world—from employee recruitment and selection, to training and development, team building, and leadership succession. This is largely thanks to the clear thinking, hard work, and phenomenal perseverance of Bob Hogan. Before his crusade, the conventional wisdom in psychology was that personality didn't much matter (and probably didn't even exist) because situational forces determined behavior (Mischel, 1968). To understand how a poor kid from rural California revived and redefined the field launched by his intellectual hero, Sigmund Freud, you need to understand his story. For who Hogan is is an inextricable part of how and what he thinks.

### Beginnings

Hogan was born in 1937, the first child of a working-class family that had moved to southern California during the

Great Depression. His parents instilled a strong work ethic and he had his first job at the age of 13. Young Hogan was bright and curious, but found school tedious and boring; he also struggled with authority relations and was frequently in trouble for his disruptive influence in the classroom. Outside school, he was fascinated by the study of animals—particularly the insects and desert reptiles of California—and by girls. By his own initiative he read a great deal, including Darwin, which sharpened his appreciation for the animal behavior he had been observing, and Freud, which intrigued him with the idea that people did things for reasons of which they were dimly aware but that were a function of underlying erotic preoccupations.

Hogan went on to undergraduate studies in the University of California system but didn't major in psychology because those courses involved the study of lab rats and covered neither evolution nor Freud. He pursued physics, engineering, and philosophy instead, but found them to be frustrating because of their lack of practical certainty. However, they did expose him to the importance of data, mathematical modeling, and existentialism.

Hogan had joined the Naval Reserve Officer's Training Corps to pay for his education so, after completing undergraduate studies, he spent three years as an officer at sea. He turned around his gunnery unit, which became the

highest performing on the ship, and received a letter of commendation from the Secretary of the Navy. This earned resentment from his fellow officers. They were privileged, middle-class young men and took exception to the way Hogan outperformed them by treating the sailors under his command as respected equals. He quarreled with his peers often.

After leaving the Navy in 1963, Hogan took a job as a probation officer in San Bernardino, California. This was a life-changing experience. His boss, a student of Carl Rogers, and other colleagues were kind and committed to helping troubled kids. Hogan's job was to evaluate teenagers who had gotten in trouble with the law. He had no empirically-based guidelines and found his education in the behavior of lab rats of little help. However, what he did find helpful was a book on abnormal psychology. Hogan concluded that there were few neurotics and even fewer psychotics among the delinquent population he evaluated, but all of them seemed to have a personality disorder.

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### Graduate Studies

Inspired by his work as a probation officer, Hogan pursued a PhD in personality psychology at the University of California, Berkley. The Berkley faculty included many esteemed psychologists such as Jack Block, Richard Lazarus, and Ed Ghiselli but it was the local Institute for Personality Assessment and Research (IPAR) where he felt most at home. The IPAR staff included

A few key events in graduate school proved fateful in shaping Hogan's career. First, the response-set controversy proposed that answers to personality questionnaire items are based on social desirability. This nearly killed substantive personality research, as researchers began to study the process of item responding instead of the consequences of individual differences. Second, Warren Norman gave a presen-

cal test theory and its goal for assessment as the estimate of "true scores" to be nonsense; instead, Gough built the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) on the idea that the goal of assessment is to predict behavior. Finally, Michel's (1968) famous attack on personality psychology was published, and it ushered in an era of behaviorism and hostility toward personality. Social psychology and situational explanations became de rigueur, making it nearly impossible to publish research on individual differences. Hogan's career has largely been motivated by proving that Michel was wrong.

Hogan's dissertation concerned the development of morality. It contrasted the Freudian view, which focused on attitudes toward authority, with the role-theoretical view of George Herbert Mead, which focused on meeting expectations for social interaction. It was an exercise in self-discovery: Hogan has serious authority issues, yet a strong sense of morality. His personal sense of fairness was influenced by the indignities and injustices he experienced growing up poor and in his struggles to reach the middle class. His dissertation study used Gough's approach to measurement to work out the links between psychoanalytic and role theoretic views of morality, and much of his subsequent research has focused on the integration of these two complementary systems.

### Personality Theorist

Hogan took his first academic professorship at Johns Hopkins in 1967, and although he received awards for his teaching, he struggled to find top-tier



*During his time at Berkley, Hogan developed a lifelong friendship with noted personality psychologist and counterculture icon Timothy Leary.*

Harrison Gough, Frank Barron, Donald McKinnon, Ravenna Helson, and other imaginative psychologists dedicated to the empirical study of high-level effectiveness.

tation at IPAR on his extensions of Tupes and Christal's (1961) empirical work suggesting the structure of personality measurement could be described with five factors. The model ran contrary to prevailing views but Hogan found the data convincing. Third, Hogan was exposed to Harrison Gough and his practical philosophy of personality measurement. Gough considered classi-

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outlets that would publish his research. His first submission to the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, a study showing how personality predicted the performance of police officers, was rejected by the editor who commented, “Everyone knows these tests don’t work.” In classic Hogan form, he declared war against the critics of personality and fought them on two fronts: by continuing his own research and by creating a reputable outlet for the research of others.

In 1977, he convinced the chairman of the APA’s Publications and Communications Board that there was a lot of important personality research but few prestigious outlets in which to publish it. The chairman established a new section in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* focused on personality and appointed Hogan as editor. The move outraged social psychologists, but under his leadership the section quickly became influential and *JPSP* became one of the most successful APA journals. It also made it possible to have a career in personality psychology, and articles by Dan McAdams and Dean Keith Simonton soon became classics in the larger field of psychology.

Hogan’s own research has been prolific and highly influential. It can be summarized as involving five initiatives.

First, as an engaging instructor at

Johns Hopkins, he involved his students in a project to apply the Five-Factor Model. They rejiggered Gough’s CPI and determined that a Five Factor scoring key produced stronger empirical results. Out of respect to his former mentor, however, Hogan did not publish the results. Instead, he and his students created a new test based on the Five-Factor Model, the Hopkins Personality Inventory (later renamed the Hogan Personality Inventory, or HPI). In addition to being structured around

at the University of Nebraska’s revered annual Symposium on Motivation, where he first introduced his Socio-analytic Theory (Hogan, 1983). The presentation was grand in its intellectual ambition, using evolutionary theory to synthesize the best insights from psychoanalysis with the best insights from sociology. The argument boiled human motivation down to biologically-based needs to get along, get ahead, and find meaning in life; it set an agenda for personality assessment as quantifying



*In 1981, Hogan and his wife Joyce left Johns Hopkins to launch the industrial-organizational psychology program at the University of Tulsa.*

the latest empirical findings, it was also developed using a normal population of working adults, as opposed to clinical samples, making it ideal for workplace applications.

Second, after Hogan left Hopkins to start and chair an industrial-organizational psychology program at the University of Tulsa in 1981, he focused his efforts on combining Freudian theory and Role Theory and tested them out using HPI data. He presented this work

individual differences in these capabilities. The theory also defined the assessment process as a “self-presentation” where test-takers try to create a certain impression, rather than a “self-report” of their underlying traits. The distinction between description (traits) and explanation (motivation) of personality phenomena was also clarified. In a single presentation, Hogan seemed to resolve all the major controversies and criticisms of personality assessment. For instance, when personality-performance relationships are organized and meta-analyzed using Socio-analytic Theory, the correlations are substantial (Hogan & Holland, 2003).

A third initiative was based on his

experience in the Navy. In 1985 Hogan began studying the psychological literature on leadership and was disappointed to find that there was no consensus about the qualities of a “good leader” and that the prevailing view was that “it depends”: In the right situation, anyone can be a successful leader. Taking a cue from Piaget, Hogan turned the question upside down: If there are no common qualities associated with successful leadership, what about failed leadership? And by systematically studying examples of failed leadership in the military, government, academics, and especially business, he concluded that leaders typically fail for one or more of a finite set of irritating interpersonal behaviors (e.g., abrasiveness, volatility, arrogance, exploitation). This work led to his formulation of leadership, based on evolutionary theory, as the social force needed to influence selfish members of a group to set aside their personal agenda, for some time, and work together to outcompete rival groups. Further, he noted that bad leadership is the norm, largely because people are drawn to leadership positions for selfish reasons (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008).

The fourth initiative was an offshoot of Hogan’s study of failed leadership. Closer examination of the irritating interpersonal tendencies led him and his wife, Joyce, to realize that these qualities were distinct from the dimensions of normal personality measured

by the HPI. These tendencies resembled the personality disorders he observed among juvenile delinquents; they had a selfish quality and were used to manipulate others for short-term gains, albeit with long-time costs. The Hogans described these attributes collectively as “the Dark Side” of personality, and they designed the Hogan Development Survey (HDS) to measure them (Hogan & Hogan, 1991). The scales on the HDS overlap somewhat with the “Bright Side” dimensions of the Five-Factor Model but are conceptualized as extending to the extreme ends of these continua, at which reside rigid and inflexible tendencies to manipulate other people. The Dark Side has been one of the more captivating concepts Hogan has introduced and has been remarkably influential in both research and real-world applications in business.

The fifth initiative has been Hogan’s refutation of the accusation that faking renders personality testing invalid. The standard view is that personality test items are transparent and that test-takers can tell which response is socially desirable, so they provide false reports of their tendencies by choosing the more desirable responses rather than honestly describing themselves. Hogan’s counterargument is that social life is “all faking, all the time.” That is, people are born self-interested and the process of socialization, from parenting to schooling and beyond, is about teaching them to suppress their selfish urges and instead behave according

to socially acceptable conventions. Viewed this way, the observed variation in personality test scores represents differences in test-takers’ social knowledge and skill, which is valid variance for predicting social performance. Support for his argument is apparent in the fact that there is variability in personality test scores and that those scores correlate with real-world behavior in meaningful ways. And although experimental manipulations can get people to (slightly) change their test scores, a study of over 5,000 job applicants who took a personality test but were denied employment showed no substantive enhancements in their test scores when offered a second chance six months later (Hogan, Barrett, & Hogan, 2007). In other words, faking may exist in theory but it doesn’t exist in practice.

## Summary

Not long ago, applied psychology had no personality. Thanks to the curiosity, creativity, and persistence of one of psychology’s most iconoclastic personalities, the subject is now a central concept in applied psychology and beyond. Bob Hogan has thought carefully and fought doggedly for 50 years to prove that personality is real and consequential. Of course, skeptics remain. As Hogan is fond of quoting, the great physicist, Niels Bohr, once observed that no amount of data will convince your academic critics; you have to wait for them to die.

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