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Who's *Really* Doing the Work?

The Impact of Group Size on Over-Claiming of Responsibility

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SUMMARY

People often believe that they do more than their fair share of work. This tendency plays out across daily life, from married couples to workplace collaborations. While the inclination to "over-claim" credit is pervasive and has potentially serious consequences, little is known about the factors that make it more or less likely to occur. This article considers two predictors—group size and the role of indirect participants, such as supervisors, teachers, coaches, and office assistants—on the phenomenon known as over-claiming. It offers practical steps for individuals, managers, and organizations to take to moderate the damaging effects of over-claiming.

KEYWORDS: over-claiming, egocentrism, group behavior, human behavior, indirect contributors, biases, psychology

The official breakup of The Beatles in 1970 was extraordinary—in the depths of both acrimony and the greed that contributed to it. "Mysterious and complicated" was how *Rolling Stone* magazine, in a 2009 post-mortem, described the end of the band that defined twentieth-century pop music.[1] There were many reasons why The Beatles split, but chronic bad blood between the band's dominant songwriters and singers, Paul McCartney and John Lennon, was prominent among them. The pair clashed repeatedly over authorship of major chart-toppers, including the 1966 track "Eleanor Rigby." In a remarkable tug-of-war over a hit single about human loneliness—dubbed by one chronicler of its creation the band's most

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"enigmatic"—Lennon went so far as to claim first that he wrote "at least 50 percent" of the lyrics before offering a more precise estimate of 70%. Referring to his own contributions to the song, McCartney insisted, "John helped me on a few words, but I'd put it down 80-20 to me." Logically, of course, this could not be: added together, Lennon and McCartney claimed to have written 150% of the song. Intentionally or not, either Lennon or McCartney was exaggerating—and that someone, Beatles scholars largely agree, was Lennon.[2]

In his tussle with McCartney over "Eleanor Rigby" credit, Lennon was engaging in a quirk of human nature psychologists call over-claiming, in which people assert more credit than they deserve. They do this through both objective measures of what they have accomplished as well as their own perceptions of how much effort they *feel* they put into the task. Over-claiming can happen when people consciously set out to earn a reward or a promotion, or for some other self-serving reason. But over-claiming can also occur in the absence of these intentions: people interpret events based on their own unique perspectives, which center on their actions and beliefs. Taking others' contributions to a project into account requires more effort than just considering your own contributions.

Over-claiming has been widely recognized as a human condition going back to ancient Greece, when Aristotle observed that successful people "become arrogant and wantonly aggressive" and "think less of everyone else." In modern times, Garrison Keillor paid tribute to over-claiming via a fictional town "where all the children are above average." The former Lakers and Miami Heat head coach, Pat Riley, saw such widespread sparring among star athletes over who was responsible for team victories that he dubbed the phenomenon "the disease of me."

We see over-claiming in both mundane and astonishing ways. Kanye West says he "made that bitch famous" in reference to country idol Taylor Swift. President Donald Trump implies that Lady Gaga owes her fame to a 2008 performance at the Miss Universe pageant, which he owned at the time. Bill Gates takes partial credit for developing the Macintosh, a staggering claim given that the computer was one of chief rival Steve Jobs's most celebrated accomplishments. In everyday life, married couples squabble over who is doing more of the household chores versus providing an income. Academics regularly spar over credit, as do politicians, military officers, sports coaches, teachers, entrepreneurs, and employees. The list goes on.

Because a sense of fairness is a necessary condition in any successful social relationship, over-claiming can exact a toll. People who overestimate their own worth may feel underappreciated or that others are taking advantage of them, which leads to dissatisfaction and conflict.[3] Conversely, people who take more credit than they deserve are less well liked.[4] Indeed, extensive research finds little upside to over-claiming. Although over-claimers may be viewed as leaders, they are also seen as generally hostile and overly competitive, especially when egotism is at the root of the false estimates.[5] New research from this author and Derek Schatz, a Haas doctoral candidate, suggests that collaborators do not believe over-claimers did as much work as they say they did, even when it is possible that the over-claimers actually did extra work. Conscious over-claimers actually suffer a double stigma: They are seen not only as dishonest, but also as manipulative in that they are trying to get ahead at the expense of everyone else.

In the workplace, perceptions among employers and employees about who is shouldering more of the work—and, by extension, who is slacking off—directly impacts promotions, compensation, and assignments. The sense of unfairness that can result from these management decisions often undermines workplace culture, hurts employee retention, and can even directly affect an organization's bottom line. Over-claiming is also a driver of conflict in negotiations, and can adversely affect learning, hiring and other decisions, and responses to crises.[6] Employees who issue ultimatums because they think they are irreplaceable sometimes get fired.

This article addresses the latest research into over-claiming that is motivated by egocentrism, or the subconscious tendency people have to value their own perspectives and contributions first and to consider others only when there is an effort to do so. Specifically, it delves into the impact that egocentric biases within large teams have on over-claiming among individual members, including those who are peripherally contributing to the group's purpose. The research also reveals new insights into how individuals who over-claim—and, conversely, those who seek less recognition than they deserve—are perceived by others within the group. Together, the effects of group size and peer perceptions paint a more vivid picture of the challenges that over-claiming poses and offer new clarity into the steps that individuals, managers, and organizations as a whole can take to lessen its magnitude.

What We Know (and Don't Know) about Over-Claiming

There exists an extensive body of research into over-claiming, which has identified two primary drivers. One is egotism, in which people assume more credit as part of a conscious strategy to bolster others' perceptions of them, perhaps to score a bigger bonus, gain status within an organization, or to win political capital. Egocentrism is the other major contributor to over-claiming. Research shows many innate biases underlie egocentrism, including the tendency people have to see themselves and their futures in a positive light, even when that optimism is not logical or realistic.[7] People also tend to assume that others know what they know, feel what they feel, and think what they think.

In one of the first studies of egocentric over-claiming, Ross and Sicoly in 1979 explored the role of egocentrism in a variety of collaborations, most tellingly among married couples.[8] When asked to rate their individual contributions to a list of rote household activities—including grocery shopping, child care, and financial decision making—spouses consistently overestimated their share of the work. Even more revealing was the over-claiming that occurred when they considered negative events: individual mates were just as likely to overestimate their roles in starting arguments or messing up the house, suggesting that over-claiming among couples was not only born out of an egotistical desire to feel good or superior. Rather, the couples over-claimed because of egocentric biases; they were too busy thinking about their own contributions to consider their partners' role.

Here is why. Correctly assessing the output of everyone involved in a joint endeavor requires that a person consider his or her own contribution *and* the output of every other individual in the group. Ideally, people could allocate portions of responsibility so that the sum of all efforts reached a logical 100%. But as the Lennon-McCartney example shows, that does not always happen. The formula for calculating relative comparisons may be straightforward, but getting accurate inputs are not. Anything that influences how much people notice, remember, and credit their own contributions versus others' impacts over-claiming. For example, human beings have difficulty making accurate relative judgments because they tend to focus on one thing at a time.[9] There is also a tendency to divide work into what "I do" and what "they do," so that many collaborators can become in people's minds a single entity to be judged as a whole.[10]

There is a growing body of research around the role of group size in over-claiming. In 2006, Caruso et al. underscored the magnitude of over-claiming within groups in a study based on psychology journal articles featuring between three and six academic authors.[11] In this experiment, relative judgments were especially difficult because there was no way to measure contributions to the process objectively. When the academics were asked to indicate the percent of work they felt they personally contributed to an article, their estimations added up to an implausible 140% on average. When asked to first consider their coauthors' contributions, the academics over-claimed less.

Other research has also found that prompting individuals to think about their collaborators and their efforts can reduce over-claiming. In experiments of elementary school students and university undergraduates, Savitsky et al. found that over-claiming is reduced substantially when people are prompted to think of collaborators as separate individuals rather than as "the rest of the group."[12]

While research shows that over-claiming is widespread and that conscious efforts to consider fellow group members' contributions reduce it, relatively little is known about how group size affects the magnitude of over-claiming. Studies to date have focused largely on small groups, where individual perceptions of contributions have added up to relatively modest over-claiming of 110% or less on average. For instance, among married couples, Ross and Sicoly found over-claiming averaged 103%.

A largely unexplored area concerns the effects that larger groups have on over-claiming. What happens to perceptions of contributions when teams increase in size? New research reveals that over-claiming is *more likely* to occur in large groups, with the effect increasing the bigger the group gets. In fact, studies have yielded over-claiming in large groups that easily surpasses 200%. Recent studies also reveal that over-claiming increases when there are "indirect contributors," or group members who do not form the core of a team, but perform on the periphery, either as coaches, teachers, supervisors, or assistants. For example, in one experiment, groups of three direct contributors claimed about 110% on average, but groups of only two direct contributors with an indirect contributor (i.e., a manager) claimed 120% on average.

Big Groups, Bigger Egos: Group Size as Catalyst for Over-Claiming

In recent decades, sweeping changes have shaken the legal profession in the United States. Globalization, mounting competition, and the public dissemination of once-private financial data have turned law firms into cutthroat enterprises where partners get paid according to "eat what you kill" formulas rooted primarily in business generation. With hundreds, if not thousands, of partners now spread around the globe, egocentrism and egotism fuel over-claiming. Where lawyers once expected to spend their entire careers in one firm, today they regularly jump ship for the promise of more money at a rival firm—and, then, if that firm does not pay what they feel is their due, they will bolt to another. As the *New Republic* put it in a 2013 expose of Big Law's myriad troubles, "No relationship in the legal profession is more fraught than the one between partners and their money."[13] Perpetually revolving doors in the legal profession have contributed to the demise of once-indomitable firms.

New research into over-claiming within large groups highlights just how colossal the job of keeping law firm partners—or any large group of individuals—happy and loyal can be. When egocentric biases are dominant, people lose the ability to assess themselves or anyone else accurately. It is simply easier for them to notice, recall, and, therefore, credit their own contributions than to do so for others. Not surprisingly, as groups get bigger, taking others' efforts into account becomes even more challenging. In married couples, there is only one other person to factor in when evaluating responsibility, and even then over-claiming happens. Imagine what happens in a family of five, where there are four additional members to evaluate. Now think about groups comprising dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of individuals. Studies find that relative allocations of responsibility within these groups become harder and harder to assess—and when individual assessments are added together, they become likely to defy logic.

The Evidence: As Numbers Grow, So Does Over-Claiming

A series of four experiments demonstrates that over-claiming increases along with group size—and that the extent of over-claiming diminishes when people consciously account for others' contributions.[14] In one experiment, the data on authorship of journal articles that formed the basis of Caruso et al.'s 2006 research were reanalyzed to account for over-claiming as the groups grew from three to six academics. Controlling for authorship order, the analyses imputing first authors' credit claims revealed that first-author contributors in the smallest groups claimed an average 205% when they estimated how much work, writing, and thought they individually put into the articles without considering their coauthors. That percentage steadily increased, as the groups got larger, with six-author groups claiming total output averaging nearly 261%. When the allocations that factored in coauthors were reanalyzed, over-claiming within the three-author groups declined slightly to about 194%. Over-claiming by six-author groups, however, showed a steeper drop-off, to 220%.

There was one potential drawback to this analysis. When asked to take fellow contributors into account, it is possible that the authors recognized that their summed estimates could not logically exceed 100%. If so, then the results suggest that simply raising awareness of others' inputs may not actually help people to weigh their contributions versus others' work with accuracy, but just reminds them to add to 100.

A novel experiment of MBA study groups as part of a negotiation course tested for this possible explanation. The students were divided into three groups: in one, members were asked to rate their individual contributions to the study groups based on six measures of effectiveness. To test whether awareness of a 100% contribution limit underlies over-claiming (and not egocentrism), a second group was given the same measures, but in a different order that required them to report their group size and each member's name first before assessing their personal contributions. Critically, the second group did not estimate a numerical value for what each person did, which could have prompted them to think about how the numbers would add to 100. Instead, they only listed their group members, which enabled them to think about others' contributions in the abstract. The third group was given similar instructions, except that members were asked to estimate the percentage contributions of their peers before reporting their own.

Once again, over-claiming increased along with group size. Larger MBA study groups claimed more responsibility for their respective groups' output than smaller groups did, with groups of eight or more members dramatically claiming more than 140% credit on average. However, prompting individual members to consider group members' contributions—in one instance, by making them implicitly aware of the size of their group and the names of fellow members and, in the other instance, by explicitly asking them to quantify their peers' contributions—reduced the degree of over-claiming significantly. This suggests, again, that people who over-claim are not engaged in self-serving tactics; they are focused on themselves, and the act of considering others requires effort.

When Contributions Are Easily Measurable

The authorship and MBA student group experiments alone, however, did not offer conclusive proof that over-claiming increases along with group size. The biggest potential drawback stemmed from the fact that the participants in both studies had already been selected into large or small groups. Because they were not randomly assigned into groups, causal connections about the impact of group size on over-claiming could not be drawn. As a result, a third experiment based on a handgrip competition was undertaken. The participants, who were 339 visitors to the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, were randomly assigned to groups of either three or six members. Each group analyzed was complete and the identities of its participants known. The overall objective was also quantifiable: each member used a handgrip with a built-in counter to squeeze as many times as he or she could within one minute. Team members could shout encouragement and strategy, but nothing else. At the end of the competition, each participant completed a survey. Half of the groups of three members or six members were asked to rate in percentage terms only their own contributions to their team's overall output. The other half of the groups reported the percentage each other group member contributed to the total before they estimated their own.

As in the prior experiments, the handgrip results showed that large groups over-claim more than small groups. Overall six-person teams estimated contributions that added up to nearly 114% on average, whereas three-person groups reported aggregate output of 104% on average. As before, large teams whose members rated their individual performances without explicitly considering others over-claimed the most, or 122.8% on average, which was more than the average claim from the three other conditions. Calling attention to others' contributions reduced over-claiming among all groups, which suggests that estimations of relative contributions become more accurate as people adjust their perceptions.

The handgrip experiment provided important causal evidence that being in a large group increases over-claiming, in a context where self-esteem or the desirability of the task were unlikely explanations. The ability to squeeze a handgrip is not central to people's lives or to their sense of self-worth, so there was little incentive to over-claim. Moreover, the results suggest that smaller groups may tend to over-claim less because group members can more easily think about the contributions of other members, whereas larger groups need a reminder to factor in others' achievements.

When Over-Claiming Spawns "Foolishness" not "Wisdom"

A fourth and final experiment highlighted "real world" instances of egocentric over-claiming as group size grows. In this study, 1,962 online panelists were asked to recall actual groups, both large and small, in which they had previously participated. As in prior experiments, the participants were divided into groups—those who were asked to remember an experience in a large group, who were then directed to rate either their contributions alone or to also consider others, and those were given similar instructions but were directed to apply them to their memory of working within a small team.

The experiment also introduced new tests for egocentrism. Some participants reported their own contributions first, while others estimated their output only after considering the efforts made by fellow collaborators. This was done to check whether people were likely to over-claim less when assessing their own contributions last because they recognized that the total limit could not exceed

100% and so they simply trimmed their estimates to stay within that logically permissible range. Participants were also asked to assess performances using the standard 0 to 100% scale, which measures relative contributions, as well as an absolute scale ranging from "contributed none of the work" to "contributed all of the work." The authors predicted that participants who assessed only their own contributions would base their estimates more heavily on the absolute amount of work they believe they did, whereas participants who also judged others would be more sensitive to the amount of work they did by comparison.

Once more, the results demonstrated that over-claiming increases in larger groups. In this case, the extent of over-claiming was especially striking. Large group members who estimated only their own contributions were the most likely to over-claim, averaging output estimates of nearly 236%. Overall, individuals who recalled experiences working with large groups—whether they took into account only their performance or also factored in others' output—estimated total contributions averaging 171%. People who remembered experiences in small groups estimated total output averaging 141%. Significantly, calling attention to others' contributions led participants to rely less on absolute assessments of the amount they contributed than on relative assessments of the percentage they contributed. When not reminded of others' contributions, participants' relative claims of responsibility were largely a function of how much absolute work they believed they did. This suggested that individuals were egocentrically relying on absolute assessments to inform their relative claims. Moreover, the findings suggest that knowledge of a 100% limit itself does not lead people to over-claim less; over-claiming fell whether they considered their own contributions first or last.

What do the results of these four experiments suggest? That over-claiming based on egocentric biases occurs at dramatically higher rates among large groups. As groups get bigger, there are simply more contributions from others to overlook. Moreover, the experiments imply that potential consequences of over-claiming within groups may be more serious than prior studies based on smaller groups suggest. Inaccurate judgments at the individual level can seem relatively minor, but they can compound significantly when aggregated across groups. When the extent of over-claiming reaches more than 235% among large groups, the effect is no longer so much the "wisdom of the crowds" but the "foolishness of the crowds."

On the Periphery: The Role of Indirect Contributors

There is an added complication to the role of group size in over-claiming. To date, research has focused on over-claiming among core members of teams under different conditions. But what about people who are on the periphery of a team? Academics, for example, do not submit manuscripts that then magically appear in scholarly journals. Editors, peer reviewers, proofreaders, and graphics specialists also participate in the process. Sports players score the winning goals, but arguably could not have done so without the help of coaches, trainers, and supportive family members. Students get assistance from teachers, administrators, tutors, and their parents. In the workplace, the engineers behind a game-changing software or team of doctors involved in a life-saving operation do not act alone. Indeed, indirect contributors often play important roles within group endeavors—through strategizing, supervision, or other assistance.

New research shows that groups with indirect contributors over-claim more than groups with only direct contributors. Because indirect contributors cannot always point to a concrete action that yielded objective results, they are even more likely than direct contributors to rely on subjective measures, such as their belief about how much effort they *feel* they added to a joint endeavor, when assessing their individual output. The more ambiguous the output, the more likely indirect contributors are to rely on egocentric information to determine their contribution to a group.

Insights from a Puzzle Competition

A series of experiments centered on word-search games demonstrates these effects. In each scenario, study participants were divided into teams with varying characteristics, with some comprising "workers" and a "manager," "workers" and an "observer," "workers" and a "helper," or just "workers." The teams were given a set amount of time to strategize and to circle as many words in the puzzle as they could find, which was ideal in that their respective outputs were clearly measurable. The role of the manager was manipulated from one experiment to the next to test for over-claiming and the underlying effect of egocentrism. For example, managers at times were simply told to "leverage the team's synergies and coordinate work flow" by, for example, shouting encouragements or passing one puzzle quickly from one worker to another. At other times, they were directed to play a more direct role by, for example, devising a comprehensive strategy or even helping to find words. Observers were consistently asked to watch and analyze, but nothing more.

At the end of each contest, participants completed a survey assessing their perceived contributions to their team's actual results, both on a scale of 1 to 7 and actual percentages up to 100%. A second measure of over-claiming was more specific: participants estimated how many total words their team circled and how many words they *believed* their team would have circled had they not been on the team. They followed the same construct for each of their team members. In this way, researchers could determine how many words the participants thought they individually helped their team find versus their perceptions of how much their teammates accomplished.

The experiments provide evidence that indirect contributors often believe they help their teams more than they do. In three experiments, the "managers" over-claimed, believing their teams would have done significantly worse without their help, despite the fact that their teams found roughly the same number of words as teams with passive observers. These experiments and one more also showed that direct and indirect contributors disagreed as to how much work indirect contributors did: indirect contributors almost always believed they did more work than direct contributors believed they did. In contrast, team members mostly agreed about how direct contributors performed. The over-claiming among managed teams was entirely due to the managers' perceptions. When managers were allowed to contribute in a more direct way—by helping workers find words—their claims of responsibility became more calibrated to reality. All of this point to egocentrism: managers' estimates relied on how much effect they *felt* they had on their teams' performance.

As further evidence of egocentrism, one experiment explicitly directed the managers to (secretly) hurt their teams' performances by, for example, calling out words that were not part of the word search. When asked to assess the extent to which indirect contributors harmed their teams' effort, workers recognized that the managers had a negative impact, but not as much as the indirect contributors themselves did. The managers actually over-claimed their negative impact as much as those who intended to make a positive impact.

Over-claiming among indirect contributors can have meaningful consequences. This is especially true within organizations that rely on 360-degree performance reviews in which pay and promotion decisions are based on the perceptions not just of direct bosses, but also those of workers farther down the ladder, peers across departments, customers, or even vendors. Over-claiming among indirect and direct contributors has ramifications as well any time there is a fixed monetary reward at stake: in one of the word-search competitions, workers and indirect contributors were asked to divide a $45 Amazon gift card among all team members based on their assessments of individual performances. When added, groups with indirect contributors claimed more money than groups with observers.

Tip Sheet: How to Keep Over-Claiming in Check

Over-claiming within groups of all sizes can be difficult to overcome when egocentrism is the primary driver. Human beings are not naturally inclined to think beyond themselves unless prompted to do so, and it is this subconscious tendency to focus inward that complicates any attempt to address over-claiming. This explains why over-claiming within almost any group is as insidious as it is inevitable. While the challenges that over-claiming poses to any joint endeavor, whether a marriage or a business with thousands of part-owners, may not be entirely surmountable, they are important to address in ways that diminish their magnitude. In the workplace especially, where conflicts between employees over perceptions of who is producing and who is not impact morale and retention, there are steps that everyone can take to keep over-claiming in check.

Foster a "Beyond Yourself" Culture

Significant research into over-claiming in recent decades has consistently found that simply reminding workers of others' efforts can dramatically reduce the prevalence of over-claiming. Savitsky et al. was among the first to observe this effect after inducing members of groups to consider their collaborators as individuals rather than as a collective whole. When individuals "unpacked" the members of their group by considering each group member's contributions separately before reporting their own contributions, they consistently credited their collaborators with a greater share of responsibility for the work product—and estimated less for themselves. In one example, a group of Harvard University students were asked to think of a time when they worked on a team of between three and six people and to do nothing more than draw pictures of their individual collaborators. When asked later to allocate responsibility for the remembered group's output, estimates for one specific task fell from 143% to nearly 107%. Over-claiming was not eliminated, but the extent of it was greatly reduced.

Opportunities to counteract over-claiming arise any time there are evaluations in the workplace, such as formal annual performance reviews or informal meetings during and after a project is completed. Clearly, asking team members to draw pictures of their colleagues as a remedy for over-claiming at the end of a joint endeavor may be viewed as silly, especially in work settings. But *any* step that causes people to notice, remember, and credit others' contributions can counteract egocentricity and reduce over-claiming. As Schroeder et al. found, this includes asking individuals to write down the initials of their collaborators before estimating their own contributions. Over-claiming also declines when individuals measure their own effort *before* assessing others, although the effect is less than when group members are rated first. When prompted to consider others, people tend to rely less on absolute assessments and to evaluate themselves and others with greater accuracy.

Raise Awareness of Indirect Contributions

As previously discussed, over-claiming is even greater in groups with supervisors, assistants, or other indirect contributors, even when there is evidence, as was observed in the handgrip competition, that they had little or no impact on the outcome. The strategies described above would also help temper over-claiming by indirect contributors, especially when they are given a concrete task to perform. How, then, do you ensure that peripheral players get due credit when, in fact, they do contribute to a group outcome, but in ways that are likely to be overlooked by the core team? In the puzzle experiments, workers were less likely to recognize any contributions from indirect actors. When workers, however, were shown video footage of managers actively strategizing before the game, they gave more credit to the indirect contributors (though not as much as the managers themselves claimed). This suggests that raising awareness of others on the periphery is critical. Videos are not a realistic solution in the real world, but senior leaders can underscore the accomplishments of indirect contributors through workplace communications, such as emails, newsletters, and 360-degree reviews that ask workers to reflect on others' achievements beyond those of their immediate coworkers.

Give Yourself a Reality Check

When people consciously think about others' efforts, either by jotting down the names of their collaborators or reflecting more concretely on their work, their self-assessments become more fair and accurate. But these measures happen only periodically, such as during evaluations or team progress reports. They do little to address the universal sense among some workers that they are always doing more work than others, which is a perception that damages business relationships and hurts job satisfaction. If you are feeling underappreciated or taken advantage of on the job, take a moment to reflect on the work you *don't* do—for instance, provide customer service or create marketing strategies—that is also critical to the organization's success.

Resist the Allure of Humility

Given the ample drawbacks to over-claiming, a reasonable conclusion might be to do the opposite: to *under*-claim your own responsibility for contributions to a group effort or, if you are a leader in the organization, to promote humility as a core company value. You may want to think twice before taking this approach. Although humility can have benefits for organizational culture and can increase social belonging, new research also suggests it can backfire in some contexts.[15] Building on prior studies of under-claimers, this author's latest research supports the finding that groups dislike under-claimers more than people who try to distribute equal credit within a team or people whose claims of responsibility are never learned. Far from being viewed as noble, under-claimers are widely seen as dishonest and their motives can seem suspicious to their peers.

Conclusion: Beware the Unintended Consequences

Nobody, as the saying goes, likes a braggart—even when the boasting is unintentional and motivated by egocentricity. People, as noted earlier, tend not to approve of or trust individuals who convey that they are above average. But this does not mean that efforts to temper its occurrence do not have their own unexpected costs. They do. Caruso et al. uncovered one of the most serious side effects of raising awareness of over-claiming: by asking members of a group to recalibrate their assessments of responsibility for an outcome, the ones who actually contributed significantly to the joint effort may realize their outsized roles with more salience and, as a result, become more dissatisfied and unwilling to work with collaborators who contributed less. This unfortunate effect occurred among cooperative groups, in which members worked toward a common goal for which the entire team, and not individual contributors, was recognized for the outcome. While this clearly undesirable result may be unavoidable, it is worth noting that it was not replicated in experiments involving competitive groups. When individual members of groups are recognized for their separate contributions—via a raise, promotion, or goodwill with a boss—Caruso et al. found that people who claimed higher levels of responsibility were not dissuaded from working with less-productive performers in the future. As the researchers noted in their study, "Some members who look beyond their own perspective may not like what they see." Even so, the problem of egocentric over-claiming is not intractable. Although employees are uniquely cognizant of their individual contributions to a project and are less aware of what others contribute, they are capable of recognizing when they do more or less than others. Managers can take steps to remind workers to consider collaborators, either by informally taking note of each team member's contributions or compiling and making transparent data that break down individual efforts. Employees would do well, too, to remember that team projects depend on many hands. "Eleanor Rigby" would never have captivated Beatles fans through the decades if it were not for Paul McCartney, John Lennon, George Harrison, *and* Ringo Starr.

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