



## 'Extreme Makeover': Identity Upgrades

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Real just isn't good enough anymore. Actuality pales in the light of fake. We have entered an age of grade inflation, plagiarism, exaggeration, political hyperbole and overstatement beyond reality, and where society faces an epidemic of resume fraud. What else would one call a curriculum vitae that states college degrees never achieved from universities never attended in disciplines not offered? What else would one call credentials which trumpet a sports career never entered and a football scholarship from a university that cannot offer sports scholarships?

Earlier this year, Los Angeles City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo's honest credentials compared to his official biography came under scrutiny during his bid to be the Democratic candidate for attorney general. Delgadillo's real accomplishments were staggering, but apparently the city attorney decided that metaphoric plastic surgery was in order, so he underwent an identity upgrade, and now his achievements were even grander. The Los Angeles Times published an account of Delgadillo's resume claims compared with his actual record. His resume claimed: 1) a football scholarship to Harvard; 2) being named as an Academic All-American; and 3) a professional football career.

Delgadillo eventually admitted that he did not play professional football. There is some confusion and controversy over whether he ever signed a contract with the Hamilton Tiger-Cats of the Canadian Football League, but everyone asked recalled that he never played in a game (he also isn't mentioned on the team roster). Harvard University will point out that Ivy League schools, including Harvard, did not give out

athletic scholarships at the time. Delgadillo received honorable mention but was not an Academic All-American. Rocky got financial aid from Harvard. He played football at Harvard. Why did he have to inflate his true record beyond that? Obviously, when the city attorney ran against Jerry Brown during the June primary, Brown's folks pointed out these qualification discrepancies.

Delgadillo's excuse for the misinformation: Someone else did it. Of course, that excuse falls short in explaining how Rocky could make these same inaccurate claims in campaign speeches.

The factually unsupportable credentials on Delgadillo's CV are highly visible examples in a sea of fraudulent claims. Trailing behind Rocky's cosmetic work is George O'Leary, head football coach for University of Notre Dame for less than a week. His Notre Dame career ended after five days when his fraudulent resume was uncovered and publicized. O'Leary lied about earning a master's degree at one university and lettering in football at another.

Then there was college professor George Ellis whose more obscure but no less egregious fake Vietnam warrior accounts pronounced at Mount Holyoke College brought him and the college into disrepute. Ellis had been reminiscing in the press with stories of his Vietnam command of combat paratroopers from the 101st Airborne around My Lai. As explained by a statement eventually issued by the college, Ellis never was in Vietnam at all during the war. Moreover, his story about scoring the winning touchdown in high school becomes a bit incredible when one learns he wasn't on the football team. Ellis is a history professor and Pulitzer Prize winner. Why lie about a nonexistent

Vietnam experience and phantom football heroics?

Sometimes a bogus resume can result in the political appointment of a fully unqualified person to a high visibility job of Herculean responsibilities with disastrous results.

Michael Brown was hired as director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency by President Bush in 2003. Brown was touted as being well qualified to handle this agency that deals in life and death. The FEMA Web site noted Brown's experience in emergency management, but Brown's prior involvement was only as assistant city manager, a position eventually acknowledged as an internship without genuine emergency services oversight. His biography also listed Brown as professor of political science where he was really a student. Then came Hurricane Katrina, and with Brown's incompetence revealed in the death and devastation, he was removed.

Remember Jayson Blair, the journalist working for The New York Times who brilliantly wrote some of the paper's best and brightest stories? Unfortunately, he was lying, plagiarizing stories, and making up his own notes. He was writing fiction in the guise of fact. More recently Harvard sophomore Kaavya Viswanathan wrote her first novel and received an advance for a second from Little, Brown & Co. She was the teenage star from Harvard. After publication of her first book, it became clear that she was borrowing extensively from a number of accomplished writers' works including, but not limited to, Megan McCafferty's novels "Sloppy Firsts" and "Second Helpings."

O'Leary lost his job at Notre Dame in under a week. Among other penalties, Ellis was suspended by Mount Holyoke without pay for a year. Viswanathan's writing ca-

reer has been derailed for now, and perhaps forever. Blair, of course, brought national scorn and approbation on The New York Times and, less important, on himself.

Delgadillo gave Jerry Brown an unnecessary weapon in the primary election, and Delgadillo lost the election (for many reasons, but his deception probably didn't get Rocky many votes).

Given the recent history of failures to complete the ruse, one wonders why someone seeking employment or political office would lie on a resume. The liar never expects to get caught, but these materials are submitted by otherwise successful and perhaps otherwise honest people.

Why do it? Why lie? Why take accomplishments and achievements and write over them with fraudulent claims? One inventive reason proffered by the attorney who represented a Los Angeles judge removed from office in 2000 for false resume claims was: the judge suffered from "pseudologia fantastica," the curable mental condition resulting in the telling of fantastic untruths even to the point where the liar may almost believe his or her own lies.

Maybe the harm caused by resume fraud could be somewhat diminished by a genuine mea culpa. Try this plea: I lied on my resume because I thought I could get away with it, and I believed it would help me (choose one): 1) get a job; 2) get a better job; 3) get a political career under way; 4) enhance my appearance; or, 5) land me a home in South Bend, Ind.

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