



## Brief Report

## The narcissism-overclaiming link revisited

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## ABSTRACT

The present research investigated how different dimensions of narcissism (i.e., assertive, antagonistic, and vulnerable) and content-specific forms of assertive narcissism (i.e., intellectual ability, physical attractiveness, social dominance) are related to overclaiming bias (i.e., the tendency to illegitimately claim knowledge). In the data from a large-scale online study ( $N = 1,658$ ), the associations between overclaiming bias and any kind of narcissism were smaller than in many previous studies. Furthermore, assertive narcissism was more positively related to overclaiming bias than antagonistic and vulnerable narcissism were. Intellectual-ability-specific and social-dominance-specific assertive narcissism were more positively related to overclaiming bias than physical-attractiveness-specific assertive narcissism was. Finally, multiple regression analyses suggested that the narcissism-overclaiming link is most robust for social-dominance-specific assertive narcissism.

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## 1. Introduction

Overclaiming bias is the tendency to illegitimately claim knowledge. It can be assessed with the Over-Claiming Questionnaire (Paulhus, Harms, Bruce, & Lysy, 2003), which asks participants how familiar they are with specific concepts, persons, places, events, and so forth. Because some of the concepts, places, persons, and events do not exist and thus cannot be known, the answers to the questionnaire allow an assessment of overclaiming bias to be made. The Over-Claiming Questionnaire was introduced as an instrument for assessing self-enhancement more objectively than better-than-average ratings and more economically than criterion discrepancy measures. Because self-enhancement is believed to be a central feature of narcissism, studies have repeatedly investigated the overclaiming-narcissism link, and most of them have found positive associations between overclaiming bias and narcissism (e.g., Paulhus et al., 2003; for an overview, see Table S1: <https://osf.io/k4mex>).

However, recent studies have questioned whether overclaiming bias is related to the narcissistic tendency to be disingenuous and self-centered: In a set of studies, Dunlop et al. (2016) found that

overclaiming bias was predicted by openness and years of formal education but not by honesty-humility or narcissism (see also, Bensch, Paulhus, Stankov, & Ziegler, 2017). Ludeke and Makransky (2016) indicated that overclaiming bias is better predicted by careless responding than by self-deceptive enhancement scores or narcissism.

In order to clarify how overclaiming bias is linked to narcissism, we believe it is necessary to distinguish various (a) dimensions and (b) content-specific forms of narcissism. Unfortunately, previous research has almost exclusively used a single index to measure narcissism even though narcissism has been found to be multidimensional (e.g., Back et al., 2013a; Miller et al., 2011; Pincus et al., 2009) and content-specific (Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, & Maio, 2012).

In terms of dimensions, the current research distinguishes vulnerable and grandiose narcissism (e.g., Pincus et al., 2009) and splits up the latter into assertive and antagonistic narcissism (e.g., Back et al., 2013a). People high in assertive narcissism promote themselves in order to reach narcissistic goals such as status, superiority, and power. People high in antagonistic narcissism harm and devalue others and engage in deliberate cheating rather than self-enhancement in order to reach narcissistic goals (e.g., Back et al., 2013a). People high in vulnerable narcissism have grandiose fantasies, but they often suffer from depressive mood and feelings of resentment and shame (e.g., Pincus et al., 2009). This suggests that people high in antagonistic and vulnerable

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narcissism do not self-enhance and that they do not perceive their ego-driven standards and fantasies are met. In fact, both antagonistic and vulnerable narcissism have been found to be negatively correlated with self-esteem (e.g., Back et al., 2013a; Pincus et al., 2009). Thus, we hypothesized that assertive narcissism would be more strongly positively correlated to overclaiming bias than antagonistic and vulnerable narcissism would be.

In terms of content-specificity, the current research distinguished intellectual-ability-specific assertive narcissism (NARQ\_ADM\_INT<sup>2</sup>), physical-attractiveness-specific assertive narcissism (NARQ\_ADM\_ATTR), and social-dominance-specific assertive narcissism (NARQ\_ADM\_DOM). We focused on the content-specific forms of only assertive narcissism because antagonistic and vulnerable narcissism should not be related to overclaiming bias. People high in NARQ\_ADM\_INT promote themselves with regard to intellectual ability: They believe they are extraordinarily intelligent. People high in NARQ\_ADM\_ATTR promote themselves with regard to their physical appearance: They believe they are extraordinarily physically attractive. People high in NARQ\_ADM\_DOM promote themselves with regard to social dominance: They see themselves as extraordinary authorities with extraordinary leadership qualities. NARQ\_ADM\_INT, in particular, should be related to overclaiming bias given that (a) “overclaiming is the tendency to claim knowledge about non-existent items” (Paulhus et al., 2003; p. 891) and (b) Paulhus et al.’s (2003) Over-Claiming Questionnaire contains mainly items from the intellectual ability sphere (e.g., fine arts, language, physical sciences). Thus, we hypothesized that NARQ\_ADM\_INT would be more strongly positively correlated to overclaiming bias than NARQ\_ADM\_ATTR, NARQ\_ADM\_DOM, or content-unspecific assertive narcissism would be.

To investigate the relations between the various dimensions and content-specific forms of narcissism and overclaiming bias, pre-existing data from a large German online study were analyzed. We included overclaiming accuracy and openness to experience in some analyses as control variables because previous studies have shown that these two variables can be related to overclaiming bias (e.g., Dunlop et al., 2016).

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

From the original sample ( $N = 1,682$ ), 24 people were removed because they showed signs of careless responding: very fast responding, invariant responding, and multivariate outliers (for details, see Text S1: <https://osf.io/b297n>). Results for the complete sample were very similar and can be found in Tables S2–S10: <https://osf.io/67xyw>. The remaining sample consisted of 1,658 German Internet users (72% female; 1,228 complete responses) who filled out an online questionnaire that contained various measures of narcissism, the Over-Claiming Questionnaire, and various self-report instruments that were not relevant to the current study. All participants were sampled via diverse mailing lists and snowball sampling. Participants received personality feedback for their participation and were entered into a lottery as an incentive for participation. The mean age was 27.25 (Range: 18–73).

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Overclaiming bias

Overclaiming bias was measured with a German version of the Over-Claiming Questionnaire-150 (OCQ-150; Erler, 2009; Paulhus et al., 2003): Participants were asked how familiar they were with

150 specific terms (persons, concepts, places, etc.; from 0 = I have never heard of the term to 4 = I am very familiar with the term). Thirty of the 150 terms referred to nonexistent foils. The presence of the nonexistent foils enables an objective assessment of overclaiming bias (i.e., the tendency to claim knowledge that one does or cannot know; Paulhus et al., 2003). In other words, respondents do not self-report their level of overclaiming bias; rather, the questionnaire assesses overclaiming bias indirectly (via claimed knowledge of entities that do not exist).

To calculate the overclaiming bias index, signal detection theory can be applied to the responses of the OCQ-150 because they fall into four categories: hits; false alarms; misses; correct rejections. The false alarms rate is sometimes used as an indicator of overclaiming bias due to its face-validity. But the false alarm rate is only based on the nonexistent foils (i.e., it discards useful information from the existent items) and it often correlates substantially with the hit rate and is thus confounded by accurate reports of knowledge (Paulhus et al., 2003). Thus, we followed Paulhus et al. (2003) and used the criterion location  $c$  as an indicator of overclaiming bias. The value  $c$  depends not only on the false alarm rate but also on the hit rate ( $c$  is the average of the  $z$ -transformed hit rate and false alarm rate). It indicates how strong the sense of familiarity has to be for a person to endorse an item. The value  $c$  was calculated for each of the 4 cutoffs on the 0 to 4 Likert scale, and then averaged to get one index for overclaiming bias (see R Code: <https://osf.io/uwgd7>).

#### 2.2.2. Narcissism

Assertive, antagonistic, and vulnerable narcissism were assessed with various subscales from the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979), the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ; Back et al., 2013a), and the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI; Pincus et al., 2009; Wright, Lukowitsky, Pincus, & Conroy, 2010; Fig. 1). The three kinds of content-specific assertive narcissism (NARQ\_ADM\_INT, NARQ\_ADM\_ATTR, and NARQ\_ADM\_DOM) were assessed with 15 items each (Back et al., 2013b; Table S11: <https://osf.io/9frxw>). Example items are “I am a genius,” “I am a very attractive person,” and “I am a leader,” respectively.

#### 2.2.3. Control variables

To assess overclaiming accuracy, we calculated the  $d'$  index from signal detection theory (Paulhus et al., 2003). The  $d'$  index indicates how well a person is able to discriminate between real and nonexistent Over-Claiming Questionnaire items. Openness was assessed with three items from the Big Five Inventory-15 (BFI-15; Schupp & Gerlitz, 2008;  $\alpha = .65$ ).

### 2.3. Analysis plan

First, we calculated a correlation matrix with overclaiming bias and the scale scores from the NPI, NARQ, and PNI subscales. The scale scores were based on the unweighted mean of the item scores. Next, we tested the hypotheses with structural equation modeling (SEM). All hypotheses were tested with one-tailed tests. Nonhypothesized relations were tested with two-tailed tests. These analyses were computed with the software Mplus (version 7.3; Muthén & Muthén, 2014) and the R package MplusAutomation (version 0.6-3; Hallquist & Wiley, 2014). Data, R Code, and Mplus Output Files are available at: <https://osf.io/5hti9>.

First, we tested whether assertive narcissism was more strongly correlated with overclaiming bias than antagonistic and vulnerable narcissism were, respectively. The three dimensions of narcissism were modeled as latent variables in a structural equation model (Fig. 1). In this analysis, we deviated from the pre-registered analysis plan in three ways due to inadequate model fit and

<sup>2</sup> These abbreviations contain “NARQ-ADM” because the items used to measure these constructs are content-specific items inspired by the NARQ subscale Narcissistic Admiration (Back et al., 2013b).

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