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# Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/paid](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/paid)

## The Overclaiming Questionnaire: A good way to measure faking? <sup>☆</sup>

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 31 January 2015

Received in revised form 16 March 2015

Accepted 18 March 2015

Available online 30 March 2015

#### Keywords:

Faking

Personality measures

Personnel selection

Job applicant screening

Deception

Overclaiming

Response distortion

Residualized Individual Change Scores

### ABSTRACT

We evaluated the validity of the Overclaiming Questionnaire (OCQ) as a measure of job applicants' faking of personality tests. We assessed whether the OCQ (a) converged with an established measure of applicant faking, Residualized Individual Change Scores (RICs); (b) predicted admission of faking and faking tendencies (Faking Frequency, Minimizing Weaknesses, Exaggerating Strengths, and Complete Misrepresentation); and, (c) predicted the aforementioned measures as strongly as RICs did. First, 261 participants were instructed to respond honestly to an extraversion measure. Next, in a mock job application, they filled out the extraversion measure again, as well as the OCQ. The OCQ only weakly predicted RICs ( $r = .17$ ), Faking Admission ( $r = .18$ ), and Faking Frequency ( $r = .15$ ), and it failed to correlate significantly with Minimizing Weaknesses, Exaggerating Strengths, and Complete Misrepresentation. Moreover, the OCQ performed significantly worse than RICS in predicting Faking Admission, Faking Frequency, Minimizing Weaknesses, Exaggerating Strengths, and Complete Misrepresentation. We urge caution in using the current version of the OCQ to measure faking, but speculate that the innovative approach taken in the OCQ might be more effectively exploited if the OCQ content were tailored to the specific job that applicants are being tested for.

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## 1. Introduction

Personality assessments are an inexpensive and effective pre-employment testing tool, making them a popular choice for major organizations. More than 40% of Fortune 100 companies utilize personality assessments to optimize hiring decisions (Rothstein & Goffin, 2006). However, a large body of literature suggests that there is a tendency for test-takers to “fake,” or, “deliberately provide inaccurate responses to personality items in a manner that they believe will increase their chances of obtaining valued outcomes, such as a favorable hiring decision” (Goffin & Boyd, 2009, p. 151).

Our purpose was to evaluate a new and promising measure of applicant faking known as the Overclaiming Questionnaire (OCQ; Bing, Klumper, Kristl Davison, Taylor, & Novicevic, 2011). We assessed how the OCQ compares to an accepted benchmark of faking, Residualized Individual Change Scores (RICs; described below). Second, we assessed the extent that the OCQ predicted Faking Admission and faking tendencies (described below). To

our knowledge, this is the first study to evaluate the OCQ using RICs as the criterion, and the first study to consider the OCQ's capacity to predict Faking Admission and faking tendencies.

### 1.1. The Overclaiming Questionnaire

The OCQ measures applicants' tendency to claim knowledge about things, which, in reality, do not exist. Paulhus, Harms, Bruce, and Lysy (2003) suggest that misrepresentation about one's knowledge is reflective of a general tendency to misrepresent oneself or fake. For example, the OCQ asks applicants if they have knowledge of various social science topics, including some fictitious ones (e.g., “megaphrenia”) included to measure faking. Asking applicants if they know of fictitious things resolves two major issues that plagued previous faking measures. First, the most common type of faking measure, social desirability scales, contains items that overlap with personality measures (Uziel, 2010). For example, a social desirability scale used to measure faking may include a statement such as “I never speed,” which, in addition to assessing social desirability, taps into personality constructs such as sensation seeking and conscientiousness (Beanland, Sellbom, & Johnson, 2014; Scott-Parker, Hyde, Watson, & King, 2013). Research shows that the OCQ items have little overlap with social desirability (Kam, Risavy, & Perunovic, 2015), and that the items are distinctly different from typical personality items. Second, endorsing uncommon, but possible, socially desirable

<sup>☆</sup> This research was supported by awards from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to Justin R. Feeney and Richard Goffin.

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behaviors in a social desirability scale, leaves some ambiguity about whether the respondent has engaged in *deliberate* faking. Regarding the previous example of speeding, some people might genuinely perceive themselves as non-speeders even if they routinely break the speed limit. In contrast, with the OCQ, claiming knowledge about a fictitious topic such as “megaphrenia” may be more likely to reflect deliberate dissimulation.

With respect to underlying response processes, theories of faking suggest that job applicants may adopt a “fake good” schema, where they craft an ideal response profile for the target job (Holden, Kroner, Fekken, & Popham, 1992). For a number of target jobs, such as the academic position used by Bing et al. (2011), applicants are likely to discern that general knowledge should be a central part of the “fake good” schema. The OCQ is particularly well-suited to capture this type of faking tendency because applicants are led to believe the OCQ is measuring their general knowledge (Bing et al.).

In addition to the previous theoretical arguments, the OCQ's possible value as a measure of faking has been supported empirically. First, undergraduates instructed to present an image that was “as positive as possible” claimed to have knowledge of more of the OCQ's fictitious items than did participants who were instructed to answer honestly. This suggests that claiming to have more general knowledge than one really has may be associated with faking (Paulhus et al., 2003). Second, Bing et al. (2011) showed that by statistically controlling for participants' OCQ scores, prediction of university grades using achievement-striving scores could be improved. This is promising because social desirability scales have failed to achieve such results (Griffith & Peterson, 2008; Peterson, Griffith, Isaacson, O'Connell, & Mangos, 2011). Nonetheless, as discussed next, one of our contributions was to evaluate the OCQ further by evaluating it against RICSs, which are an accepted benchmark in faking measures.

### 1.2. Residualized Individual Change Scores

Non-Residualized Individual Change Scores (ICSs), which are the precursor to RICSs, are derived by collecting a set of “honest” and “applicant” personality scores from each applicant. Then, the “honest” scores are subtracted from the “applicant” scores to compute the ICSs. The “honest” and “applicant” scores can be obtained using several different research methodologies (cf. Griffith, Chmielowski, & Yoshita, 2007; McFarland & Ryan, 2000; Peterson, Griffith, Converse, & Gammon, 2011).

Peterson, Griffith, Isaacson, et al. (2011) showed that statistically controlling for ICSs improved the prediction of self-reported counterproductive work behaviors by conscientiousness, whereas controlling for social desirability did not improve prediction. Research has also suggested that ICSs are better able to differentiate fakers from non-fakers than are other faking measures (Griffith & Peterson, 2011; Peterson, Griffith, Isaacson, et al., 2011). Nonetheless, one concern with ICSs is that they positively correlate with participants' personality scores in the “applicant” condition and negatively correlate with their personality scores in the “honest” condition (Burns & Christiansen, 2011). This can cause inferential errors whereby relationships are attributed to faking when they are actually due to the underlying personality traits used to calculate ICSs. To resolve this problem, Burns and Christiansen (2011) support the computation of Residualized ICSs (RICSs), which are the residuals obtained by regressing scores during a job application or simulation on the same applicant's honest scores. RICSs reduce the potential for the inferential errors described above, providing a purer measure of applicant faking than ICSs (Burns & Christiansen, 2011).

An important logistical limitation of both ICS and RICSs is that they require collection of “honest” and “applicant” scores,

which would be very difficult for hiring organizations in true pre-employment testing scenarios. Although researchers have accomplished this by recruiting applicants to participate in research study after the selection process (Peterson, Griffith, & Converse, 2009; Peterson, Griffith, Isaacson, et al., 2011), it seems unlikely that this approach would be successful for many hiring organizations. In this scenario, applicants would likely be suspicious that attempts to collect honest scores are a ruse, especially prior to employment decisions. Moreover, when “honest” scores are collected after, rather than before, “applicant” scores, as was the case in the above studies, there is cause for concern that the “honest” scores are affected by carryover effects (Jackson, Wroblewski, & Ashton, 2000). Nonetheless, RICSs play a vital role as the most defensible benchmark of faking in faking research studies, such as the current one.

### 1.3. Evaluating the Overclaiming Questionnaire

As mentioned, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the OCQ. The first test was whether the OCQ converges strongly with the benchmark faking measure, the RICS. We utilized Cohen's (1992) guidelines, whereby a “strong” correlation is defined as equal to or greater than .50, “moderate” is between .3 and .49, and “weak” is lower than .30. Therefore, we expected the correlation of OCQ with RICSs to be at least .50 in magnitude and tested this expectation as follows:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The correlation of OCQ scores with RICSs will not be significantly weaker than .50.

The second test was to evaluate the OCQ by testing its capacity to predict Faking Admission and four different faking tendencies that we assessed under assurances of confidentiality. *Faking Admission* simply assessed whether participants admitted faking their personality responses to improve their scores during the applicant condition of the study. The first faking tendency, called *Faking Frequency*, asked participants how often they faked. Second, *Minimizing Weaknesses* asked participants to what extent they made adjustments in their responses to personality items to make their weaknesses less apparent. Third, *Exaggerating Strengths*, asked participants how often they exaggerated their strengths in their personality test responses. Finally, *Complete Misrepresentation* assessed the proclivity to provide what they believed to be the ideal personality test responses, regardless of what their honest responses would be. The latter three measures were based on Donovan, Dwight, and Hurtz's (2003) typology of faking tendencies. We expected that if the OCQ is a sound measure of faking, it should correlate positively with Faking Admission and all four faking tendencies.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** The OCQ will correlate positively and significantly with Faking Admission (**H<sub>2a</sub>**), Faking Frequency (**H<sub>2b</sub>**), Minimizing Weaknesses (**H<sub>2c</sub>**), Exaggerating Strengths (**H<sub>2d</sub>**), and Complete Misrepresentation (**H<sub>2e</sub>**).

The final test was to compare the ability of the OCQ to predict Faking Admission and the four faking tendencies using the RICSs ability to predict those same measures as the benchmark. If the OCQ is a valid measure of faking, its prediction of Faking Admission and faking tendencies should not be significantly weaker than the RICSs'. Thus,

**H<sub>3</sub>:** The OCQ's correlations with Faking Admission (**H<sub>3a</sub>**), Faking Frequency (**H<sub>3b</sub>**), Minimizing Weaknesses (**H<sub>3c</sub>**), Exaggerating Strengths (**H<sub>3d</sub>**), and Complete Misrepresentation (**H<sub>3e</sub>**), will not be significantly weaker than the RICSs'.

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