The Over-Claiming Questionnaire:

Invulnerable to Faking and Warning about Foils

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ABSTRACT

The Over-Claiming Questionnaire (OCQ) has been shown to overcome many of the weaknesses of previous measures of cognitive ability and narcissistic self-enhancement. Respondents are asked to rate their familiarity with 150 items (persons, events, products, etc.). Because 20 percent of the items are non-existent foils, an individual's responses can be analyzed with signal detection theory to yield accuracy and bias scores. Study 1 shows that the validity of the OCQ indexes is maintained when respondents are warned about the foils. Study 2 shows that the OCQ bias index is responsive to self-presentational demand yet both indexes remain valid indicators of individual differences within conditions.

INTRODUCTION

The over-claiming method provides concrete indexes of cognitive ability and self-enhancement while avoiding the impracticality of collecting an external objective criterion. Over-claiming is the term we use to describe the degree to which an individual will claim knowledge about non-existent items.

To systematize this approach, we developed a comprehensive self-report measure of academic and everyday knowledge (Paulhus & Bruce, 1990). The items were culled from comprehensive lists provided by Hirsch (1988) in the appendix of his book, Cultural Literacy. We partitioned the items into 10 categories: Historical Names and Events, Fine Arts, Language, Books and Poems, Authors and Characters, Social Science and Law, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, Popular Culture, and Current Consumer Products.

On the final version of the questionnaire, titled the **Over-Claiming Questionnaire (OCQ),** respondents rate their familiarity with 150 items broken down into 10 categories. Each item is rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (never heard of it) to 6 (know it very well). One sample page from the questionnaire is presented in Table 1. Within each category, three out of every 15 items are foils, that is, they do not actually exist. Hence any degree of claimed knowledge about them constitutes over-claiming. The three foils for each category were selected to closely resemble the 12 existent items and thus appeared plausible to a non-expert. In total, over-claiming is possible on 30 items spread across a variety of topics.

Previous data indicate that (a) the OCQ-accuracy index was correlates .45 to .55 with scores on an IQ test and (b) the OCQ-bias index was correlates .25 to .40 with measures of narcissistic self-enhancement.

Study 1. Effects of Warning Participants about Foils

Earlier studies confirmed the ability of the OCQ bias measure to predict trait measures of self-enhancement. But is this capability undermined by prior knowledge that the OCQ contains foils? Study 1 evaluates that possibility by directly manipulating awareness of the foils.

METHOD

Participants. A total of 239 students (83 males and 156 females) participated for bonus marks in an undergraduate psychology course.

Procedure. The OCQ and the NPI were administered in several large classes. The NPI was administered in standard fashion. A cover sheet was distributed with spaces for demographic information and brief instructions about how to rate familiarity of the OCQ items. To keep all participants responding at the same pace, the OCQ items were presented one-at-a-time on an overhead projector and simultaneously read aloud.

The warning manipulation was effected by randomly varying the instruction statement appearing in bold at the bottom of the cover page. Participants in the warned condition were advised: "Note that some of the items in this inventory do not exist". Participants in the unwarned condition were advised: "Note that some of the items in this inventory are very difficult".

After completing all 90 items, participants were asked to turn over their answer booklet. They were then informed that some items did not exist and were asked if they recalled receiving the warning about the presence of foils. Without turning over the sheet, they were asked to indicate on the back of the answer booklet whether they recalled seeing the warning.

RESULTS

Participants were divided into three categories (low, moderate, high) based on NPI scores. In the warned condition, only the participants who noticed the warning were included. The results were analyzed in a 2x2 ANOVA with narcissism (low, high) and condition (warned, unwarned) as between-subject factors.

Narcissism showed a strong main effect, $F(1, 115) = 8.29$, $p < .01$. Narcissists over-claimed more than did non-narcissists. The main effect for condition was marginally significant, $F(1, 115) = 3.08$, $p < .08$. Over-claiming was lower in the warned than in the unwarned condition. The interaction was not significant, $F(1, 115) = 0.93$, $p = .34$.

We also analyzed answers to the incidental question about whether participants had noticed the warning about foils. Results were analyzed in a 2x2 ANOVA with narcissism (low, high) and condition (warned, unwarned) as between-subject factors.

Not surprisingly, participants who were warned reported seeing the warning significantly more than did those who were unwarned, $F(1, 153) = 32.04$, $p < .001$. This result provides a check for the warning manipulation. Narcissism showed a significant main effect, $F(1, 153) = 3.81$, $p = .05$ with high narcissists claiming to have seen the warning more than did low narcissists. The interaction was not significant, $F(1, 153)$ 0.16, $p = .90$. The lack of interaction implies that narcissists claimed to have seen a warning whether or not they actually received it.

DISCUSSION

Does warning participants about the foils have any effect on over-claiming? Study 2 suggests two effects. First, overall accuracy is not hampered but over-claiming is somewhat reduced by the warning. Second and more important, the validity of the OCQ indexes is not compromised by the warning.

Study 2. Effects of Deliberate Self-Presentation

To manipulate self-presentation, we administered the OCQ under two instructional sets: "respond honestly" and "good impression". Such instructions have been shown to be effective in altering the level of desirable responding in a systematic fashion (e.g., Paulhus, Bruce, & Trapnell, 1995; Wiggins, 1959).

Note that all participants were specifically warned about the presence of foils on the OCQ. This instructional set provides a powerful test of the robustness of the OCQ-bias index. Can it withstand both faking and warning instructions?

METHOD

Participants. A total of 76 undergraduate students participated as a class exercise in a second year undergraduate social-personality class.

Materials and Procedure.

In a within-subjects design, three instruments were administered under both the honesty and good impression conditions. For this purpose, preliminary work was necessary to develop parallel forms of the three instruments. Two 30-item versions of the OCQ were developed by sampling items across four domains (literature, science, art, and history). Otherwise, the format was identical to the OCQ in Studies 1-2. The NPI was divided into two 20-item versions. As in Study 1, it followed the standard forced-choice format. Finally, two 14-item self-report measures were developed: Each version contained two items for each factor of the Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999) and four ability-related items. The items were matched for desirability across versions. The rating scales ran from (1) <u>not at all</u> to (7) <u>very much</u>. As a composite, the 14 items were labeled <u>Positive Personality</u>.

The administration procedure was presented as a class exercise in faking questionnaires. Participants were told that the responses would be totally anonymous. The two versions of each instrument were administered back-to-back. Preliminary instructions were forthright that participants were to respond honestly to the first version of each measure and to present an impression that was "as positive as possible" on the second version. Honest responses to the first version were encouraged by noting that, without responding honestly, later scoring and feedback on their responses would be pointless. We chose this order because previous work indicated that faking first undermines the validity of honest responses (Lautenshlager, 1994).

Items were presented one-by-one on an overhead projector. The order of presentation was (1) the two 14-item personality-ability items (2), the two 20-item versions of the NPI, and (3) the two 30-item versions of the OCQ. All participants were specifically warned about the presence of foils on the OCQ.

RESULTS

All instruments were scored such that high numbers represent a positive impression. The 14 personality/ability items are combined to form a 'positive personality'. The alpha reliabilities for the two conditions were reasonable: Positive Personality (.76, .72), NPI (.74, .80), and OCQ bias (.78, .90). It may be surprising that the alphas were so high in the faking condition because one would expect a severe restriction of range at the positive end of each measure. The sizable alphas suggest that individuals used a consistent faking style: Some stick with the most positive option whereas others select a less-than-perfect option to indicate that the best personality is not the most extreme.

The mean scores for each version of the three instruments were compared across honesty and faking conditions. All three measures showed significant increases in positivity. The 14-

item "Positive Personality" index was successful as a manipulation check to confirm that participants were following the instructions, $t(74) = 22.4$, $p < .01$. More important, the OCQ-bias measure was significantly higher in the good impression condition than in the honest condition, $t(74) = 4.5$, $p < .01$. This result supports our first hypothesis.[1]

The 20 responses to the NPI items in the honest condition were used to measure trait narcissism. These scores were then used to predict OCQ-bias scores in both the honest condition ($r = .21$, $p < .05$) and good impression conditions ($r = .17$, $p < .05$). To test whether these associations were different we evaluated the interaction between condition and level-of-narcissism. A median split on the NPI was used to separate low from high narcissists. In a mixed ANOVA, OCQ-bias scores in the two conditions were used as the with-subjects factor and the NPI categorization as the between-subjects factor.

The main effect for condition was significant, $F(1, 74) = 23.87$, $p < .01$, as was the main effect for narcissism, $F(1, 74) = 5.61$, $p < .05$. Unexpectedly, there was no sign of an interaction, $F(1, 73) = 1.73$, $p = .22$. This lack of interaction along with the main effect for narcissism supports our second hypothesis in confirming that the OCQ-validity is significant in the good impression condition. The lack of interaction, however, does not support our third hypothesis that the validity should drop. Apparently, self-presentation does not destroy the validity of the OCQ-bias index.

Although these validities – the associations between OCQ-bias and NPI -- may not appear impressive, some readers may be cognizant of the statistical factor that works against the significance of our predictions in this study: Specifically, the standard NPI and OCQ measures were shortened for use in the repeated measures design. Thus all the measures are systematically

[1] Note that the OCQ was the only one of the three measures where participants were warned

less reliable than the version typically administered (see Gulliksen, 1967). When corrected for the fact that the NPI was one-half and the OCQ was one-fifth its usual size, the correlations between the NPI and the OCQ-bias index rise from .21 (honest condition) and .17 (good impression condition) to .34 (honest condition) and .29 (good impression condition). As effect sizes (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991, p.444), the latter values are in the moderate range.

DISCUSSION

The OCQ-bias index appears to be responsive to both state and trait forms of self-enhancement. When trying to give a positive impression, participants showed a substantially higher rate of over-claiming. Even when warned of the presence of foils, participants motivated to impress show a clear tendency to exaggerate their claims of familiarity. Thus the OCQ bias index can be used to compare demand for self-presentation across conditions.

At the same time, individual differences continue to play a role in predicting over-claiming. Within each condition, high IQ individuals are still more accurate and narcissists over-claimed more than did non-narcissists. Hence the OCQ remains a robust measure regardless of the contextual demand for self-presentation or a warning to beware of foils.

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about possible detection of their faking.

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Table 1.

Format of the Over-Claiming Questionnaire (OCQ)

- Using the following scale as a guideline, write a number from 0 to 6 beside each item to indicate how familiar you are with it.

Never heard of it						Very Familiar
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Physical Sciences

____ Manhattan Project	____ asteroid	____ nuclear fusion
____ cholarine	____ atomic number	____ hydroponics
____ alloy	____ plate tectonics	____ photon
____ ultra-lipid	____ centripetal force	____ plates of parallax
____ nebula	____ particle accelerator	____ satellite

Note. Of the 15 items above, the following 3 are foils: cholarine, ultra-lipid, and plates of parallax. Other topic categories include literature, art, history, social science, language, contemporary culture, and consumer products

Table 2.

Study 1: Associations of the two OCQ indexes with Criterion Measures of Ability and Self-Enhancement

	OCQ Signal Detection Indexes	
	Accuracy	Bias
Cognitive Ability (IQ test)	.52**	.17*
Narcissism (NPI)	-.15	.35**
Self-Deceptive Enhancement (SDE)	.11	.30**
Self-Deceptive Denial (SDD)	-.15	-.14
Impression Management (IM)	-.15	-.15
Self-Monitoring scale (SM)	.14	.11
Discrepancy measures based on discussion-group ratings		
Ability enhancement	.13	.25**
Personality enhancement	.03	.22**

Note. N = 137

All values are beta coefficients obtained when both bias and accuracy are entered in regression equations.

* indicates $p < .05$, two-tailed

** indicates $p < .01$, two-tailed

Table 3.

Study 1: Comparative Predictive Efficacy of OCQ-Bias Index and Two Discrepancy Measures of Self-Enhancement

		Discrepancy Measures of Self-Enhancement	
Criterion or Outcome	OCQ Bias	Intelligence Enhancement	Personality Enhancement
Narcissism (NPI)	.35**	.31**	.17*
Self-Deceptive Enhancement (SDE)	.30**	.26**	.17*
Peer-ratings of egotism	.27**	.29**	.26**
Peer-ratings of bragging	.37**	.37**	.29**

Note. N = 137

All values are beta regression coefficients.

* indicates $p < .05$, two-tailed

** indicates $p < .01$, two-tailed

Table 4.

Study 4: Associations of OCQ Bias measure with Three Measures of Adjustment

	Self-Esteem (RSE)	Ego-Resiliency (ER-89)	Peer-rated adjustment
Bias predictor (with only accuracy in equation)	.30**	.25**	-.11
Bias predictor (when NPI is added to equation)	.22*	.18*	.13

Note. N = 210

All entries are beta regression coefficients.

* indicates significance at $p < .05$, two-tailed

** indicates significance at $p < .01$, two-tailed.