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Boomerasking: Answering Your Own Questions

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Humans spend much of their lives in conversation, where they tend to hold many simultaneous motives. We examine two fundamental desires: to be responsive to a partner and to disclose about oneself. We introduce one pervasive way people attempt to reconcile these competing goals—*boomerasking*—a sequence in which individuals first pose a question to their conversation partner ("How was your weekend?"), let their partner answer, and then answer the question themselves ("Mine was amazing!"). The boomerask starts with someone asking a question, but—like a boomerang—the question returns quickly to its source. We document three types of boomerasks: *ask-bragging* (asking a question followed by disclosing something positive, e.g., an amazing vacation); *ask-complaining* (asking a question followed by disclosing something negative, e.g., a family funeral); and *ask-sharing* (asking a question followed by disclosing something neutral, e.g., a weird dream). Though boomeraskers believe they leave positive impressions, in practice, their decision to share their own answer—rather than follow up on their partner's—appears egocentric and disinterested in their partner's perspective. As a result, people perceive boomeraskers as insincere and prefer conversation partners who straightforwardly self-disclose.

Public Significance Statement
To pursue a vast array of goals, humans spend much of their lives in conversation. We are required to make microdecisions at every turn of every conversation about what to say and how to say it. While asking questions to understand others' minds has been shown to be a virtuous conversational behavior, especially when the asker listens and follows up, this article finds that failing to engage with a partner's answer by *boomerasking*, answering your own questions with your own disclosure (rather than following up on a partner's disclosure), reveals the asker's self-interest and signals disinterest in their partner. These findings offer practical insight into how to become better conversationalists.

Keywords: question-asking, egocentrism, self-disclosure, conversation

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The authors report all data exclusions, manipulations, and measures. The complete set of preregistrations, stimuli, data, and analysis code from every study can be found on the Open Science Framework at https://bit.ly/3moUs3c. The main idea in this article has been presented in teaching sessions for pedagogical purposes. Most of the studies in this article (Studies 1–5) rely on hypothetical vignettes, which ask participants to imagine conversations by reading or watching them, and anticipate what their thoughts and behavior might be like in those scenarios. These methods follow a rich tradition of using vignettes to study psychology, and they allow them to examine boomerasking in a controlled way across different conversation topics and contexts. In particular, these studies allowed them to examine the effects of boomerasking on romantic dates, at parties, in get-to-know-you conversations between strangers, in everyday conversation between acquaintances; to compare the effects of asking a question followed by complaints, brags, and neutral disclosure topics; and to compare the effects of boomerasking among participants from Eastern and Western cultures—in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Hong Kong. However, vignette studies do not capture real behavior. Therefore, they also include a study of live conversations (Study 6) to examine boomerasking in a more naturalistic conversation environment. Even this naturalistic study has constraints, as it examines conversations between strangers in dyads who were given the specific goal to maximize enjoyment on 12 topics that the experimenters provided for them. There may be many conversational contexts—such as between people who know each other more intimately, or in larger groups, or with goals other than enjoyment—in which boomerasking has different effects than they have identified in this project. For example, in an educational context, instructors who use the Socratic method often ask questions, allow their students to answer (and debate each other), and then provide their own answers as ground truth in order to pursue the goals of teaching and learning. The constraints on generality in their methods leave many important questions open for future research.

Though asking questions in conversation has been shown to increase information exchange, perceptions of responsiveness, and interpersonal liking, the benefits of question-asking have been shown to be driven almost entirely by follow-up questions—those who ask more follow-up questions, compared to other types of questions, learn more information, seem more responsive to their partners, and are better liked. The authors became curious to explore what happens when conversationalists ask questions and then fail to follow up on their partners' responses—a failure of responsiveness and conversational uptake that is noticeably common in naturally occurring conversations. The findings in this article show that boomerasks provide an important boundary condition on the benefits of question-asking: to reap the rewards of questions, askers may need to both listen to their partners' answers and verbally signal that they were listening. By studying a multiturn sequence of decisions, the current work on boomerasking contributes to an emerging emphasis in social science to study unfolding transcript data alongside more traditional survey and behavioral measures for a comprehensive understanding of the psychology of conversation. This work helps to

continued

A colleague approaches you and asks, "Hey, what are you up to this weekend?" You tell her you are not sure, but nothing big. She replies: "I'm going to my lake house and we're having a massive bonfire" or "I have no friends, so I'm just going to stay in my basement" or "I'm going to a medieval fair to use the trebuchet I made." In each case, what seemed like a genuine expression of interest in *you* suddenly shifts. It becomes a chance for your partner to disclose about herself—to brag, to complain, or simply to share. We term this common three-turn sequence of conversational choices as *boomerasking*. Like the outgoing and returning arc of a boomerang, boomeraskers ask a question, let their partner answer, and then immediately bring the focus of the conversation back to themselves.

According to the conversational circumplex theory of goal pursuit (Yeomans et al., 2022), conversationalists often balance multiple goals when speaking with others, which can lead to suboptimal behaviors that fall short of achieving their goals. Here, we examine two commonly held motives: to be responsive (to a partner) and to disclose (about oneself). When people are responsive, they demonstrate listening and show interest in someone else (Reis & Shaver, 1988). They can express responsiveness to others' utterances in many ways, such as by asking follow-up questions (Huang et al., 2017), acknowledging or affirming a disparate viewpoint (Yeomans et al., 2019), or by saying *anything* that responds to a partner's previous utterance (Demszky et al., 2021). On the other hand, when people disclose, they share information about themselves with others, often because they enjoy the topic themselves (Cozby, 1973; Tamir & Mitchell, 2012), and as a symbol of liking or closeness (N. L. Collins & Miller, 1994).

Boomerasking represents a failed attempt to satisfy both of these goals—responsiveness and disclosure—at once. While asking a question suggests that the asker is interested in their partner and will be responsive to their partner's answer, an immediate disclosure reveals that the suggestion of responsiveness may have been insincere. While there is a rich literature on self-disclosure and, separately, a rich literature on responsiveness, little work has explored the tension between these two conversational goals—and how people navigate the tension in conversation. Our work demonstrates the delicate interplay of these two goals in conversation, offering insight into when and how people might succeed or fail.

The Desire to Disclose

Conversation is an integral and intricate part of the human experience, and among the countless number of possible topics people could discuss, few are enjoyed by people as much as … themselves. People find self-disclosure intrinsically enjoyable (Cozby, 1973; Greene et al., 2006; Jourard & Landsman, 1960; Jourard & Lasakow, 1958; Omarzu, 2000) to such an extent that sharing information about the self is undergirded by the same brain regions that respond to rewards like good food and attractive faces (Tamir & Mitchell, 2012).

It is therefore not surprising that egocentrism permeates the conversations of children and adults alike (Adams, 1932; Derber, 1979; Langmuir, 1934; Piaget, 1926; Rugg et al., 1929). Observational studies of conversations in public areas show that between 40% and 60% of a person's utterances are ego-related, focusing on their own feelings, opinions, or personal experiences (Dunbar et al., 1997; Henle & Hubbell, 1938; Landis & Burtt, 1924). One such study demonstrates that topics focusing on only one of the participants (e.g., Jim's job or Kay's sister) were initiated by *that* participant over two thirds of the time (Derber, 1979). More recent research suggests that this tendency is even more pronounced on social media, where some 80% of communication is self-focused (Naaman et al., 2010).

Moreover, sharing about oneself represents more than just a pleasurable activity—it is the principal means through which people shape others' impressions of them (Baumeister, 1982; N. L. Collins & Miller, 1994; Goffman, 1967; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1980). Through self-disclosure, individuals share information while also attempting to leave favorable impressions on others and so engage in behaviors like bragging and complaining to elicit preferred reactions like admiration and sympathy (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Kowalski, 1996; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Rudman, 1998).

At the same time, people recognize that the norms of conversation prohibit blatantly egocentric behavior and that conversation involves some give-and-take, where each person works to "discover the identity of their partner"—not merely "make evident their own" (Pin & Turndorf, 1985). For example, most people have, at some point, found themselves on the receiving end of overt impression management strategies—like excessive complaining or explicit self-promotion—and recognize that such disclosures often yield negative consequences (Baumeister, 1982; Gergen & Wishnov, 1965; Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Schlenker, 1975; Scopelliti et al., 2015; Tice et al., 1995; Clark & Schaefer, 1987).

People attempt to solve this problem—self-disclosure without egocentrism—with a variety of indirect impression management strategies intended to communicate desired information while masking self-interested intent (Brooks et al., 2019; Cialdini, 1989; Cialdini et al., 1976, 1990; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992;

bridge interdisciplinary borders between experimental psychology, linguistics, psycholinguistics, and conversation analysis and provides practical advice for conversationalists themselves: If you ask a question, do not turn the focus of the conversation back to yourself before showing interest in your partner's answer.

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Sekhon et al., 2015; Sezer et al., 2018; Tice & Baumeister, 1990). For instance, individuals looking to elicit admiration can choose to humblebrag, couching self-promotion in modesty (Sezer et al., 2018), or reveal their failures along with their successes to mitigate observers' envy (Brooks et al., 2019).

While this prior research in social cognition has largely focused on a single turn of a conversation at a time (e.g., Did she brag or not?), here we investigate a predictable sequence of *three* turns: posing a question to one's conversation partner, letting the partner respond, and answering the question oneself (instead of responding to the partner's answer)—a common sequence that we term *boomer-asking*. In focusing on a multiturn phenomenon, our work draws on the traditions of conversation analysis, which has identified common patterns that emerge across sequential conversational turns. A common topic of study in that literature is adjacency pairs—two utterances made sequentially by two speakers, one immediately after the other. Examples include a question followed by an answer, a request followed by acceptance or rejection, a complaint followed by an excuse or remedy, a compliment followed by acceptance or refusal, or a greeting followed by a greeting response (Goffman, 1981; H.P. Grice, 1991; see Stivers, 2013, for a recent review).

Building on this tradition, in the current work, we identify boomer-asking as a common *three*-turn sequence. The social impact of a boomerask is suggested by central theories in psycholinguistics, which focus on the importance of establishing common ground between speakers (e.g., Clark & Brennan, 1991; Clark & Schaefer, 1987; Wilkes-Gibbs & Clark, 1992). That work documents the constant effort spent during conversation to sequence speaker contributions and converge on a shared understanding of each utterance (Pickering & Garrod, 2004). While that literature conceptualizes conversational behavior as fundamentally collaborative, boomerasking represents a rare (and perhaps costly) violation of that norm. That is, when someone is asked a question, they expect their answer to matter to the asker. When they perceive that the asker may have wanted to self-disclose (rather than learn about the partner), their sense of cooperation in pursuit of common ground may be overturned.

Questions and Impression Management

Why might people believe boomerasking leaves a more favorable impression than directly sharing information that is not prefaced by a question? They may be misapplying a conversational strategy that *does* work: People who ask more questions are better liked (Huang et al., 2017; Yeomans et al., 2019). Speed daters who ask more questions get more second dates (Huang et al., 2017), patients whose physicians ask them more questions tend to be more satisfied with their visits (Bertakis et al., 1991), and, more generally, people prefer conversing with "openers"—individuals who elicit high amounts of disclosure from their partner (Miller et al., 1983). Though answers tend to be remembered more vividly than the questions that elicited them (Zormpa et al., 2023), speakers tend to like and appreciate the people who ask them.

However, simply asking questions at random is unlikely to be effective. Undergirding the effectiveness of questions is their ability to convey responsiveness to one's conversation partner—showing them that the question-asker hears them, understands them, cares about their situation, and values their perspective (Huang et al., 2017; Reis et al., 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988). It is not just about asking questions, but listening to, processing, and caring about the answers. Indeed, people hold more favorable impressions of responsive conversation partners (Reis et al., 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988), even when that partner is an ideological adversary. For example, debaters hold more favorable opinions of opponents who ask them to elaborate on their positions (Chen et al., 2010). Moreover, when people disclose personal information—in response to questions or otherwise—they carefully search for cues that signal their partner's conversational motives (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019; Raskin & Attardo, 1994; Reis et al., 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Yeomans et al., 2022). Perceived motives are crucial in determining the success of self-promotion (Baumeister, 1982; Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Yeomans et al., 2022), and people signal insincere motives by failing to be responsive to their partners (Dunbar et al., 1997; Gilovich et al., 2000; Godfrey et al., 1986; Huang et al., 2017; Landis & Burtt, 1924).

We suggest that one key means by which responsiveness is conveyed during conversation is via "conversational uptake"—the extent to which a speaker builds on the contribution of their interlocutor by, for example, asking a follow-up question, acknowledging what they have said, repeating it, paraphrasing, or reformulating it in some way (Demszky et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2017; Yeomans et al., 2022). While boomerasking may successfully signal interest on the first turn of the boomerasking sequence (asking the question), and even the second turn (giving space for a partner to respond), we expect that it fails dramatically on the third step, where responsiveness is absent and seemingly blatant self-focus rises to replace it. As a result, communicators may be better liked when they straightforwardly share their brags, complaints, and interests—without prefacing their self-disclosures with a question.

Overview of Studies

We explore our predictions across eight studies that range from surveys of participants' recollections of their own experiences with boomerasking (Studies 1A and 1B), to experiments in which participants imagine engaging in conversations (Studies 2–4), to observing and participating in conversations in real time (Studies 5 and 6). Most of the studies in this article (Studies 1–5) rely on hypothetical vignettes, which ask participants to imagine conversations by reading or watching them and to anticipate what their thoughts and behavior might be like in those scenarios. These methods follow a rich tradition of using vignettes to study psychology, and they allow us to examine boomerasking in a controlled way across different conversation topics and contexts. In particular, these studies allowed us to examine the effects of boomerasking on romantic dates, at parties, in get-to-know-you conversations between strangers, in everyday conversation between acquaintances; to compare the effects of asking a question followed by complaints, brags, and neutral disclosure topics; and to compare the effects of boomerasking among participants from Eastern and Western cultures—in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Hong Kong. Importantly, though, vignette studies do not capture real behavior (Yeomans et al., 2023). Therefore, we also include a study of live conversations (Study 6) to examine boomerasking in a more naturalistic conversation environment.

In all of our online studies, we targeted a sample size of 100 participants per condition for experiments measuring perceptions and 150 participants per condition for experiments measuring both perceptions and behavioral outcomes. In our 20-cell multitopic studies (10 topics × 2 communicator types, Studies 2A–C), we targeted a

sample size of 30 participants per cell. These larger samples allowed us to explore possible effects of topic type and do not affect resulting effect sizes, which we report for every study (Simmons et al., 2013). Across all studies, demographic information was collected via participant self-report.

Transparency and Openness

We report all data exclusions, manipulations, and measures. The complete set of preregistrations, stimuli, data, and analysis code can be found on the Open Science Framework at https://bit.ly/3moUs3c. Studies 1–6 were preregistered.

Study 1A: Enacting Versus Receiving a Boomerask

Boomeraskers share their own information rather than following up on their partner's response. Since people constantly gauge how their conversation partners react to what they have said and search for clues about their partner's conversational motives (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019; Raskin & Attardo, 1994; Yeomans et al., 2022), boomeraskers' self-focus and lack of responsiveness may signal disinterest in their partner's answer and thus harm their partner's conversational experience (Demszky et al., 2021). Accordingly, we expect that recipients of boomerasks will have significantly worse conversational experiences than boomeraskers themselves. In Study 1A, we test this prediction by asking participants to recall instances when they boomerasked or were the recipient of a boomerask. The preregistration for this study can be accessed at https://bit.ly/3moUs3c, which also includes all stimuli, analyses, and code as well Yeomans and Brooks (2024).

Study 1A: Method

Sample

We recruited participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (hereinafter "MTurk workers"). In our preregistration, we stated that we intended to collect 150 participants for each of our two experimental conditions, which was decided informally based on the effect size of a previous study with a similar design. Three hundred two participants started our survey, and all of them passed our attention check and completed the survey (M_{age} = 38.5 years, SD = 10.1; 46.7% female, 52.9% male).

Procedure

Participants read one of two prompts, randomly assigned. In the *boomerasker* condition, they were asked: "Have you ever asked someone a question and then shared your answer to the question soon after they responded?" In the *recipient* condition, they were asked: "Have you ever had an experience where someone asked you a question and then they shared their answer to the question soon after you responded?" Participants who could not recall such an interaction provided basic demographic information and exited the survey.

We asked those who could recall at least one such interaction to recall the most recent instance. Participants provided the original question that (they/their partner) asked, the answer to the question, and the content of the boomerask (see Table 1 for examples).

Table 1
Examples of Self-Classified Boomerasks From Study 1A

Boomerask type	%	Example
Neutral ask-shares	24	"How was your day?" It was busy, and had little time to achieve anything she wanted for herself. "Kids were acting up all day, and I'm not feeling very good." "What should we eat for supper tonight?" "Maybe we should have subway?" "Let's eat tacos, I'll make some now." I asked who someone voted for. They told me which candidate they voted for. I shared who I voted for.
Ask-brags	56	I asked what they were doing for the holiday. They were going to see their parents. I said I was going to spend it with my boyfriend's family. "Have you won any contests lately?" "No." I told them that I won the Pick a Present contest that will happen December 12! "How was your weekend?" "It was fine, I didn't do too much. Just watched Netflix." "Oh, that's cool. I went for a long hike of ten miles. It was so much fun!"
Ask-complaints	14	"How was your day?" "It was exhausting." "Tell me about it. All I did today was clients and kids!" I asked what my coworker thought of the manager. They said that our manager was garbage. I said that our manager was terrible and lazy. What did you think about the movie? They told me they liked it. I said I thought it was OK but not really my cup of tea.

Measures

Participants evaluated the communicator's motives during the interaction (those in the *boomerasker* condition rated their own motivations). Participants characterized the communicator's motivation as a desire to share "something (positive/negative/neutral) about their life, experiences, preferences, or views." Participants also reported when the interaction took place (*within the past 3 days*, *between 3 and 7 days ago*, *between 1 week and 1 month ago*, or *over 1 month ago*).

Participants then evaluated the interaction from both their perspective and their partner's perspective. They provided their own ratings for the following statements (presented in a randomized order) on a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* and predicted how their conversation partner would rate the same statements: (a) *I felt this conversation was enjoyable*, (b) *I felt this conversation was pleasant*, (c) *I felt this conversation was irritating*.

Finally, participants self-reported their relationship with their conversation partner (*acquaintance*, *coworker*, *friend*, *family member*, *romantic partner*, or *other*), their partner's age and gender, how long they have known the person (___ *years,* ____ *months*), and their own age and gender.

Study 1A: Results

Familiarity

Participants readily recalled examples of boomerasks in both conditions (boomeraskers and recipients). Almost all participants (92.6%) remembered receiving a boomerask, and almost all participants (91.9%) reported boomerasking themselves, $t(306) = 0.2$, $p = .821$. Moreover, over half of participants recalled an example of boomerasking from within the past week (35% of boomerasks occurred within the past 3 days, 30% between 3 and 7 days ago, 23% between 1 week and 1 month ago, and 12% over a month ago). Boomerasking happened across many different relationships and spanned varying levels of interpersonal closeness. Most boomerasking happened between friends (30%), followed by coworkers (24%), romantic partners (24%), family members (17%), acquaintances (5%), and other relationships (1%).

Interaction Experience

We expected that boomeraskers' lack of responsiveness to their partner would harm their partner's conversational experience. The results of Study 1A support this prediction. Recipients reported having worse interaction experiences than boomeraskers on all measured dimensions. Specifically, compared to recipients of boomerasks, boomeraskers recalled their interaction as more enjoyable ($M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 5.46$ out of 7, $SD = 1.14$ versus $M_{\text{Recipient}} = 4.91$, $SD = 1.41$), $t(282) = 3.6$, $p < .001$; more pleasant ($M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 5.69$ out of 7, $SD = 1.13$ versus $M_{\text{Recipient}} = 5.07$, $SD = 1.52$), $t(282) = 3.9$, $p < .001$; and less irritating ($M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 1.93$ out of 7, $SD = 1.37$ versus $M_{\text{Recipient}} = 3.01$, $SD = 1.89$), $t(282) = 3.9$, $p < .001$.

Partner Predictions

Boomeraskers and their recipients did not differ much in their predictions of their conversation partners' experience. Specifically, compared to boomeraskers, recipients predicted their partners would not find these conversations more enjoyable ($M_{\text{Recipient}} = 5.50$, $SD = 1.17$ versus $M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 5.33$, $SD = 1.18$), $t(282) = 1.2$, $p = .224$; pleasant ($M_{\text{Recipient}} = 5.56$, $SD = 1.28$ versus $M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 5.46$, $SD = 1.16$), $t(282) = 0.7$, $p = .464$; or irritating ($M_{\text{Recipient}} = 2.21$, $SD = 1.38$ versus $M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 2.15$, $SD = 1.40$), $t(282) = 0.4$, $p = .708$.

In our preregistration, our primary hypothesis focused on the comparison between each side's predictions and the reported experiences of the other side. We conducted this analysis for all three outcomes, and we found a consistent pattern. On average, boomeraskers overestimated the recipients' experience. Boomeraskers believed recipients found the conversations more enjoyable, $t(282) = 2.7$, $p = .007$; more pleasant, $t(282) = 2.4$, $p = .017$; and less irritating, $t(282) = 0.4$, $p = .708$, than recipients' reports. However, recipients correctly predicted the boomeraskers' average ratings of enjoyment, $t(282) = 0.2$, $p = .806$; pleasantness, $t(282) = 4.4$, $p < .001$; and irritation, $t(282) = 1.4$, $p = .088$.

Boomerasking Subtypes

The boomerasks recalled by participants revealed three common and distinct subtypes of boomerasking. The first subtype—which we term *ask-bragging*—involves asking a question and, soon after, answering that question yourself with a positive self-disclosure (a brag). The second subtype—*ask-complaining*—involves asking a question and soon after answering that question yourself with a negative self-disclosure (a complaint). Last, we use the term *ask-sharing* to describe instances in which a communicator asks a question followed by their own "neutral" disclosure, such as a nonvalanced opinion or experience. Overall, 47% of the participants' examples were self-coded by participants as ask-brags, 39% were coded as ask-shares, and 14% were coded as ask-complaints. There was a significant interaction across condition, $\chi^2(2) = 9.0$, $p = .011$, such that compared to boomeraskers, recipients more often reported an ask-complaint (20% vs. 10%) and less often reported an ask-share (31% vs. 46%). We report examples of each boomerasking subtype in Table 1.

Study 1A: Discussion

These findings offer initial evidence that boomerasking is common and undesirable—a hypothesis we will explore in more depth in Studies 2A–6. A substantial majority of participants recalled receiving and employing boomerasks—a finding we revisit and replicate in naturally occurring live conversations in Study 5. In line with our predictions, recipients reported that boomeraskers dominated conversational airtime (a related indicator of conversational egocentrism) and rated their interaction experience as worse than the boomerasker's. Moreover, boomeraskers were unaware of how their lack of responsiveness harmed their partner's experience and erroneously believed that both partners had an equally enjoyable interaction. In Study 1B, we explore why individuals do not anticipate the negative interpersonal consequences of boomerasking by probing its intuitive appeal.

Study 1B: Why Do People Boomerask?

Study 1A suggests that people fail to anticipate the adverse interpersonal consequences of boomerasking. In Study 1B, we investigate this forecasting error by exploring why people boomerask

at all, including whether individuals mistakenly believe that boomerasking affords interpersonal benefits compared to overt disclosure.

Study 1B: Method

Sample

We recruited MTurk workers as participants, targeting a sample of 150 participants (following the same rule of thumb as Study 1A). We recruited 200, although we focus our analyses on the 155 participants who had completed the survey and the attention check (M_{age} = 34.9 years, SD = 11.2; 37.4% female, 62.6% male).

Procedure

We asked participants to indicate something they would be interested in sharing in an upcoming conversation (their *disclosure*). They were told it "could be something interesting from your day, an event you're excited for, an opinion you have about something in the news, or anything you might want to tell someone." On the next page, participants were asked to provide *a question* that they could use to bring that topic up in a conversation.

Then participants were shown two potential strategies that they might use to raise their desired topic in a conversation. We used the participant's disclosure and questions to illustrate how an interaction would proceed under each strategy:

> Again, here is what you wanted to share: [*participant's disclosure*]
>
> And a question you could ask to bring up that topic: [*participant's question*]
>
> Imagine that you bring up [*participant's disclosure*] to two different people.

Participants were shown descriptions of two conversations. The *overt disclosure* conversation was described as: "While talking with person 1, you just share [*participant's disclosure*]. You do not ask them to share on this topic." The *boomerasking* conversation was described as: "While talking with person 2, you first ask them [*participant's question*]. After they share *their* answer, you share [*participant's disclosure*]."

Measures

Participants answered the question "Based only on this interaction, which person do you think would find you *more likable?*" using a 100-point slider scale ranging from *definitely person 1* to *definitely person 2* and explained why they answered the way they did using a text box. Finally, participants rated the degree to which they felt their disclosure was (a) *a brag*, (b) *a complaint*, and (c) *a neutral statement*, on three 9-point scales ranging from *not at all* to *definitely*.

Study 1B: Results

Preferred Strategy

A large majority of participants predicted that, compared to overt disclosure, introducing their disclosure with a question—*boomerasking*—would leave their conversation partner with a better impression of them. Roughly 83% of respondents favored boomerasking—on the 100-point slider scale, the median response was 82, and the mean response was 75.3 (SD = 27.7), which was significantly greater than the midpoint, $t(154) = 11.3$, $p < .001$, $d = .91$. Moreover, strategy preference was not significantly associated with the degree to which participants felt their disclosure was a brag, complaint, or neutral statement (all $r < .06$, all $p > .47$).

Reasons for Boomerasking

We recruited two research assistants—blind to our predictions—to categorize participants' written reasons for believing that boomerasking would leave better impressions than overtly disclosing the same information. We asked the annotators to indicate whether individuals believed boomerasking would yield any of the interpersonal benefits common to question-asking (Huang et al., 2017) or indirect impression management strategies, listed some other reason, or did not provide any reason. Specifically, the annotators indicated whether participants favored boomerasking because it (a) conveys interest in one's partner (Reis et al., 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988), (b) allows one's partner to share about themselves (Greene et al., 2006; Omarzu, 2000; Tamir & Mitchell, 2012; Yeomans, 2019), (c) makes the communicator appear less self-centered and vain (Derber, 1979; Pin & Turndorf, 1985; Vangelisti et al., 1990), (d) better conforms to conversational norms and expectations (Derber, 1979; Goffman, 1967), (e) feels more natural than sharing out of the blue (Holtgraves & Srull, 1989; Tal-Or, 2010), or (f) listed some other reason or did not list any intelligible reason (e.g., responded "yes" or "nice," or left the item blank).

Among participants who preferred boomerasking, our two annotators agreed 91% of the time, and the annotators reached consensus by discussion in cases where they disagreed. We find that the participants favored boomerasking for several reasons: (a) asking a question conveys interest in one's partner (12.2%), (b) asking a question allows one's partner to share about themselves (16.3%), (c) boomerasking would make them appear less self-centered (6.2%), (d) directly sharing without asking one's partner to share violates conversational norms (13.2%), and (e) asking a questions first feels more natural (20.2%; see Table 2 for examples). The remaining participants listed some other reason or no reason at all (31.8%).

Study 1B: Discussion

The results of Study 1B help explain the decision to boomerask: Individuals believe that boomerasking offers several advantages over overt disclosure. Specifically, some participants endorse a more deliberate approach, believing that prefacing a disclosure with a question will make their partner(s) feel more included in the conversation. Other participants reveal a less deliberate set of choices, with an intuitive sense that overt disclosure will feel unnatural or violate conversational norms.

These beliefs are not illogical—in fact, they align with prior research showing that question-asking yields a host of interpersonal benefits (Huang et al., 2017; Miller et al., 1983; Yeomans et al., 2019). However, these previous demonstrations of positive outcomes heavily depend on the question-asker's responsiveness to their partner's answers—not just questions themselves but what happens in the turns that follow questions. Since conversations unfold as a series of turns, and individuals use the emotional and behavioral responses of their conversation partners as cues about their partner's conversational

Table 2
Examples of Reasons Given for Boomerasking From Study 1B

Reason	%	Example
Asking a question allows one's partner to speak about themselves and engage in the conversation	35	"People like to talk about themselves." "They would feel included in the conversation and no just being told what I had to say." "They were sharing, too." "It involves them in the conversation [rather than] just talking about me."
Not asking one's partner to share feels unnatural, impolite, or goes against societal norms	22	"Prompting another's opinion seems more appropriate than just spouting whatever comes to mind." "It's more fluid and natural." "Instead of just blurting out what you're doing, its courteous to ask what their plans are and then share your own plans." "It's polite to seem interested in someone to start a conversation."
Asking a question conveys interest in one's partner	18	"Because I'm showing an interest in them too instead of only talking about myself." "People like to think you are interested in them and their lives." "I showed interest in them first." "I am showing an interest in that person and they would be more likely to think I cared about them."
Other	26%	"If I just came out and made my statement to Person 1 without anything leading up to it, it would seem more like a bragging statement then me wanting to share." "Because [overtly disclosing] might seem like bragging." "The question lets me know if they even care about memes or weird internet facts and leads into my statement." "It would let me know how interested they are in listening to me."

motives (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019; Raskin & Attardo, 1994; Reis et al., 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988), communicators can signal insincere motives by failing to listen, validate, or follow up on their partner's responses (Dunbar et al., 1997; Gilovich et al., 2000; Godfrey et al., 1986; Landis & Burtt, 1924).

The results of Study 1A suggest that boomeraskers are not responsive communicators, likely because they introduce conversation topics and then share their views on those topics themselves, giving the appearance that they care more about sharing their own responses, rather than hearing, understanding, or validating their partner's (Demszky et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2017).

Though boomeraskers pose questions under the guise of interest in their partner's response, their lack of responsiveness to their partner's subsequent answers may reveal the insincerity of those questions and undermine the expected benefits of question-asking. If this is the case, then individuals looking to self-disclose—and even self-*promote*—may leave better impressions by doing so *directly*. This result would run counter to both the lay theory revealed by Study 1B, which asserts the superiority of boomerasking over overt disclosure, and the established theory demonstrating that people find direct self-promotion—like straightforwardly bragging or complaining—socially unattractive (Gergen & Wishnov, 1965; Powers & Zuroff, 1988). However, because perceived motives are crucial in determining the success of self-promotion (Baumeister, 1982; Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Yeomans et al., 2022), communicators who fail to successfully mask their selfish motives will be seen as insincere. Communicators who directly disclose information—even socially unattractive information—may be viewed as straightforwardly self-interested, rather than self-interested and perhaps deceptive about it. Boomeraskers, on the other hand, open themselves up to the additional risk of being exposed as insincere, deceptive, or manipulative.

In sum, the results of Studies 1A and 1B provide suggestive evidence that boomerasking is commonly recalled, more unpleasant to receive than to convey, and is believed to leave better impressions than directly disclosing the same information. In the remaining studies, we compare boomerasking with overt disclosure across an array of disclosure types, paradigms, and conversation topics. We predict that, despite its intuitive appeal, boomerasking has negative interpersonal consequences and that communicators would make more favorable impressions by asking follow-up questions (Huang et al., 2017; Yeomans et al., 2019) or by straightforwardly disclosing information they want to share.

Study 2: Boomerasking Across Contexts

In Studies 2A–D, we conduct experiments to build on the survey results of Studies 1A–B by carefully studying the effects of boomerasking on impression formation. In each study, we compare boomerasking to a straightforward disclosure, in which a speaker discloses without asking an initial question first.

In Study 2A, we study boomerasking in the domain of positive disclosures (i.e., ask-bragging vs. overt-bragging). In Study 2B, we study boomerasking in the domain of negative disclosures (i.e., ask-complaining vs. overt-complaining). In Study 2C, we study boomerasking in the domain of neutral disclosures (i.e., ask-sharing vs. overt-sharing). In Study 2D, we study boomerasking in the context of romantic dates. In each case, we predicted that overt-disclosers would be evaluated more favorably than boomeraskers. Further, we test a potential mediator of the boomerasking effect: perceptions of speaker sincerity. That is, we predict that overt-disclosers are seen as more sincere than boomeraskers, which will mediate the difference in liking.

Study 2A: Method

Sample

We recruited MTurk workers as participants, targeting a sample of 600 participants (i.e., 30 per cell). We recruited 665, although we focus our analyses on the 598 participants who completed the survey (M_{age} = 36.0 years, SD = 11.2; 46.3% female, 53.1% male; no differential attrition across conditions), $\chi^2(1) = 0.0$, $p = .841$.

Procedure

Participants read part of a transcript from a fictional conversation with an acquaintance at a party. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 10 possible conversation topics (Appendix B). We selected these topics based on the open-ended responses from Study 1A and chose topics that covered a variety of domains (e.g., experiences, personal life, material possessions).

Half of the participants were randomly assigned to read a transcript in which an acquaintance was an *overt-braggart*. The acquaintance approached and greeted the participant and—unprompted—shared a positive piece of information about themselves on the assigned topic (e.g., "Hey, so, I just got offered a job doing marketing for Google"). The other half of participants read a transcript where their acquaintance was an *ask-braggart*. The acquaintance approached and greeted the participant, then asked them a question on the assigned topic (e.g., "Hey, how is your job going?"), and—after hearing the participant's response—then shared a positive piece of information about themselves on the topic (e.g., "So, I just got offered a job doing marketing for Google"). The information disclosed by the acquaintance was held constant across conditions.

Measures

After reading the transcript of the interaction, participants evaluated the communicator on the three "liking" items and three "perceived sincerity" items presented in a randomized order (see Appendix A for all measures). Participants also evaluated the acquaintance's motives on a 7-point scale ranging from *they just want to share* (a relational motive) to *they wanted to brag* (a selfish motive).

Study 2A: Results

We analyzed the effect of communicator type using a linear mixed-effects model (Bates et al., 2007) to estimate random effects controlling for topic. We confirm our results were the same when these controls were not included. Additionally, mediation analyses (in this study, and in all studies) were conducted using the mediation R package (Tingley et al., 2014).

Perceived Sincerity

The three sincerity items were combined into a standardized index (α = .77). A regression indicated that participants perceived ask-braggarts as less sincere than overt-braggarts, $\beta = .413$, $SE = 0.077$; $t(609) = 5.3$, $p < .001$. These results directionally held for nine of the 10 conversation topics. Participants felt that ask-braggarts were driven by a desire to brag (vs. share) to a greater extent than overt-braggarts, $\beta = .624$, $SE = 0.143$; $t(609) = 4.4$, $p < .001$.

Liking

The three liking items were combined into a standardized index ($\alpha = .79$). A regression indicated that participants liked ask-braggarts less than they liked overt-braggarts, $\beta = .298$, $SE = .078$; $t(609) = 3.8$, $p < .001$; see Figure 1. These results directionally held for nine of the 10 conversation topics, and the topic-by-topic results are shown in Appendix C. Consistent with our proposed mechanism, we found that sincerity mediated a significant portion of the total direct effect (β = .349, 95% CI [.218, .480], $p < .001$; based on 10,000 bootstrap samples, PROCESS Model 4; Hayes, 2017). The remaining direct effect from condition to liking decreased to nonsignificance (β = −.051, 95% CI [−.140, .040], $p = .250$).

Study 2B: Method

Sample

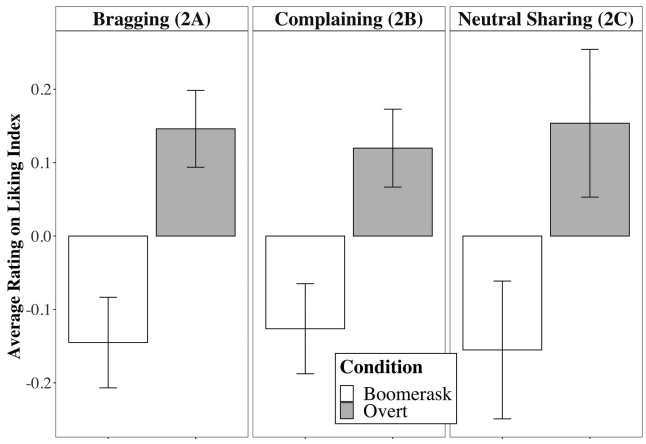
We again recruited MTurk workers as participants, targeting a sample of 600 participants. We recruited 643, although we focus our analyses on the 604 participants that completed the survey (M_{age} = 35.6 years, SD = 11.0; 47.7% female, 52.2% male; no differential attrition across conditions), $\chi^2(1) = 1.9$, $p = .164$.

Procedure

Participants read part of a transcript from a fictional conversation with an acquaintance at a party. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 10 possible conversation topics (Appendix B). Half of the participants were assigned to read a transcript where their acquaintance was an *overt-complainer*—who shared an unprompted negative piece of information about themselves on the assigned topic (e.g., "Hey, so I was just laid off—it's been kind of hard."). The other half read a transcript where their acquaintance was an *ask-complainer*—who asked a question on the assigned topic (e.g., "Hey, how is your job going?"), listened to the participant's response, and then shared a negative piece of information about themselves on the topic (e.g., "So, I was just laid off—it's been kind

Figure 1

Perceived Liking by Communication Type, From Study 2



Note. Error bars reflect ±1 standard error from the mean.

of hard."). Again, the acquaintance's actual disclosure was held constant between conditions.

Measures

After reading the transcript, participants evaluated the communicator on the three "liking" items ($\alpha = .71$) and three "perceived sincerity" items ($\alpha = .75$) used in Study 2A, presented in a randomized order. Participants also evaluated the acquaintance's motives on a 7-point scale ranging from *they wanted to share* (a relational motive) to *they wanted my pity* (a self-interested motive; Yeomans et al., 2022).

Study 2B: Results

Perceived Sincerity

Participants perceived ask-complainers as less sincere than overt-complainers, $\beta = .571$, $SE = 0.076$; $t(593) = 7.5$, $p < .001$. These results directionally held for all 10 conversation topics. Participants felt that ask-complainers were driven by a desire to seek pity (vs. share) to a greater extent than overt-complainers, $\beta = .436$, $SE = 0.131$; $t(593) = 3.3$, $p < .001$.

Liking

Participants liked ask-complainers less than they liked overt-complainers, $\beta = .248$, $SE = 0.079$; $t(593) = 3.1$, $p = .001$; see Figure 1. These results directionally held for eight of the 10 conversation topics (see Appendix C). Consistent with our proposed mechanism, we again found that perceived sincerity mediated the effect of communicator type on liking ($\beta = .411$, 95% CI [.299, .530], $p < .001$). The remaining direct effect from condition to liking was reduced but remained significant in the opposite direction ($\beta = -.162$, 95% CI [−.280, −.050], $p = .007$).

Study 2C: Method

Sample

We recruited MTurk workers as participants, targeting a sample of 200 participants. We recruited 242, although we focus our analyses on the 207 participants who completed the survey ($M_{age} = 37.2$ years, $SD = 12.2$; 48.8% female, 50.2% male; no differential attrition across conditions), $\chi^2(1) = 0.1$, $p = .779$.

Procedure

Participants read three excerpts from different fictional conversations with an acquaintance (Appendix D). Half of the participants were randomly assigned to read excerpts where their acquaintance was an *overt-sharer*, who shared neutral information about themselves (e.g., "I had the weirdest dream ever last night—I dreamt that I was playing hide-and-seek with a werewolf."). The other half read a transcript where their acquaintance was an *ask-sharer*—who asked a question on the assigned topic (e.g., "Did you have any weird dreams last night?"), listened to the participant's response, and then shared on the topic (e.g., "Yeah, I had the weirdest dream ever last night—I dreamt that I was playing hide-and-seek with a werewolf."). As in the previous studies, the information ultimately disclosed by the communicator was held constant across conditions.

Measures

After reading the transcripts of the hypothetical interaction, participants evaluated the communicator on three "liking" dimensions (a–c, $\alpha = .82$) and three "perceived sincerity" dimensions (d–f, $\alpha = .93$) on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *definitely* (see Appendix A).

Study 2C: Results

As expected, participants perceived ask-sharers as less sincere than overt-sharers ($M_{Ask\text{-}sharer} = 4.63$, $SD = 1.71$ vs. $M_{Overt\_sharer} = 5.76$, $SD = 1.46$), $t(205) = 5.12$, $p < .001$, $d = .71$. Furthermore, as predicted, participants liked ask-sharers less than they liked overt-sharers ($M_{Ask\text{-}sharer} = 4.37$, $SD = 1.66$ vs. $M_{Overt\_sharer} = 5.43$, $SD = 1.28$), $t(205) = 5.11$, $p < .001$, $d = .72$. Finally, consistent with our hypothesis, we again found that perceived sincerity mediated the effect of communicator type on liking ($\beta = .309$, 95% CI [.040, .580], $p = .024$). The remaining direct effect from condition to liking was reduced to nonsignificance ($\beta = .031$, 95% CI [−.218, .280], $p = .811$).

Study 2D

In Study 2D, we investigate boomerasking in a specific conversational context: dating. Extant work suggests that question-asking, self-disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness all play important roles in the initiation and maintenance of romantic relationships (Huang et al., 2017; Laurenceau et al., 1998; McFarland et al., 2013; Rubin et al., 1980). Specifically, research has shown that speed daters who ask more follow-up questions and build more shared connections get more second dates (Huang et al., 2017; McFarland et al., 2013); that the level of self-disclosure to one's romantic partner is positively associated with self-reported feelings of attachment, caring, and intimacy (Rubin et al., 1980); and that people who perceive their partner as more responsive during their interactions also perceive those interactions as more intimate (Laurenceau et al., 1998).

Here, we pursue a more nuanced study of question-asking in the context of dating. Though boomeraskers ask questions, they fail to respond to their partner's answers. Even if daters intend to convey relational interest through question-asking, boomeraskers might be *harming* their romantic prospects by asking questions and failing to acknowledge their partner's responses.

Study 2D: Method

Sample

We recruited MTurk workers as participants, targeting a sample of 300 participants. We recruited 382, although we focus our analyses on the 304 participants that completed the survey ($M_{age} = 35.7$ years, $SD = 10.$; 38.2% male, 61.8% female; no differential attrition across conditions), $\chi^2(1) = 2.8$, $p = .093$. Participants read excerpts from a fictional conversation with a potential romantic partner on their first date, which included questions their date asked and information their date shared about themselves (Appendix E).

Procedure

We randomly assigned half of the participants to see this information presented in a randomized order such that the questions their date asked and the information their date shared about themselves were not obviously connected in any meaningful way (*overt communicator* condition). The other half saw the same questions and disclosures but rearranged so that their date's self-disclosures on a topic immediately followed a question on that topic that their date posed (*boomerasker* condition). For example, participants in the boomerasker condition read that their date asked them, "What's your favorite kind of food?" and, after listening to the participant's response, their date replied, "I'd say mine is definitely Italian … probably because I lived abroad in Italy for a year." Analogously, participants in the overt communicator condition read that at some point in the conversation, their date said, "My favorite kind of food is definitely Italian" and "I lived abroad in Italy for a year" and also asked, "What is your favorite kind of food?" though these statements were not presented sequentially, and so were not necessarily part of the same conversational stream and did not represent a successful or unsuccessful display of conversational uptake (Demszky et al., 2021).

Measures

After reading the excerpts, participants rated their date on several dimensions of perceived sincerity and liking, presented in a randomized order. For perceived sincerity, participants rated the extent to which their date appeared "fake," "insincere," and was "pretending to have different motives than the ones they truly have" (all reverse-scored, $\alpha = .94$). For liking (Huang et al., 2017), participants rated the degree to which their date appeared "likable," and the extent to which they agreed to the following three statements: "I like my date," "I would enjoy spending time with my date," and "I disliked my date" (reverse-scored, $\alpha = .91$). Both the "perceived sincerity" and "liking" measures were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *very much*. Finally, participants indicate how likely they would be to accept a second date with the person using a 100-point slider scale ranging from *not at all likely* to *extremely likely*.

Study 2D: Results

Impression Ratings

As expected, participants perceived boomeraskers as less sincere than overt communicators ($M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 4.28$ out of 7, $SD = 1.65$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt}} = 5.20$, $SD = 1.55$), $t(288) = 4.87$, $p < .001$, $d = .59$. Likewise, participants liked boomeraskers less than they liked overt communicators ($M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 4.35$ out of 7, $SD = 1.58$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt}} = 5.24$, $SD = 1.13$), $t(288) = 5.46$, $p < .001$, $d = .65$. Consistent with our hypothesis, we again found that perceived sincerity mediated the effect of communicator type on liking ($b_{\text{indirect}} = -.50$, $SE = .11$; 95% CI [−.74, −.29]). The remaining direct effect from condition to liking was significantly reduced (from $b = -.89$, $SE = .16$, $p < .001$, to $b = -.39$, $SE = .13$, $p = .003$).

Behavioral Intention

In addition to leaving worse impressions than overt disclosure, boomerasking may produce worse *behavioral* outcomes for the communicator. Participants were less likely to accept a second date with a boomerasker than they were to accept a second date with an overt communicator who shared the same information about themselves *and* asked the same questions, albeit in a less conspicuously unresponsive sequence of turns ($M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 55.9$, $SD = 28.7$ versus $M_{\text{Overt}} = 70.9$, $SD = 21.8$), $t(302) = 5.1$, $p < .001$.

Study 2: Discussion

Taken together, Studies 2A–D show that communicators who boomerask are viewed more negatively than those who straightforwardly disclose. The effects of boomerasking were consistent across many conversational contexts: at a party, in casual conversations between strangers, on romantic dates, and across many conversation topics.

Though bragging (Study 2A) and complaining (Study 2B) are aversive interpersonal behaviors, even those who sought to convey neutral information were better off doing so directly, rather than prefacing their disclosure with a question (Study 2C). While people might dislike braggarts' immodesty, or complainers' negativity, those who overtly brag or complain were viewed as more likable and sincere than boomeraskers (Studies 2A–D).

Overall, Studies 2A–D show that regardless of the valence of one's self-disclosure (brag, complaint, or neutral information), and across several conversational contexts, neglecting to acknowledge a partner's answer—a failure to display responsiveness—has negative interpersonal consequences.

Study 3: Boomerasking Across Cultures

In Study 3, we attempt to replicate the results from Studies 2A–D across cultures. While many constructs have been used to describe and compare cultures, one of the most widely studied in cultural psychology is the dimension of individualism–collectivism (e.g., Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Triandis, 1994). Previous research in cultural psychology shows that people's values, concepts of self, perceptions of others, and patterns of interaction are influenced by the "cultural meaning systems" in which they operate (Triandis, 1989). In particular, core concepts related to collectivism, individualism, and in-group behavior have been shown to differ dramatically between Eastern and Western cultures (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

In collectivist cultures, attitudes toward events and people depend on how they relate to the individual's needs to belong, fit in, engage in behaviors that are contextually appropriate, maintain social harmony, and save face for the self and others. Therefore, collectivists tend not to express their negative emotions and disclosures—and to view others' negative expressions of emotion in public settings as inappropriate. On the other hand, those in individualistic cultures tend to view negative self-expression as more appropriate because intrapersonal and interpersonal success rests on being unique and direct in one's self-expression. In collectivist cultures, the in-group is defined as "family and friends concerned with my welfare," while in individualist cultures, the in-group is defined as "people who are like me in social class, race, beliefs, attitudes, and values." This difference means that, during interactions with out-group members, especially strangers, negative disclosures may be seen as more inappropriate among collectivists compared to individualists. Indeed, previous research suggests that complaint behavior—and interpersonal perceptions of others' complaint behavior—differs markedly between Eastern

and Western cultures, such that collectivists are far less likely to complain publicly and are more likely to judge public complaints negatively (Liu & McClure, 2001).

In Studies 3A and 3B, we examine the effects of boomerasking between Eastern and Western cultures, based on both geographical and self-reported cultural specificity. In Study 3A, we examine the effects of boomerasking by comparing participants in an Eastern culture (Hong Kong) and participants in a Western culture (United States). Of course, culture is not only determined by place but by people as carriers of their culture—their racial ethnicity, family heritage, memories, and habits. Accordingly, in Study 3B, we study boomerasking in a Western city that has a mix of people with Eastern and Western ethnicity and heritage (London), where we measure culture via participants' own self-report. In Studies 3A and 3B, we again examine the main effect of boomerasking compared to straightforward disclosure (in which a speaker discloses without asking an initial question first). Across all participants, we predicted a replication of our results from Study 2: that overt-disclosers would be evaluated more favorably than boomeraskers and that this main effect is mediated by perceptions of sincerity.

Further, we also examine the interaction between disclosure valence (positive vs. negative) and participant culture (Eastern vs. Western). While Studies 2A and 2B found similar effect sizes for positive ask-brags and negative ask-complaints in a Western sample (United States), in Studies 3A and 3B, we test whether those effects hold among participants from Eastern cultures. Based on prior research that people from collectivist cultures are less likely to express negative disclosures and more likely to judge others' public complaint behavior negatively (e.g., Liu & McClure, 2001), we expected participants from Asian (collectivist) cultures to show more disdain for negative disclosures (complaints) compared to participants from non-Asian (individualist) cultures, whether the complaints are preceded by a question or not.

Study 3: Method

Study 3A: Sample

In line with our preregistration, we recruited participants to a behavioral lab in Hong Kong, targeting a sample of 300 participants. We recruited 325 total, although we focus our analyses on the 253 who completed all attention checks and the study (M_{age} = 19.6 years, SD = 1.37; 57% female, 43% male). Only one participant left the study after being assigned to condition, precluding differential attrition.

Study 3B: Sample

In line with our preregistration, we recruited participants to a behavioral lab in London, targeting a sample of 400 participants. We recruited 406 total, although we focus our analyses on the 385 who completed all attention checks and the study (M_{age} = 31.8 years, SD = 11.7; 65% female, 34% male). Four participants left the study after being assigned to condition. However, we confirm there was no differential attrition across conditions, $\chi^2(1) = 0.24$, $p = .626$.

Study 3: Procedure

We conducted a nearly identical study in both locations. Here we describe the common methods. Participants read an excerpt from a fictional conversation with an acquaintance in a 2 (disclosure valence: brag vs. complaint) × 2 (turn-taking type: boomerask vs. overt disclosure) design. Within each condition, participants had an equal chance of seeing one of three possible scenarios. The scenarios were drawn from the stimuli in Studies 2A and 2B, which focused on a car, kids, or vacation (see Appendix B).

Study 3: Measures

After reading the transcripts of the fictional interaction, participants evaluated the conversation on four "liking" dimensions (3A: α = .85; 3B: α = .82) and three "perceived sincerity" dimensions (3A: α = .69; 3B: α = .80) on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *definitely* (see Appendix A). Each set of dimensions was collapsed into a standardized index. All effects were again estimated with linear regressions, using topic fixed effects.

The only difference between Study 3A and Study 3B was that in 3B, participants were asked to self-report their ethnicity, using the following categories: White (46%), Black or African Origin (6%), American Indian or Alaska Native (0%), East Asian (14%), South Asian (22%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0%), Latino (3%), and Other (5.9%). An additional 4% reported multiple categories. For our analyses, we classified anyone who reported East Asian or South Asian identity (exclusively or in combination with others) as having an Asian ethnicity (37%).

Study 3A: Results

Liking and Sincerity

As expected, compared to overt-disclosers, participants perceived boomeraskers as less likable ($M_{Ask\text{-}sharer}$ = 3.91, SD = 1.12 vs. M_{Overt_sharer} = 4.14, SD = 1.03), less enjoyable ($M_{Ask\text{-}sharer}$ = 3.72, SD = 1.19 vs. M_{Overt_sharer} = 3.98, SD = 1.25), less pleasant ($M_{Ask\text{-}sharer}$ = 3.91, SD = 1.19 vs. M_{Overt_sharer} = 4.18, SD = 1.30), and more irritating ($M_{Ask\text{-}sharer}$ = 3.73, SD = 1.35 vs. M_{Overt_sharer} = 3.39, SD = 1.29), and the difference on the liking index was significant, $t(248) = 2.1$, $p = .034$, $d = .266$. Furthermore, participants found boomeraskers as less sincere ($M_{Ask\text{-}sharer}$ = 4.05, SD = 1.32 vs. M_{Overt_sharer} = 4.66, SD = 1.08), less caring ($M_{Ask\text{-}sharer}$ = 3.22, SD = 1.24 vs. M_{Overt_sharer} = 3.85, SD = 1.21), and more superficial ($M_{Ask\text{-}sharer}$ = 4.03, SD = 1.32 vs. M_{Overt_sharer} = 3.50, SD = 1.28) than overt-disclosers, $t(248) = 5.3$, $p < .001$, $d = .47$. Consistent with our hypothesis, we again found that perceived sincerity mediated the effect of communicator type on liking (β = .254, 95% CI [.375, .150], $p = .027$). The remaining direct effect from condition to liking was reduced to nonsignificance (β = .027, 95% CI [−.159, .210], $p = .768$).

Moderation by Disclosure Valence

We found a main effect of disclosure valence—braggers were seen as less sincere, standardized β = −.573, SE = 0.115, $t(248) = 5.0$, $p < .001$—but not significantly less likable, standardized β = .202, SE = 0.125, $t(248) = 1.6$, $p = .001$. We also found an interaction such that disclosure type moderated the effect of boomerasking on liking, interaction effect: β = −.593, SE = 0.206, $t(247) = 2.9$, $p = .004$, though not on sincerity, interaction effect: β = −.062, SE = 0.181, $t(247) = 0.3$, $p = .733$. In this sample, boomeraskers were liked less than overt-disclosers when bragging, simple effect: β = −.525,

$SE = 0.153$, $t(123) = 3.4$, $p < .001$, but not when complaining, $\beta = .079$, $SE = 0.132$, $t(122) = 0.6$, $p = .553$.

Study 3B: Results

Liking and Sincerity

As expected, compared to overt-disclosers, participants perceived boomeraskers as less likable ($M_{\text{Ask-sharer}} = 4.38$, $SD = 1.17$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt\_sharer}} = 4.69$, $SD = 1.05$), less enjoyable ($M_{\text{Ask-sharer}} = 4.13$, $SD = 1.33$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt\_sharer}} = 4.32$, $SD = 1.27$), less pleasant ($M_{\text{Ask-sharer}} = 4.30$, $SD = 1.40$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt\_sharer}} = 4.62$, $SD = 1.28$), and more irritating ($M_{\text{Ask-sharer}} = 3.40$, $SD = 1.60$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt\_sharer}} = 2.86$, $SD = 1.38$), and the difference on the liking index was significant, $t(248) = 2.1$, $p = .034$, $d = .266$. Furthermore, participants found boomeraskers as less sincere ($M_{\text{Ask-sharer}} = 4.58$, $SD = 1.53$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt\_sharer}} = 5.31$, $SD = 1.18$), less caring ($M_{\text{Ask-sharer}} = 3.61$, $SD = 1.55$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt\_sharer}} = 4.17$, $SD = 1.34$), and more superficial ($M_{\text{Ask-sharer}} = 3.76$, $SD = 1.55$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt\_sharer}} = 2.95$, $SD = 1.31$) than overt-disclosers, $t(248) = 5.3$, $p < .001$, $d = .47$. Consistent with our hypothesis, we again found that perceived sincerity mediated the effect of communicator type on liking ($\beta = .267$, 95% CI [.170, .368], $p < .001$). The remaining direct effect from condition to liking was reduced to nonsignificance ($\beta = .014$, 95% CI [−.160, .127], $p = .846$).

Moderation by Disclosure Valence

We found a main effect of disclosure valence such that braggers were seen as less sincere than complainers, standardized $\beta = -.609$, $SE = 0.092$, $t(380) = 6.6$, $p < .001$, though not significantly less likable, standardized $\beta = .307$, $SE = 0.100$, $t(380) = 3.1$, $p = .002$. Across the whole sample, we did not find a significant interaction between disclosure valence and boomerasking on liking, interaction effect: $\beta = -.247$, $SE = 0.199$, $t(379) = 1.2$, $p = .217$.

Because we measured ethnic background, we looked at this relationship separately for Asian and non-Asian participants in this sample. Among non-Asian participants, there was no indication of any interaction, interaction effect: $\beta = -.087$, $SE = 0.252$, $t(235) = 0.3$, $p = 730$. However, among Asian participants, there was a marginally significant interaction with valence and boomerasking, interaction effect: $\beta = -.573$, $SE = 0.331$, $t(138) = 1.7$, $p = .086$. The pattern of the interaction was similar to Study 3A—while boomeraskers were less likable than overt-sharers in the positive domain, $\beta = -.530$, $SE = 0.226$, $t(73) = 2.3$, $p = .022$, there was no boomerasking effect in the negative domain, $\beta = .019$, $SE = 0.252$, $t(63) = 0.1$, $p = .941$. We caution any strong interpretation of these results, however, as the three-way interaction effect between boomerasking, culture, and valence in this study was not significant, $t(375) = 1.1$, $p = .278$.

Study 3: Discussion

While the results of Studies 3A and 3B are consistent with culture-specific moderation by valence as demonstrated in Study 3B, they are also consistent with no moderation by valence, as demonstrated in Studies 2A and 2B. While, as before, boomerasks were viewed more negatively than overt disclosures in the positive domain, when people complained, we noticed a possible attenuation that occurred among part of our sample. Among non-Asian participants, we strongly replicated the effect from Study 2B: Direct disclosures were liked more than ask-brags and ask-complaints. However, participants in Hong Kong and participants of Asian ethnicity in the United Kingdom responded a bit differently to positive and negative information. Specifically, the data suggest they may not have liked speakers who disclosed negative information, regardless of whether the negative disclosure was preceded by a question or not.

This pattern is consistent with prior research that people from Eastern cultures find negative self-disclosure more aversive, whether it is preceded by a question or not (e.g., Liu & McClure, 2001). Even with this potential moderation in one subpopulation, we still robustly replicated the boomerasking effect in the positive domain for all samples. These results underscore the robustness of the boomerasking effect and suggest potential avenues for future research that more carefully examines cross-cultural differences in conversational cognition and behavior.

Study 4: The Presence Versus Absence of Reciprocal Questions

We have theorized that the negative effects of boomerasking are due to a perceived lack of responsiveness from the boomerasker—because boomeraskers fail to respond to their partner's answer. There are different ways to test this theory. First, we could study scenarios in which the boomerasker asks a follow-up question instead of (or in addition to) their egocentric self-disclosure. However, it is clear that follow-up questions would increase the perceptions of responsiveness, as prior research robustly shows that asking follow-up questions signals high responsiveness (e.g., Huang et al., 2017; Yeomans et al., 2019). Another way to test this mechanism, which we use in this study, is for the boomerasker's partner to *solicit* the boomerasker's disclosure with a reciprocal (i.e., mirror) question. For example, if Speaker A says "How was your weekend?" then Speaker B says "It was great. How was yours?" before Speaker A (the boomerasker) shares about their weekend, this pattern of turn-taking may be seen as more responsive than if Speaker B simply says "It was great" without the reciprocal question ("How was yours?") and Speaker A shares about their weekend without being asked. Though prior work suggests that reciprocal questions may not reflect sincere interest from the asker, we suspect they do license their recipients to self-disclose. In Study 4, we examine solicited versus unsolicited boomerasks.

Study 4: Method

Sample

In line with our preregistration, we recruited MTurk workers as participants, targeting a sample of 450 participants. We recruited 462, although we focus our analyses on the 459 participants who passed the initial attention check ($M_{\text{age}} = 41.7$ years, $SD = 12.3$; 47.1% male, 51.0% female). All exclusions were conducted before assignment to condition.

Procedure

Participants read an excerpt from a fictional conversation with an acquaintance. They were randomly assigned to one of three

experimental conditions: solicited boomerask (in which they asked a reciprocal question), unsolicited boomerask (in which they did not ask their partner to share their perspective), or overt disclosure (in which their partner straightforwardly disclosed). Within each condition, for stimulus sampling, participants had an equal chance of seeing one of three possible scenarios that either focused on a dream, sport, or vacation (see Appendix F for full stimuli).

Measures

After reading the transcript of the fictional interaction, participants evaluated the conversation on four "liking" dimensions ($\alpha = .86$) and three "perceived sincerity" dimensions ($\alpha = .78$) on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *definitely* (see Appendix A).

Study 4: Results

As preregistered, we conducted all our hypothesis tests as linear regressions, controlling for topic fixed effects.

Liking and Sincerity

Replicating the findings from Study 2, participants perceived unsolicited boomeraskers as less likable than overt-disclosers ($M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = -0.110$, $SD = 1.14$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt\_sharer}} = 0.120$, $SD = 0.86$), $t(454) = 1.97$, $p = .049$, $d = .22$, and less sincere ($M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = -.220$, $SD = 1.12$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt\_sharer}} = .116$, $SD = 0.81$), $t(454) = 3.0$, $p = .003$, $d = .33$. And we again found that perceived sincerity mediated the difference in liking between unsolicited boomerasking and overt disclosure ($\beta = .273$, 95% CI [.090, .456], $p = .002$).

Turning to the new condition (solicited boomerasks), we found that solicited boomerasks did not face the same penalties as unsolicited boomerasks. Solicited boomerasks were seen as more sincere ($M_{\text{Solicited}} = 0.108$, $SD = 1.01$) than the unsolicited boomeraskers, $t(454) = 2.9$, $p = .004$, $d = .33$, and similarly likable ($M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = -.110$, $SD = 1.14$), $t(454) = 0.9$, $p = .364$, $d = .10$. While the main effect of solicited versus unsolicited boomerasking on likeability was not significant, we found a significant mediated pathway of perceived sincerity for the difference between solicited and unsolicited boomerasking on likability ($\beta = .233$, 95% CI [.060, .403], $p = .009$). We found no significant differences between the solicited boomeraskers and the overt-disclosers, for either likability, $t(454) = 1.1$, $p = .292$, $d = .120$, or sincerity, $t(454) = 0.07$, $p = .945$, $d = .008$.

Study 4: Discussion

As expected, the negative effects of boomerasking were somewhat mitigated when the boomerasker's self-disclosure was invited by their partner. These findings substantiate our theory that the harmful effects of boomerasking are due to uninvited egocentrism from the boomerasker. When their disclosure is invited, the harmful effects of boomerasking are diminished.

Study 5: Observing Face-to-Face Conversations

Studies 1–4 show that people readily recall instances of boomerasking, believe that boomerasks will be received more favorably than overt disclosures, and that across a wide variety of conversational contexts, straightforward disclosure may be more beneficial than prefacing disclosures with a question. If a speaker asks a question, allows their partner to answer, but does not follow up on that answer, and is not invited to share their own perspective, but shares it anyway, this series of choices is perceived as insincere and unlikable. Still, these studies relied on participant recall and hypothetical conversation scenarios. We shift toward more naturalistic contexts and, ultimately, real conversations in Studies 5 and 6.

While the text-only stimuli in Studies 1–4 allowed us to systematically vary contextual variables across experimental conditions, during face-to-face conversations, people have access to much richer information than words alone. In addition to verbal content, they can observe nonverbal cues (e.g., body language, facial expression, gesticulation, trunk lean) as well as prosodic cues (e.g., tone of voice, cadence of speaking, interruptions, laughter, back channels like "yea" and "uh huh"). Factors across all three categories of conversational content (verbal, nonverbal, prosodic content) profoundly influence interpersonal dynamics, decisions, perceptions, and outcomes. For example, the acoustic features of speech (e.g., intonation, prosody, volume, vocal effort, and speaking rate) carry information about a speaker's message above and beyond the message's linguistic content (Camp et al., 2021; Murray & Arnott, 1993; Oba & Berger, 2024; Scherer et al., 1991; Van Zant & Berger, 2020), and many aspects of facial expression and body language influence the meaning of the words people say to each other (Carney et al., 2015, for a review). In Study 5, we add more informational richness by asking participants to observe and evaluate videos of face-to-face interactions.

Study 5: Method

Sample

We again recruited MTurk workers as participants, targeting a sample of 300 participants. We recruited 371, although we focus our analyses on the 305 participants that completed the survey ($M_{\text{age}} = 36.9$ years, $SD = 11.2$; 43.0% male, 57.0% female; no differential attrition across conditions), $\chi^2(1) = 0.1$, $p = .702$.

Procedure

Participants were told that they would watch a short video in which two people took turns answering questions. Participants were shown a picture of the target individual (the "communicator") and told that they would be evaluating that person after watching the video.

Participants then watched one of two videos featuring two men engaged in face-to-face conversation (Appendix G). In the *overt communicator* video, a title slide introduced a new topic question ostensibly provided by the experimenter (e.g., "Question 1: If you could have one superpower, what would it be?"), which was first answered by the recipient and then answered by the communicator. In the *boomerasker* video, a title slide likewise introduced a new topic question, but the title slide only listed the topic question number, not the question itself (e.g., "Question 1"). Instead, participants in this condition saw an additional snippet of video showing the communicator posing the topic question to the recipient himself.

Measures

After watching the video, participants evaluated the communicator on several dimensions of perceived sincerity and liking, presented in a randomized order. For perceived sincerity, participants rated the extent to which the communicator appeared "genuine," "insincere" (reverse-scored), and "fake or phony" (reverse-scored, $\alpha = .85$). For liking, participants rated the extent to which the communicator appeared "likable," "like someone I would want to spend time with," "annoying" (reverse-scored), and "irritating" (reverse-scored, $\alpha = .89$). Both the "perceived sincerity" and "liking" measures were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *very much*.

Participants indicated the communicator's motivation by selecting one of three options: "Mostly wants to hear [the recipient's] answers," "Wants to share his own answers and hear [the recipient's] answers," or "Mostly wants to share his own answers." These options reflected common conversational motives that range from high relational interest to low relational interest (i.e., self-interest; Yeomans et al., 2023). Participants also rated the sincerity of the communicator's interest in the recipient's answers on a 100-point slider scale ranging from *[the communicator] genuinely cares about [the recipient's] answers* to *[the communicator] is pretending to care about [the recipient's] answers*. Finally, participants selected which communicator they would prefer to spend time with or selected "I'm indifferent."

Study 5: Results

Exclusions and Analysis Plan

To ensure that participants did not experience technical issues that would substantially affect their experience, we asked, "Did you experience any issues while playing the video?" Participants selected: "I couldn't watch the video at all," "The video was slowly loading, lagging, and/or grainy," "I couldn't hear some (or any) of the conversation," or "I watched the entire video without any issues." Over 99% indicated that they watched the video, and 93% reported no technical issues. We include all participants in our analyses (though three participants neglected to answer the item measuring the extent to which the communicator's interest was pretend vs. genuine, resulting in a sample size of 302 for this item).

Perceived Sincerity

As predicted, participants perceived the communicator as less sincere when he was presented as a boomerasker than when he was presented as an overt communicator ($M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 3.74$ out of 7, $SD = 1.65$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt}} = 5.11$, $SD = 1.36$); $t(303) = 7.87$, $p < .001$, $d = .91$. Furthermore, participants felt that, compared to the overt communicator, the boomerasker's interest in the recipient's answers was more likely to be pretend (vs. genuine; $M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 69.6$ out of 100, $SD = 26.6$ vs. $M_{\text{Overt}} = 46.7$, $SD = 24.6$); $t(300) = 7.75$, $p < .001$, $d = .89$. Instead, participants felt that the communicator mostly wanted to share his own answers (59%) rather than hear the recipient's answers (5%) or both (36%) compared to overt communicators, share: 51%, hear: 3%, both: 46%; $\chi^2(1) = 2.12$, $p = .146$, $\phi = .08$.

Liking

Furthermore, participants liked the communicator less when he was presented as a boomerasker than when he was presented as an overt communicator ($M_{\text{Boomerasker}} = 3.79$ out of 7, $SD = 1.64$ versus $M_{\text{Overt}} = 4.99$, $SD = 1.29$); $t(303) = 7.11$, $p < .001$, $d = .75$. Consistent with our hypothesis, we again found that perceived sincerity mediated the effect of communicator type on liking ($b_{\text{indirect}} = -.1.15$, $SE = 0.15$; 95% CI [−1.46, −.85]). The remaining direct effect from condition to liking was reduced to nonsignificance ($b = -.05$, $SE = .09$, $p = .580$).

Behavioral Intention

A significantly larger fraction of participants preferred to hang out with the overt communicator compared to the boomerasker (overt communicator condition: 44% *preferred communicator*, 23% *preferred recipient*, 33% *indifferent*; boomerasker condition: 20% *preferred communicator*, 51% *preferred recipient*, 29% *indifferent*); $\chi^2(2) = 29.5$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .31$. Excluding the 31% of participants who were indifferent between the two individuals, people were far more likely to hang out with the communicator when he was presented as an overt communicator than as a boomerasker (overt communicator condition: 65% *preferred communicator*; boomerasker condition: 28% *preferred communicator*), $\chi^2(1) = 28.9$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .37$.

Study 5: Discussion

In Study 5, we found that participants evaluating others' face-to-face interactions perceived boomeraskers as less sincere than communicators who overtly disclosed and liked boomeraskers less. This suggests that the negative effects of boomerasking persist when visual and acoustic information are available. The results of Study 4 also replicate the finding from Study 2D that—in addition to negative perceptual consequences—boomerasking may harm important behavioral outcomes, such as others' willingness to interact with the boomerasker in the future. Though these stimuli were a more information-rich version of our controlled conversational vignettes from Studies 2–4, participants were still positioned as third-party observers. In Study 6, we examine live dialogue, in which participants are active participants in the conversation, not just observers.

Study 6: Boomerasking in Natural Conversation

The results of Studies 1–5 demonstrate the interpersonal effects of boomerasking across a variety of settings, disclosure types, and conversation topics. However, these studies relied on fictional scenarios and recalled conversations. These stimuli allowed us to carefully control conversation topics and the askers' behavior, at the expense of naturalness. In Study 6, we complement the results of Studies 1–5 by studying boomerasking in natural, face-to-face conversations.

In this study, we test the effects of boomerasking using a data set that was originally collected for other research on perspective-taking in conversation (Yeomans & Brooks, 2023). In that study, participants were told to maximize mutual enjoyment and were given a predetermined list of 12 conversation topics to discuss. They were paired with a stranger, and dyads were allowed to engage in natural turn-taking, freely choosing when to make statements, ask follow-up questions, or change topics. These conversations were recorded and then transcribed and annotated. At the end of the conversation,

participants evaluated all of the topics, the conversation, and each other.

This data set is rich and complex, and we did not randomly assign participants to boomerask on particular topics. Instead, we conducted an observational, post hoc analysis of boomerasking behavior in this data set, which was an ideal setting to study boomerasking, because the transcripts were annotated at a turn-by-turn level for topics. That is, the data have identified what topic the interlocutors are discussing at every turn of the conversation. In most transcript data, detecting boomerasks at scale is extremely challenging because current language technology has a very hard time detecting the boundaries between one topic and the next in natural dialogue (Purver, 2011). However, the nature of this data set allows us to conceptualize boomerasks as raising a topic (which most commonly occurs by asking a question) and then subsequently dominating the airtime on that topic. The transition from controlled experimental manipulations of boomerasking across only a few conversational turns in Studies 1–5 to an examination of boomerasking in natural dialogue in Study 6 mirrors the breadth and evolution of methods used by behavioral scientists to study conversation dynamics over the past several years, with an increasing emphasis on supplementing traditional experimental and survey methods with more transcript data that has occurred in real time (e.g., Brown-Schmidt & Hanna, 2011; Yeomans et al., 2023).

Study 6: Method

Sample

Individuals were recruited separately to a behavioral lab. We intended to collect 200 participants (i.e., 100 pairs), based on the expectations of participant availability. We planned to have the research assistant conducting the study identify any dyads that had a technical malfunction, failed to follow instructions, or otherwise did not complete the study. In our data, 210 people started the study, and the exclusions removed 14 people (7 dyads), leaving 196 speakers (98 dyads) in the final sample (M_{age} = 32.4 years, SD = 14.52; 54.6% male, 45.4% female).

Stimuli

In a pilot study, we pretested 50 conversation topics drawn from previous research. For example, "When is the last time you sang to yourself? To someone else?" or "What is the strangest thing about the place where you grew up?" (Aron et al., 1997; Huang et al., 2017). From the pilot data, we selected 12 topics that received middling ratings of interestingness on average, with high variance, so that participants would not all want to talk about the same things. See Appendix H for the final list of 12 topics provided to participants in Study 6.

Procedure

Before meeting, participants read the 12 topic questions in a random order and rated their generic preference for each topic without any partner in mind, as a baseline. Then they met another participant and spent 10 min conversing about the 12 topics with a clear, shared goal: enjoy the conversation (see Appendix I for the exact instructions). Both people were given a piece of paper with the list of topics—we randomized (at the dyad level) the order that the topics were displayed on the sheet, so everyone's topic list was in the same order as their partner's list. Participants were also randomized into one of two conditions—half were told to switch topics frequently, while the other half were not told how often to switch topics. However, this manipulation was unrelated to the hypotheses we test here, and we collapse across conditions in all analyses below.

Measures

All the conversations were recorded on video and transcribed. After the study, we asked research assistants to annotate each turn in every conversation with one of the 12 topic labels (see Appendix J for annotation protocol), or else a label for "off-topic" discussion, including the initial introductions and final goodbyes. After the conversation, each speaker rated their preference for each topic with their partner and predicted their partner's same preference rating for each topic (see Appendix I for the exact prompts).

Study 6: Results

We conducted all analyses at the level of individual topics. For each topic, we compared their preconversation and postconversation preferences to their behavior during the conversation itself, to identify whether one person's boomerasking on a topic during the conversation affected their partners' preference for that topic. To account for person- and dyad-level covariation in our regression estimates, we clustered our standard errors at the person and group level using the multiwayvcov package in R (Graham, Arai & Hagströmer, 2016).

To estimate an effect of boomerasking in these data, we needed to measure and compare three variables for each topic discussed: how the topic was initiated; how much each person contributed to the topic; and how much each person reported enjoying the topic afterward. We discuss each of these three measures in turn before our main test.

Topic Initiations

On average, dyads spent at least one turn of their conversation on 8.0 of the 12 topics. For the most part, each topic was discussed in a single block of consecutive turns (less than 3% of discussed topics were raised again, later in the conversation, and discussed a second time). In cases where someone changed topics midturn, we manually divided turns and assigned each fragment to the appropriate topic. For each discussed topic, we labeled the person who first mentioned each topic as the "initiator." We observed that the vast majority of initiators started the topic with a question (85.1%), while a small fraction started to discuss the topic (14.9%). In our analyses below, we focus only on the topics that were initiated with a question, although we confirm that the results are substantively identical when we include the nonquestion initiations as well (in part because there are so few of them).

Topic Contributions

Once a topic was introduced, dyads spent an average of 10.9 turns on that topic before switching to another, spanning an average of 80.6 s and 208 words per topic. Because many turns are short (interjections, backchannels like "yea" and "uh huh," etc.) in friendly

conversation, the turn count was less correlated with the other two metrics (speaking time: $r = .523$; word count: $r = .595$) than speaking time and word count were correlated with each other ($r = .956$). We use talk time as a metric of topic contributions, though we confirm that the results are similar for other measures. Furthermore, we define a person's "topic share" as their total amount of speaking time spent on a topic, as a fraction of the total amount of airtime devoted to the topic by the dyad.

Topic Preferences

In general, the best predictor of a person's postconversation preference for a topic was their baseline preconversation preference for a topic, $\beta = .551$, $SE = 0.028$; $t(1,392) = 19$, $p < .001$. These baseline preferences also predicted conversation behavior. Participants' own baseline preferences increased the probability they would initiate the topic during their conversation, $\beta = 4.31\%$, $SE = 1.69\%$; $t(1,392) = 2.5$, $p = .011$. Thus, in all the regressions below, we control for baseline preferences (the raw estimates are essentially the same).

We saw evidence of topic preference contagion: people's baseline preferences for topics affected their partner's preferences through the conversation. For instance, a person's postconversation topic preferences were predicted well by their partner's baseline topic preferences, $\beta = .088$, $SE = 0.37$; $t(1,392) = 2.4$, $p = .018$, and by their partner's talk time, $\beta = .142$, $SE = 0.032$; $t(1,392) = 4.5$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, individual talk time was well predicted by both that person's own baseline preferences, $\beta = 4.71$, $SE = 0.99$; $t(1,391) = 4.8$, $p < .001$, and their partner's baseline preferences, $\beta = 2.14$, $SE = 1.17$; $t(1,391) = 1.8$, $p = .067$. In other words, when someone liked a topic and talked about it a lot, their partner tended to also talk about that topic more and enjoyed that topic more afterward.

Boomerasking

Critically, we found a boundary condition on this contagion effect: The relationship between speaking time and topic preferences depended on who initiated the topic. For the topic initiator, both their own talking time, $\beta = .187$, $SE = 0.044$; $t(694) = 4.3$, $p < .001$, and their partners' talking time predicted their postconversation topic preferences, $\beta = .083$, $SE = 0.038$; $t(694) = 2.2$, $p = .032$. However, for noninitiators, only their own talking time, $\beta = .274$, $SE = 0.041$; $t(694) = 6.6$, $p < .001$, but not their partner's talking time, $\beta = -.012$, $SE = 0.042$; $t(694) = 0.3$, $p = .783$, predicted their postconversation preferences.

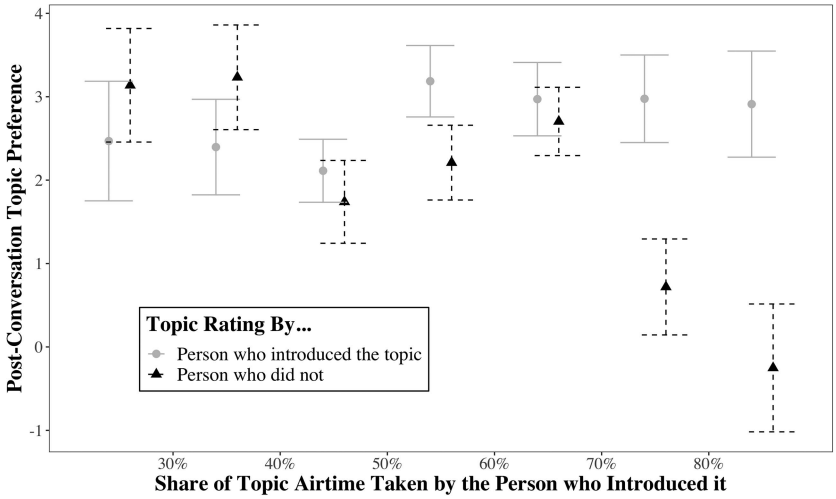
We formalize these comparisons in terms of topic share—the percentage of a person's talking time on a topic (see Figure 2). For topic initiators, there was no relationship between their topic share and their postconversation preference, $\beta = -.003$, $SE = .033$; $t(694) = 0.1$, $p = .927$. However, when their partner initiated a topic, the topic share mattered. The more the initiator dominated the topic, the less their partner enjoyed the topic, $\beta = -.100$, $SE = .036$; $t(694) = 2.7$, $p = .007$; interaction term: $\beta = -.296$, $SE = .120$; $t(1,389) = 2.5$, $p = .014$. In other words, when someone boomerasked on a topic by initiating it and then dominating the airtime on that topic, their partner did not enjoy the topic as much and was unlikely to want to discuss that topic again. We provide an example of this pattern of speech in Appendix K.

Study 6: Discussion

In Study 6, we observed boomerasking play out in natural conversation. Even when people could talk about any topic in any order, with any distribution of airtime and a simple goal to have fun, they disliked topics that were raised by—and subsequently dominated by—their partner. In free-flowing conversation, too, it seems that people dislike boomeraskers.

Figure 2

Effect of Topic Initiation and Airtime on Postconversation Topic Preferences



Note. Airtime is binned in 10 percentage point bins, with the bins at each end combined (0%–30% and 80–100%) due to sample size. Error bars show ±1 standard error from the mean.

General Discussion

Conversation requires constant navigation of often-conflicting motives (Yeomans et al., 2022). Though people enjoy talking about themselves and eliciting desired perceptions and reactions—like admiration and sympathy—from others, at the same time, they know that others find conversational narcissism and overt self-promotion unappealing. Our studies suggest that people engage in a predictable pattern of speech in an attempt to show interest in others and share about themselves. They *boomerask:* They ask a question, let a partner respond, and then talk about one's own perspective on that topic. Alas, boomeraskers often pay too little attention to their partners' responses and talk too much about their own perspective—a common form of conversational egocentrism (Study 1A).

Although people believe that boomerasking will more successfully convey interest in a partner than directly disclosing the same information (Study 1B), we find that recipients prefer communicators who overtly share, brag, and complain—rather than ask-share, ask-brag, or ask-complain—across a wide range of topics, disclosure types, and conversational contexts (Studies 2A–D), in both Eastern and Western cultures (Studies 3A–B). The negative interpersonal effects of boomerasking seem driven largely by the fact that they are unsolicited—when people raise a topic and then share their perspective on the topic without being asked for it. Indeed, the negative effects of boomerasking diminish when the boomerasker's perspective is solicited by their partner, for example, with a mirror question like "My weekend was good. How was *your* weekend?" (Study 4).

These effects were not limited to reading hypothetical conversation scenarios in text. People preferred overt communicators to boomeraskers when they observed their partner's nonverbal and acoustic behavior on video (Study 5), when they interacted with a new acquaintance (stranger) in live dyadic conversation, and where boomerasking was conceptualized as initiating a topic (usually by asking a question like "Have you seen *Inside Out 2*?") and then dominating the airtime on that topic ("Oh you haven't? Well let me tell you all my thoughts about *Inside Out 2*." Study 6).

Theoretical Contributions

Prior research on human interaction has often overlooked the rich information that exists at the turn-by-turn level of conversation—the unfolding sequence of decisions people make at every moment of every interaction (Stivers, 2013; Stokoe, 2021; Yeomans et al., 2023). Some research has studied one turn of conversation at a time. For example, research has measured outcomes when someone brags, complains, deceives, apologizes, asks a question, seeks or gives advice, makes an offer, an excuse, a joke, and so on (Baumeister, 1982; Gergen & Wishnov, 1965; Godfrey et al., 1986; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Kowalski, 1996; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Miller et al., 1983; Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Rudman, 1998; Scopelliti et al., 2015; Tice et al., 1995)—without studying the conversational content that comes before and after those decisions. Still, other research has focused on whole interactions as monolithic experiences: Did people interact or not? Did they interact face to face or virtually? Were the conversants men or women? and so on (e.g., Boothby et al., 2018; Brooks & Schweitzer, 2011; Epley & Schroeder, 2014; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Meanwhile, work in conversation analysis has identified common descriptive patterns of turn-taking across interlocutors, such as adjacency pairs (e.g., Sacks et al., 1974; Stivers, 2013).

Taken together, these approaches provide very valuable insights—but they can overlook the rich information contained in the turn-by-turn level of analysis, especially in sequences of more than one turn across multiple minds, the psychological processes that underlie those turn-level behaviors, and connecting conversational behavior and cognition to important outcomes (Yeomans et al., 2023). For example, one emerging area of study focuses on how people search, choose, shift, and end topics at every turn of every conversation (e.g., Mastroianni et al., 2021; Sun & Slepian, 2020; Yeomans et al., 2022). How do people make decisions to manage topics? How should they? Our findings here suggest that individuals should largely avoid raising topics, letting others respond, and quickly switching back to their own point of view or dominating the airtime on that topic (while showing insufficient interest in a partner's perspective).

Our work also contributes to the literature on impression management (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990)—specifically indirect strategies (Cialdini, 1989; Cialdini et al., 1976; Sekhon et al., 2015; Sezer et al., 2018)—by identifying and examining a novel indirect impression management strategy: asking questions to license self-disclosure. Boomerasking combines elements of communicator-centric strategies (Cialdini, 1989; Cialdini et al., 1976; Jones et al., 1963; Sekhon et al., 2015; Sezer et al., 2018) and recipient-centric strategies (Cialdini et al., 1990; Jones & Wortman, 1973). However, unlike other indirect impression management strategies, which may successfully conceal insincere intentions, boomerasking is often seen as insincere and ineffective by the boomerasker's talk partner. These perceptions may be linked to feeling duped (Vohs et al., 2007) when the recipient feels that the boomerasker has misrepresented their sincere interest (Levine & Wald, 2020).

We also contribute to the literature on question-asking and disclosure in conversations. In general, question-asking yields interpersonal benefits. When a communicator asks their conversation partner a question, they show interest in their perspective and invite their partner to self-disclose (e.g., Di Stasi et al., 2024). However, since question recipients search for cues that signal their partner's motives (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019; Raskin & Attardo, 1994; Reis et al., 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988), the interpersonal benefits of question-asking are contingent upon the question-asker's responsiveness to their partner's answers (Huang et al., 2017). In fact, the benefits of question-asking are driven almost entirely by follow-up questions that, by definition, require the asker to listen and probe for more information (Huang et al., 2017; Yeomans et al., 2019). Boomeraskers fail at the task of conversational uptake, overfocusing on sharing their own information, paying too little attention to their partner, and undermining the benefits of question-asking. Thus, boomerasking serves as a theoretical and practical boundary condition for the positive interpersonal effects of question-asking.

Finally, we contribute to existing research on the critical role of listening in conversation. Good listening comes with a host of interpersonal benefits. Perceiving that one's partner is listening empathetically and attentively can reduce a speaker's social anxiety (Itzchakov et al., 2017), boost their attitude clarity (Itzchakov et al., 2018), and alleviate depression (Hale et al., 1997). Recent work suggests that the best listeners may not only signal listening through

nonverbal cues like nodding, smiling, eye contact, and forward trunk lean, but through verbal cues that demonstrate uptake and responsiveness, such as repeating, paraphrasing, or reformulating what a partner has said (H. K. Collins, 2022; Demszky et al., 2021; Yeomans et al., 2022). Boomeraskers fail to signal uptake—and therefore present as poor listeners preoccupied with their own upcoming disclosure—even when they may have been sincerely interested and listening carefully to the partner's response. People's negative reactions to boomeraskers provide further evidence that bad listeners—or even good listeners who do not offer sufficient evidence of their good listening to their partner—tend to degrade conversational quality (H. K. Collins, 2022; Yeomans et al., 2022).

Future Directions

Boomerasking Signals

Though boomerasking can be planned or spontaneous (intentional or unintentional), previous research highlights the effect of even subtle changes in question phrasing in leading recipients to draw different inferences about the asker's intentions (H. P. Grice, 1975, 1991; Minson et al., 2018; Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Wilson & Sperber, 2002). For example, "negative assumption" questions that presuppose problems (e.g., "How noisy are the neighbors?") can signal that the speaker is more assertive and knowledgeable on a topic than "positive assumption" questions that presuppose the absence of problems (e.g., "The neighbors are quiet, right?"; Minson et al., 2018). Future research could investigate the role of different types of questions in boomerasking.

For instance, recipients are more likely to recognize and disdain boomerasking when the questions preceding them are more specific. When a communicator asks a specific question, recipients must infer why the communicator chose *that* question over a broader question that—in most cases—is more likely to be relevant to the recipient (H. P. Grice, 1975; Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Wilson & Sperber, 2002) and may infer that such a specific question must be relevant for something the communicator wishes to disclose. For example, a broad question like "How is work going?" could be followed by any number of stories about work, while "What do you think of the new HR system?" suggests the asker is looking for a particular kind of response.

As a preliminary empirical test of this notion, we asked a small sample (N = 105 MTurk workers; M_{age} = 34.2 years, SD = 9.52, 37.1% female) to rate the sincerity and scope of 10 questions—one broad and one narrow question in each of five conversational domains: that day's events, the past weekend, work, travel, and romantic relationships (full method and results in Appendix L). For example, participants evaluated two questions from the "work" domain, one broad ("How is work going?") and one narrow ("Is your boss ever just a huge jerk to you?"). Participants rated the sincerity of each question on a 101-point slider scale ranging from *they want me to ask them back* to *they are genuinely interested* and rated the scope of each question on another 101-point slider scale ranging from *extremely vague* to *extremely specific*. Across all domains, the narrow questions were rated as less genuine than the broad questions (M_{Narrow} = 36.9 out of 100, SD = 32.3 vs. M_{Broad} = 56.5, SD = 30.3), $t(1,048) = 10.1$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.60$, and question specificity was negatively correlated with perceived sincerity (standardized $\beta = -.124$, $SE = 0.031$), $t(1,048) = 4.0$, $p < .001$. These results offer preliminary evidence that specific questions—like "Did you have any weird dreams last night?" and "What's the craziest thing you've ever swam with?"—may serve as a warning of a forthcoming boomerask.

Boomerasking Subtypes

How often are boomerasks planned or strategic? The results of Study 1A revealed that most recipients (89%) perceive boomerasks as deliberate or strategically employed, and most boomeraskers admit their conscious intentions (81%), but other boomeraskers held the opposite view—that they asked a sincere question and then quickly followed it with a brag, complaint, or neutral disclosure by accident (without an a priori intention or desire to disclose). Future research could explore both the prevalence and effectiveness of strategic boomerasks compared to unintentional boomerasks—or the extent to which any undesirable patterns of turn-taking emerge intentionally in the moment. In addition, we identified three distinct and common subtypes of boomerasking: ask-bragging, ask-complaining, and ask-sharing. It is likely that other subtypes exist, including "ask-debating," "ask-arguing," or "ask-persuading," whereby a communicator asks someone for their opinion on a topic merely to spark debate or persuade the person to change their stance on an issue.

A Boomerasking Antidote

Finally, researchers could investigate how boomeraskers might be able to recognize and therefore alter their usage of problematic boomerasks. Awareness, merely knowing what boomerasks are and that they tend to be regarded poorly, may help. Here, we suggest that would-be boomeraskers will often be well-served to be more responsive to their conversation partners after each turn of a conversation, via increased conversational uptake and responsive listening through verbal cues like affirmation, validation, and repeating and/or reformulating what a partner has said (H. K. Collins, 2022).

In addition to aiming for more responsiveness broadly, chronic boomeraskers might focus on asking questions that they are unable to answer themselves (e.g., someone without children could ask about a friend's children), blocking the possibility of boomerasking entirely. Another antidote may be reaching a norm of reciprocal self-disclosure (Sprecher et al., 2013). For example, over time, a close pair may develop a norm within their relationship in which they habitually take turns disclosing (in relatively equal amounts), without much responsiveness. We suspect this may succeed when a norm *other* than the norm of conversational uptake has been clearly established over time (i.e., across many interactions). Finally, we suspect that avoiding self-disclosure entirely is not an antidote. At some point, self-disclosure following your own question becomes not only tolerable but important for mutual involvement and balance in the conversation or the relationship more broadly. Future work could identify how long interlocutors should wait to self-disclose after asking a question—to help individuals strike a productive balance between being both interested in their partners and interesting themselves.

Conclusion

People often boomerask—they pose questions only to quickly answer those questions themselves. Alas, boomeraskers leave worse

impressions than overt communicators: While question-asking offers a host of positive interpersonal outcomes, unresponsive, self-centered, or disingenuous inquiry undermines those benefits. Communicators who ask sincere questions and listen to their partners' answers can uncover deeper, more supportive conversations and relationships, but people should avoid turning the focus of a conversation back to themselves before showing interest in their partner's answer.

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(*Appendices follow*)

Appendix A

"Perceived Sincerity" and "Liking" Measures Used in Studies 1–4

Study 1A (Not Designed as—or Combined Into—Composite Measure)

Perceived sincerity

My conversation partner cared about what I had to say.

Liking

I liked my conversation partner more after the conversation.

I enjoyed the conversation.

I felt annoyed or frustrated during the conversation. (R)

Study 2A

Perceived sincerity (α = .80)

This person is sincere.

This person cares about my perspective.

This interaction was superficial or fake. (R)

Liking (α = .82)

I like this person.

This interaction was pleasant, overall.

This interaction was irritating. (R)

Study 2B

Perceived sincerity (α = .75)

This person is sincere.

This person cares about my perspective.

This interaction was superficial or fake. (R)

Liking (α = .71)

I like this person.

This interaction was pleasant, overall.

This interaction was irritating. (R)

Study 2C

Perceived sincerity (α = .75)

This person is sincere.

This person cares about my perspective.

This interaction was superficial or fake. (R)

Liking (α = .71)

I like this person.

This interaction was pleasant, overall.

This interaction was irritating. (R)

Study 4

Perceived sincerity (α = .94)

My date is being insincere with me. (R)

My date is being fake in these conversations. (R)

My date is pretending to have different motives than the ones they truly have. (R)

Liking (α = .91)

I like my date.

My date is likable.

I would enjoy spending time with my date.

I dislike my date. (R)

Study 5

Perceived sincerity (α = .85)

Overall, (the communicator) seems…

Genuine

Insincere (R)

Fake or phony (R)

Liking (α = .89)

Overall, (the communicator) seems…

Likable

Like someone I would want to spend time with

Annoying (R)

Irritating (R)

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix B

Prompts, Topics, Questions, and Disclosures Used in Studies 2A, 2B, 3A, and 3B

Positive Disclosure Prompts (2A, 3A, and 3B)

Boomerasker (Ask-Braggart)

Imagine you are at a party when an acquaintance sits down next to you and asks, (*Boomerasker's Question*)

You briefly give your answer and ask them back. Your acquaintance responds, (*Brag*)

Overt Communicator (Braggart)

Imagine you are at a party when an acquaintance sits down next to you and says, (*Brag*)

Negative Disclosure Prompts (2B, 3A, and 3B)

Boomerasker (Ask-Complainer)

Imagine you are at a party when an acquaintance sits down next to you and asks, (*Boomerasker's Question*)

You briefly give your answer. Then, your acquaintance responds, (*Complaint*)

Overt Communicator (Complainer)

Imagine you are at a party when an acquaintance sits down next to you and says, (*Complaint*)

10 Topics Used as Stimuli in Studies 2A, 2B, 3A, and 3B

Boomerasker's Question

1. Brag (2A, 3A, 3B)
2. Complaint (2B, 3A, 3B)

Note—Studies 3A and 3B only used three of these topics: one (car), five (kids), and nine (vacation).

Topic 1: Car

What kind of car do you drive?

1. I just bought a Tesla Model 3. The technology in it is incredible.
2. My car just died on me last week, so I've been taking the bus to work. I'm not really sure what I'm going to do about that yet.

Topic 2: Dating

So, what's new? Are you dating anyone?

1. I've got a date this weekend. I'm a little nervous because the person is really cute.
2. I just got dumped. It's been a pretty bad few weeks. I really thought they were the one.

Topic 3: Day

How is your day going?

1. I just asked someone on a date and they said yes. And I aced my job interview. It's been such a great day for me
2. I asked someone out and got denied and then botched my job interview. It's been a pretty awful day for me.

Topic 4: Job

How is your job going?

1. I just got offered a job doing marketing for Google.
2. I was just laid off—it's been kind of hard.

Topic 5: Kids

How are your kids doing?

1. My son was just admitted by Yale and I'm really excited for him.
2. My son has been going through a lot lately. He's considering dropping out of college and I'm not sure what to do to help him.

Topic 6: Partner

What does your partner do for a living again?

1. My partner just landed a job at a big local law firm. It's a huge deal and I'm really proud.
2. My partner actually just lost their job. We've been hunting around but the job market is rough right now.

Topic 7: Phone

What kind of phone do you have?

1. I just got the new iPhone X. The camera is amazing. I love it.
2. I dropped my phone today and broke the screen.

Topic 8: Restaurants

Have you eaten at any new restaurants lately?

1. I went to this gourmet French place last night, and the wine was incredible.
2. I haven't really been able to go out much lately. I'm just getting over the flu. I was sick for like 2 weeks.

(*Appendices continue*)

Topic 9: Vacation

Where are you going on vacation?

1. I just booked a 2-week, three-country tour of Europe. I'll be visiting France, Switzerland, and Italy.
2. I don't think I'm going to take a vacation this year. I can't really afford it.

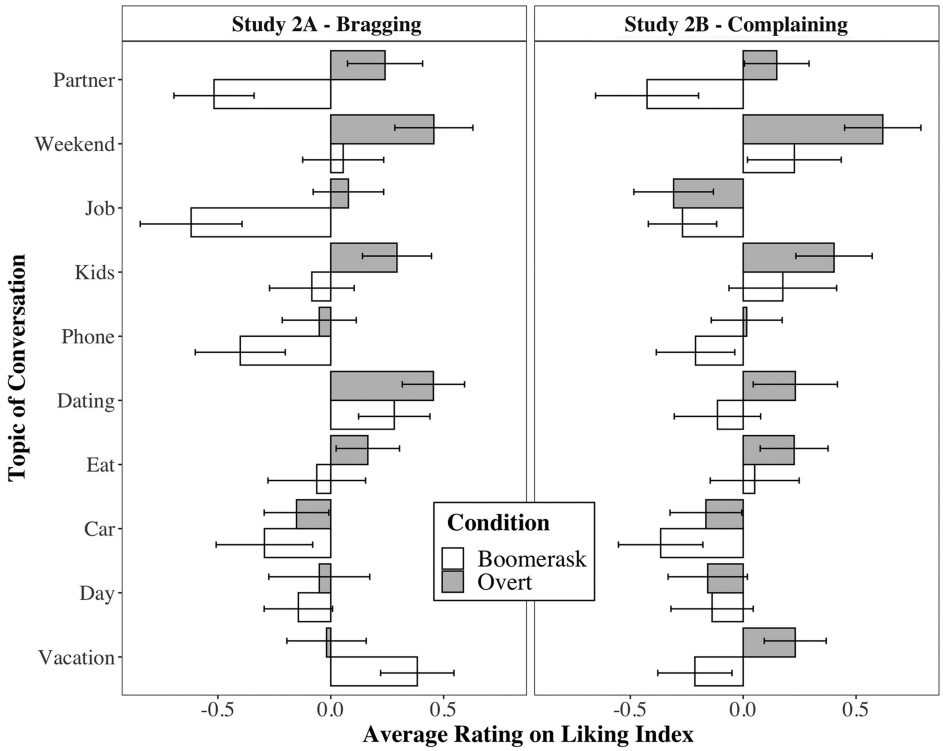
Topic 10: Weekend

Are you doing anything interesting this weekend?

1. I'm seeing Hamilton on Broadway. My friend has a hookup for tickets.
2. I have to take care of my mother this weekend. She had a bad case of pneumonia and just got home from the hospital.

Appendix C

Full Results From All 10 Topics in Studies 2A and 2B



Note. Perceived liking across communication types and conversation topics. Error bars reflect ±1 standard error from the mean.

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix D

Prompts, Topics, Questions, and Disclosures Used in Study 2C

Topic 1: Dreams

Overt-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they say,

"I had the weirdest dream ever last night—I dreamt that I was playing hide-and-seek with a werewolf."

Ask-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they ask,

"Did you have any weird dreams last night?"

You briefly give your answer. They respond,

"Yeah, I had the weirdest dream ever last night—I dreamt that I was playing hide-and-seek with a werewolf."

Topic 2: Uber Drivers

Overt-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they say,

"I just had such a strange interaction with my Uber driver on my way over here. The entire interior of his car was covered in colorful duct tape."

Ask-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they ask,

"Have you ever had a strange interaction with an Uber driver?"

You briefly give your answer. They respond,

"Yeah, I just had such a strange interaction with my Uber driver on my way over here. The entire interior of his car was covered in colorful duct tape."

Topic 3: Exciting Event

Overt-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they say,

"I'm really excited right now—my sister is getting back from Peru tonight. She's been there for 2 months. I can't wait to see her."

Ask-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they ask,

"Are you really excited for anything right now?"

You briefly give your answer. They respond,

"Yeah, I'm really excited right now—my sister is getting back from Peru tonight. She's been there for 2 months. I can't wait to see her."

Appendix E

Prompts, Topics, Questions, and Disclosures Used in Study 2D

Below are things that your date asked and shared with you during the conversation	
Overt communicator	Boomerasker
"What is the most physically exhausting thing you've ever done?"	Them: "What is the most physically exhausting thing you've ever done?" You: *respond*
"I once walked 13 miles in a walkathon for children with disabilities."	Them: "Yeah, mine was walking 13 miles in a walkathon for children with disabilities"
"What is your favorite kind of food?"	Them: "What is your favorite kind of food?" You: *respond*
"My favorite kind of food is definitely Italian." "I lived abroad in Italy for a year."	Them: "I'd say mine is definitely Italian … probably because I lived abroad in Italy for a year."
"What wrong assumptions do people make about you?"	Them: "What wrong assumptions do people make about you?" You: *respond*
"I like to exercise and play sports." "I went to Cornell."	Them: "For me, it's that people sometimes think I'm a blockhead jock because I like to exercise and play sports—but I went to Cornell."

Note. The eight items in the *overt communicator* condition and the three groups of items in the *boomerasker* condition were presented in a randomized order. The items in the "Overt Communicator" column are grouped by similarity only to highlight their informational equivalence to those in the "Boomerasker" column.

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix F

Prompts, Topics, Questions, and Disclosures Used in Study 4

Topic 1: Dreams

Overt-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they say,

"I had the weirdest dream ever last night—I dreamt that I was playing hide-and-seek with a werewolf."

Ask-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they ask,

"Did you have any weird dreams last night?"

You briefly give your answer. They respond,

"Yeah, I had the weirdest dream ever last night—I dreamt that I was playing hide-and-seek with a werewolf."

Ask-Reciprocator

You are talking with an acquaintance when they ask,

"Did you have any weird dreams last night?"

You briefly give your answer. Then you ask back:

"What about you"?

They respond,

"Yeah, I had the weirdest dream ever last night—I dreamt that I was playing hide-and-seek with a werewolf."

Topic 2: Sport

Overt-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they say,

"So, I recently started playing pickleball. I'm starting to get the hang of it."

Ask-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they ask,

"Have you picked up any new hobbies recently?"

You briefly give your answer. They respond,

"So, I recently started playing pickleball. I'm starting to get the hang of it."

Ask-Reciprocator

You are talking with an acquaintance when they ask,

"Have you picked up any new hobbies recently?"

You briefly give your answer. Then you ask back:

"What about you"?

They respond,

"So, I recently started playing pickleball. I'm starting to get the hang of it."

Topic 3: Exciting Event

Overt-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they say,

"I'm really excited right now—my sister is getting back from Peru tonight. She's been there for 2 months. I can't wait to see her."

Ask-Sharer

You are talking with an acquaintance when they ask,

"Are you really excited for anything right now?"

You briefly give your answer. They respond,

"Yeah, I'm really excited right now—my sister is getting back from Peru tonight. She's been there for 2 months. I can't wait to see her."

Ask-Reciprocator

You are talking with an acquaintance when they ask,

"Are you really excited for anything right now?"

You briefly give your answer. Then you ask back:

"What about you"?

They respond,

"Yeah, I'm really excited right now—my sister is getting back from Peru tonight. She's been there for 2 months. I can't wait to see her."

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix G

Summary of Video Stimuli Scripts Used in Study 5

Overt Communicator Video

(TITLE SLIDE 1) *QUESTION 1: If you could have one superpower, what would it be?*

(RECIPIENT) "Umm. Probably super strength."

(COMMUNICATOR) "Mhm. Mine would be teleportation."

(TITLE SLIDE 2) *QUESTION 2: What's the craziest thing you've ever swam with?*

(RECIPIENT) "Umm. I really haven't swum with anything crazy. Probably just fish?"

(COMMUNICATOR) "Yeah. … Last year I swam with a giant manta ray. It was incredible."

Boomerasker Video

(TITLE SLIDE 1) *QUESTION 1*

(COMMUNICATOR) "If you could have one superpower, what would it be?"

(RECIPIENT) "Umm. Probably super strength."

(COMMUNICATOR) "Mhm. Mine would be teleportation."

(TITLE SLIDE 2) *QUESTION 2*

(COMMUNICATOR) "What's the craziest thing you've ever swam with?"

(RECIPIENT) "Umm. I really haven't swum with anything crazy. Probably just fish?"

(COMMUNICATOR) "Yeah. … Last year I swam with a giant manta ray. It was incredible."

Appendix H

Topic List Provided to Participants in Study 6

Twelve topic provided to participant
What do you do for work? What do you like about it?
Why do you do these kinds of studies?
Are you a religious person? Why?
Do you have any fruit trees, plants, or a garden?
What's the strangest thing about where you grew up?
What is the cutest thing you've seen a baby or child do?
Would you like to be famous? In what way?
When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?
If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
What do you value most in a friendship?
Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix I

Materials for Study 6

Instructions for Study 6

All participants in Study 6 were given a paper with one of two sets of instructions (frequent switch vs. natural switch). Below the instructions, they saw all 12 topics listed in a random order. For any given pair, both people had the same sheet.

For the next 10 min, please have a friendly, open-ended conversation about the topics listed below.

(You and your partner should try to discuss all 12 topics during your conversation. That is, your goal is to discuss all the topics before 10 min are up. You can switch back and forth if you prefer, as long as you cover them all once.)

(You and your partner can chat about as many or as few of these topics as you'd like. That is, you don't have to discuss all the topics before the 10 min are up. You could even stay focused on one or two of them for the whole conversation if you prefer.)

During your chat, you should try to stick close to the topics below, though you can discuss the topics in any order you'd like. You should also feel free to discuss any questions, ideas, jokes, and stories related to these topics (we don't want you to feel overly constrained). Be natural. Be yourself. Have fun.

(list of 12 topics in random order)

Outcome Measures in Study 6

All participants in Study 6 answered these two blocks of questions—the first block before their conversations (one item per topic) and the second block after their conversations (two items per topic). Within each block, the questions were repeated 12 times, for each of the topics.

BEFORE CONVERSATION

Imagine the topic below came up in a conversation. Would you want to talk about this? Or would you want to switch to a new topic?

(topic question)

Please tell us your preference using the slider below, which ranges from −10 indicating a strong preference to switch to a new topic to +10 indicating a strong preference to stay on this topic.

(−10 to +10 slider: "Switch to a new Topic" to "Stay on this Topic")

AFTER CONVERSATION

Please answer these questions about the following conversation topic:

(topic question)

Your Own Topic Preferences

What is your own preference for talking more about this topic with your conversation partner? That is, if you were to have another conversation with your partner, would you prefer to talk more about this topic, or would you prefer to switch to a new topic?

(−10 to +10 slider: "Switch to a new Topic" to "Stay on this Topic")

Your Partner's Topic Preferences

What do you think your partner's preference is for talking more about this topic with you? That is, if you were to have another conversation with your partner, do you think they would prefer to talk more about this topic, or would they prefer to switch to a new topic?

(−10 to +10 slider: "Switch to a new Topic" to "Stay on this Topic")

Appendix J

Study 6 Transcript Annotation Protocol

All conversations in Study 6 were video recorded in our behavioral lab and sent to a third-party transcription service. Transcripts provided diarization (who said what, in what order) as well as time stamps for the beginning and end of each turn. Twenty-six transcripts did not have end-of-turn timestamps, so we asked our research assistants to fill them in. Additionally, the research assistants corrected all the original transcriptions (e.g., spelling, speaker ID, hard-to-hear portions) as they completed their main annotation task.

The main task was to give every turn in every conversation one (and only one) of 16 labels, which included the following: any one of the 12 topics from the 12-topic list we provided, as well as four other structural topic labels: introduction topic (e.g., hellos, exchanging names), ending topic (e.g., goodbyes), "off-topic" label for diversions from the list (e.g., sports, movies, current events), or a "switch" label for turns in which a speaker finished one topic and started the next topic in the same turn. The full instructions for coding topics are included in our Open Science Framework repository.

All transcripts were labeled by at least two independent annotators, and in general, there was very high agreement (91%). Most of the disagreement was on the edges of the structural topics—in 55% of all disagreements, annotators differed on whether a midtopic diversion was sufficiently "off-topic," and another 15% of disagreements focused on whether a turn was a clean transition to the next topic or a switch turn that bridged from the previous topic. All disagreements on topic coding were resolved by a third research assistant. Additionally, each "switch" turn was split into two fragments that each covered a single topic for some of our analyses.

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix K

Example of Naturalistic Boomerasking (Study 6)

Speaker	Text
B	So, what do you do for work and what do you like about it if you like it?
A	Oh, well, like, I mean, I'm a student so, I mean, I do have, like, an on-campus job and, like …
B	Here at [University name]?
A	… in like, [the library]. Yeah, so, I, I mean, I just, like, I guess, help out there. Like, I shelve books and stuff
B	At the library here?
A	Uh-huh.
B	I'm sorry. So, I actually don't really have a formal job for work I did but I recently, not recently, in the past year moved home from Connecticut, I was in Connecticut for 10 years but I recently moved back here to Massachusetts, which is where I grew up because my mother is ill, and she has something pretty terminal. So, I moved back here to be her caretaker and it's an unpaid position, obviously, it's my mother, so, she does have a business that I help her with and manage and, you know, since she is pretty incapacitated. I do most of that, but like I said, it's all unpaid, you know, but, but then again, I live at her house. I use her car. You know, if I need money, she will have a credit card or, you know, they'll give me money to use. But I did have some saved up. I wouldn't really say I, I like anything about it because it's a lot of work. I basically, if I had to put it in work terms, it's pretty much like three jobs in one because I'm a caretaker, I manage, she has a property, property income, rental income business, I mean, she's got, like 23 properties, so, and then there's like 23 properties, and then my grandmother, also, lives right across the street. And so, there's two houses that I have to take of care of, too, so it's like three jobs at once. So, I'm wondering, if, it's really stressful and a lot of work. And it's, it gets frustrating to me because you know, you see both of them getting old and, you know, there's a lot of illness that I have to, like, deal with. Like, her back, I mean, she can't walk and so, a lot of leg lifting. So, I wouldn't say I really like it. I like being around my family but other than that it's really stressful and it's tiring.

To illustrate the pattern of speech we operationalized as boomerasking in the naturalistic dialogue observed in Study 6, here is an example of boomerasking drawn from one conversation. Though its seven-turn sequence exceeds the three-turn sequence we used for boomerasking stimuli in Studies 1–5, in this example, Speaker B asks a topic-initiating question ("What do you do for work and what do you like about it?") and ultimately goes on to dominate the airtime on that topic through self-disclosure.

Appendix L

Supplemental Study in the General Discussion

The research question for this study was Does question specificity signal insincerity (i.e., forewarn boomerasking)?

Method

Participants ($N = 105$ MTurk workers; $M_{age} = 34.2$ years, $SD = 9.52$, 37.1% female) rated the sincerity and scope of 10 questions—one broad and one narrow question in each of five conversational domains: that day's events, the past weekend, work, travel, and romantic relationships. For example, participants evaluated two questions from the "work" domain, one broad ("How is work going?") and one narrow ("Is your boss ever just a huge jerk to you?"). Participants rated the sincerity of each question on a 100-point slider scale ranging from *they want me to ask them back* to *they are genuinely interested* and also rated the scope of each question on another 100-point slider scale ranging from *extremely vague* to *extremely specific*.

Results

Manipulation Check

Confirming our manipulation, across all domains, narrow questions were rated as more specific than the broad questions ($M_{Narrow} = 72.5$ out of 100, $SD = 27.1$ vs. $M_{Broad} = 42.9$, $SD = 31.6$), $t(1,048) = 16.3$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.90$. The narrow question was rated as more specific than the broad question within each of the five domains (all $t > 4.59$, all $p < .001$, all $d > 0.60$).

Specificity Signals Boomerasking

Furthermore, across all domains, narrow questions were rated as less genuine than the broad questions ($M_{Narrow} = 36.9$ out of 100, $SD = 32.3$ vs. $M_{Broad} = 56.5$, $SD = 30.3$), $t(1,048) = 10.1$, $p < .001$, $d = .60$. The narrow question was rated as significantly less genuine than the broad question in four of the five domains (all $t > 3.9$, all $p < .001$, all $d > 0.52$) but was not much different across conditions in the "weekend" domain ($t = 0.25$, $p = .80$, $d = .03$).

Finally, a linear regression model revealed that, across all questions and domains, question specificity was negatively correlated with perceived genuineness, standardized $\beta = -.124$, $SE = .031$, $t(1,048) = 4.0$, $p < .001$. That is, the more specific a question was, the more participants felt like it was being asked to license the communicator's own disclosure, rather than because the communicator was genuinely interested in the participant's answer.

(*Appendices continue*)

Domain	Question type	
	Broad	Narrow
Day	How was your day?	Anything funny happen to you today?
Work	How is work going?	Is your boss ever just a huge jerk to you?
Travel	Do you like to travel?	Have you ever been to Italy?
Weekend	How was your weekend?	Go to any good restaurants this weekend?
Relationship	How is your partner doing?	Have you ever felt like you and your partner might not be a good fit?

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