

# Study: People may use overconfidence to persuade or deceive others

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A pair of researchers, one from the University of Munich, the other the University of Amsterdam has found that people may behave with overconfidence as a means to persuade or deceive other people. In their paper published in the journal *Nature Human Behavior*, Peter Schwardmann and Joël van der Weele describe a two-stage experiment

they carried out with volunteers and what they found.

Scientists who study [human behavior](#) have found through [various studies](#) that most people tend to overrate their own abilities or characteristics. Most people think they are smarter than they actually are, for example. And most people seem to think they are better drivers than all the others on the road. But why is this? In this new effort, Schwardmann and van der Weele sought to find out if there might be an advantage to being overconfident—to that end, they carried out a two-stage experiment designed to reveal possible advantages.

In the first part of the experiment, a group of volunteers was given an [intelligence test](#); half were told that they would receive €15 if they could convince other people that they did very well on the test. After taking the test, all of the volunteers were given their results and asked to convince other people that they had done well. Unbeknownst to the volunteers, not all were given their actual scores by the researchers. Some were given results that were higher, while others received a lower score. The researchers then studied the behavior of the volunteers as they tried to convince mock employers that they had scored high on the test.

The researchers report that those volunteers who were told they scored well on the test reported higher confidence to the researchers than those who were told they scored badly. That was the first result. The second part of the study was designed to find out if overconfidence gave people an advantage when dealing with other people. This involved studying the [behavior](#) of the volunteers as they attempted to persuade a mock [employer](#) that they had done well on the test. The researchers report that those who were told they scored high on the test, whether they actually had or not, were better able to convince the employer that they had—an example of an advantage for overconfidence

**More information:** Peter Schwardmann et al. Deception and self-

deception, *Nature Human Behaviour* (2019). [DOI: 10.1038/s41562-019-0666-7](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-019-0666-7)

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