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INFLUENCE OF ANONYMITY ON SURVEY DATA

In survey research, it is generally thought that anonymous questionnaires will produce more honest responses than questionnaires that require the respondent to record their name. Although this seems likely, there is surprisingly little experimental evidence in its support. We tested whether an anonymous survey will produce different results than one that requires respondents to include their name. A 10-item questionnaire was created that asked personal, and perhaps embarrassing questions (e.g., do you pee in the shower, do you view pornography), participants responded on a 9-point scale from never to always. Items such as these will often lead to socially desirable responding and people may respond differently depending on whether they are required to include their name. The questionnaires were distributed to 40 students throughout Concordia University of Edmonton main campus. Half the respondents were instructed to give their name on

the survey, whereas half remained anonymous. All participants chose to complete the survey voluntarily and none of the participants had their name disclosed. Results were based on 39 respondents (26 women, 13 men) of various ages (18-25) and varying ethnicities. Nineteen respondents were asked to provide their name and 20 responded anonymously. Responses for each item were compared between the identified and anonymous respondents using a multivariate analysis. The results indicated no difference on any of the questions. This study provides evidence that anonymity likely has no influence on the validity of responses to a paper and pencil questionnaire. Similar experiments should be conducted to compare other survey methods.

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