



THE 2026

# TRUST IN HIRING REPORT

How Careerfishing, AI Deception, and  
Broken Verification Are Reshaping the  
Employer-Candidate Trust Gap

# Executive Summary

The modern hiring process is caught in a credibility crisis. In a national survey of 1,500 U.S. working adults who actively applied for jobs within the past 18 months (GCheck, 2026), 93% admitted to engaging in at least one form of embellishment or misrepresentation. The behavior spans every generation, gender, and demographic group, driven primarily by competitive job market pressure (72%), weak verification expectations (53%), and the belief that honesty is a competitive disadvantage (60%).

The consequences extend in both directions. Among those who embellished, 39% experienced post-hire stress or anxiety, 29% found their overstatement became apparent on the job, and 25% faced negative workplace outcomes because their skills did not match their resume. From an organizational perspective, 88% of all respondents acknowledge that candidate misrepresentation puts businesses at risk.

Beyond credential inflation, the survey documents widespread identity concealment (64% of Hispanic and 56% of Black job seekers altered their appearance or communication style for interviews to avoid bias), AI-assisted misrepresentation (25% used an AI avatar of themselves in a virtual meeting), and pervasive digital self-censorship (80% have avoided posting honest views online due to employer concerns).

Yet the same workforce overwhelmingly supports transparent, fair, and human-led screening: 82% want a clear explanation of what is being checked, and 81% want human review rather than fully automated decisions. The path forward requires compliance approaches that balance rigorous verification with candidate transparency, consistent fairness, and human oversight.

## Methodology

Online survey of 1,500 U.S. adults employed full-time who actively applied for at least one job in the past 18 months. Fielded February 14–22, 2026 via Pollfish. Demographics: 783 male / 717 female; 245 Gen Z (≤29) / 717 Millennials (30–45) / 494 Gen X (46–61) / 44 Baby Boomers (62+); 854 White / 301 Black / 202 Hispanic / 91 Asian. Margin of error: ±2.5% at 95% confidence (wider for subgroups). Conditional questions about motivations and consequences asked only of those who reported embellishment. Multi-select questions allow totals exceeding 100%.

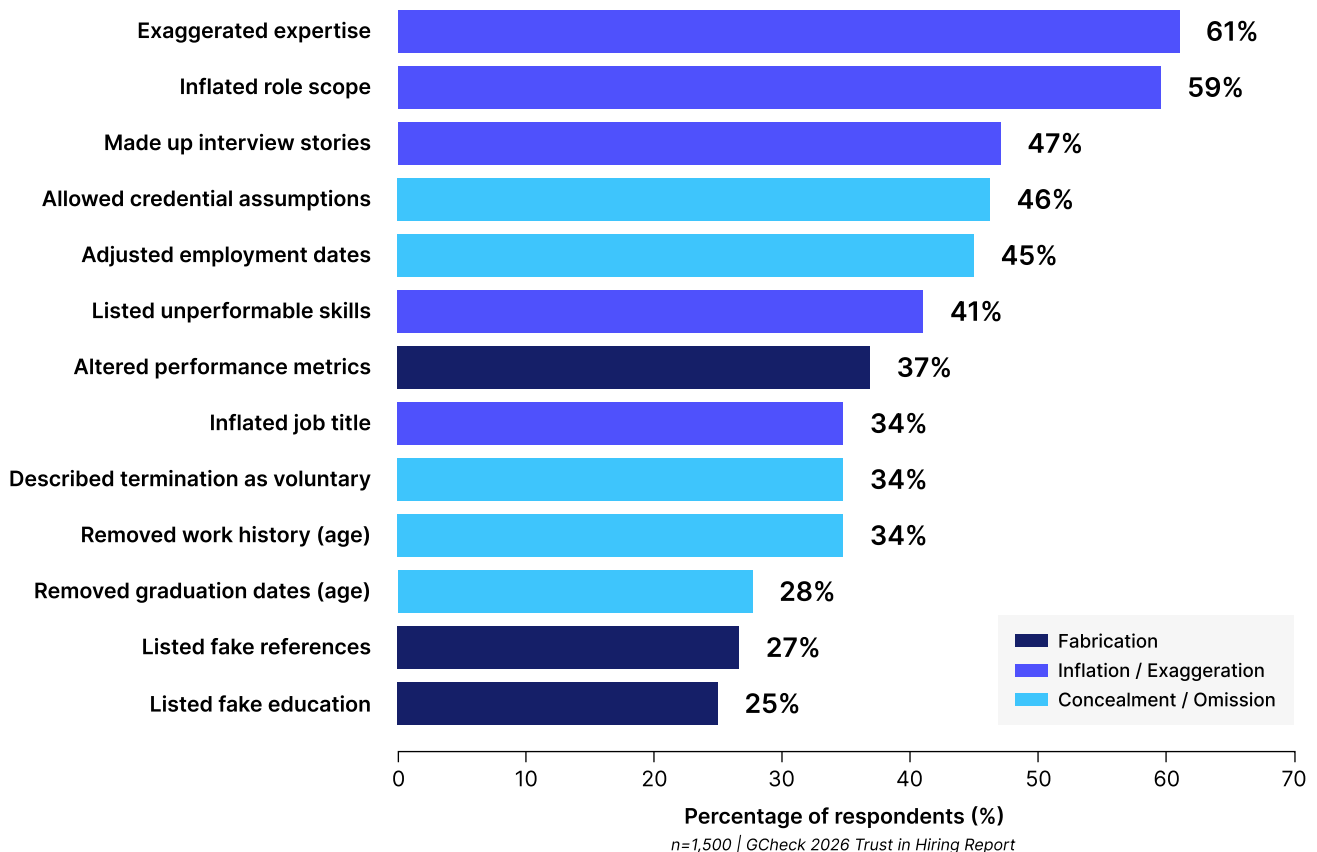
# In Today's Hiring Market, Exaggeration Is the Norm

93%

of recent job seekers have embellished or lied during the hiring process.

The Professional Background Screening Association (PBSA, 2023) has consistently reported that over 95% of employers conduct some form of background screening. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2024) has documented rising concerns about candidate misrepresentation. But the scale of these findings goes well beyond what most HR leaders expect, or what existing screening processes are designed to catch. The most common behaviors were exaggerating expertise in a skill (61%) and inflating the scope of previous roles (59%). At the far end of the spectrum: 27% listed fake references and 25% claimed educational credentials they never earned.

## The Careerfishing Spectrum: 13 Embellishment Behaviors Ranked by Prevalence

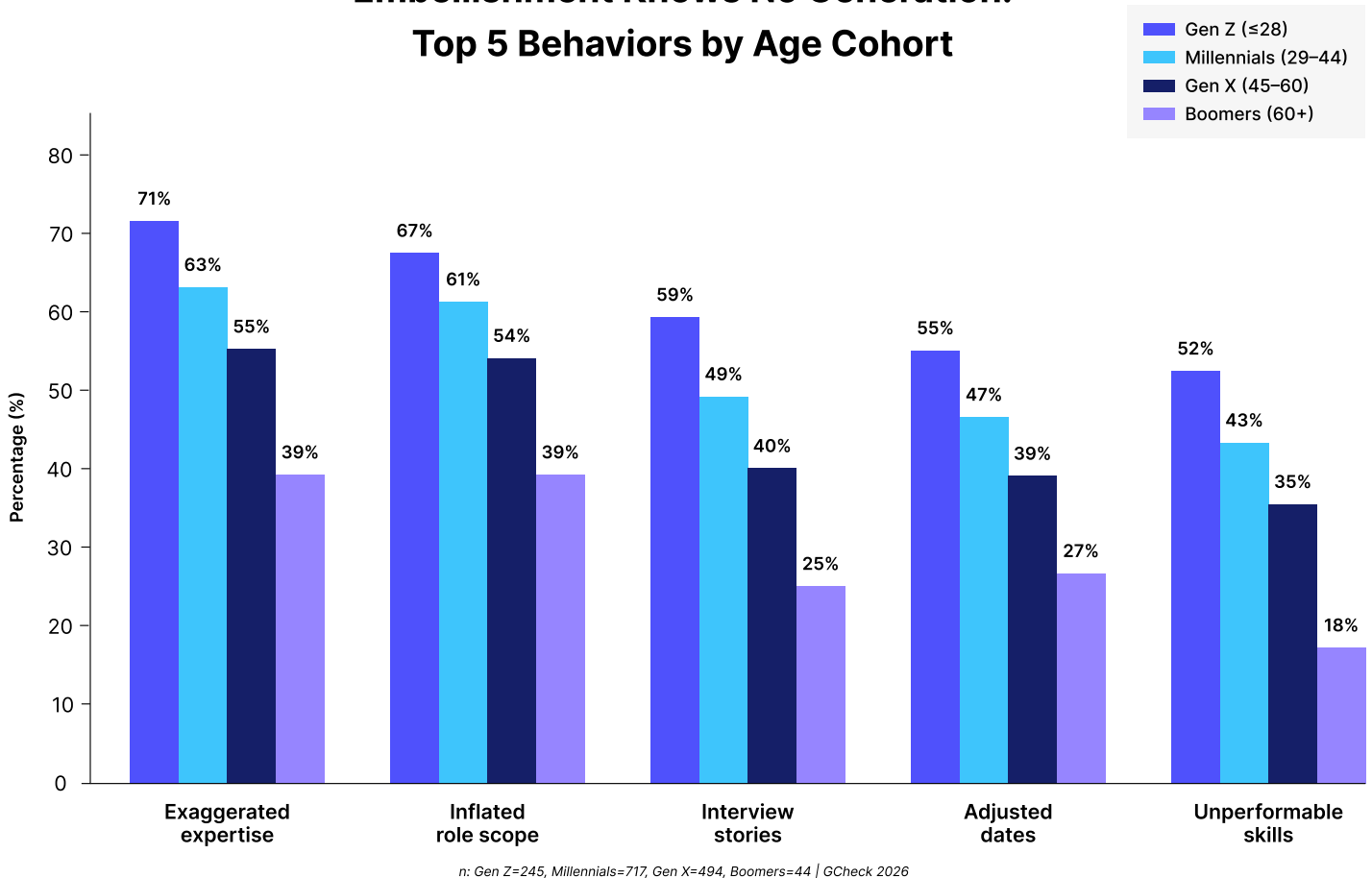




# The Generational Divide

Baby Boomers reported the highest overall embellishment rate at 97%, but every generation participated at very high levels: 96% of Gen Z, 93% of Millennials and 91% of Gen X. The generational differences become more pronounced on fabrication behaviors: 40% of Gen Z listed fake references compared to 7% of Boomers, and 37% of Gen Z claimed unearned educational credentials compared to 17% of Boomers. Similarly, 41% of Gen Zers have described a job departure as voluntary when they were actually terminated, compared to 17% of Boomers. Gender differences were comparatively modest (95% of men vs. 91% of women). Embellishment is a market problem, not a demographic one.

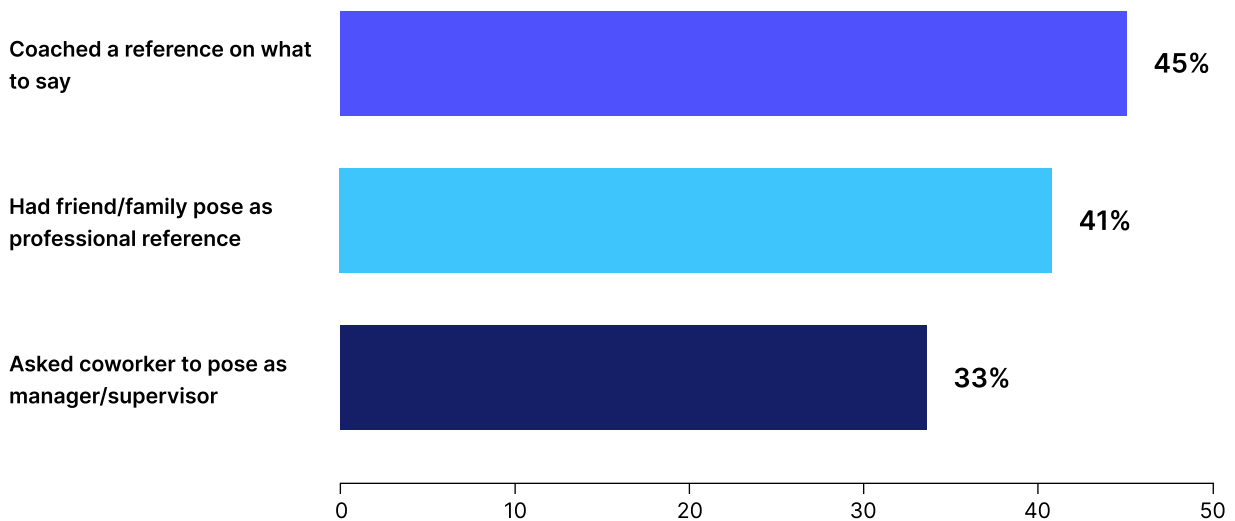
## Embellishment Knows No Generation: Top 5 Behaviors by Age Cohort



# Reference Manipulation

Reference checks are widely treated as a final validation of a candidate's claims. The findings suggest that trust may be misplaced. When nearly half of candidates actively prepare their references to deliver a scripted narrative, the signal-to-noise ratio in traditional reference checking drops substantially.

## References Under Fire: How Candidates Game the Verification Process



n=1,500 | GCheck 2026 Trust in Hiring Report

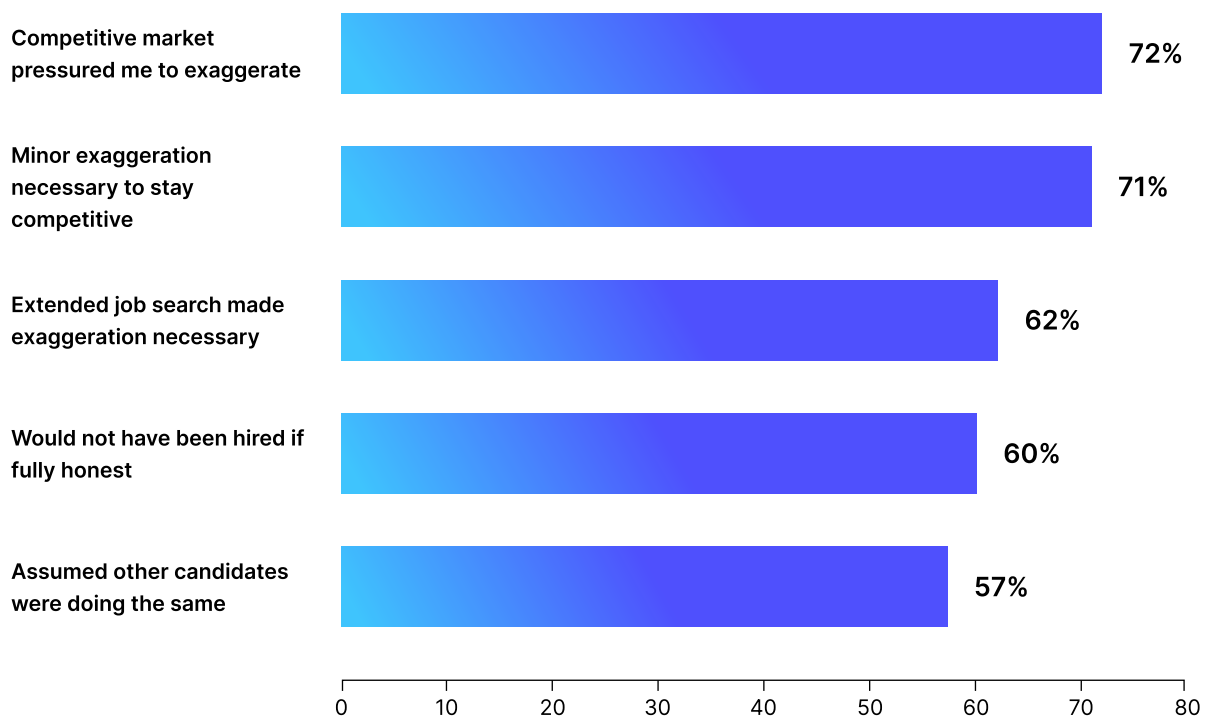
**Careerfishing** is the systematic embellishment, distortion, or fabrication of professional qualifications across resumes, interviews, and references as a deliberate competitive strategy, driven by market pressure and weak verification expectations.



# Why Candidates Feel Forced to Exaggerate

Among those who engaged in embellishment, the motivational factors point decisively toward structural incentives rather than individual dishonesty. Competitive pressure was the single most cited driver, followed by extended job searches and the assumption that other candidates were doing the same. Sixty percent said they would not have been hired if they had presented their experience fully accurately.

## Why Candidates Exaggerate: The Five Drivers of Careerfishing



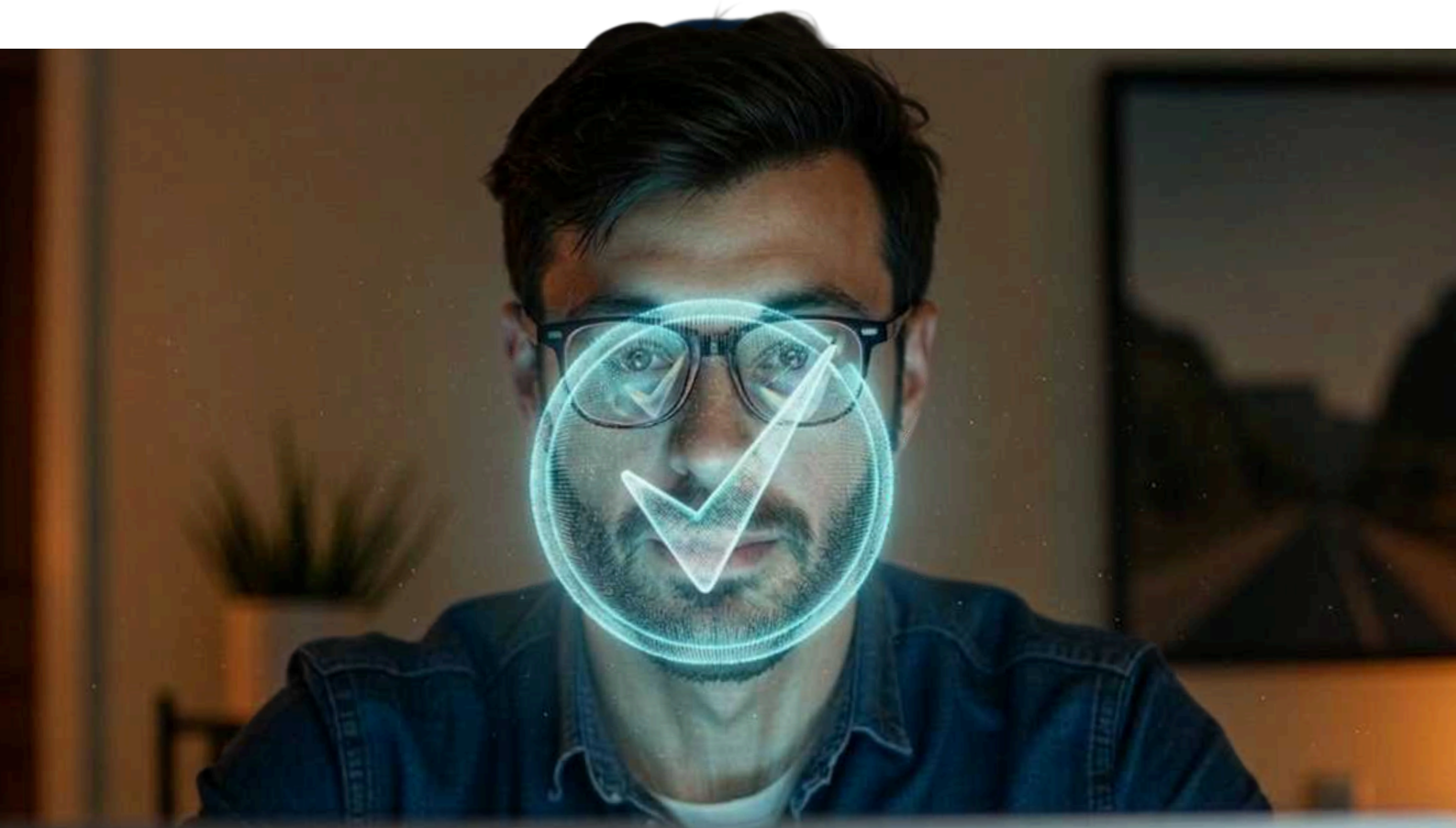
n=1,394 (embellishers only) | GCheck 2026 Trust in Hiring Report

# The Verification Feedback Loop

Competitive pressure alone does not fully explain why embellishment has become so pervasive. A second, self-reinforcing mechanism is at work: weak employer verification creates the expectation of weak verification, which incentivizes further inflation. Just over half of those who embellished (53%) did so because they believed employers would not verify everything. That belief is not unfounded. Only 26% reported that someone actually verified their claims and found a discrepancy, while only 28% lost an opportunity over a detected exaggeration. When the probability of detection is this low, embellishment becomes a rational calculation.

## COMPLIANCE FOR GOOD™: Transparent Compliance

*The verification feedback loop thrives in opacity. When candidates do not know what will be checked (56% report this concern), they assume the answer is minimal and calibrate their embellishment accordingly. Organizations that clearly communicate what will be verified before candidates apply can disrupt this cycle at its root.*



# The Fallout: Stress, Mismatch, and Workplace Risk

Among those who embellished, 39% experienced stress or anxiety once hired, 29% said their overstatement became clear after starting the role, and 25% faced negative workplace consequences because their skills did not match their resume. The burden was not distributed equally: Hispanic respondents reported the highest post-hire stress (55%), and Gen Z faced the sharpest workplace fallout (38% experienced negative outcomes).



## The Candidate Toll: What Happens After the Hire

**39%**

Experienced post-hire stress or anxiety

**29%**

Overstated experience became clear on the job

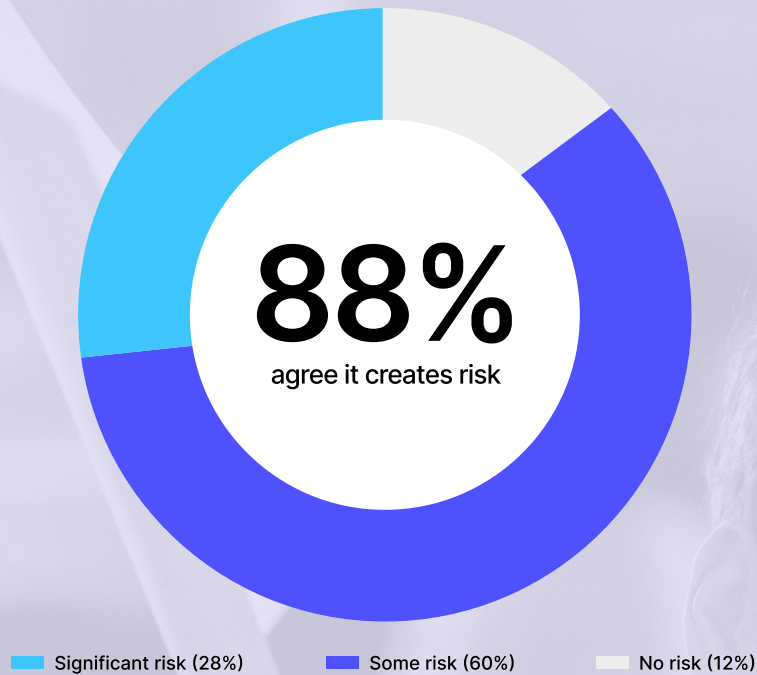
**25%**

Faced negative workplace consequences

*n=1,394 (embellishers only) | GCheck 2026*

The report's central paradox emerges from a separate finding: 88% of all respondents agree that candidate misrepresentation puts businesses at risk (28% "significant risk," 60% "some risk"). This near-universal acknowledgment, from a population in which 93% embellished, is not hypocrisy. It is a market failure. Candidates embellish because the system incentivizes it and simultaneously recognize that the cumulative effect is corrosive.

## Do Misrepresenting Candidates Put Business at Risk?



### The Careerfishing Paradox

**93%**  
have embellished

**88%**  
know it creates risk

*The paradox is the point. Candidates are rational participants in a broken system.*

n=1,500 | GCheck 2026 Trust in Hiring Report

### COMPLIANCE FOR GOOD™: Protective Compliance

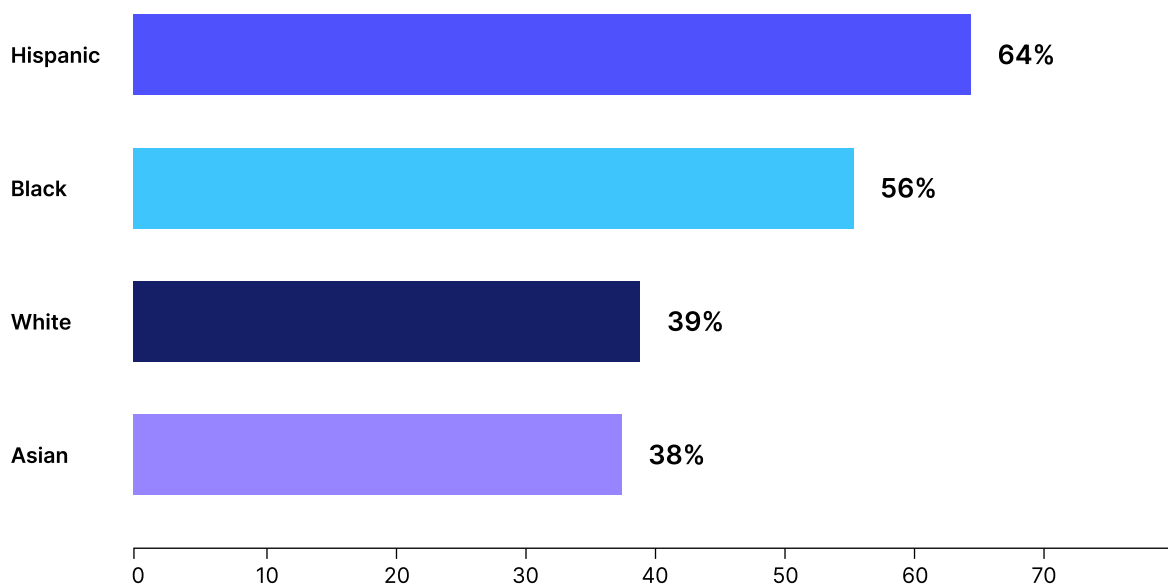
*When candidates themselves acknowledge that misrepresentation creates organizational risk, the case for consistent verification processes is self-evident. Protective screening reduces negligent hiring exposure and reduces the post-hire anxiety that embellishers carry into their new roles.*



# Bias and Digital Scrutiny Are Reshaping Candidate Behavior

Beyond credential embellishment, the survey documents a parallel phenomenon: systematic identity concealment. When candidates alter their appearance, change their name, or hide their children from prospective employers, the motivation is not competitive advantage. It is self-protection in a system they experience as biased. Forty-six percent of all respondents altered their appearance or communication style for interviews, with rates significantly higher among candidates of color.

## Altered to Fit In: Identity Modification by Race and Ethnicity



*n=1,394 (embellishers only) | GCheck 2026 Trust in Hiring Report*

50%

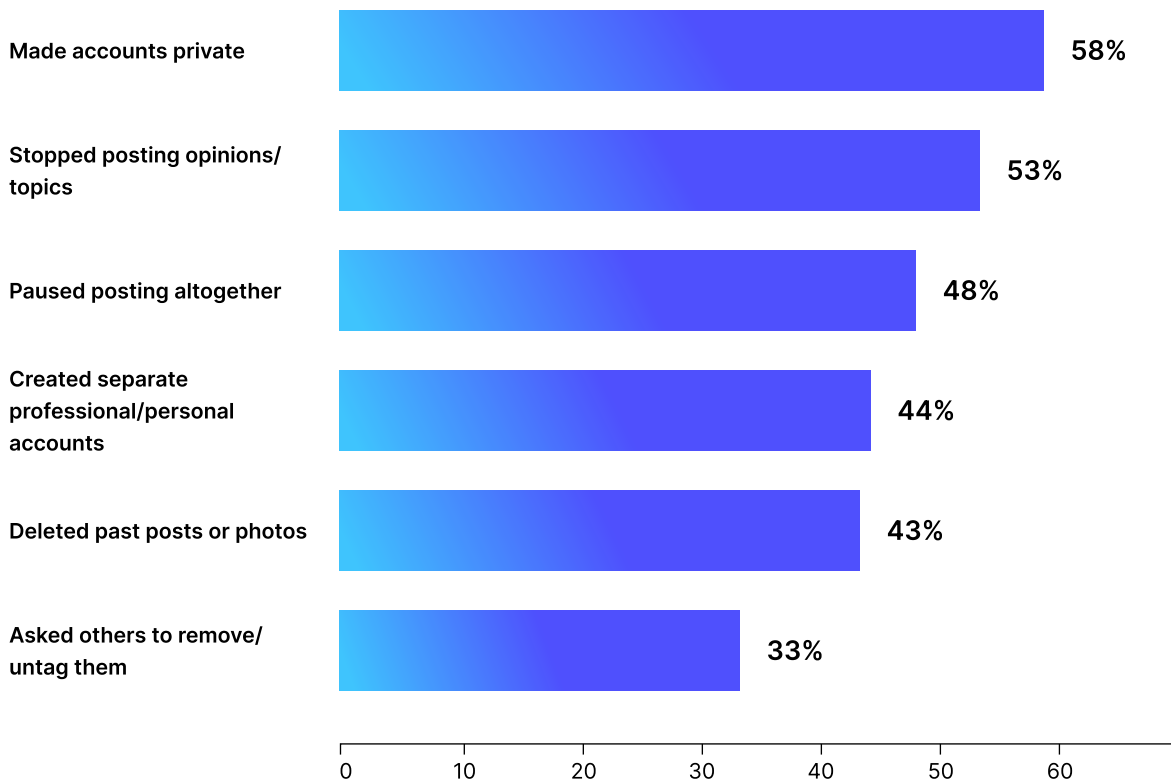
of working mothers with children under 18 avoided mentioning caregiving responsibilities during the hiring process.

Among fathers in the same situation, the rate was 38%. The 12-point gap reflects the documented motherhood penalty in hiring. Additional identity concealment behaviors included removing cultural or identity-related details from resumes (31% overall, 40% among Asian respondents), using a gender-neutral version of their name (24%) using a different name to avoid ethnicity questions (21%, rising to 32% among Black respondents) and concealing age indicators (36%, rising to 47% for Baby Boomers).

## Digital Self-Censorship

Employer scrutiny of social media has created a culture of digital self-censorship. Eighty percent of respondents reported that concerns about employer interpretation have caused them to avoid posting honest views online. The behavioral modifications go further: 58% made accounts private during a job search, 53% stopped posting certain opinions, and 48% paused posting altogether.

### Digital Self-Censorship: How Job Seekers Manage Their Online Presence



n=1,500 | GCheck 2026 Trust in Hiring Report

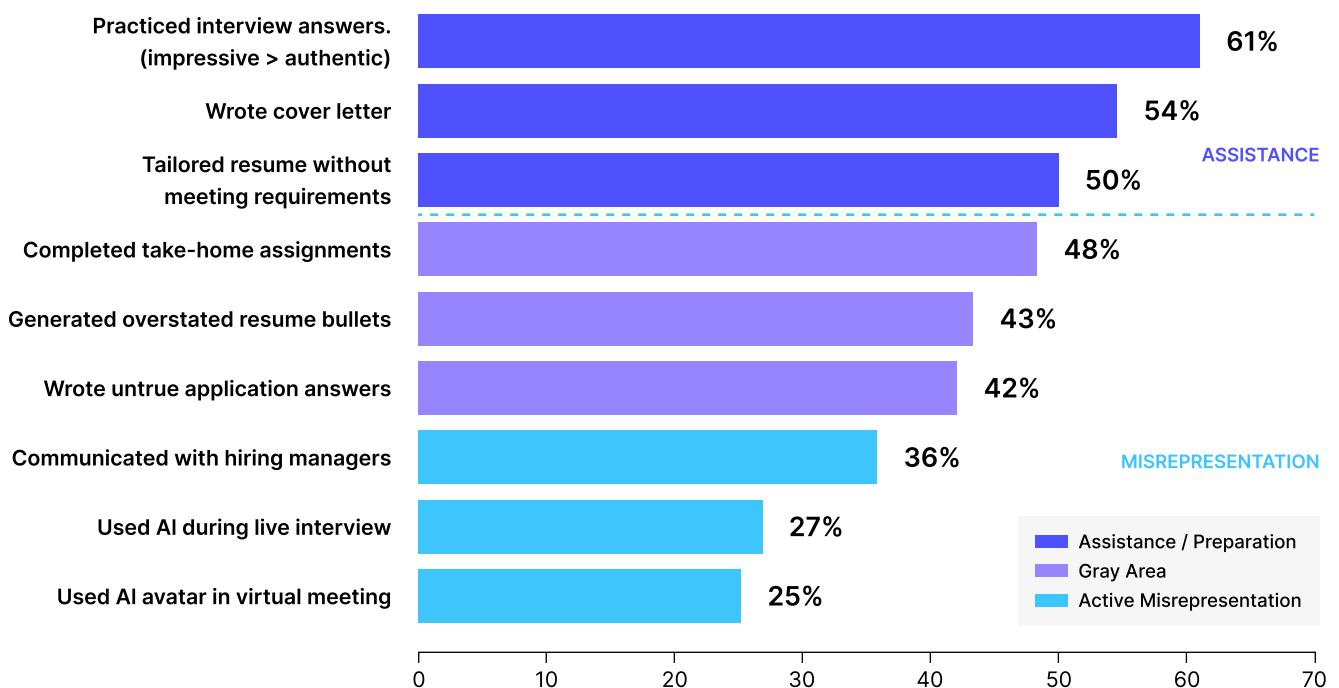
# AI as Accomplice: Technology Is Blurring Preparation and Deception

25%

used an AI avatar of themselves to conduct a virtual job meeting.

One in four respondents reported using an AI-generated avatar in a video interview or meeting, a finding that represents a fundamental shift in what remote hiring verification can assume. The broader AI picture is equally consequential: 61% used AI to practice interview answers until they sounded more impressive than authentic, 48% used AI to complete take-home assignments, and 27% used AI during live interviews for real-time answer generation.

## AI in the Job Search: From Assistance to Impersonation



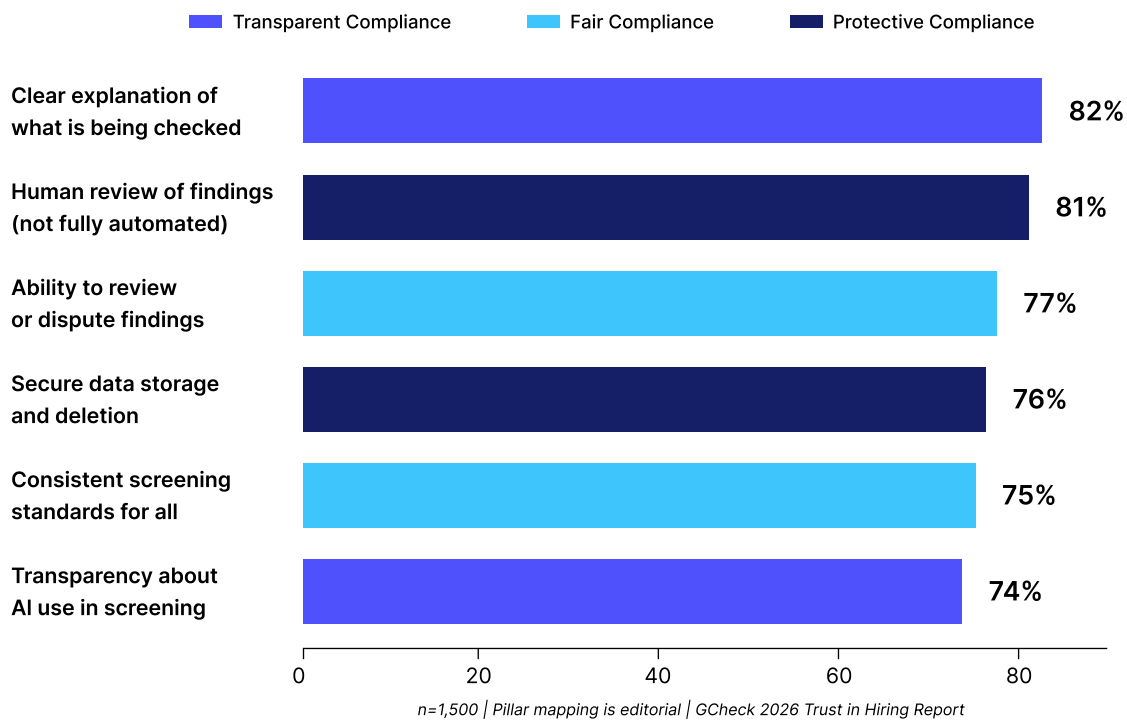
n=1,500 | Threshold categorization is editorial | GCheck 2026

Remote interviews introduced additional vulnerabilities: 44% used notes or prompts off-camera, 31% received real-time help from another person, and 28% had someone else assist with technical assessments.

# Trust in Screening Is Conditional, Not Absent

Despite high embellishment rates, 80% of respondents said ongoing or periodic background screening is important, either for all roles (31%) or for safety-sensitive roles (49%). Their support, however, comes with specific conditions. The most widely shared concern (56%) is not understanding what employers can see or verify. The most widely requested feature (82%) is a clear explanation of what is being checked. Close behind, 81% want human review of findings rather than fully automated decision-making. These six trust-building factors map directly to the principles of transparent, fair, and protective compliance.

## What Would Build Your Trust? The Candidate Mandate for Modern Screening



Transparent Compliance	Fair Compliance	Protective Compliance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>82% want to know what's checked</li> <li>74% want AI transparency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>77% want dispute ability</li> <li>75% want consistent standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>81% want human review</li> <li>76% want secure data handling</li> </ul>

# The Path Forward: Rebuilding Credibility in Hiring

The data reveals a hiring ecosystem under significant strain. Candidates increasingly feel pressure to exaggerate qualifications to remain competitive, while employers face growing difficulty verifying credentials efficiently and fairly. As technology expands both opportunity and risk, trust in the hiring process is weakening on both sides.

Restoring credibility requires modern verification practices that balance rigor with fairness, use technology responsibly, and provide candidates with clear visibility into the process. The future of hiring depends not only on identifying talent but on rebuilding trust in an increasingly AI-driven environment.

## Foundational Principles for a Trust-Based Model

Addressing the “careerfishing” trend requires alignment around three core principles reflected in candidate feedback:

### Transparency as a Standard



82%

#### Candidates Want Clarity

With 82% of candidates wanting clarity, organizations must communicate verification practices openly rather than relying on opaque screening processes.

### Commitment to Fair Opportunity

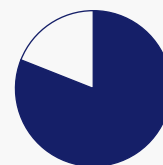


46%

#### Candidates Conceal Identity

As 46% of candidates report concealing aspects of their identity to avoid perceived bias, verification must be standardized and context-aware to support objective evaluation.

### Human-Centric Decision Making



81%

#### Respondents Call for Human Oversight

With 81% of respondents calling for human oversight, automated systems should be overseen and manually verified by trained human review to ensure accuracy and proper context.

# Operational Responses for the Modern Employer

The findings highlight practical shifts that can reduce risk while improving the candidate experience:



## Proactive Disclosure

Communicating verification standards in job postings is the most cost-effective intervention to discourage embellishment before it starts.



## Independent Verification

Validating employment and education history directly from the source closes the gaps left by relying on self-reported narratives.



## Biometric & Deep Fake Detection

Deploying advanced AI safeguards and live-proctored assessments effectively counters identity fraud and real-time AI answer generation.



## Human-Centric Review

Manual human review of all findings ensures accuracy and context, reduces bias-driven concealment, and maintains FCRA and EEOC compliance (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012).



## Audit-Ready Infrastructure

Standardizing hiring criteria and adverse action documentation protects the organization from potential legal challenges.



## Transparency as a Talent Magnet

Leading with clear communication about screening practices attracts candidates who value integrity, helping build a more reliable talent pool.

**The Bottom Line:** Rebuilding trust in hiring isn't just about catching embellishments; it's about creating an environment where integrity is expected, verified, and rewarded.

## The Honesty Tax: A Defining Dynamic in Modern Hiring

Taken together, the findings in this report point to a structural pattern in hiring: candidates are often penalized for accuracy and rewarded for optimization.

This pattern is reflected in what we describe as **The Honesty Tax**. Transparent, realistic candidates are more likely to be filtered out, while embellished or AI-enhanced profiles are more likely to advance.

The dynamic aligns with earlier findings: **60%** of candidates believe full honesty would cost them the job, while only **26%** report that discrepancies are actually detected.

### In practice, this appears as:

- Skills described with precision losing to inflated "expert" claims
- Employment gaps penalized relative to constructed narratives
- Realistic salary expectations reducing leverage
- Honest work style preferences interpreted as lack of fit

The implications extend beyond hiring. Candidates absorb the cost upfront, but organizations carry the downstream impact. Mismatch, underperformance, and early attrition are predictable outcomes of a system in which optimization is rewarded over accuracy.

As organizations implement more transparent, consistent, and human-centered screening practices, reducing this imbalance becomes central to sustaining long-term trust in hiring.



## About



GCheck is a modern, hire-to-retire screening platform dedicated to Compliance for Good™, helping organizations hire and retain with speed, accuracy, and fairness. We operate across the entire employee lifecycle, delivering background checks, identity verification, drug testing, employment and professional verifications, continuous monitoring, and compliance management through one unified platform.

Our Compliance for Good™ framework is built on three pillars: transparent compliance, fair compliance, and protective compliance, ensuring every screening decision upholds dignity, reduces risk, and strengthens trust. GCheck serves enterprise HR teams, healthcare organizations, nonprofits, and regulated industries that need more than a fast check; they need a compliant, ethical, and audit-ready screening partner.

To learn more, visit [gcheck.com](https://gcheck.com)

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