

# Study suggests people dislike you more for humblebragging than for regular boasting

January 12 2018, by Bob Yirka

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A team of researchers from Harvard University and UNC-Chapel Hill has conducted a study regarding humblebragging—in which a person boasts about an achievement but tries to make it sound less boastful by minimizing it—and report what they learned. In their paper published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, the group describes

their study and what they found.

Humblebragging is very common, the researchers note—people want to brag about their accomplishments, but do not want to come off as a braggart, so they try to cloak it with words that are meant to seem like they are still being humble. It is a form of false modesty. The problem with that approach, the researchers found, is that other people see right through it and they do not like it.

The study by the team involved nine experiments, all of which revolved around asking people to report how they felt when encountering humblebragging in one of three main areas: [social media](#), [field experiments](#) and in the [real world](#), where volunteers documented things they saw in diaries. In all, 646 people were surveyed regarding their feelings about humblebragging and 70 percent of them were able to recall an instance of humblebragging they had seen or heard recently.

The researchers also divided humblebragging into two main types: complaint and humility-based. The first occurs when somebody complains about something as a way of showing others that they have been asked to do something important, e.g. "I hate having to do these meet-and-greets with all these celebrities." The second is when someone attempts to brag using what is meant to be humility, e.g., "Why do I always get asked to the dance by so many guys."

The researchers found that people tend to notice and remember the second kind most often. They also found that most of the respondents preferred pure boasting to humblebragging—because, most reported, it is at least more honest. They also found that people would rather have listened to someone flat-out complain about something than have to listen to them humblebragging. The experiments also showed that people who engage in humblebragging are less liked (and trusted) in general than other people, though they also noted that most people engage in it

sometimes.

**More information:** Sezer, Ovul, Francesca Gino, and Michael I. Norton. "Humblebragging: A Distinct – and Ineffective – Self-Presentation Strategy." Harvard Business School Working Paper, [dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/14725901](https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/14725901) , [dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/14725901/15-080.pdf](https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/14725901/15-080.pdf)

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