

JONATHAN Z. BERMAN, EMMA E. LEVINE, ALIXANDRA BARASCH,
and DEBORAH A. SMALL*

People often brag about, or advertise, their good deeds to others. Seven studies investigate how bragging about prosocial behavior affects perceived generosity. The authors propose that bragging conveys information about an actor's good deeds, leading to an attribution of generosity. However, bragging also signals a selfish motivation (a desire for credit) that undermines the attribution of generosity. Thus, bragging has a positive effect when prosocial behavior is unknown because it informs others that an actor has behaved generously. However, bragging does not help—and often hurts—when prosocial behavior is already known, because it signals a selfish motive. In addition, the authors demonstrate that conspicuous cause marketing products have effects akin to bragging by signaling an impure motive for doing good deeds. Finally, the authors argue that bragging about prosocial behavior is unique because it undermines the precise information that the braggart is trying to convey (generosity). In contrast, bragging about personal achievements does not affect perceptions of the focal trait conveyed in the brag. These findings underscore the strategic considerations inherent in signaling altruism.

Keywords: prosocial behavior, altruism, bragging, self-promotion, signaling

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The Braggart's Dilemma: On the Social Rewards and Penalties of Advertising Prosocial Behavior

Next time I give money to anybody, it will be anonymous.... And I'm going to tell everybody.

—Larry David, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*

Public displays of generosity are ubiquitous. Rarely is there a university building or hospital wing that does not

bear the name of a generous benefactor. In some extreme cases, even coatrooms, staircases, and elevators of a building are tagged with the names of sponsors seeking recognition for their donation (Isherwood 2007). Such displays are not limited to the wealthy. The increasing prevalence of social networking sites makes it simple for people to broadcast their good deeds to wide audiences. People also signal their generosity to others by wearing buttons and T-shirts from charities or by purchasing conspicuous prosocial products such as a pair of TOMS Shoes, a Product Red T-shirt, or an electric car.

One reason it is surprising to see so many people advertise their good deeds is that there exists a strong norm to be modest about prosocial behavior. The spirit of charity rests in selflessness; when evaluating prosocial behavior, people discount good deeds that result in gains to the actor (Lin-Healy and Small 2013; Newman and Cain 2014). Furthermore, people often go to great lengths to communicate to themselves and to others that their good deeds are not moti-

*Jonathan Z. Berman is Assistant Professor of Marketing, London Business School (e-mail: jberman@london.edu). Emma E. Levine is a doctoral candidate in Operations and Information Management (e-mail: emmased@wharton.upenn.edu), Alixandra Barasch is a doctoral candidate in Marketing (e-mail: abarasch@wharton.upenn.edu), and Deborah A. Small is Associate Professor of Marketing and Psychology (e-mail: deborahs@wharton.upenn.edu), the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. The authors thank Clayton Critcher, Stephen Hoch, Joseph Simmons, Gal Zauberman, and the *JMR* review team for their thoughtful feedback on previous versions of this article. Partial support for this research comes from the Wharton Behavioral Lab. Address correspondence to the first author. Dilip Soman served as associate editor of this article.

vated by self-interest. To appear pure, prosocial actors will actively eschew selfish benefits, emphasize their sacrifice, or even subject themselves to personal suffering (Ariely, Bracha, and Meier 2009; Gneezy et al. 2010; Olivola and Shafir 2013).

Despite these attempts to demonstrate selflessness, people often engage in prosocial behavior to be regarded favorably by others (Bénabou and Tirole 2010; Ellingsen and Johannesson 2011; Giskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh 2011; Harbaugh 1998a, b; Lacatera and Macis 2010). Those who succeed at demonstrating their generosity receive positive returns on reputation and status (Flynn 2003; Flynn et al. 2006; Hardy and Van Vugt 2006), making it appealing to communicate one's good deeds to others. Ultimately, someone who performs a good deed and wants to receive credit for it is faced with a dilemma: by telling others, he runs the risk of being perceived as motivated by selfish desires, but by remaining silent, he runs the risk of no one finding out what he did and thereby receiving no credit at all.

In this article, we examine the effectiveness of bragging about one's prosocial behavior on an individual's reputation as a generous or altruistic person. We define bragging as informing others of a positive, self-relevant behavior or trait. Although people brag about a variety of accomplishments, we focus our investigation primarily on those who brag about their good deeds. Furthermore, while people who brag about their good deeds may do so for different reasons (e.g., to enhance their reputation, to influence others to act charitably), this article does not examine actual motives behind bragging. Instead, it investigates how bragging is perceived by others.

In addition, although recent work in consumer behavior related to charitable giving has focused almost exclusively on the factors that affect charitable behavior (e.g., Fennis, Janssen, and Vohs 2008; Kristofferson, White, and Peloza 2014; Liu and Aaker 2008; Shang, Reed, and Croson 2008; Small and Simonsohn 2008; Small and Verocchi 2009; Smith, Faro, and Burson 2013; White and Peloza 2009; Winterich, Mittal, and Ross 2013), very little research has examined perceptions of prosocial acts and whether people can advertise their good deeds without raising suspicion about their motives. We investigate when bragging succeeds or fails in communicating generosity to others.

SIGNALS OF MOTIVES FOR PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

The motive to be viewed favorably by others is a fundamental driver of human behavior (Baumeister 1982; Jones and Wortman 1973; Leary and Kowalski 1990; Tetlock 2002). To improve their image, people engage in impression management through a variety of means. For example, they seek out certain brands and products to communicate characteristics of the self or to gain social status (Belk 1998; Giskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh 2011; Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010; Veblen 1899; Wernerfelt 1990). People also utilize a range of interpersonal communication strategies to manage how they are perceived. In particular, they adopt ingratiation strategies to be liked by others, whereas they self-promote when attempting to convey competence (Jones and Pittman 1982). However, not all self-presentation strategies are effective at managing impressions. Although ingratiation tends to be successful at being liked, the success of self-promoters who want to be viewed as competent is

equivocal (Godfrey, Jones, and Lord 1986). Moreover, as illustrated by the examples at the beginning of this article, people sometimes self-promote to communicate very specific traits—including generosity. Yet it remains unclear when this is a successful strategy, if ever.

The judgment of another person's good deeds depends on the intentions that an observer believes underlie a given behavior (Reeder 2009). When evaluating prosocial behavior, an observer attempts to identify whether an actor's motivation is altruistic (i.e., this person is helping because he cares about the well-being of others) or selfish (i.e., this person is helping because he wants to reap the rewards that may result from doing good deeds). In situations in which self-presentation concerns are salient, people become highly sensitive to cues that suggest that an actor might have an ulterior motive (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Fein 1996; Fein, Hilton, and Miller 1990; Heyman et al. 2014). This is particularly true in the context of prosocial behavior because people hold a strong belief that humans are motivated by self-interest (Miller 1999; Miller and Ratner 1998). Merely reflecting on the reasons why a philanthropist contributed to a charity is enough to trigger suspicion and increase the perception that the philanthropist was motivated by selfish rather than altruistic reasons (Cricher and Dunning 2011).

What, then, do people think about an actor who advertises his good deeds? We expect that bragging about prosocial behavior leads to two opposing inferences. On the one hand, bragging may increase perceptions of altruism because it communicates that an actor does good deeds. On the other hand, bragging may decrease perceptions of altruism by signaling an ulterior motive (i.e., a selfish desire to enhance one's reputation) that undermines the belief that the actor sincerely cares or is intrinsically motivated to help. We expect that bragging increases perceptions of altruism when prosocial behavior is unknown because, without it, others have no evidence of generosity. However, we expect that bragging decreases perceptions of altruism when prosocial behavior is already known because bragging no longer conveys new information about an actor's good deeds. Instead, it triggers suspicion and signals that the braggart was motivated to attain the reputational benefits that come from being perceived as generous.

H_{1a} : Bragging increases perceptions of altruism when it provides new information about an actor's tendency to do good deeds.

H_{1b} : Bragging decreases perceptions of altruism when others are already aware of an actor's good deeds because it no longer provides new information regarding his behavior; instead, it signals that the actor was motivated by reputational benefits.

In H_{1a} and H_{1b} , we argue that there are two key aspects of advertising one's prosocial behavior that affect how it is perceived. The first is the extent to which it provides novel information about an actor's tendency to help others. The second is the extent to which it results in the attribution that a braggart was motivated by image concerns, rather than an intrinsic desire to help others. We expect that a variety of relevant factors will influence each of these inputs and, thus, whether bragging is successful in conveying generosity. In the following section, we provide an overview of key

factors and predict how they will influence perceptions of those who brag about their good deeds.

Factors That Influence Whether Bragging Conveys New Information

H_{1a} proposes that the effectiveness of bragging depends on prior knowledge about the person who does a good deed. In particular, we expect that bragging helps when it provides novel information about an actor's tendency to engage in prosocial behavior.

In addition to having information about a specific deed, people sometimes have prior knowledge about a person's reputation that can influence the effectiveness of bragging. We expect that someone who is not already known to be a generous person is likely to experience the most positive effects from bragging because doing so informs others that he does good deeds. However, we expect that someone who is already known to be generous will not be similarly rewarded for bragging. For such a person, bragging will not update people's beliefs about his tendency to help others. For example, if the leader of a nonprofit organization tells others that she spent a weekend organizing a charity event, the communication provides little new information about her character. However, if a person who does not have an existing reputation as a generous person tells others that she spent a weekend organizing a charity event, this communication is likely to boost perceptions of her character.

Factors That Influence the Perceived Motives of the Braggart

H_{1b} proposes that when an actor tells others of his good deeds, observers infer that the actor was motivated by selfish concerns, which decreases perceptions of generosity. However, other factors can affect the perceived intentions underlying a brag, which will influence how a braggart is perceived. For example, prior research has found that bragging incites less suspicion when it occurs in response to a question (e.g., "Was your paper accepted for publication?" "Yes, it was.") than when it is an unprompted statement (e.g., "My paper was accepted for publication."). Because it is socially normative to answer questions truthfully, responding to a question removes suspicion that a person is trying to promote his reputation (Holtgraves and Srull 1989; Tal-Or 2010).

In a similar vein, the content of a braggart's message may alter the extent to which others perceive him to be motivated by image concerns. In particular, the message content can signal to others that a prosocial actor has a sincere reason for discussing his good deeds. For example, a person may convey that he is telling others about his good deeds because he wants to increase awareness about a cause, raise additional money for charity, or express solidarity toward those in need. In these cases, an actor is likely to be perceived as less motivated by selfish concerns than someone who does not signal an altruistic reason to brag.

SIGNALING ALTRUISM THROUGH CONSUMPTION

In addition to using verbal communication, people can also advertise their good deeds to others through the products they consume. Certain prosocial brands and products contain distinct attributes that make it easy for others to recognize that people who purchased them contributed to a

good cause. We expect that engaging in conspicuous consumption of prosocial products will be perceived as a form of bragging. Specifically, we predict that conspicuous consumption of prosocial products will undermine perceived generosity because it signals that the consumer was motivated in part by reputational concerns, rather than a pure altruistic motive. Thus, a consumer who is known to purchase conspicuous prosocial products will be judged as less altruistic than a consumer who is known to purchase inconspicuous prosocial products.

BRAGGING ABOUT PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR IS UNIQUE

So far, we have argued that bragging about prosocial behavior can undermine the information that the braggart is trying to convey. When prosocial behavior is already known, bragging becomes self-defeating: by telling others of his good deeds, a prosocial actor is viewed as caring less about helping others, which reduces perceptions of altruism. Our final predictions examine the mechanism by which bragging affects perceptions of altruism.

We predict that although bragging about prosocial behavior undermines perceptions of altruism, not all brags are self-defeating. Specifically, we do not expect that bragging about personal achievements or self-interested pursuits will undermine perceptions of the desired trait in a similar manner. For example, Holtgraves and Srull (1989) find that people who spontaneously self-promoted their success on intelligence-related tests were not viewed as being less intelligent than those who were asked about their performance on these tests. Similarly, Schlenker and Leary (1982) show that people who described their good performance after finishing a tennis tournament or an exam were not judged to have different abilities than those who were modest about their performance.

Building on these findings, we investigate how the success of bragging depends on the bragged-about trait. We propose that self-promotion of prosocial behavior is discounted in the eyes of others, whereas self-promotion of a personal achievement is not. Self-promotion of prosocial behavior signals that an actor was motivated in part by image concerns, which is at odds with having an intrinsic desire to help. As a result, when a good deed is already known, bragging reduces perceived intrinsic motivation and trait altruism. However, for self-interested pursuits, image concerns are not directly at odds with perceptions about the desired personal qualities. For example, if an academic boasts about a research award he received, he will not be judged as less of a researcher; however, if he boasts about his charitable donations, his generosity will be discounted. Thus, we expect that—unlike prosocial behavior—bragging about personal achievements and activities pursued for the self will have no effect on perceived intrinsic motivation or on perceptions of the trait conveyed in the brag.

H_{2a}: Whereas bragging about a good deed undermines perceived intrinsic motivation for helping, bragging about activities pursued for the self does not undermine perceived intrinsic motivation for those activities.

H_{2b}: Whereas bragging about a good deed undermines perceptions of altruism, bragging about activities pursued for the self does not undermine perceptions of the relevant traits.

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

The following studies show how bragging about prosocial behavior affects perceptions of altruism. Studies 1–4 test H_{1a} – H_{1b} . Studies 1a and 1b demonstrate that bragging increases perceptions of altruism when prosocial behavior is unknown but decreases perceptions of altruism when prosocial behavior is already known. Study 2 examines how prior knowledge about a person influences the effectiveness of a brag and demonstrates that bragging is most effective for those who do not have a preexisting reputation as a generous person. Study 3 shows that the message content of the brag can also influence its effectiveness; someone who brags and recruits others to donate is viewed as being more altruistic than someone who simply brags. Study 4 demonstrates that when it is known that a person purchased a prosocial product, those who purchased a conspicuous prosocial product are viewed as less altruistic than those who purchased an inconspicuous prosocial product. Studies 5 and 6 test H_{2a} – H_{2b} and show that bragging about prosocial behavior decreases the perception that the actor was intrinsically motivated to help, which in turn decreases perceptions of altruism. However, bragging about self-interested pursuits does not undermine the braggart's perceived intrinsic motivation. As a result, trait perceptions remain consistent with the information conveyed in the brag.

In all studies, our sample size was determined in advance, and we report all measures assessed. No conditions or participants were dropped from any of the analyses (Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn 2011).

STUDY 1A: BRAGGING ON FACEBOOK

Study 1a investigates the inferences that people make of those who brag about their prosocial behavior. We expect that bragging communicates that an actor has done a good deed but also signals that he may have had a selfish motive. Thus, a person whose good deeds are unknown to others will be viewed as more altruistic when he brags than when he does not brag because, otherwise, no one will know of his good behavior. However, a person whose good deeds are already known to others will be viewed as less altruistic when he chooses to brag because bragging no longer communicates new information about the behavior and instead signals that his actions were motivated by reputation concerns.

Method

Two hundred one people from the United States (39% female; mean age = 24.8 years) were recruited to participate in an online study in exchange for payment. We conducted a 2 (donation visibility: known, unknown) \times 2 (Facebook post: brag, no brag) between-subjects design. Participants read the following: "Imagine that you are walking around one day, when you run into a colleague of yours named Jeff. The two of you talk for a few minutes and catch up on life. During your walk, you pass by a group that is taking donations for the local food bank, a charity that helps feed the hungry." In the known condition, participants read that Jeff donates \$20 to the food bank, whereas in the unknown condition, no information about his prosocial behavior was provided. Participants then read that they later see that Jeff has posted a message to Facebook, which was displayed to the participants. In the brag condition, the post read, "Just

donated \$20 to the food bank," whereas in the no-brag condition, the post read, "Going to my favorite restaurant tonight." For images of the stimuli, see Appendix A.

Participants first rated Jeff on a 12-item perceptions of altruism measure ($\alpha = .92$), which included 6 positive items (moral, nice, altruistic, good, sincere, and pure) and 6 negative items that were reverse-coded (immoral, mean, selfish, bad, insincere, and impure; see Barasch et al. 2014). The 12-item measure used as our main dependent variable is similar to existing measures of moral character (e.g., Reeder and Spores 1983; Wojciszke, Bazinska, and Jaworski 1998) but is more focused on altruism-relevant traits than previous scales (which typically also include altruism-irrelevant traits that are not central to our theory [e.g., honest, righteous, tolerant]).¹ Next, participants evaluated (1) their own likelihood and (2) their own interest in donating \$20 to the local food bank on a future occasion. We included these items to explore any social influence effects of bragging and averaged them to create a two-item donation likelihood measure ($\alpha = .80$). All items were rated on seven-point scales ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 7 = "extremely."²

To obtain a manipulation check of whether the bragging treatment successfully increased the perception that Jeff is a self-promoter, we created a five-item self-promotion scale ($\alpha = .94$; adapted from Ames, Rose, and Anderson 2006). Specifically, participants rated the following statements on seven-point scales ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree": (1) "Jeff likes to show off if he gets the chance," (2) "Jeff likes to impress others," (3) "Jeff likes to be complimented," (4) "Jeff likes to be the center of attention," and (5) "Jeff thinks that he is a special person."

At the end of the survey, we included two attention checks. Participants selected (1) whether they saw Jeff donate to charity in person ("yes" or "no") and (2) the statement that corresponded with Jeff's Facebook post from a list that included the two Facebook posts in the study. A total of 190 participants (94.5%) correctly answered both attention checks. In this and all subsequent studies, our results include every participant, and all results hold when participants who failed the attention checks are removed from the analysis. Web Appendix A presents a full description of attention check items and results for all subsequent studies. Finally, in this and all subsequent studies, participants indicated their age, gender, and political leaning. Analyses of these variables show no significant interactions affecting our main dependent variables and will not be reported further.

Results

Manipulation check. A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant main effect of Facebook post on perceptions that Jeff was a self-promoter ($F(1, 197) =$

¹In addition to running an analysis on the 12-item perceptions of altruism measure, in Studies 1–4 we conducted additional analyses to probe the robustness of our results. For these analyses, we used a shortened two-item measure consisting solely of the "altruistic" and "selfish" items to probe the robustness of our results because these items pertain most directly to perceptions of altruism. We replicated all findings using this shortened measure.

²In Studies 1a and 1b, participants evaluated two additional exploratory measures that did not produce any significant results: (1) the extent to which they believed that donating to the local food bank was a worthy cause and (2) how much impact they believed a \$20 donation to the food bank would have.

50.18, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .203$). Participants viewed Jeff as more self-promoting when he posted about his charity donation ($M = 5.10$, $SD = .98$) than when he posted about going to his favorite restaurant ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.46$). No other effects were significant (each $p > .45$).

Perceptions of altruism. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant donation visibility \times Facebook post interaction on perceptions of altruism ($F(1, 197) = 25.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .116$). When the donation was unknown, bragging had a positive effect: participants rated Jeff as being *more* altruistic when he bragged ($M = 5.38$, $SD = .91$) than when he did not brag ($M = 4.63$, $SD = .71$; $t(99) = 4.65$, $p < .001$). However, when the donation was known, bragging had a negative effect: participants rated Jeff as being *less* altruistic when he bragged ($M = 5.24$, $SD = .91$) than when he did not brag ($M = 5.72$, $SD = .90$; $t(98) = -2.66$, $p = .009$). Figure 1 displays these results.

Social influence. We also examined whether Jeff's bragging influenced participants' reported likelihood to donate to the charity. Although the pattern of means matched those of perceptions of altruism, a two-way ANOVA did not reveal any significant effects (each $p > .20$). Specifically, when the donation was unknown, participants were slightly—but not significantly—more likely to donate when Jeff bragged ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.41$) than when he did not brag ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.52$; $t(99) = .80$, $p = .43$). When the donation was known, participants were slightly—but not significantly—less likely to donate when Jeff bragged ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.47$) than when he did not brag ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.27$; $t(98) = -.45$, $p = .64$).

STUDY 1B: BRAGGING BY WEARING A BUTTON

Study 1b presents a conceptual replication of Study 1a with the following changes. First, we conducted the study using student participants in a university lab. Second, we utilized a more subtle form of bragging: rather than posting on Facebook, Jeff wore a button that either advertised his donation to charity or supported the school's basketball team.

Method

One hundred forty-eight students from the University of Pennsylvania (58% female; mean age = 21.4 years) were recruited to participate in a laboratory study in exchange for payment. We conducted a 2 (donation visibility: known, unknown) \times 2 (button message: no brag, brag) between-subjects design. Participants read the following: "Imagine that you are walking around campus one day, when you run into a student from your class named Jeff. The two of you talk for a few minutes about school. Jeff says that he is a big fan of Penn basketball and plans on going to the game tonight. During your walk, you pass a student group that is taking donations for the Philadelphia Food Bank, a charity that helps feed the hungry." In the known condition, participants read that Jeff donated \$20 to the food bank, whereas in the unknown condition, no information was provided. Participants then read that they see Jeff later that day and he is now wearing a button. The image of the button is displayed to the participants. In the brag condition, the button read, "I donated money to the Philadelphia Food Bank!!!" and in the no-brag condition, the button read "Go Quakers!!!" (for a depiction of the stimuli, see Web Appendix B). The rest of the study proceeded in the same manner as in Study 1a. All measures achieved sufficiently high reliability (each $\alpha > .81$).

Results

Manipulation check. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of button message on perceptions that Jeff was self-promoting ($F(1, 144) = 5.76$, $p = .018$, $\eta_p^2 = .038$). Specifically, participants viewed Jeff as more self-promoting when he wore a button about his charity donation ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.34$) than when he wore a button supporting the basketball team ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.46$). No other effects were significant (each $p > .20$).

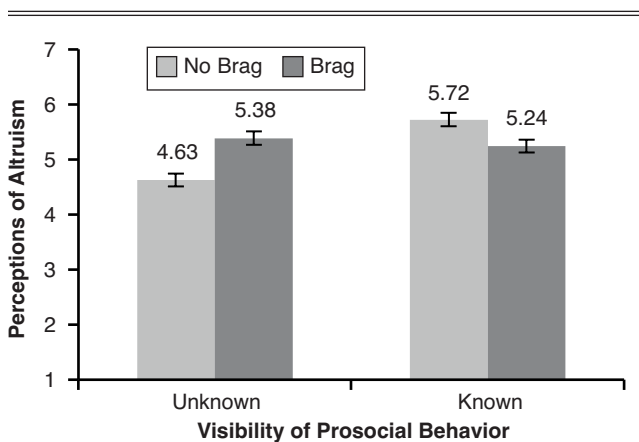
Perceptions of altruism. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant donation visibility \times button message interaction ($F(1, 144) = 27.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .159$). When the donation was unknown, bragging had a positive effect: participants judged Jeff to be more altruistic when he bragged ($M = 5.42$, $SD = .69$) than when he did not brag ($M = 4.66$, $SD = .73$; $t(71) = 4.57$, $p < .001$). However, when the donation was already known, bragging had a negative effect: participants judged Jeff to be less altruistic when he bragged ($M = 5.29$, $SD = .84$) than when he did not brag ($M = 5.73$, $SD = .49$; $t(73) = -2.77$, $p = .007$).

Social influence. A two-way ANOVA revealed no significant effects on likelihood to donate (each $p > .21$), although the pattern of means followed those of perceptions of altruism. Specifically, when the donation was unknown, participants were slightly—but not significantly—more likely to donate when Jeff bragged ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.03$) than when he did not brag ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.29$; $t(71) = .26$, $p = .80$). When the donation was known, participants were slightly—but not significantly—less likely to donate when Jeff bragged ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.07$) than when he did not brag ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.19$; $t(73) = -1.53$, $p = .13$).

Discussion

Studies 1a and 1b highlight how bragging provides information about one's prosocial behavior but can also under-

Figure 1
PERCEPTIONS OF ALTRUISM (STUDY 1A)



Notes: This figure presents evaluations of Jeff's altruistic character in Study 1a as a function of the visibility of his prosocial behavior and whether he bragged on Facebook. Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

mine perceptions of altruism. People do not get credit for their prosocial behavior when no one knows about it; therefore, bragging pays off when an actor's deeds are unknown to others. However, bragging is self-defeating when the deed is already known. In the next study, we examine whether prior knowledge about a person influences the effectiveness of bragging.

STUDY 2: THE SUCCESS OF BRAGGING DEPENDS ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF A PERSON'S CHARACTER

The previous study shows that when a person's behavior is unknown, bragging about prosocial behavior increases perceptions of altruism. In the present study, we examine whether certain types of people benefit from bragging more than others. We expect that bragging helps the most for those who are not known to be generous because it provides information that they do good deeds. However, bragging is less effective for those already known to be generous because it provides no new information about their tendency to do good deeds.

To examine the role of prior knowledge about a person's prosocial reputation, in Study 2, we manipulate the person's occupation. In particular, participants evaluate either a person whose occupation is associated with self-interest (an investment banker) or a person whose occupation is associated with compassion and a desire to help others (a social worker).

Method

Two hundred eighteen students from the University of Pennsylvania (62% female; mean age = 21.5 years) were recruited to participate in a laboratory study in exchange for payment. We conducted a 2 (occupation: investment banker, social worker) \times 2 (statement: no brag, brag) between-subjects design.

Participants were told to imagine that they were invited to a dinner party where they met a man named Jeff. We manipulated occupation by informing participants that Jeff is either an investment banker who works in mergers and acquisitions or a social worker who works with underprivileged children. To control for perceptions of free time, across both conditions, participants learned that Jeff works 50 hours per week. Participants then read that during the dinner there was a lull in the conversation. In the no-brag condition, Jeff mentions that the weather has been improving lately, whereas in the brag condition, Jeff mentions that he recently spent an afternoon volunteering for the local soup kitchen. Participants then rated Jeff on the same 12-item perceptions of altruism measure ($\alpha = .90$) and 5-item self-promotion manipulation check ($\alpha = .95$) used in the previous studies.

Results

Manipulation check. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of statement on perceptions that Jeff was self-promoting ($F(1, 214) = 72.18, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .252$). Specifically, participants viewed Jeff as more self-promoting when he bragged about his volunteering ($M = 4.59, SD = 1.20$) than when he mentioned the weather ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.16$). There was also a marginally significant effect of occupation on perceptions of self-promotion ($F(1, 214) =$

$3.80, p = .053, \eta_p^2 = .017$) such that Jeff was considered slightly more self-promoting as an investment banker ($M = 4.07, SD = 1.32$) than a social worker ($M = 3.75, SD = 1.38$). The occupation \times statement interaction was not significant ($p = .19$).

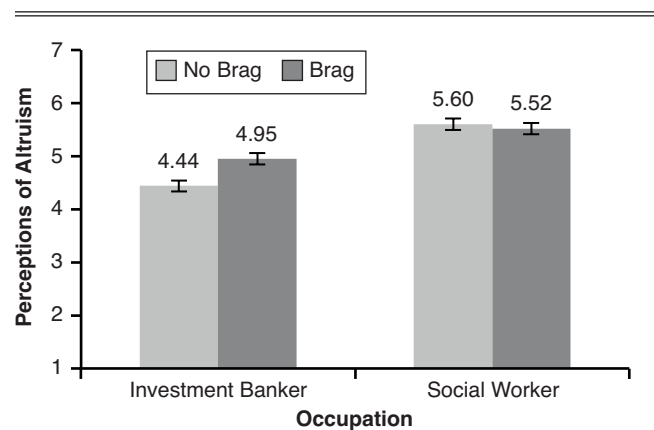
Perceptions of altruism. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant occupation \times statement interaction ($F(1, 214) = 7.56, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .034$). When Jeff was an investment banker, bragging had a positive effect: participants judged Jeff to be more altruistic when he bragged ($M = 4.95, SD = .93$) than when he did not brag ($M = 4.44, SD = .72; t(107) = 3.14, p = .002$). However, when Jeff was a social worker, bragging did not affect perceptions of altruism: participants judged Jeff similarly when he bragged ($M = 5.52, SD = .77$) to when he did not brag ($M = 5.60, SD = .68; t(107) = -.58, p = .56$). Figure 2 displays these results.

Discussion

Study 2 shows that prior knowledge about an actor's prosocial reputation influences the effectiveness of bragging. An actor who does not have a preexisting reputation as a generous person (e.g., an investment banker) gains more from bragging about his good deeds than an actor who has a strong reputation as a generous person (e.g., a social worker). In this sense, a person's reputation acts similarly to the role of knowledge in Studies 1a and 1b. An investment banker gains from bragging because doing so provides information about his tendency to do good deeds that was previously unknown to others.

Notably, we do not find that bragging diminishes perceptions of the social worker's altruism, despite participants knowing that he already does good deeds. In Studies 1a and 1b, the brag contained the exact information that was already known. In contrast, in this study, the brag contained information about Jeff's volunteering behavior that was not identical to the information gleaned from the knowledge that Jeff is a social worker. It is likely that bragging would have hurt Jeff if he directly bragged about information already known (i.e., being a social worker), rather than his

Figure 2
PERCEPTIONS OF ALTRUISM (STUDY 2)



Notes: This figure presents evaluations of Jeff's altruistic character in Study 2 as a function of his occupation and whether he bragged about his volunteering. In all cases, his behavior was unknown to the observer. Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

volunteer work. In addition, according to the previously reported manipulation check, the social worker was viewed as slightly less self-promoting than the investment banker. In other words, the same statement of information (i.e., the brag) may be interpreted differently when it comes from a social worker than when it comes from an investment banker. People may be less suspicious of those who devote their careers to good deeds than they are of those who do not.

In the subsequent studies, we further explore when bragging does and does not signal a selfish motive. To do this, we always make information about a person's good deeds known to others, and we manipulate the content or context of the brag. This approach enables us to examine how the act of bragging affects motive and trait inferences, independent of information about a person's behavior. In particular, in the next study, we investigate how the content of a message influences the perceived intentions of a braggart.

STUDY 3: MESSAGE CONTENT AFFECTS PERCEIVED INTENTIONS

In Study 3, we examine whether manipulating the message content can enable people to simultaneously advertise their good deeds while minimizing suspicion regarding their motives. To investigate the mechanism by which bragging affects perceptions of altruism, we also measure perceptions of the braggart's intrinsic motivation to help others.

One way in which people may be able to convey their generosity without inciting suspicion is by recruiting others to help support a cause. By encouraging others to help, a person can plausibly convey that he is telling other people about his good deeds—not because he wants to receive credit for them but because he wants to raise money or awareness for the cause he supports. Thus, we expect that, relative to those who simply brag, those who brag and recruit others to donate will be perceived as more intrinsically motivated to help others and, as a result, more altruistic.

Method

Three hundred people from the United States (31% female; mean age = 29.5 years) were recruited to participate in an online study in exchange for payment. Participants were allocated into one of three conditions in a between-subjects design.

Participants were asked to imagine that they are walking around town when they run into a colleague named Jeff. They pass by a table taking donations for the Red Cross, and they see Jeff donate \$20 to the Red Cross. Note that because they see Jeff donate, the present study resembles the known condition in Studies 1a and 1b. Later, they go home and see a message Jeff posted on Facebook, which is then displayed to participants. In the no-brag condition, the post read "Going to the movies tonight!"; in the brag condition, the post read "Just donated \$20 to the Red Cross!"; and in the brag + recruit condition, the post read "Just donated \$20 to the Red Cross, and you should too! <http://www.redcross.com>."

Participants then rated Jeff on the same 12-item perceptions of altruism measure ($\alpha = .91$) used in the previous studies. Participants also evaluated nine statements intended to explore Jeff's motivation for volunteering (e.g., "Jeff has a genuine passion for helping others"; for full measures, see

Appendix B), which we averaged to create a perceived intrinsic motivation measure ($\alpha = .91$). Participants also evaluated Jeff on the same five-item self-promotion manipulation check ($\alpha = .95$) used in the previous studies.

Results

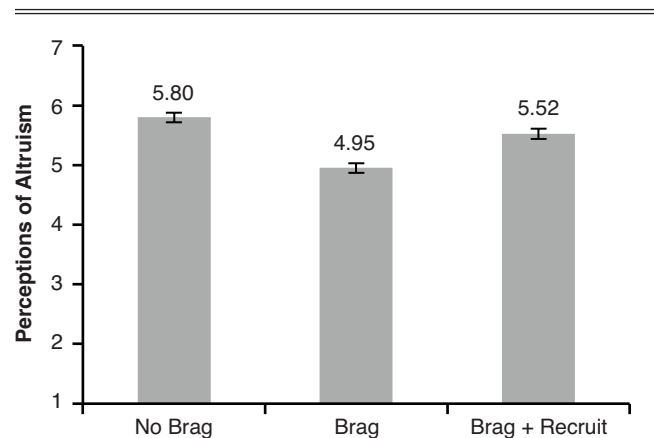
Manipulation check. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of Facebook post on perceptions that Jeff was self-promoting ($F(2, 297) = 56.64, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .287$). Jeff was viewed as more self-promoting in the brag condition ($M = 5.22, SD = 1.08$) and the brag + recruit condition ($M = 4.75, SD = 1.34$) than the no-brag condition ($M = 3.37, SD = 1.31; ts > 7.32, ps < .001$). In addition, Jeff was seen as more self-promoting in the brag condition than the brag + recruit condition ($t(199) = 2.78, p = .006$).

Perceptions of altruism. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of Facebook post on perceptions of altruism ($F(2, 297) = 26.92, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .153$). Jeff was viewed as more altruistic in the no-brag condition ($M = 5.80, SD = .72$) than the brag + recruit condition ($M = 5.51, SD = .84; t(196) = 2.58, p = .011$) and the brag condition ($M = 4.95, SD = .94; t(199) = 7.20, p < .001$). Importantly, participants viewed Jeff as more altruistic in the brag + recruit condition than the brag condition ($t(199) = 4.49, p < .001$). Figure 3 displays these results.

Perceived intrinsic motivation. The perceived intrinsic motivation measure followed a similar pattern. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of Facebook post on perceptions of intrinsic motivation ($F(2, 297) = 49.54, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .250$). Participants viewed Jeff as more intrinsically motivated in the no-brag condition ($M = 5.43, SD = .82$) than the brag + recruit condition ($M = 4.77, SD = 1.07; t(196) = 4.88, p < .001$) and the brag condition ($M = 4.04, SD = 1.05; t(199) = 10.42, p < .001$). Furthermore, participants viewed Jeff as more intrinsically motivated in the brag + recruit condition than the brag condition ($t(199) = 4.84, p < .001$).

Mediation analysis. We predicted that the effect of bragging on perceptions of altruism will be mediated by the extent to which people believe that Jeff is intrinsically moti-

Figure 3
PERCEPTIONS OF ALTRUISM (STUDY 3)



Notes: This figure presents evaluations of Jeff's altruistic character in Study 3. In all cases, the behavior was known to the observer. Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

vated to help others. We ran a bootstrap mediation analysis that included Facebook post (no brag, brag, and brag + recruit) as a categorical independent variable, perceived intrinsic motivation as the mediator variable, and perceptions of altruism as the dependent measure (SPSS Macro *MEDIATE*; Hayes and Preacher 2013). We find that perceived intrinsic motivation mediates the effect of Facebook post on perceptions of altruism in the predicted direction (indirect effect = .16, SE = .026, 95% confidence interval CI = [.12, .22]).

Discussion

These results show that the content of a message can affect the perceived intentions of the braggart. Those who brag and recruit others to donate are viewed as more intrinsically motivated to help others and, as a result, more altruistic than those who brag without recruiting others to donate. However, those who brag and recruit may still not be perceived as purely altruistic and can still incite suspicion regarding their motives. As a result, people perceive them as less intrinsically motivated and less altruistic than those who donate to charity but do not mention their donation to others. In the next study, we examine whether signaling one's good deeds through conspicuous cause marketing products is penalized in a manner similar to verbal bragging.

STUDY 4: SIGNALING GENEROSITY WITH CONSPICUOUS PROSOCIAL PRODUCTS

The studies so far have examined perceptions of people who signal their generosity by verbally communicating their good deeds. Another way that people attempt to signal their generosity is through consuming conspicuous prosocial products. Consumers often use products to signal social identities and characteristics of the self (Belk 1988; Berger and Heath 2007; Berger and Ward 2010; Chan, Berger, and Van Boven 2012; Solomon 1983; Veblen 1899). Just as riding a Harley-Davidson motorcycle signals a free and rebellious spirit (Schembri 2009), purchasing a charity T-shirt signals generosity and concern for others.

In Study 4, we examine whether people who purchase prosocial products are viewed differently if the product is more or less conspicuous (i.e., easily identifiable as being prosocial). Consistent with our previous findings, we expect that consuming a conspicuous prosocial product will undermine perceptions of altruism because the consumer will be viewed as being motivated in part by an ulterior motive (i.e., to be perceived by others as being generous). To test our hypothesis that purchasing a conspicuous (vs. inconspicuous) prosocial product will undermine perceptions of altruism, we made sure that participants in this study were always aware of an actor's good deed, again resembling the known condition in Studies 1a and 1b.

Furthermore, to rule out the possibility that conspicuous consumption has a general negative effect on perceived altruism, we also include a condition in which participants evaluate a person who purchases a conspicuous or an inconspicuous product that is unrelated to generosity. In contrast to our prediction about prosocial products, we expect that those who purchase conspicuous products that signal identities and traits unrelated to generosity will not be judged as less generous than those who consume inconspicuous products.

Method

Four hundred people from the United States (67% female; mean age = 29.1 years) were recruited to participate in an online study in exchange for payment. We conducted a 2 (product type: charity, noncharity) \times 2 (shoe style: conspicuous, inconspicuous) between-subjects design. All participants read that Jeff, a college student, was searching for shoes at a local store. Jeff then looks at the section that sells Reverse shoes, a brand that is currently popular among college students. We manipulated whether the shoe that Jeff purchases is associated with a charity. We also manipulated whether Jeff purchases a conspicuous or an inconspicuous shoe.

In the charity condition, participants read that Reverse shoes are popular because "for every pair of Reverse shoes that is purchased, the company donates a small amount of money to Hunger Relief, an organization that helps feed the needy." Participants then read that Jeff picked out a specific pair of shoes for purchase. In the conspicuous condition, participants read that the Reverse shoes that Jeff purchased are very distinctive, bright orange in color, and as a result, "when Jeff is wearing this shoe, everyone can tell that he bought a pair of shoes that help a charitable cause." In the inconspicuous condition, participants were told that the Reverse shoes Jeff purchased are not at all distinctive, white in color, and as a result, "when Jeff is wearing this shoe, no one can tell that he bought a pair of shoes that help a charitable cause."

In the noncharity condition, participants were told that Reverse shoes are popular because "the basketball players on [Jeff's] school team wear Reverse shoes." Participants then read that Jeff picked out a specific pair of shoes for purchase. In the conspicuous condition, participants read that the shoes that Jeff purchased are very distinctive, bright orange, and as a result, "when Jeff is wearing this shoe, everyone can tell that he bought a pair of shoes that show support for his school." In the inconspicuous condition, participants read that the shoes are not at all distinctive, white in color, and as a result, "when Jeff is wearing this shoe, no one can tell that he bought a pair of shoes that show support for his school." Participants then evaluated Jeff on the 12-item perceptions of altruism measure ($\alpha = .86$) and 5-item self-promotion measure ($\alpha = .95$) used in the previous studies.³

Results

Manipulation check. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of shoe style on perceptions of self-promotion: Jeff was perceived as more self-promoting when he bought a conspicuous pair of shoes ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.19$) than when he bought an inconspicuous pair of shoes ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.53$; $F(1, 396) = 181.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .314$). There was also a significant product type \times shoe style interaction ($F(1, 396) = 11.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .029$), whereby shoe style had a stronger effect for the charity shoe than on the noncharity shoe. However, the effect of shoe style on

³In this and all subsequent studies, we included exploratory measures that examined Jeff's likability because previous research has found some evidence that self-promotion reduces likability (Godfrey, Jones, and Lord 1986; Holtgraves and Srull 1989). A full description of items and results appears in Web Appendix C.

judged self-promotion was still significant across both the charity and noncharity conditions (each $p < .001$).

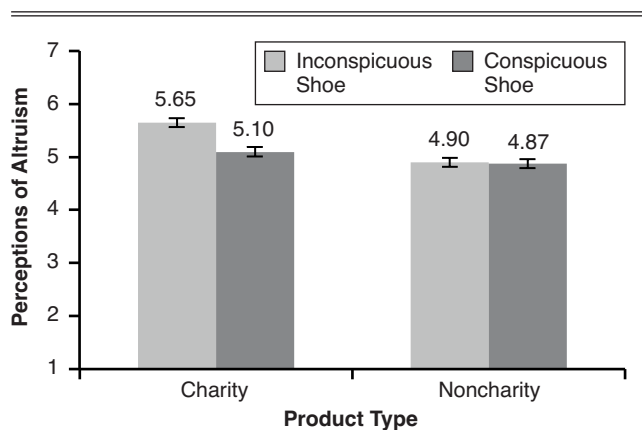
Perceptions of altruism. Consistent with our hypothesis, a two-way ANOVA revealed a significant product type \times shoe style interaction ($F(1, 396) = 9.57, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .024$). When purchasing a charity shoe, conspicuous consumption hurt: participants judged Jeff to be less altruistic when he purchased the conspicuous shoe ($M = 5.10, SD = .87$) than when he purchased the inconspicuous shoe ($M = 5.65, SD = .79; t(196) = -4.68, p < .001$). However, when shopping for the noncharity shoe, conspicuous consumption had no effect: participants judged Jeff to be equally altruistic whether he chose to purchase a conspicuous shoe ($M = 4.87, SD = .81$) or an inconspicuous shoe ($M = 4.90, SD = .90; t(200) = -.24, p = .81$). Figure 4 displays these results.

Discussion

This study shows that when a purchase is known to others, those who purchase conspicuous prosocial products are perceived to be less altruistic than those who purchase inconspicuous prosocial products. Furthermore, we demonstrate that this effect is unique to products related to generosity; conspicuous consumption of products unrelated to generosity does not influence perceptions of altruism.

In this study, all participants in the charity condition were made aware of Jeff's purchase of a prosocial product, mimicking the known condition in Studies 1a and 1b. Although a conspicuous prosocial product may undermine generosity, it still signals information to others that the person did a good deed by purchasing such a product. Thus, if a prosocial purchase is otherwise unknown, a person displaying a conspicuous prosocial product may actually be evaluated more positively than a person displaying an inconspicuous prosocial product that no one can identify as being related to charity. This may explain the success of conspicuous prosocial brands, such as TOMS shoes or Product Red clothing; consumers who wear these brands inform others that they have done a good deed that would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Figure 4
PERCEPTIONS OF ALTRUISM (STUDY 4)



Notes: This figure presents evaluations of Jeff's altruistic character in Study 4 as a function of the product type and the style of shoe he purchased. In all cases, his behavior was known to the observer. Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Finally, note that participants in the conspicuous condition were made explicitly aware that the shoe broadly signaled charity or school pride. We did this to ensure that participants understood the signals associated with the conspicuous product. However, one limitation of the present study is that in the real world, these signals may be weaker or may not be universally recognized and, as a result, may not always be viewed negatively.

In the next study, we examine the differences between bragging about one's generosity and bragging about traits and achievements that are irrelevant to generosity. We also further explore the mechanism that causes bragging about prosocial behavior to undermine perceptions of generosity.

STUDY 5: BRAGGING ABOUT PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR VERSUS PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

In addition to advertising their prosocial behavior, people frequently advertise their personal achievements and gains for the self. Study 5 investigates whether bragging about prosocial behavior (e.g., volunteering to charity) is different from bragging about self-interested pursuits (e.g., completing a 10K race). We also explore the mechanism by which bragging reduces credit given for a specific behavior. In particular, we show that bragging about prosocial behavior is self-defeating: by advertising his good deeds, a braggart implies that he was less intrinsically motivated to help and therefore gets less credit for his actions. However, bragging about self-interested pursuits is not self-defeating: someone who advertises his personal achievements does not undermine the impression that he was intrinsically motivated to achieve his goals. As a result, people do not discount the accomplishments of those who brag about their personal achievements.

Method

Two hundred people from the United States (44% female; mean age = 30.1 years) were recruited to participate in an online study in exchange for payment. We conducted a 2 (activity type: prosocial, athletic) \times 2 (Facebook post: no brag, brag) between-subjects design.

Participants imagined running into a colleague who had either just volunteered for the local soup kitchen or just completed a 10K race. Again, note that across all conditions, the behavior is observed and resembles the known condition from Studies 1a and 1b. Specifically, the scenario read (athletic condition in brackets): "Imagine that you are walking around town one afternoon when you see that the local soup kitchen is collecting food for the homeless [that there is a local 10K race that has just finished]. At the event, you see a colleague of yours named Jeff who has just finished volunteering for the soup kitchen [running in the race]. The two of you talk for a few minutes and catch up on life." Next, participants read that later that day they saw that Jeff had posted to Facebook. In the prosocial/brag condition, the post read, "Just volunteered with the soup kitchen" and in the athletic/brag condition, the post read, "Just completed a 10K race." In both the athletic and prosocial no-brag conditions, the post read, "Going to my favorite restaurant tonight."

Participants evaluated nine statements intended to explore Jeff's motivation for volunteering or running in the 10K. These items were the same those used in Study 3,

adapted to fit each scenario (e.g., “Jeff has a genuine passion for helping others [running]”; $\alpha = .90$). Participants also evaluated Jeff’s traits in the respective domain. In the prosocial condition, participants rated Jeff’s altruism using the following items: generous, kind, selfish (reverse-coded), and caring ($\alpha = .87$).⁴ In the athletic condition, participants rated Jeff’s athleticism using the following items: athletic, sporty, unhealthy (reverse-coded), and active ($\alpha = .81$). All items employed seven-point scales. Finally, we included the same manipulation check items as in the previous studies to measure whether participants viewed Jeff as a self-promoter ($\alpha = .93$).

Results

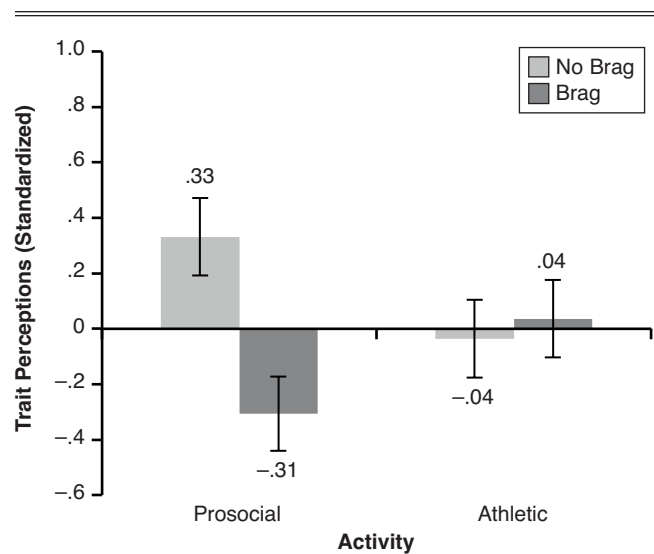
Manipulation check. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Facebook post on perceptions of self-promotion: participants viewed Jeff as more self-promoting when he bragged ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.37$) than when he did not brag ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.24$; $F(1, 196) = 24.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .112$). There was also a significant activity type \times Facebook post interaction ($F(1, 196) = 4.18$, $p = .042$, $\eta_p^2 = .021$), whereby bragging had a stronger effect in the prosocial domain than the athletic domain. However, the effect of bragging was still significant in each domain (each $p < .04$).

Perceived intrinsic motivation. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Facebook post on perceived intrinsic motivation: participants perceived Jeff as less intrinsically motivated when he bragged ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 1.05$) than when he did not brag ($M = 5.45$, $SD = .82$; $F(1, 196) = 10.71$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .052$). However, this was qualified by a significant activity type \times Facebook post interaction ($F(1, 196) = 10.71$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .052$). In the prosocial condition, Jeff was viewed as less intrinsically motivated when he bragged ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.02$) than when he did not brag ($M = 5.60$, $SD = .90$; $t(100) = -4.83$, $p < .001$). However, in the athletic condition, participants did not evaluate Jeff’s intrinsic motivation differently when he bragged ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.02$) versus when he did not brag ($M = 5.31$, $SD = .71$; $t(96) = .00$, $p = .99$). The main effect of activity type on perceived intrinsic motivation was not significant ($F(1, 196) = 1.07$, $p = .30$).

Trait perceptions. To compare whether Jeff’s brag affected perceptions of the behavior-relevant trait, we first standardized the altruistic and athletic measures separately to get an activity-specific measure of trait perceptions. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant activity type \times Facebook post interaction ($F(1, 196) = 6.60$, $p = .011$, $\eta_p^2 = .033$). In the prosocial condition, participants rated Jeff as being less altruistic when he bragged ($M = -.31$, $SD = 1.02$) than when he did not brag ($M = .33$, $SD = .88$; $t(100) = -3.38$, $p = .001$). However, in the athletic condition, participants did not evaluate Jeff’s athleticism differently when he bragged ($M = .04$, $SD = .92$) versus when he did not brag ($M = -.04$, $SD = 1.08$; $t(96) = .72$, $p = .72$). Figure 5 displays these results.

Mediation analysis. We ran a moderated mediation analysis using the bootstrap procedure (Preacher, Rucker, and

Figure 5
TRAIT PERCEPTIONS (STUDY 5)



Notes: This figure presents evaluations of trait perceptions in Study 5 as a function of bragging. Trait evaluations are domain specific (altruistic and athletic) and, thus, standardized. In the prosocial condition, participants evaluated Jeff’s altruistic character, and in the athletic condition, participants evaluated Jeff’s athletic character. In all cases, the behavior was known to the observer. Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Hayes 2007) to test the process by which bragging affects domain-relevant trait perceptions (i.e., judgments of Jeff’s altruism or athleticism). Specifically, we predicted that in the prosocial condition, a braggart would be viewed as less intrinsically motivated, which would diminish judgments of altruism. However, in the athletic condition, bragging would not affect judgments of intrinsic motivation or athleticism. Our mediation model (SPSS Macro PROCESS, Model 7) included Facebook post as the independent variable, activity type as the moderator variable, perceived intrinsic motivation as the mediator variable, and trait perceptions as the dependent measure. Consistent with our hypothesis, we found that perceived intrinsic motivation mediates the interaction in the predicted direction. Specifically, we find a significant indirect effect for the prosocial condition (indirect effect = $-.66$, $SE = .15$; 95% CI = $[-.97, -.39]$) but not for the athletic condition (indirect effect = $.00$, $SE = .14$; 95% CI = $[-.26, .27]$).

Discussion

Study 5 demonstrates that when a behavior is known, bragging about one’s good deeds negatively affects judgments of altruism; however, bragging does not affect domain-relevant traits for personal achievements, such as completing a race. Study 5 also shows that bragging decreases credit for prosocial behavior by decreasing the perception of an intrinsic motivation to help. Moreover, bragging about a personal achievement does not undermine perceived intrinsic motivation.

In this study, we find that bragging about prosocial behavior decreases the perception that an actor was intrinsically motivated to help, which in turn decreases perceptions of altruism. An alternative explanation of these findings is

⁴In this study, we used only four trait items to measure judgments of generosity because it was difficult to come up with a larger number of nonredundant items to measure judgments of athleticism, and we wanted an equal number of items across domains.

that bragging simply adds noise to the attribution process. Although we suggest that bragging signals that a person was motivated by reputational concerns, bragging could also plausibly signal that he is insecure or that the behavior was an unusual accomplishment, among other inferences. Such attributions do not necessarily conflict with perceptions of intrinsic motivation, but they would add uncertainty to trait judgments, which could result in attenuated judgments of the person's generosity. If this were the case, we would also expect bragging to attenuate trait judgments of those who accomplish personal achievements. However, given that we do not find that bragging attenuates trait perceptions for running a 10K, such an explanation is unlikely.

It is possible that a 10K race was not extreme enough of an achievement to allow for a regressive effect. To rule out this alternative explanation, we ran an alternative version of Study 5 with 179 participants, in which Jeff either did or did not brag about completing a marathon, an extremely athletic achievement. We replicated our findings from Study 5 using a marathon instead of a 10K. Specifically, we find a significant activity type \times Facebook post interaction for trait perceptions ($F(1, 175) = 7.20, p = .008$) such that bragging reduces perceptions of altruism for prosocial behavior ($M_{\text{brag}} = -.24, SD = .97$ vs. $M_{\text{no brag}} = .22, SD = .99; t(86) = -2.21, p = .03$) but does not affect perceptions of athleticism ($M_{\text{brag}} = .16, SD = .96$ vs. $M_{\text{no brag}} = -.16, SD = 1.02; t(89) = 1.53, p = .13$).

In addition, it is also possible that participants believed that running a 10K requires more effort than volunteering, and bragging is more acceptable for high-effort behaviors. However, if this were true, we would expect participants to rate Jeff as more intrinsically motivated in the athletic condition than the prosocial condition. Given that we did not find a main effect of activity type on perceived intrinsic motivation, it is unlikely that a difference of effort could explain our findings. Nonetheless, in the next study, we hold effort constant by comparing bragging about spending money on oneself with bragging about spending money on others.

STUDY 6: BRAGGING ABOUT SPENDING ON THE SELF VERSUS OTHERS

Study 6 provides additional evidence that bragging about prosocial behavior is self-defeating, whereas bragging about gains for the self is not. To do so, we hold effort constant by having participants evaluate a person who spent the same amount of money in each condition. In particular, we compare how a braggart is perceived when he chooses to publicize his donation to charity versus when he publicizes the purchase of a tennis racket. Study 6 also provides additional evidence that bragging reduces perceptions of altruism because it undermines the perception that a person was intrinsically motivated to help others.

Method

Two hundred three people from the United States (28% female; mean age = 27.4 years) were recruited to participate in an online study in exchange for payment. We conducted a 2 (expenditure: spending on the self, spending on others) \times 2 (Facebook post: no brag, brag) between-subjects design.

Participants were told to imagine they had a friend named Jeff. In the spending on others condition, participants read

that Jeff donated \$60 to the local children's hospital. In the spending on the self condition, participants read that Jeff purchased a new tennis racket for \$60. Next, participants read that Jeff posted to Facebook later that day. In the spending on others/brag condition, the post read, "I just donated money to the local children's hospital," and in the spending on the self/brag condition, the post read, "I just bought a new tennis racket." In both of the no-brag conditions, the post read, "Going to the movies tonight."

Participants rated the extent to which Jeff was intrinsically motivated to help others (play tennis), how altruistic (athletic) he was, and how much of a self-promoter he was in the same manner as Study 5. All measures achieved sufficiently high reliability (each $\alpha > .78$).

Results

Manipulation check. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Facebook post on perceptions of self-promotion: participants rated Jeff as more self-promoting when he bragged ($M = 4.84, SD = 1.22$) than when he did not brag ($M = 3.78, SD = 1.27; F(1, 199) = 39.33, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .165$). There was also a significant expenditure \times Facebook post interaction ($F(1, 199) = 9.86, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .047$), whereby bragging had a stronger effect when Jeff spent on others than when he spent on himself. However, the effect of bragging was significant in each domain (each $p < .03$).

Perceived intrinsic motivation. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Facebook post on perceived intrinsic motivation: Jeff was viewed as less intrinsically motivated when he bragged ($M = 4.52, SD = 1.02$) than when he did not brag ($M = 5.03, SD = .86; F(1, 199) = 15.83, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .074$). However, this finding was qualified by a significant expenditure \times Facebook post interaction ($F(1, 199) = 10.24, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .049$). In the spending on others condition, participants perceived Jeff as less intrinsically motivated to help others when he bragged ($M = 4.22, SD = .83$) than when he did not brag ($M = 5.15, SD = 1.04; t(98) = -4.94, p < .001$). However, in the spending on the self condition, participants did not evaluate Jeff as less intrinsically motivated to play tennis when he bragged ($M = 4.81, SD = 1.11$) than when he did not brag ($M = 4.91, SD = .63; t(101) = -.57, p = .57$). The main effect of activity type on perceived intrinsic motivation was not significant ($F(1, 199) = 1.91, p = .17$).

Trait perceptions. As in Study 5, we standardized the trait measures separately to get a domain-specific measure of trait perceptions. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant expenditure \times Facebook post interaction ($F(1, 199) = 4.22, p = .041, \eta_p^2 = .021$). In the spending on others condition, participants rated Jeff as being less altruistic when he bragged ($M = -.23, SD = .93$) than when he did not brag ($M = .23, SD = 1.01; t(99) = -2.37, p = .02$). However, in the spending on the self condition, participants did not evaluate Jeff's athleticism differently when he bragged ($M = .05, SD = .98$) versus when he did not brag ($M = -.05, SD = 1.03; t(101) = .55, p = .59$).

Mediation analysis. We ran the same moderated mediation analysis as in Study 5 and included Facebook post as our independent variable, expenditure as our moderator variable, perceived intrinsic motivation as our mediator variable, and domain-specific trait perception as our dependent measure. We predicted that in the spending on

others condition, people would view a braggart as less intrinsically motivated, which would affect perceptions of altruism. However, in the spending on the self condition, bragging would have no effect on intrinsic motivation or perceptions of athleticism. We find that perceived intrinsic motivation mediates the interaction in the predicted direction. Specifically, we find a significant indirect effect for spending on others (indirect effect = $-.75$, $SE = .16$; 95% CI = $[-1.07, -.45]$) but not for spending on the self (indirect effect = $-.08$, $SE = .15$; 95% CI = $[-.41, .19]$).

Discussion

Study 6 replicates our findings from Study 5, demonstrating that bragging about prosocial behavior is unique. Study 6 also rules out effort as an alternative explanation for this finding by holding costs constant across conditions. When a behavior is already known, a person who brags about donating to charity is perceived as less intrinsically motivated and less altruistic than someone who does not brag, but the motivation of a person who brags about making a personal purchase is not discounted in the same manner.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Is bragging a good strategy to enhance one's reputation as a generous person? Across seven studies involving donations of time and money and utilizing different forms of bragging (posting on Facebook, wearing a button, conversing at a dinner party, and purchasing conspicuous products), we document the unique ways in which bragging about one's prosocial behavior affects perceptions of altruism. People who tell others about their good deeds inform others that they have behaved prosocially but also are perceived as less intrinsically motivated to help others. Thus, bragging can either boost or diminish the perception that a person is generous, depending on whether the brag provides new information about an actor's tendency to help others. Bragging helps when others do not know that an actor does good deeds. However, bragging does not help—and can often hurt—when others are already aware that an actor does good deeds.

We further demonstrate that bragging about prosocial behavior is special because it directly undermines the information that the person is trying to convey. In this sense, the studies here depart from research examining whether self-promotion is harmful in general (Godfrey, Jones, and Lord 1986; Holtgraves and Srull 1989). Rather, the present research addresses when a braggart succeeds or fails at conveying a specific trait; it shows that bragging about prosocial behavior undermines perceptions of generosity, but bragging about personal activities does not affect perceptions of traits reflecting those activities. Note that there may be other situations in which bragging undermines the focal trait conveyed by a brag. For example, a person who brags about his modesty is likely to be considered less modest as a result because bragging is directly antithetical to modesty. There may also be more general effects that result from bragging. For example, in some contexts, bragging may broadly signal poor social skills or a lack of awareness about social norms.

The hypotheses presented here also speak to how people will perceive those who repeatedly brag about their good deeds. It is likely that a person who tells others of his good

deeds may be viewed favorably at first, when bragging still provides novel information. However, as the person continues to brag, the information about his generosity will become less novel, and others may become particularly suspicious of his motives. As a result, even when new good deeds are unknown to others, those who brag repeatedly may damage their reputation in the long run.

Further research can identify ways in which people are able to communicate prosocial behavior without inciting suspicion about their motives. For example, people may create an appropriate context to discuss good deeds by steering a conversation in a direction that makes it appropriate to discuss prosocial behavior (Tal-Or 2010). Some people may also strategically tell a select small group of people about their good deeds to let others brag on their behalf (Jones and Wortman 1973; Pfeffer et al. 2006).

Additional factors may affect the extent to which people become suspicious of a braggart's motives. For example, people may be suspicious of coworkers who brag about their good deeds because these coworkers have a strong incentive to increase their reputation within an organization, whereas they may be less suspicious of close friends or family members who brag. Furthermore, bragging about certain prosocial actions may incite less suspicion than other actions. A person who brags about his many years of volunteering with a local homeless shelter may be met with less suspicion regarding his motives than a person who brags about volunteering for just one afternoon. Because volunteering for many years requires significant self-sacrifice, an observer may be more willing to believe that the braggart's motives are sincere.

Irrespective of how a braggart is perceived, it is possible that braggarts can do more good for a cause than their silent counterparts because the act of bragging not only promotes their own behavior but also publicizes a cause. Some argue that proudly communicating one's good deeds may be highly altruistic if it leads to a "culture of giving" that focuses more on the total good being done rather than whether one is motivated by the right reasons (e.g., Singer 2009). In our studies, we did not find a significant effect of bragging on social influence. However, this could be because the actor in our studies was fictitious, resulting in a conservative test of social influence. Although bragging publicly may make a charity salient or make it easier for others to donate to a cause (e.g., if a Facebook or Twitter post is accompanied by a hyperlink to a charity's website), it is less clear how bragging affects the behavior of others controlling for these factors.

More broadly, although we focus our studies on bragging about charitable donations and volunteer work, we expect that our results will hold for bragging about other kinds of prosocial behavior. For example, a parent may brag about sacrifices made on behalf of a child, or a friend may brag about a favor performed for another. Similar to donating or volunteering to charity, bragging may provide information about a person's behavior but may also signal a desire to be recognized as a good parent or friend, rather than a pure desire to be one.

It is also likely that corporations that want to receive credit for their prosocial behavior face a comparable dilemma. Similar to individuals, corporations can benefit from being perceived as generous (Brown and Dacin 1997;

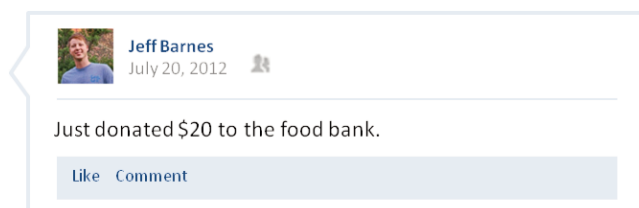
Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2007; Ellen, Mohr, and Webb 2000; Murray and Vogel 1997; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). However, there may be different norms regarding corporate communication of prosocial behavior. Corporations may be expected to actively publicize their good deeds—at least at a minimum level—because it enables consumers who value corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to make an informed decision about which brands to choose. Nonetheless, firms that advertise their CSR behavior too heavily may incite suspicion that they are overtly trying to persuade customers (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Friestad and Wright 1994). Advertising firms' CSR initiatives may also backfire if it is clear that a company is trying to directly benefit as a result of its good deeds, or if the brand is associated with concepts that are inherently at odds with the message of the CSR campaign (Torelli, Monga, and Kaikati 2012; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz 2006).

Finally, whereas this article investigates perceptions of others, further research can examine how bragging affects a person's self-image. Theories of self-signaling argue that people learn information about themselves on the basis of the choices they make (Bem 1972; Bodner and Prelec 2003). On the one hand, a person who brags may believe that his motivations for doing so are selfish in nature, thereby decreasing perceptions of his own generosity. On the other hand, given that, in general, people view themselves in a positive light (Bradley 1978; Brown 1986), a braggart may not be as suspicious of his own motives as he would be of others'.

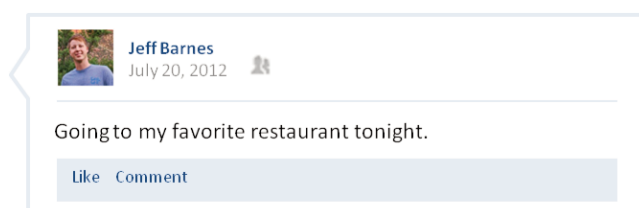
In summary, although people often want to know about the generous behavior of others, they also want to know if these good deeds were performed for the right reasons. Bragging about prosocial behavior communicates that a person has acted generously but also signals that the braggart may not have been motivated by pure intentions. For any prosocial behavior, our findings illuminate the fundamental tension between doing good and appearing good.

Appendix A STUDY 1A STIMULI

A: Brag Condition



B: No-Brag Condition



APPENDIX B: PERCEIVED INTRINSIC MOTIVATION SCALE (STUDY 2)

Items 1–5 were evaluated on a scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree.” Items 6–9 were evaluated on a scale ranging from 1 = “not at all” to 7 = “extremely.”

1. Jeff was internally motivated to donate to the Red Cross.
2. Jeff has a genuine passion for helping others.
3. Jeff sincerely cares about helping others.
4. Jeff donated to the Red Cross because he wanted other people to like him more. (reverse-coded)
5. Jeff donated to the Red Cross to improve his image. (reverse-coded)
6. How authentic do you find Jeff's passion for helping others?
7. How suspicious are you of Jeff's passion for helping others? (reverse-coded)
8. How likely is Jeff to donate to the Red Cross in the near future?
9. Now imagine that one day Jeff was asked to volunteer at Habitat for Humanity, and he agreed to do it. How much effort do you think he would put into helping out with Habitat for Humanity?

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