

Don't be modest—it's OK to brag, study suggests

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If something positive happens in your life, don't be modest by keeping the news to yourself—brag about it to your close friend or family member, or risk having them feel devalued when they find out second hand, say researchers at the University of Michigan.

People are often concerned about being seen as braggarts. They avoid capitalizing on their [close relationships](#) even when it is likely their friends would ultimately learn about the news, according to a new study published online in the *Journal of Personality*.

The researchers say withholding information is a forecasting error. People overestimate how negatively their friend would react to disclosure and expect their friend would react more positively if they discovered the news on their own through external means.

"They neglect to predict that partners who later learn of the news ... in fact feel devalued," said

study co-author Oscar Ybarra, U-M professor of psychology.

Ybarra—along with U-M psychology doctoral student Zachary Reese and lead author Todd Chan, a U-M Ph.D. graduate and now a researcher at Facebook—conducted nine studies involving vignettes reviewed by nearly 2,200 participants.

In two vignettes, researchers examined how people responded to incidences of "missed capitalization," where an opportunity arose to disclose positive news but the individual stayed quiet.

About 80 participants imagined having dinner with a close friend, who asks how their work has been going. The response given was "work has been going all right." The next day, on a Facebook timeline, co-workers congratulated the individual on a promotion. The study participants then considered how they would feel being on the receiving end of the conversation—hearing a general response or being told about the promotion.

The participants felt more negative about the news if their friend—who received a promotion—gave a general answer, failing to capitalize when an opportunity to announce the information existed.

"Not being the recipient of positive self-disclosure may lead close friends to feel a host of negative emotions and to feel devalued in the friendship if they later find out about the [news](#)," the researchers wrote. "This feeling devalued may be accompanied by one reevaluating how much trust, value and emotional closeness one feels in the relationship as well."

Ybarra said this pattern of feeling negatively on the part of the [friend](#) exists because missed capitalization violates the relational norms of close relationships. Several alternative explanations could not account for the results, for example, the

idea that people may simply prefer to learn information about others (i.e., be "in the know") rather than not.

More information: Todd Chan et al. Better to brag: Underestimating the risks of avoiding positive self-disclosures in close relationships, *Journal of Personality* (2021). DOI: [10.1111/jopy.12635](https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12635)

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