

BALANCING POLLYANNA AND PLATO: EXPLORING THE COMPLEMENTARY
SELF-PRESENTATION STRATEGIES OF SKEPTICISM AND ENTHUSIASM

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ABSTRACT**BALANCING POLLYANNA AND PLATO: EXPLORING THE COMPLEMENTARY
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At work, employees benefit significantly from the ability to influence and persuade others. Success depends in part on the substance of the topic, but also largely on the impression that the individual is able to convey in the eyes of other people. Research in self-presentation has long shown that using specific impression management tactics to craft a positive image is fraught with challenges. Among many possibilities, highlighting past accomplishments risks coming across as immodest and unlikable, and direct flattery risks being seen as instrumental and inauthentic. Drawing on theories of person perception, attitude change, and intellectual humility, I hypothesize that communicating a consideration of alternatives and a realistic understanding of challenges, a self-presentation strategy which I label *skepticism*, can achieve attributions of competence without incurring the penalties commonly associated with self-promotion. Additionally, I hypothesize that the cognitive strategy of skepticism can be enhanced when complemented by an affective strategy of displaying momentary expressions of positive emotion, which I label *enthusiasm*. Results from three studies demonstrate that both skepticism and enthusiasm can be effective self-presentation strategies, and that they are particularly successful when used together in contexts that involve persuasion and influence. I discuss the implications for theory and research on impression management, social judgment, and leadership in organizations.

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CHAPTER 1

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Introduction

People strive to be seen as capable, intelligent, and knowledgeable in a wide variety of work interactions. Doctors demonstrate expertise so that patients will pay attention to their instructions (Ong, De Haes, Hoos, & Lammes, 1995), sales agents must convince their customers that they understand the product (Szymanski, 1988), and lawyers need juries to listen to and be persuaded by their technical arguments in a case (Lubet, Tape, & Talbot, 2010). At the same time, people also benefit from being seen as likable. Patients take into account their feelings about their doctor when deciding to sue (Ambady et al., 2002; Beckman, Markakis, Suchman, & Frankel, 1994; Roter, 2006), customers' liking of sales reps leads to the development of long-term sales relationships (Nicholson, Compeau, & Sethi, 2001), and juries assess the likability of lawyers when deciding whether to believe their sides of the case (Hans & Sweigart, 1992). These two dimensions of social judgment, commonly labeled *competence* and *warmth*, account for up to 80% of our impressions of other people (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007).

The impressions that people hold are consequential in many momentary settings (e.g., when a customer is deciding whether to purchase a car from a salesperson), but also have implications for how future interactions unfold. If a supervisor believes that one of their employees is not particularly intelligent, they are unlikely to give that employee the same opportunities for growth that another employee might receive. Evidence from many literatures in psychology suggests that once people form an impression, they unwittingly seek, interpret, and create cognitive and behavioral data that verify it, while avoiding that

which is likely to disconfirm it (Nickerson, 1998; Snyder & Stukas Jr, 1999). Even if the employee does well on a new assignment, the pre-existing impression serves as a lens through which behavior is noticed and performance is evaluated (Fiske, 1998; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). Beliefs about people are difficult to change once formed, and the schema used to form judgments initially are further anchored by further use (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2001).

Given the importance of others' beliefs, it stands to reason that people generally engage in a variety of self-presentational strategies in an effort to create a favorable image (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990b). This conscious management of behavior in an attempt to gain specific attributions from other people is described as *impression management* (Jones & Pittman, 1982). All people generally want others to hold favorable images of them (Baumeister, 1982; Frey, 1978; Goffman, 1967; Jones & Wortman, 1973; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, Weigold, & Hallam, 1990; Sedikides, 1993), but this may be particularly true in work settings where positive evaluations can lead to the attainment of higher performance ratings, salaries, and promotions (Gould & Penley, 1984; Wayne & Liden, 1995). Impression management theory views people as "actors" who perform in "settings" before "audiences" (Goffman, 1959), terms that I will use throughout this paper.

Despite the near ubiquity of impression management in organizational life and more than half a century of empirical research, evidence still suggests that employees struggle to construct positive images that balance competence and warmth. These two dimensions of judgment correspond to the two most widely-studied impression management strategies, self-promotion (seeking competence attributions) and ingratiation

(seeking warmth attributions). Self-promotion typically takes the form of sharing information about one's accomplishments and abilities. While there is broad consensus in the business community that self-promotion is an acceptable and even necessary tool on the path to advancement and achievement (Molinsky, 2013), researchers have found mixed empirical support for its effectiveness in actually achieving the attribution of competence or other beneficial work outcomes (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003b). Even when seen as more competent, self-promoters often inadvertently incur social penalties for violating modesty norms that outweigh the benefits associated with the achieved competence. Some studies have demonstrated net benefits (Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995), while others have shown net costs (Gordon, 1996; Judge & Bretz Jr, 1994; Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997).

The second of the highly-studied impression management tactics is ingratiation, which typically takes the form of flattery and opinion conformity. Evidence from social psychology and has shown that individuals are generally more effective at using ingratiation to achieve attributions of warmth (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Gordon, 1996; Vonk, 2002), and field studies have linked the use of ingratiation tactics in organizations to performance evaluation, compensation, and promotions (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003a; Kumar & Beyerlein, 1991; Stern & Westphal, 2010; Westphal & Stern, 2007). However, ingratiation still leaves plenty of room for error and can backfire if it is perceived as inauthentic or instrumental by the target (Keeves, Westphal, & McDonald, 2017; Liden & Mitchell, 1988). More broadly, research in the stereotype literature suggests that when individuals are seen as likeable, they may face a compensatory judgment in which they are assumed to be less competent, and therefore less valuable a

partner for exchange in organizational settings, especially if they are women (Bergsieker, Leslie, Constantine, & Fiske, 2012; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004, 2008; Glick & Fiske, 2001). As Cialdini and DeNicholas (1989: 626) stated, “if there is an overarching lesson to be learned from the large body of work on impression management, it is that favorable self-presentation is a tricky business.”

In this dissertation, I propose a novel self-presentation strategy that focuses on how actors can manage impressions by consciously structuring the way that they talk about their ideas, projects, and experiences. Drawing on theories of person perception, attitude change, and intellectual humility, I hypothesize that communicating a consideration of alternatives and a realistic understanding of challenges, a self-presentation strategy which I label *skepticism*, can achieve attributions of competence without incurring the penalties commonly associated with self-promotion. Additionally, I hypothesize that the cognitive strategy of skepticism can be enhanced when complemented by an affective strategy of displaying momentary expressions of positive emotion, which I label *enthusiasm*. Because self-presentation and social judgment is influenced by role expectations and stereotypes around salient characteristics, I also hypothesize that the effects of enthusiasm in particular will be moderated by the gender of the actor, such that social role expectations and stereotypes will lead women to be perceived as warmer relative to men.

Most existing research on impression management focuses specifically on the behaviors performed by actors and the perceptions and attributions made by the audience (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008; Leary, Allen, & Terry, 2011). Because the self-presentation strategy of skepticism is about the way that information about an idea is

conveyed, as opposed to conveying information primarily about the self, I contextualize my theorizing in situations that involve persuasion and interpersonal influence. In its most basic form, persuasion is about changing the mental states of another person (O'keefe, 2002). Skepticism and enthusiasm are hypothesized as specific strategies for presenting oneself, during the act of persuasion, in a manner that gains positive attributions and avoids negative attributions that have persistently been found in organizational contexts (Bolino, Long, & Turnley, 2016).

I test my hypotheses around skepticism and enthusiasm using three studies. In Study 1, I use a crowdfunding context and an experimental design to explicitly manipulate the self-presentation strategies of skepticism and enthusiasm while varying gender. Participants judged the entrepreneur and reported the degree to which they were persuaded that the project would be successful. Results generally support my hypotheses, with both skepticism and enthusiasm predicting higher overall evaluations and the combination of both strategies resulting in the highest judgments and evaluations for both male and female actors. Consistent with gender stereotypes, women were perceived as warmer across most conditions relative to men. In Study 2, I conducted a field survey at a medical call center to analyze how the self-reported use of skepticism and enthusiasm is related to successful persuasion in recruiting new customers. Once again both strategies proved were related to positive gains in persuasive outcomes, and in this context, I did not find evidence of a moderating role for gender. In Study 3, participants in a laboratory experiment gave suggestions to a business owner and were prompted to deliver their idea in a skeptical, enthusiastic, combined, or neutral (control) manner. Responses were rated on warmth and competence by independent raters and the two company founders rated

the overall quality of the ideas. Consistent with my predications, the skepticism presentation strategy resulted in higher attributions of competence, the enthusiasm strategy resulted in higher attributions of warmth, and the combination of the two was the most effective at producing both positive attributions and higher quality ideas.

This dissertation contributes to scholarship on impression management, social judgement, and leadership in organizations. First, it answers specific calls by impression management scholars to explore how individuals convey more than one impression management strategy simultaneously (Leary & Allen, 2011), in contexts where actors must be attuned to multiple self-presentational demands (Bolino et al., 2016). Second, it presents a novel self-presentation strategy, the communication of skepticism, that can be applied to many work contexts and does not involve targeting one specific individual for ingratiation or self-promotion, tactics which are more likely to backfire (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). Third, it reflects findings from the social judgement and stereotype content literatures that women and men face different expectations when striving for the same social goals (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Cuddy et al., 2008; Rudman & Glick, 1999), but offers a promising suggestion that both men and women can benefit from the non-gendered skepticism strategy. Most fundamentally, these findings help inform the study of how people can actively influence the impressions of others, and how they might improve these skills of self-presentation. If lab participants can be nudged to frame their suggestions using these strategies with only short manipulations, it suggests that leaders may be able to help their employees improve their use of self-presentation to grow and succeed in their careers. Many theories of leadership include components related to the personal development of employees (e.g., individualized consideration within

transformational leadership theory) (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006), and this dissertation provides insights into self-presentation strategies that might be improved over time with practice and feedback.

Impression Management: What the Actors are Doing

Goffman (1959) famously described social interaction as a theatrical play in which actors know their parts and did their best to fulfill them, and audience members interpret their performance in light of their expectations surrounding the scene. While social philosophers had long acknowledged that people control their behavior in front of other people, Goffman's key insight was that people control their self-presentation with the specific goal of creating a desired image in the eyes of other people. A stream of research in social psychology began analyzing this intentional, directed behavior in dyads where the subjects were given specific goals to appear a certain way to a "target" (e.g., Jones, 1964; H. M. Rosenfeld, 1966; Schneider, 1969), and interest in impression management spread to other disciplines including organizational psychology (DuBrin, 2011; Gardner & Martinko, 1988).

Scholars have created several taxonomies of impression management that persist in the literature, but the one that has received the most research attention and continues to be most widely used is from Jones and Pittman's (1982) influential synthesizing chapter on self-presentation strategies. Their taxonomy identified five strategies of impression management, classified by the intended attribution that the actor seeks from the target. Self-promotion describes actors seeking to be viewed as competent, typically by highlighting personal abilities and past accomplishments. Ingratiation is where an actor seeks the attribution of likability, typically by flattering and mirroring the target.

Exemplification involves an actor seeking to be seen as dedicated, and is demonstrated by “going the extra mile,” performing additional work duties, and working longer hours.

Supplication is a strategy in which an actor seeks to be seen as needing help and support, by showing weakness or highlighting limitations. Lastly, intimidation seeks attributions of fear and is demonstrated by bullying and threatening (Jones & Pittman, 1982). For the purpose of this dissertation, I focus on the two types concerned with competence and warmth attributions, self-promotion and ingratiation.

A constant tension in the study of impression management is the distinction between an actor’s intentions and the audience’s reactions to their demonstrated behavior. Individual actors tend to view impression management as honest, reasonable, and goal-focused (P. Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995), and intuitively understand that successful self-presentation involves maintaining a delicate balance among self-enhancement, accuracy, and humility (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). These generally well-intentioned actors focus their behavior-management on projecting a desired image, determined by how one wants other to see them, even if this is different from what one is (Leary & Kowalski, 1995; Roberts, 2005).

On the other hand, from the audience’s perspective, impression management may well backfire on the actor for a myriad of reasons. In the case of self-promotion, for example, actors can easily cross the line to seeming like they are bragging or arrogant, even when the attempt to be careful (Sezer, Gino, & Norton, 2018). In general, there exists a modesty norm in many societies that warns against people acting in ways that overtly seem to be attempting to enhance their own status (Wortman & Linsenmeier, 1977). This is particularly strong for women (Rudman, 1998), but it has been documented

in the impression management literature that it clearly applies to both genders (Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989; Gibbins & Walker, 1996; Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986; Jones & Pittman, 1982). The perceived violation of this modesty norm, and incurring negative judgments as a result, is a constant risk in the act of self-promotion. Similarly, an ingratiation's efforts to engender feelings of liking by complementing his supervisor may work well when directed upward at his boss (Bolino et al., 2008; Bolino et al., 2016), but when observed by peers the same behavior is viewed as sycophantic and even immoral (Kim, LePine, & Chun, 2018).

While researchers have spent a great deal of time carefully parsing the effects of specific self-presentation tactics within Jones and Pittman's (1982) five categories (not to mention other taxonomies), some prominent scholars have called for approaches to studying impression management that move closer to naturalistic settings, and that examine strategies that are both conscious and subconscious and more present in everyday life (Bolino et al., 2016; Leary et al., 2011). This dissertation shifts the focus of impression management strategies from exclusively on the target, which is typical of studies in laboratory settings, and places the focus on how actors present themselves when talking about ideas, projects, experiences, plans, and other focal objects besides the actor and the target themselves. Self-presentational concerns still abound in these situations, particularly at work where competence is constantly under review.

But before introducing the strategies that form the focal point of my propositions, I first review the other side of the stage. When an actor puts on their performance, what is the content of the audience's judgments?

Social Judgment: What the Audience Perceives and Why it Matters

Researchers in social cognition have long been concerned with the processes by which individuals gain knowledge about behavior and events that they encounter in social interaction, and how they use this knowledge to guide their future actions (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). From this perspective, people are "intuitive scientists" searching for the causes of behavior that they observe, drawing inferences about people and their circumstances, and acting upon this knowledge (Kelley, 1967, 1973). Because the human mind cannot possibly process every detail of the social world, perception must work within certain cognitive limits and accept simplification into schemas that guide future behavior. These schemas are populated by judgments about others, which affect future interaction and perception in many consequential ways (Snyder & Swann Jr, 1978; Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977). For this reason, it is critical to study impression management not just from the perspective of the actor, but also from the perspective of the audience. Judgments formed as a result of successful or unsuccessful, appreciated or unappreciated impression management efforts are likely to influence future interactions in organizational settings.

This dissertation is grounded primarily in one particular schema for the understanding of social others and their behavioral goals: warmth and competence, two dimensions sometimes referred to as universal dimensions of social cognition (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). The adaptive, functional explanation for the primacy of warmth and competence judgments in our evaluation of other people can be derived from a simple scenario (Fiske, 1994). When an individual encounters a new person or group of people, the first and most important evaluation that must be considered is, "What is their intention towards me?" Is it positive or negative? Cooperation or competition? Second,

once we have established whether they are going to attempt to stab us with a spear or not, we must then determine “What is their capability to carry out those intentions?” Given my judgment about their intent, are they capable of executing them successfully and how do I need to respond? These two characteristics - intent towards us and ability to carry out that intent - determine our warmth and competence judgments of the individual (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Wojciszke, 1994). Warmth is associated with friendliness, trustworthiness, empathy, and kindness, while competence is associated with intelligence, power, efficacy, and skill (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008).

In the context of social judgment, bidimensional ambivalence comprises either high warmth and low competence (e.g., traditional stereotypes of women; Glick & Fiske, 1996) or high competence and low warmth (e.g., stereotypes of Asians; Lin, Kwan, & Cheung, & Fiske, 2005).

Since the inception of research in person perception, researchers have been interested in how various judgments about a person, sometimes formed simultaneously and sometimes in succession, relate to and are influenced by each other. One possibility with considerable support is termed the halo effect, which specifies that perceivers tend to view a person as relatively good or relatively inferior, and for that evaluation to influence all more-specific judgments about the person (Thorndike, 1920). In a classic halo effect experiment, Kelley (1950) gave students two different vignettes that either described a new professor as “rather cold” or “very warm,” among other intellectual characteristics. The students in the warm condition participated in the subsequent discussion at a rate of 56%, whereas only 32% of the students in the cold condition participated. This experiment is generally interpreted as demonstrating that their

judgment of the discussion was shaped by a halo effect, such that the warm professor attracted attention and the cold professor did not. Asch (1946) and Anderson (1965) both reported a halo effect in their work, and Rosenberg et al.'s (1968) social and intellectual good-bad dimensions were related by a .42 correlation.

However, researchers in person perception have also amassed considerable to evidence to suggest that under certain conditions, warmth and competence tend to be negatively related, such that high judgments on one dimension correspond to relatively lower judgments on the other dimension. The first condition concerns congruence with existing stereotypes, such that when perceivers receive information on one dimension that corresponds to an ambivalent stereotype, they will assume that the target is similarly extreme on the other dimension. For example, if told that an elderly person is very kind and caring, or that a French man is very eloquent and intelligent, many perceivers will rate those individuals as particularly incompetent and cold, respectively (Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005; Yzerbyt, Provost, & Corneille, 2005). Unfortunately, in the case of outgroup stereotypes, bidimensional ambivalence appears to be not the exception but the rule (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007), making this sort of negative association more common.

The second condition in which researchers have found a negative, sometimes termed "hydraulic," relationship between warmth and competence judgments is when comparing two or more targets to each other. Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima (2005) conducted a series of studies in which they consistently found that when evaluating two groups or individuals against each other, the one judged more positively

on one dimension was judged less positively on the other. Additionally, the judgments along the two dimensions were negatively related to each other such that participants who saw a bigger difference between two groups on one dimension tended to see a bigger difference between them on the other, in the opposite direction. When they only had participants judge one target, however, the effect reversed and resembled the halo effect that other perception researchers, all who had participants judge targets in isolation, had found decades earlier (e.g., Kelley, 1950; Rosenberg et al., 1968). Labeling this a "compensatory effect," Judd et al. speculated that the negative relationship was a result of implicit fairness norms, or a sense that there must be good qualities to everyone, that only became evident when comparing groups or individuals that had relatively more to others who had relatively less. The realization that one group (or individual) is better than the other on one of the two dimensions perhaps leads to a compensation on the other dimension, saying that the second group (or individual) is better on that other dimension (Kay & Jost, 2003). In a test of the compensation effect with behavioral confirmation, Kervyn, Yzerbyt, Judd, & Nunes (2009) demonstrated that after learning about two fictive groups that were either very warm or very competent, they preferred to ask follow-up questions that were low on the other dimension, such that they would be congruent with their judgments about the group. Other work by these researchers has demonstrated that the compensatory effect does not exist for other dimensions of judgment besides warmth and competence (Yzerbyt, Kervyn, & Judd, 2008), and called for further investigation into this relationship in order to understand implications for management (Fiske, 2012).

In summary, a considerable body of work in social judgement has demonstrated that competence and warmth judgments are fundamental to our understanding of other human beings, and that many forces act to push us to favor one dimension over the other. The remainder of this dissertation is focused on countering those forces by exploring two self-presentation strategies that actors use in an effort to achieve the dual attributions of competence and warmth when trying to persuade an audience.

Skepticism as a Self-Presentation Strategy

What does it mean to know what you do not know? In Plato's *Apology* (Plato & Burnet, 1977), Socrates is puzzled by the Delphic oracle's pronouncement to a friend that he, Socrates, is the wisest man in Athens. Seeking clarity, he consults the leading citizens of Athens on what they know, and each believes to know more than the next about the great and important things of the world. Through examining how this contrasts with his own beliefs, that he in fact is lacking a great deal of important knowledge about the world, Socrates (or rather Plato) comes to realize that he may in fact be wiser than his many much-more-certain peers. His attitude of skepticism towards his own beliefs, and his willingness to share them unashamedly, is a hallmark of his underlying wisdom.

This dissertation proposes that in many organizational settings that involve presenting ideas, proposals, projects, and stories, communicating skepticism can be an effective strategy for signaling competence. A skeptical attitude, broadly defined, is generally any questioning attitude towards knowledge or opinions/beliefs stated as facts, or doubt regarding claims that are taken for granted elsewhere. In the sociology of science, Robert Merton (1957) included "Organized Skepticism" as a norm of science required for the acquisition of scientific knowledge. He described a profession-level

commitment to not accepting results at face value, and the open questioning of experiments, interpretation, generalization, alternative hypotheses, bias, possible scientific misconduct and the influence of money on scientific outcome. According to Merton, skepticism involved the suspension of judgment until ‘the facts are at hand’ and the detached scrutiny of beliefs in terms of empirical and logical criteria. Being skeptical does not mean being cynical or distrustful, nor does it mean questioning every belief or claim one comes across. Instead, it means pausing to consider alternatives and to search for evidence—especially systematically collected empirical evidence—when there is enough at stake to justify doing so.

In the context of self-presentation strategy, I define skepticism as the communication of doubt, uncertainty, or negative information alongside positive information. Skepticism in this conception is not negativity—it is a balancing act of communicating both the strengths and weaknesses, the positives and negatives. Skepticism is a cognitive strategy, related to how people think and process information and intentionally communicate those thoughts to others in a way that demonstrates competence. Drawing from theories of persuasive messaging, attitude change, and intellectual humility, I propose that skepticism can be used as a self-presentation strategy that signals competence without incurring the penalties commonly associated with self-promotion.

Shortly following World War II, a group of psychologists became interested in understanding how to better inoculate citizens from propaganda messages in future wars (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949; Lumsdaine & Janis, 1953). Across several experiments, they tested the effects of showing audiences propaganda and

counterpropaganda films that were one-sided, meaning arguing only in favor of one position, or two-sided, meaning acknowledging the other sides' positions. They demonstrated that the two-sided messages were was more effective in changing attitudes about controversial issues and led to better refutation of propaganda arguments several months later (Lumsdaine & Janis, 1953).

A small literature in field of marketing has tested the effects of two-sided messaging primarily on purchase intent, generally finding support for the idea that two-sided messages could increase trust in the salesperson (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994; Golden & Alpert, 1987; Kamins & Assael, 1987), but had mixed effects on purchase decision because the negative information was often weighted heavily (Eisend, 2006; Etgar & Goodwin, 1982; Kamins & Marks, 1987). Researchers in this literature typically applied an attribution theory lens to understand the process by which consumers made judgments (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1973). Consumers could either attribute claims about a product to the desire to sell the product, or to an honest desire to describe the product. The inclusion of negative information via two-sided messages triggered the latter and enhanced credibility, but only sometimes strengthened the purchase intent by influencing the judgments of the positive attributes. Applying this finding to self-presentation and skeptical messages, it suggests that actors would need to be cognizant of how negative information about ideas is communicated. In their theoretical framework for issue selling in organizations, Dutton and Ashford (1993) proposed that two-sided messages would be related to the success of issue selling, but that proposition has not yet been tested in empirical research.

For a deeper understanding of how skepticism can provide benefits in self-presentation contexts, I build on Crowley and Hoyer's (1994) application of optimal arousal theory in the context of attitude change, with a particular focus on social attributions. Theories of optimal arousal (Berlyne, 1971) argue that stimuli that are moderately novel, surprising, or complex will be preferred over stimuli that offer too much or too little novelty. The extent of arousal is based on a discrepancy from the "adaptation level," which is described as the level the individual has come to expect. Minor deviations from the adaptation level (either a little more or a little less) can generate positive affect, while large discrepancies will create negative affect. In the context of communicating skepticism in a work setting, optimal arousal theory suggests that skeptical messages have the potential to evoke novelty and increase attention. Once the attention is gained, I argue that audience members are more likely to make positive attributions towards the actors' competence. Skepticism provides the hook, and positive evaluative judgments follow. Individuals who communicate with certainty about their ideas, on the other hand, may be more in line with what audiences have come to expect in work contexts. Because they follow expectations, they are less likely to draw attention and less likely to draw competence attributions.

Extending this relationship, a developing stream of research on the psychological construct of intellectual humility provides additional support for why attributions are likely to be competence-related when actors convey skepticism as a self-presentation strategy. Intellectual humility is defined as recognizing that one's beliefs and opinions might be incorrect (Davis et al., 2016; Hazlett, 2012; Hopkin, Hoyle, & Toner, 2014; Leary et al., 2017; McElroy et al., 2014). While related conceptually to skepticism,

intellectual humility is a construct more akin to a personality trait that remains relatively stable within an individual over time, while skepticism is an intentional self-presentation strategy employed in service of a goal. Individuals high in intellectual humility may be more likely to employ skepticism as a tactic, but many other factors might play a role. Conversely however, I argue that audiences are likely to perceive actors who convey skepticism through a similar attributional lens, and make positive judgments as a result. Research demonstrates that people high in intellectual humility are more attentive to the strength of evidence (Leary et al., 2017) and more interested in understanding the reasons that other people disagree with them (Porter & Schumann, 2018). I hypothesize that audience members intuitively understand the link between someone who communicates with skepticism and someone who manifests these behaviors: examining evidence and understanding others, as well as considering alternatives and building a broader base of knowledge. The kinds of people who communicate with techniques like skepticism are generally the kinds of people who deserve to be considered more competent within those domains.

For all these reasons, I hypothesize that skepticism is likely to be positively related to persuasion in contexts where interpersonal influence and judgments about the actor are tied to persuasion outcomes. The persuasion context is an important boundary condition, because it intentionally separates out the degree to which skepticism is the source of persuasion vs. skepticism is a characteristic associated with actual underlying differences in intelligence. When successful interpersonal influence results in tangible persuasion outcomes, I expect that skepticism will lead to persuasion, and this relationship will be mediated through competence judgements.

Hypothesis 1: Skepticism is positively related to persuasion

Hypothesis 2: Skepticism is positively related to competence judgements (H2a), and competence judgments mediate the relationship between skepticism and persuasion (H2b)

Infusing Affect by Displaying Enthusiasm

In contrast to the cognitive wheels that turn when delivering and judging a skeptical argument, displaying enthusiasm is an affective self-presentation strategy characterized by the temporary expression of positive emotional arousal, excitement, and energy. Research on emotional display rules, emotional contagion, and a rapidly growing literature on passion all support the general prediction that enthusiasm is positively related to warmth attributions and persuasion.

Positive affect and negative affect are the two dominant dimensions that consistently emerge in studies of affective structure, both in the United States and in a number of other cultures, and have been studied across different time horizons including momentary facial expressions, diffuse mood states, and as more stable personality traits (Diener, Larsen, Levine, & Emmons, 1985; Russell, 1980; Watson & Clark, 1984; Zevon & Tellegen, 1982). Positive affect reflects the extent to which a person *feels* enthusiastic, active, and alert. High positive affect is a state of high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement, whereas low positive affect is characterized by sadness and lethargy. In contrast, negative affect is a general dimension of subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement, including negative moods and more specific emotions of anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness, with low negative affect being a state of calmness and serenity (Tellegen, Watson, & Clark, 1999; Watson & Tellegen, 1985)

While both positive and negative affect have been studied in organizational settings, positive in particular has been linked to important outcome variables such as creative problem solving, risk-taking, helping, prosocial behavior, and job performance (Brief & Weiss, 2002; George & Brief, 1992; Isen & Baron, 1991; Staw & Barsade, 1993; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). In most contexts, individuals high in PA are likely to be more effective at performing the duties of the job, and are therefore more likely to be evaluated positively by perceivers.

Focusing in on temporary rather than trait-level positive affect, a core element of all theories of emotional labor and emotional expression is that individuals follow display rules, and these rules spell out which emotions are appropriate in particular situations, as well as how those emotions should be expressed (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Ekman, Sorenson, & Friesen, 1969; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996). Strong norms exist regarding which emotions workers should and should not reveal to customers, coworkers, and supervisors (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). These "display rules" are often made explicit and serve to guide the emotional expressions of employees (VanMaanen & Kunda, 1989). Emotional labor entails following these display rules regardless of one's felt emotions (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2000).

Positive affective displays have most notably been studied in service interactions, where display rules dictate strong adherence to the communication of positive affect and the suppression of negative affect (Troughakos, Beal, Green, & Weiss, 2008). Demonstrated benefits of positive affectivity displays include an impact on service quality evaluations (Pugh, 2001), customer willingness to return and recommend an

organization to others (Tsai, 2001), the time customers spend in a store (Tsai & Huang, 2002), and higher levels of customer satisfaction (Brown & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994). In general, customers are happier when employees display positive affect during an interaction, and I expect that displaying enthusiasm across the vast majority of work-related self-presentation contexts will have a similar result. Enthusiasm is predicted to be associated with higher levels of persuasion, mediated by judgments of warmth.

The mechanisms for this effect are likely to be both cognitive and affective, with actor displays of enthusiasm leading to positive underlying attributions and positive affective states that transfer through contagion. Emotional contagion denotes a subconscious process by which people mimic the facial expressions, vocal expressions, and postures of those around them; and "catch" others' emotions as a consequence of such facial, vocal, and postural feedback (Barsade, Brief, & Spataro, 2003; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1992, 1993; Neumann & Strack, 2000). A recent study by Li, Chen, Kotha, and Fisher (2017) demonstrated that positive affective displays in crowdfunding videos did indeed transfer positive feelings to the audience members, who in turn were more likely to share the project on social media and donate to the project.

In addition to the aforementioned study by Li et al., (2017), the field of entrepreneurship has recently seen a significant expansion in the theoretical and empirical study of *passion* within the context of fundraising and entrepreneurship more broadly. Recent studies show that passion signals the presence of persistence (Cardon, Gregoire, Stevens, & Patel, 2013; Cardon & Kirk, 2015), reduces relationship conflict (Boone, Clarysse, & Andries, 2018), attracts angel investor interest (Hsu, Haynie, Simmons, & McKelvie, 2014), leads to future growth (Murnieks, Mosakowski, & Cardon, 2014).

Results have been largely positive, with a few notable exceptions. Jiang, Yin, and Liu (2019) used computational methods and found a curvilinear relationship between peak displays of joy and funding performance (i.e., successfully persuading investors to provide funding), with pitch videos that express peak positive emotions for too long being less funded than those in moderation. In a study of venture pitch competitions, Chen, Yao, and Kotha (2009) found that affective passion did not predict venture capital funding, while preparedness did. These two studies provide an excellent illustration of the challenges associated with current work in passion: a construct creep in which emotions, abilities, scripts, displays, and years of work are subsumed under the label *passion*. Holding more tightly to a definition of entrepreneurial passion would make parsing the positive benefits and potential drawbacks more clear. For example, Cardon, Wincent, Singh, and Drnovsek (2009) define entrepreneurial passion as “consciously accessible intense positive feelings related to the entrepreneurial activities that are meaningful and salient to the self-identity of the entrepreneur.” With this definition, the distinction between passion and my conceptualization of enthusiasm as a self-presentation strategy is much clearer—enthusiasm is a temporary state that is intentionally acted out in service of a goal. The stakes are not so high, and the affective display can be employed across many work contexts.

In total, the body of evidence suggests that even in lower-stakes evaluative situations, enthusiasm can be an effective self-presentation strategy that influences warmth attributions and increases the ability to persuade the audience.

Hypothesis 3: Enthusiasm is positively related to persuasion

Hypothesis 4: Enthusiasm is positively related to warmth judgements (H4a), and warmth judgments mediate the relationship between enthusiasm and persuasion (H4b)

The Complicating Role of Gender Expectations

As Goffman (1959) described, the successful performance of an actor is determined in part by the expectations of the audience. Norms place powerful constraints on what behavior is acceptable or unacceptable, and these norms can significantly alter the way that behavior is perceived and interpreted. Because gender is a salient characteristic in work settings and one to which many behavioral norms apply, it is important to consider how the gender of the actor influences the success of impression management strategies (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007).

According to social role theory, the traditional roles occupied by men (hunter, provider, protector) vs. women (caregiver, nurturer) in society leads to different norms and expectations in much of social behavior, including work. Men are expected to be agentic (assertive, independent, confident) while women are expected to be communal (sensitive, cooperative, expressive). When acting within their prescribed norms, both men and women can be perceived positively. When violating those role expectations, they are more likely to face a backlash (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999).

In addition, the stereotype that women are more emotional than men is pervasive across many different cultures (Timmers, Fischer, & Manstead, 1998). Among American samples, relative to men, women are believed to be more emotionally intense (Richie et al., 1997); more emotionally expressive (e.g., more likely to smile, laugh, cry); more skilled in the use of nonverbal cues related to emotion (Briton & Hall, 1995); and more likely to use rumination and less likely to use distraction in regulating their emotions

(Strauss, Muday, McNall, & Wong, 1997). Though the distinction between expression and experience is not always made, when it is, the results consistently show stereotypes to be stronger for emotional expression than for emotional experience (Plant, Hyde, Keltner, & Devine, 2000). Women are clearly expected to smile more often than men (Birnbaum, Nosanchuk, & Croll, 1980) and to do so in a wide variety of situations (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). Hochschild (1983) also argued that women are expected to do more emotion management than men both at work and at home.

Social role theory and the stereotype literature both suggest that in the context of impression management at work, women are likely to be expected to display higher levels of enthusiasm. For this reason, I hypothesize that gender will have a magnifying impact on the relationship between enthusiasm, warmth judgements, and persuasion. Empirically, this would manifest itself as women gaining more than men from displaying enthusiasm. But the converse is also true, that women who do not display enthusiasm are penalized relative to men if they choose to display calm emotions rather than excitement and energy.

Hypothesis 5: Gender moderates the relationship between enthusiasm and persuasion (H5a) and enthusiasm and warmth judgments (H5b), such that women gain more from enthusiasm expressions than men. Stated differently, women are penalized relative to men for displaying low levels of enthusiasm

Notably, I do not expect that gender will moderate the relationships between skepticism, competence, and persuasion. While men may be expected to be more agentic than women, I view skepticism as a relatively weak form of agentic self-presentation. While it does seek the attributions of competence, and therefore ability and agency, skeptical statements do not fit the stereotype of the confident, headstrong tribal leader. In

fact, particularly strong skeptical statements may be more likely to lead to a backlash against men than against women. While an interesting direction for future research, I am restricting this dissertation to skepticism statements that attempt to hold confidence constant in order to examine the effects of skepticism more precisely.

Combining Strategies

Lastly, there is reason to expect that using both skepticism and enthusiasm in conjunction would be likely to be more effective than purely additive. As discussed earlier in this chapter, there appears to be a compensatory effect between competence and warmth judgements in many realms of social judgment (Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005; Kervyn, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2009; Kervyn, Yzerbyt, & Judd, 2010; Yzerbyt, Kervyn, & Judd, 2008). When presented with a strong signal about one dimension and an absence of information about the second dimension, audiences tend to assume that the unknown dimension must be relatively lower. This effect is particularly strong when comparing multiple individuals (Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005), which is likely to be especially common in organizational settings where many people are collaborating and many ideas are being evaluated. By combining the two strategies, I expect the each will compensate for the hydraulic risk associated with the other.

Additionally, and likely more importantly, combining the two strategies allows each to reach its full potential within the theoretical models described earlier in this chapter. Skepticism, due to its novelty in most work contexts, is likely to provide the hook of attention. Once paying attention to the actor and the idea more closely, the target is more likely to be influenced by the positive emotion conveyed through enthusiasm.

Hypothesis 6: Enthusiasm strengthens the relationship between skepticism and persuasion

Figure 1 presents a visual representation of all six hypotheses. In summary, I predict that skepticism and enthusiasm both influence persuasion through positive attributions made about the actor. Skepticism garners competence attributions and enthusiasm garners warmth attributions. Gender moderates the effects of enthusiasm, such that enthusiastic women gain more from displaying it or lose more from failing to display it. Finally, enthusiasm strengthens the relationship between skepticism and persuasion such that when actors enact both strategies they achieve the largest gains in persuasion effectiveness.

CHAPTER 2

PRESENTATION AND OUTCOMES OF SKEPTICISM AND ENTHUSIASM

Study 1

Lab Experiment Using Crowdfunding Context

The goal of Study 1 was to test my hypotheses by experimentally manipulating skepticism, enthusiasm, and gender in the context of an entrepreneurial funding campaign. Study 2 asked participants to review and evaluate a product on Kickstarter (www.kickstarter.com). The Kickstarter website, like other online crowdfunding platforms, provides a venue for entrepreneurs, artists, and social activists to raise money for projects through an open call on the Internet (Belleflamme, Lambert, & Schwienbacher, 2013; Mollick, 2013). Potential contributors can browse a long list of projects that are currently seeking funding, and can contribute on a donation basis, or for some projects in exchange for equity or access to the product before it reaches the general retail market. The Kickstarter page for a small business venture typically contains a lengthy product description and a biography of the founder. For this experiment, I used a product called the "NoBowl Cat Feeding System", a set of small rubber mice that can be used to feed cats. A picture of the NoBowl and the other introductory material is available in the Appendix. Participants in the experiment were asked to watch a short promotional video for the product, review the biography of the founder, study the Kickstarter funding request page, and then report their judgments about the founder and the venture.

Method

Participants and Procedures

The participants were 432 adults (129 male, 303 female, $M_{age} = 25.1$ years, $SD = 10.0$ years) recruited to participate in laboratory sessions at a university in the Northeastern United States in exchange for monetary payment. The experiment followed a 2 (Gender of the Founder: Male vs. Female) x 2 (Enthusiasm: Enthusiastic vs. Calm) x 2 (Skepticism: Skepticism vs. Certainty) between-subjects design.

The participants were told that the study was focused on the how people evaluate products on Kickstarter pages. After reading a brief introduction to crowdfunding to familiarize them with the context, the first main page of the study contained a description of the NoBowl product and several pictures. The second page contained a brief biography and picture of the founder, a practicing veterinarian who was raising money to launch the product. The third page contained a 90-second video that showed various graphics and video clips of cats pursuing the NoBowls, with voice over by the founder. The fourth and final page contained a paragraph with the heading “Why bet on us?” bearing a final message from the founder.

Gender Manipulation. I varied gender of the founder by providing a male or female name (Eric Sorenson vs. Erica Sorenson), altering pronouns ("he" vs. "she"), and including a picture of the founder on the biography page. Examples of the biographies with photos are available in the Appendix. Additionally, the voice-overs for the promotional videos were recorded by two different voice actors, one male and one female.

Enthusiasm Manipulation. The level of enthusiasm displayed by the founder was manipulated in the biography and promotional video sections of the study. In the biography, the enthusiasm condition included a greeting (“*Hello!*”) and a closing line

(*“Please join me!”*) with exclamation points, while the calm condition omitted them. The scripts of the voice-overs for the promotional video contained one difference (*“I’m so excited to be talking to you today”* vs. *“I want to thank you for listening today”*). Most critically, the actors recording the voice parts were instructed with tone notes to vary the affective delivery between the conditions. In the enthusiasm condition, they were instructed to be “enthusiastic, energetic, and inspired.” In the calm condition, they were instructed to be “calm, even-keeled, relaxed but still interested, not bored.”

Skepticism Manipulation. To manipulate skepticism, the scripts of the voice-overs and the final notes from the founder were varied to either indicate complete confidence from the beginning of the venture (certainty condition) or that the founder had initially been daunted by the challenges of starting a company and had only slowly become confident (skepticism condition). The certainty condition contained lines such as, *“When I first came up with the NoBowl, I was convinced it was the solution I had always been looking for,”* in contrast to the skepticism condition’s line, *“...I wasn’t even convinced it would work.”* Importantly, the ending point for both scripts was that the founder was confident in the present state of the venture. The skepticism condition acknowledges the difficulties ahead, (*“I know it will be a challenge, but with this great idea and this great team I am completely confident...”*) while the certainty condition omitted references to the difficulties of the path ahead (*“With this great idea and this great team, I am completely confident...”*). The tone notes for the voice actors also included instructions regarding skepticism. The certainty condition instructed the actor to convey “being completely confident in the idea”, while the skepticism instructions note the founder “wasn’t always sure this was going to work; has been convinced and by the

final line is confident.” On the final “Why bet on us?” page of the study, the founder once again expressed several either certainty statements (“*Running a business feels completely natural to me,*” and “*From the very beginning we knew this was going to be a successful company, and we have worked hard and successfully prepared ourselves for this launch*”) vs. skepticism statements (“*Running a business is not what I was trained to do as a veterinarian, but I have learned a great deal in the last year,*” and “*When we first started we weren’t sure we would be able to get this far, but we have worked hard and successfully prepared ourselves for this launch*”).

Measures

Participants completed a questionnaire to assess their impressions of the founder and the likelihood of success of the venture. All ratings were assessed using 7-point scales and anchored by "Not at all" (1) and "Very much" (7), unless otherwise noted.

Warmth. The survey first asked the participants to rate the degree to which they perceived the speaker to possess a number of traits. I measured participants' perceptions of the speaker's warmth using a three-item scale consisting of “likeable,” “warm,” and “friendly,” that has been broadly used across previous research on warmth (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014), likeability (Pfeffer, Fong, Cialdini, & Portnoy, 2006), and social attraction (Rudman, 1998) ($\alpha = .91$).

Competence. I measured competence perceptions using a three-item scale consisting of “competent,” “intelligent,” and “capable,” that has been used to study competence (Rudman, 1998), agency (Kervyn, Yzerbyt, Judd, & Nunes, 2009) and general ability (Goodwin et al., 2014) ($\alpha = .95$).

Persuasion: Likelihood of Success. In the Kickstarter context, founders have a specific goal of raising the money needed to further the venture, and a broader goal, to create a positive impression on the audience as a potential future customer. Successfully persuading the audience involves convincing them that the venture is going to be funded and the product will be available for future consumption. Following Kerr, Lerner, and Shoar (2014), I asked participants to rate on a 7-point scale the likelihood that this founder would “successfully meet the fundraising goal,” “become a successful business,” and “grow the company to have 100+ employees at some point in the future.” ($\alpha = .84$).

Manipulation and Attention Checks. To ensure the validity of findings, at the end of the survey participants were asked to respond to one final set of ratings about the founders. For enthusiasm, they were asked to rate the extent to which the founder presented him or herself as “enthusiastic,” “inspired,” and “energetic” ($\alpha = .93$) when describing the product and company. For skepticism, participants rated to what degree the founder “realistically assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the business,” “had to overcome initial doubts and hesitations,” and “understood the challenges ahead” ($\alpha = .78$). For gender, participants were then asked whether the founder was a man or a woman. Lastly, participants responded to one multiple-choice attention check question regarding the color of the cat (orange, white and brown, or black) in the promotional video. One participant failed to identify the gender of the speaker correctly, and two participants failed the attention check (the cat was white and brown). These three participants’ responses were removed, resulting a final sample of 429 participants.

Results and Discussion

Before testing my hypotheses, I checked the effectiveness of the enthusiasm and skepticism manipulations. Because this study involved a 2 (Gender of the Founder: Male vs. Female) x 2 (Enthusiasm: Enthusiastic vs. Calm/Low Enthusiasm) x 2 (Skepticism: Skepticism vs. Certainty/No Skepticism) between-subjects design, I used the three scale items listed above to conduct a three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). There was a significant effect for the enthusiasm conditions ($F [1, 421] = 62.73, p < .001$), with participants rating founder's enthusiasm higher in the enthusiasm ($M = 5.53, SD = 1.28$) conditions than in the calm ($M = 4.41, SD = 1.70$) conditions. There was also a significant difference between the skepticism ($M = 4.70, SD = 1.25$) and certainty ($M = 3.91, SD = 1.26$) conditions, $F (1, 421) = 36.78, p < .001$. These results helped establish the effectiveness of the manipulations, demonstrating that participants did indeed recognize the enthusiastic and skeptical elements of the written content, audio messages, and speakers' voice tones.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the focal variables across all eight conditions.¹ I began testing my hypotheses by conducting a three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), beginning with the effects of the three conditions on the persuasion outcome, which in this context is the likelihood of success for the venture. Hypothesis 1 predicted that skepticism would be positively related to this success likelihood rating, which was supported by a significant main effect ($F [1, 421] = 13.04, p < .01$). There was also a significant effect of enthusiasm on success likelihood in this

¹ Figures are provided for better visual representation of the results of this study. Figure 2 shows the relationships between skepticism, enthusiasm, gender, and **competence** judgments, and Figure 3 shows the means and standard errors by condition. Figure 4 visually shows the relationships between skepticism, enthusiasm, gender, and **warmth** judgments, and Figure 5 shows the means and standard errors by condition. Figure 6 shows the means and standard errors of **success likelihood** by condition.

model ($F [1, 421] = 19.10, p < .001$), which supported Hypothesis 3. The interaction between enthusiasm and skepticism, which was predicted in Hypothesis 6, was not significant ($F [1, 421] = .793, n.s.$). In this experiment, enthusiasm does not enhance the effect of skepticism beyond its independent effect.

A three-way ANOVA was again conducted to analyze the effects of skepticism on competence judgements (Figure 2). Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, there was a significant main effect of skepticism on competence ($F [1, 421] = 24.73, p < .001$). There was no significant main effect for gender of the founder. Unexpectedly, there was a significant main effect of enthusiasm on competence ($F [1, 421] = 6.44, p < .05$). Perhaps even more unexpectedly, this effect was moderated by gender as the interaction term between enthusiasm and gender was also significant ($F [1, 421] = 8.53, p < .01$). The form of this interaction can be interpreted with Figure 2—enthusiastic women receive higher competence ratings than calm women, but men are judged as similarly competent regardless of their level of enthusiasm. While not hypothesized, this relationship is consistent with social role (Eagly & Steffen, 1984) and stereotype (Locksley, Borgida, Brekke, & Hepburn, 1980) theories that informed Hypotheses 5a and 5b. While I hypothesized these effects would operate through warmth judgements, the enthusiastic female founder appears to be judged through a halo effect (Bagozzi, 1996; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Yzerbyt et al., 2008) that is not present for the male founder.

A three-way ANOVA with warmth as the dependent variable demonstrated support for this relationship between enthusiasm and warmth judgements (Figure 3). The main effect of enthusiasm on warmth was significant, ($F [1, 421] = 47.08, p < .001$), providing support for Hypothesis 4a. The other significant main effect on warmth was

gender, with women on average being rated as warmer than men ($F [1, 421] = 45.99, p < .001$). While this was not a formal hypothesis, it is consistent with gender stereotypes about women (Cuddy et al., 2008). In contrast to the effect on competence judgements, the interaction between enthusiasm and gender on warmth was not significant ($F [1, 421] = 1.13, n.s.$), meaning that Hypothesis 5a was not supported. Returning to the first ANOVA, Hypothesis 5b was also not supported. The interaction between enthusiasm and gender on success likelihood was not significant ($F [1, 421] = .596, n.s.$).

Hypothesis 2b predicted that competence judgments would mediate the relationship between skepticism and persuasion, which in this context is operationalized as the likelihood of success ratings assigned to the Kickstarter campaign as a whole. I used Hayes' (2012) PROCESS macro for SPSS to generate 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals for the indirect effects. In support of Hypothesis 2b, the indirect effect of skepticism on success likelihood ratings through competence was positive and significant ($\beta = .23, SE = .06, 95\% \text{ CI } [.12, .37]$), indicating that hypothesis 2b was supported.

Hypothesis 4b predicted that warmth mediated the relationship between enthusiasm and success likelihood. If gender moderated the path from enthusiasm to warmth, this may additionally hold for the mediation relationship and result in a conditional indirect effect, or moderated mediation (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Because the moderating hypotheses were not supported, I tested the mediation model first without and then with the moderator. Again using Hayes' (2012) method, the indirect effect of enthusiasm on likelihood of success ratings through warmth was positive and significant, ($\beta = .31, SE = .06, 95\% \text{ CI } [.19, .43]$). When I included the gender moderator, both the male

founder ($\beta=.26$, $SE=.08$, 95% CI [.12, .41]) and the female founder ($\beta=.35$, $SE=.07$, 95% CI [.22, .51]) saw the effect of enthusiasm on success likelihood mediated by gender.

Taken together, these results provide initial support for the ideas that skepticism and enthusiasm are two complementary but separate paths on the road to positive image construction. There was a significant relationship between both skepticism and enthusiasm and the participants' rating of the likelihood of the venture's success. Skepticism was associated with higher competence judgements of the founder, and enthusiasm was associated with higher warmth judgments. As predicted, these judgments mediated the effects of skepticism and enthusiasm on success likelihood. While the interaction effect between skepticism and enthusiasm was not significant, for both the male and female founders, the single highest likelihood of success average was in the condition where the founder used both strategies ($M = 4.38$ for the female founder, $M = 4.30$ for the male founder). At least in this context, the effects of the two strategies appear to be additive.

Upon review, the unexpected effect of enthusiasm on competence ratings perhaps should not have been so unexpected. While the impression-managing actor's goal of enthusiasm is perhaps more likely to be focused on likability than on competence in many contexts, this particular context (i.e., entrepreneurial fundraising), is one in which enthusiasm is seen as a strong signal of both ability and motivation. As discussed in the previous chapter, a growing number of researchers in the last decade have demonstrated entrepreneurial passion is related to positive judgments about both the entrepreneur and the venture (Breugst, Domurath, Patzelt, & Klaukien, 2012; Cardon, Wincent, Singh, &

Drnovsek, 2009; Chen et al., 2009; Murnieks, Cardon, Sudek, White, & Brooks, 2016; Murnieks et al., 2014).

In order to constructively replicate my findings related to both enthusiasm and skepticism, I conducted an additional field study in which enthusiasm, skepticism, and gender could be explicitly measured via self-report survey responses.

Study 2

Field Survey of Medical Call Center Employees

In order to better understand the consequences of displaying skepticism and enthusiasm in organizational settings, I conducted Study 2 in a medical health network call center. I assessed skepticism and enthusiasm using a self-report survey and obtained objective measures of job performance, which at this organization is tightly linked to performance, over a three-month period following survey collection.

Method

Participants and Procedures

I collected data from a sample of 215 call center employees at two locations in the state of Florida. The organization labels itself a medical health network, and its primary goal is to attract new “members” who receive health assessments and potentially long-term medical care in their homes from nurse practitioners who are employed by the company. The employees in the call centers are responsible for making contact with potential members, describing the array of services offered by the network, and scheduling home visits. This was an excellent context for studying self-presentation and persuasion because the calls regularly last 15-20 minutes and require a significant amount of information sharing, relationship-building, and interpersonal influence.

To distribute the survey, human resources professionals at the company first introduced operating managers to the survey and asked them to encourage all staff to participate. The company leadership provided sponsorship to allow each employee a dedicated 10-minute period at the start of their shifts to participate. An invitation to participate in the study was sent via internal message to 282 current employees. It was

clear to the employees that their participation was voluntary and that they would not be reported for choosing not to participate, but due to the dedicated time period the majority chose to complete the survey. 244 employees completed the survey. 30 employees were excluded from the analysis because they had worked for fewer than 60 days and were still in a training period that lacked adequate tracking of performance data. The final sample of 215 represented an 76.2% response rate. The sample was 63% female ($n = 136$), 37% male ($n=79$), 76% white ($n = 163$), 15% African American ($n = 31$), and 9% Hispanic ($n = 19$). The average age was 41.9 years ($SD = 14.1$) and the average organizational tenure was 1.74 years ($SD = 1.62$).

Self-Report Measures

The two most commonly used self-report scales for impression management by Bolino & Turnley (1999) and Wayne and Ferris (1990) relate to specific interpersonal behaviors that map onto the Jones and Pittman (1982) five-tactic taxonomy. Because neither scale behaviors related to enthusiasm expression (the ingratiation tactic includes items such as “I do personal favors for people”) or skepticism (the self-promotion tactic includes items such as “I make people aware of my accomplishments”), I developed and tested scales that capture my theoretical constructs in this particular organizational context, where conversation partners on the phone calls are referred to as “potential members.” Study participants responded to 7-item Likert type scales to the following prompt: “These questions relate to how you communicate with potential members when you are trying to persuade them to join the network. Please rate your agreement or disagreement with each statement.”

Skepticism. I developed four items to measure the key behavioral manifestation of skepticism in this context, which is the acknowledgement of both positives and negatives associated with different avenues of medical care. The goal is always to convince the potential member to schedule a home visit to begin involvement with the network, but there are many services provided that stem from that visit and they differ considerably from traditional medical care. The items were “I talk about both the positives and negatives of different options with members,” “I have found that being balanced makes me more convincing when trying to persuade potential members,” “I tend to acknowledge the limits of my suggestions with potential members, even when I feel strongly about them,” and “When I am talking about our services, I think it's good to sometimes admit the drawbacks about what we can do” ($\alpha = .81$).

Enthusiasm. I maintained the form of Bolino and Turnley's self-report items while drawing from the descriptive adjectives in the enthusiasm subscale of the PANAS (Tellegen, Watson, & Clark, 1988) to generate four items to measure enthusiasm: “I show a lot of enthusiasm when I am talking to potential members,” “When I am talking to a potential member, I tend to get excited and upbeat,” “I try to show passion about what we do here when I'm talking on the phone,” and “I have a lot of energy when I am introducing our services to potential members” ($\alpha = .91$).

Conscientiousness. Conscientiousness is a personality trait that describes the tendency to which employees are disciplined, dependable, organized, and hard-working (Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991). It has been shown to influence job performance across a wide variety of job roles (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge & Ilies, 2002) and specifically in call centers (e.g., Grant, 2008; Skyrme, Wilkinson, Abraham, & Morrison, 2005; Witt,

Andrews, & Carlson, 2004). While not a component of my hypotheses, I measured conscientiousness in order to both control for its likely effect on job performance and to be able to make a comparison with the pattern of results for skepticism and enthusiasm. I used a 4-item scale adapted from the items used by Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann Jr (2003), in which participants choose between word-pairs on a 7-point scale. Word pairs included “Carefree-Careful” and “Organized-Unstructured” ($\alpha = .71$).

Gender and Age. Gender was coded 0 = male and 1 = female. Because nearly all potential members are over the age of 60, participant age was recorded in years and included as a control variable to account for a homophily effect (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). Researchers have demonstrated that humans can estimate age quite accurately from voices alone (Ptacek & Sander, 1966; Ryan & Capadano, 1978).

Organizational Controls. I included a number of control variables in order to better understand the independent effects of enthusiasm and skepticism on objective performance. Organizational tenure was included because there is a considerable learning curve in this context and because low performers earn considerably less compensation and tend to voluntarily leave the company. I also included a categorical variable to indicate the two different call center locations, though they are only 40 miles apart and share management. There are two primary job roles, inbound and outbound, that have to do with the nature of the potential members that the employee is trying to persuade. Inbound representatives answer calls from potential members who proactively call the network, or who file a request for information via mail or the internet. Outbound representatives contact potential members who have been referred to them either by

insurance companies or other health organizations, and generally have lower performance metrics than the inbound callers.

Scheduled Visits Per Day. Lastly, I included one additional control variable for an objective performance measure that is also related to performance, scheduled visits per day. This is the total number of visits that an employee schedules over the period, divided by the number of days works. Scheduled visits per day were provided to me by the organization for the three-month period following survey collection. The average number of scheduled visits per day was 13.45, with a range from 8 to 22 ($SD = 2.79$).

Persuasion Measure: Completion Rate

The most important single performance metric for employees at this organization is called completion rate, and reflects the number of scheduled visits that result in an actual nurse visiting the home of the potential member. After a visit is scheduled by the call center employee, there are one or two (depending on the time between the initial schedule and the visit) additional confirmation points with a potential member, and cancellations are common during either of these confirmation points. The better the job that a call center employee does in convincing the potential member that the service will be valuable, the less likely they are to cancel. Large numbers of scheduled visits but relatively lower completion rates are a problem for the organization because relatively few potential members who schedule but then cancel a visit will ever join the network (i.e., they will not schedule a first visit again in the future). For this reason, completion rates are considered the most important single metric when evaluating performance of individual employees. The average completion rate was 68.6% and the range was from 41.3% to 82.0% ($SD = 7.8\%$).

As logic would suggest, scheduled visits and completion rates tend to be inversely related—the longer an employee spends talking to potential members, the more likely they are to complete the visit. For this study I use completion rate as the key dependent variable because it reflects deeper level of persuasion and influence than the number of visits scheduled alone. A call center employee may be able to quickly convince a potential member to verbally agree to a time for a home visit, but without persuading the potential member that the service is indeed beneficial and worth the time of the first in-home visit, they are far more likely to cancel the visit or ignore the confirmation requests and messages (which results in a cancellation). For the reasons highlighted above, the completion provided an excellent test of the success or failure of the employee to persuade potential members.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal consistency reliability estimates for the variables in Study 2. I began testing my hypotheses using hierarchical ordinary least squares regression (OLS), following procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991; see also Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). I mean-centered the continuous independent variables and created interaction terms by multiplying gender by skepticism and enthusiasm. Beginning with completion rate as the dependent variable representing persuasion, I entered the controls into step 1 of the regression, gender, skepticism, and enthusiasm into step 2, and the interaction terms in step 3. The analysis, shown in Table 3, indicates additional support for the relationships between skepticism, enthusiasm, and successful persuasion, but does not support the gender moderation hypotheses.

While this data lacks an operationalization for competence judgments that precludes testing all hypotheses explicitly, the proposition of my theoretical model predicted that skepticism would be positively associated with persuasion. Step 2 of the first regression demonstrates that skepticism was indeed associated with a higher completion percentage ($b = 1.00$, $s.e. = .51$, $B = .13$, $t = 2.31$, $p < .05$), providing support for Hypothesis 1. A similar result holds for the enthusiasm self-presentation strategy, which predicted that enthusiasm would be associated with higher persuasion. There was a significant effect on completion percentage ($b = 1.09$, $s.e. = .47$, $B = .16$, $t = 2.31$, $p < .05$), providing support for Hypothesis 3.

Hypotheses 5a and 5b predicted that gender would moderate the relationships between enthusiasm and the downstream attributions that result in persuasion, such that women would benefit more from enthusiasm, consistent with stereotyped expectations. The results of my analyses did not support these moderating effects, with neither interaction term being significantly associated with completion percentage. In this context, both men and women benefitted from using either enthusiasm or skepticism as self-presentation tactics in their conversations with potential members. This differs from my hypotheses, and may be explained by two underlying features of the organizational context.

First, the job context is one that does not lend itself to particularly strong gender-based stereotypes. While societal perceptions certainly exist about the entrepreneurial context of Study 1 (Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009), it is likely that the potential members are not necessarily expecting a gendered script from someone who calls them on the phone to discuss having a nurse come to your home. In a context that does not

involve strong stereotypes, both men and women may have more freedom to present themselves in any way that they choose without risking kinds of backlash effects that have been seen in many research settings (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Rudman & Phelan, 2008).

Second, there is considerable research evidence that even in setting where stereotypes exist, the more information an audience learns about an individual, the less a role the stereotypes play on social judgment (e.g., Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 1982; Locksley et al., 1980; Locksley, Hepburn, & Ortiz, 1982). In this call center context, many calls result in an opportunity for substantial conversation, information exchange, and rapport-building. In contrast to the one-minute videos in Study 1, most potential members have a back-and-forth exchange over at least 10 minutes with any employee engaging in enthusiasm or skepticism tactics. For this reason, the benefits of the tactics may come to outweigh and overpower any relatively smaller penalty for stereotype-inconsistent behavior.

To test Hypothesis 6, my final hypothesis concerning the moderating effect of enthusiasm on the relationship between skepticism and persuasion, I conducted an additional regression analysis removing the two gender interaction terms but adding an enthusiasm and skepticism interaction term to test the relationship between these two self-presentation tactics. The results are displayed in Table 4. If stereotypes are not “getting in the way,” so to speak, of the intended effects, then it should hold that some employees would benefit from doing both simultaneously. Rather than being a purely additive effect on overall evaluation and persuasion, I predicted that individuals who are able to both show enthusiasm and skepticism gain even more from simultaneously

providing positive dimensions on which to be evaluated. Indeed, the enthusiasm-skepticism interaction term in step 3 of the regression was positive and significant ($b = .80$, $s.e. = .41$, $B = .12$, $t = 1.95$, $p < .05$). In addition, the interaction explained an additional 1.3% incremental variance in completion rates, which was a significant increase ($F(10, 204) = 8.6$, $p < .05$).

These results suggest that when the context is appropriate, especially perhaps when stereotypes are weak and individuation is possible, both strategies can be employed together to produce a more positive persuasion result. In order to further investigate this relationship, I designed a laboratory experiment in which participants would be prompted to take on different self-presentation strategies when suggesting an idea to an entrepreneur.

Study 3

Idea-Generation Lab Experiment Using Skepticism and Enthusiasm

Study 3 uses an idea-generation task to extend the findings from Study 2.

Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in which they are encouraged to present a suggestion for improvement using enthusiasm, skepticism, or combined framings when offering suggestions to the founders of the company. Independent coders rated content of the messages and the three company founders rated the overall quality of the suggestions. While the amount of information available to participants was similar to Study 1, the experimental context was not predicated on Kickstarter or fundraising of any other form. In this study, participants were told that the company founders were working with the experimenters in order to improve their product and marketing. The company was called “Shibumi Shade,” and was an actual beach umbrella manufacturer based in North Carolina. At the time of data collection, the company had been in business for approximately two years and the two founders were still heavily involved in its operation and growth.

Method

Participants and Procedures

The participants were 221 adults (89 male, 132 female, $M_{age} = 21.8$ years, $SD = 1.9$ years) recruited to participate in laboratory sessions at a university in the Northeastern United States in exchange for monetary payment. The participants were told that the study was focused on the how people evaluate new products. The first few pages of the study gave an overview of the product, including pictures and a list of its advantages relative to other beach umbrellas and the history of the company. A picture of one of the

founders was also included, who was a 32-year-old man. Participants watched a 60-second video of the umbrella being set up but there was no voice narration over the video. Pictures of the Shibumi Shade study materials are available in the Appendix.

At the conclusion of the video, participants were taken to a page titled “Suggestions for Improvement.” Each participant was asked to provide at least one concrete suggestion for the founder about the product or its current marketing materials. The only length requirement was an instruction to write “a few sentences,” but participants were able to choose to write less.

Skepticism and Enthusiasm Manipulation. All participants received the same opening and closing lines on the suggestion prompt, but a center line of the instructions contained the manipulation that randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions: enthusiasm, skepticism, combined, or control. In the enthusiasm condition, participants received the line:

“We encourage you to be enthusiastic with your idea. Research shows that when suggestions are presented with enthusiasm, they are more likely to be judged as helpful and adopted by the recipient.”

In the skepticism condition, participants received the line:

“We encourage you to communicate both the upsides and the downsides of your idea. Research shows that when suggestions consider both strengths and weaknesses, they are more likely to be judged as helpful and adopted by the recipient.”

In the combined condition, participants received the line:

“We encourage you to be enthusiastic with your idea, but also consider mentioning the potential downsides along with the upsides. Research shows that when suggestions consider both strengths and weaknesses while still being enthusiastic, they are more likely to be judged as helpful and adopted by the recipient.”

In the control condition, participants received no additional instructions beyond what was shared across all four conditions. In order to maintain the psychological realness of the laboratory environment, participants then rated the Shibumi Shade product on several of dimensions unrelated to my hypotheses before completing the study.

Competence and Warmth Ratings (independent raters)

Two independent research assistants provided an additional set of ratings to be used as measures of warmth and competence. Both raters had a basic knowledge of research practices, but neither was familiar with the hypotheses or manipulations, or with the Shibumi Shade product. They were given a basic overview so that they would understand the messages, then asked to read each message and provide two ratings.

Instructions for the rating were “Based on what this person wrote in their message, what are your impressions of them? *This person seems...*”. For warmth, the rating was a combination of the same widely used warmth items from Study 1:

Likeable/Warm/Friendly. For competence, the rating was a combination of:

Competent/Intelligent/Capable. Each rater made a judgement on the two dimensions on a 1-7 scale, with 1 = Not at all and 7 = Very much. Agreement between the two raters was strong. Using a two-way random model with consistency agreement, the inter-rater reliability was .77 for warmth and .62 for competence for the average measures, which

were used moving forward in the analysis. For illustrative purposes, Table 5 contains sample suggestions from participants and how they were rated by the founders and the warmth/competence raters.

Persuasion Measure: Quality of Suggestion (company founders)

In order to assess the success of the participants in producing persuasive statements, I enlisted the two founders of the company to read and rate the statements. They were not informed of the general premise of the research, the specific hypotheses, or the conditions provided to the participants. Because of the large number of suggestions and the considerable length of many participants' messages, each founder provided a single-item overall quality rating on a 10-point scale. They were instructed not to communicate with each other about the content or quality of any ideas during the rating process, and submitted their rating independently. The founders demonstrated strong agreement. Using a two-way random model with consistency agreement, the inter-rater reliability was $ICC(2,2) = .721$ for average the average measure, 95% CI [.64, .79], $p < .001$. This average measure was used as the dependent variable to test persuasive success on the task.

Additional Variables

In order to further explore the dynamics of these impression management strategies, I included the gender of the participant. I also measured the number of words written per statement, and due to the skewed nature of that distribution I computed a natural log transformation.

Manipulation Checks (independent coders)

Lastly, two coders who were not completely blind to the research program coded each response for enthusiasm and skepticism. For enthusiasm, they rated “to what extent does this message use explicit enthusiasm words or signals, including high-activation positive words, emotion-related words, and punctuation (especially exclamation points). Each response was coded on 1-7 scale. For skepticism, they coded each response for 2 items: “Depth – thoroughness of exploring the idea or suggestion, many details,” and “Strengths and weaknesses – explicitly mentioning why their idea might be both good and bad, or if there could be drawbacks or additional challenges.” The inter-rater reliability for enthusiasm was $ICC(2,2) = .765$ for the average measure. For skepticism it was $ICC(2,2) = .756$ for the average measure but lower, $.437$ for the single measure, due to the lower mean for strengths and weaknesses rating.

Results and Discussion

To investigate whether the manipulations did indeed lead the participants to adopt different strategies for providing their suggestions, I first conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare the two enthusiasm conditions (enthusiasm and combined) to the non-enthusiasm conditions (control and skepticism) on the coded measure. The results demonstrated that the messages were significantly more enthusiastic ($F [1, 219] = 14.11$, $p < .01$) in the two intended conditions ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.42$) than the non-enthusiasm conditions ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.04$). Another test using the skepticism effects demonstrated that the participants in the skepticism conditions ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.10$) used those communication tactics to a greater degree ($F [1, 219] = 21.47$, $p < .001$) than participants in the non-skepticism conditions ($M = 2.46$, $SD = .73$). These results helped establish the effectiveness of the self-presentation manipulation.

Table 6 contains means and standard deviations for the four conditions. Figures 7, 8, and 9 show the means and standard errors by condition for competence, warmth, and overall quality, respectively. With neither the founders nor the judgment raters able to identify the gender of participant, I removed those conditions and tested hypotheses using a the 2 (Calm vs. Enthusiasm) x 2 (Certainty vs. Skepticism) ANOVA. Consistent with earlier results, there was a strong main effect of enthusiasm on warmth judgements ($F [1, 217] = 19.31, p < .001$) and of skepticism on competence judgements ($F [1, 217] = 7.76 p < .01$). Unexpectedly, the skepticism conditions also had a significant main effect on warmth ratings ($F [1, 217] = 7.18, p < .01$). Enthusiasm did not have a similar cross over effect (as it did in Study 1), with the main effect of enthusiasm on competence not being statistically significant ($F [1, 217] = .322, n.s.$). With the founder quality rating as the dependent variable, both enthusiasm ($F [1, 217] = 4.01, p < .05$) and skepticism ($F [1, 217] = 11.9, p < .01$) had significant main effects. There were no significant interactions in any of the models. These results demonstrated further support for Hypothesis 1 and 3.

To test Hypotheses 2 and 4, I again calculated bootstrap confidence intervals using Hayes' PROCESS software to test the indirect effects of the conditions on the quality ratings. Competence ratings mediated the relationship between skepticism and persuasion ($\beta=.27, SE=.09, 95\% \text{ CI } [.09, .46]$). Warmth ratings mediated the relationship between enthusiasm and persuasion ($\beta=.43, SE=.11, 95\% \text{ CI } [.22, .67]$). Skepticism also had an indirect effect on persuasion through warmth ($\beta=.25, SE=.10, 95\% \text{ CI } [.06, .47]$).

Hypothesis 6 predicted that enthusiasm would strengthen the relationship between skepticism and persuasion. The interaction term in the ANOVA test was not significant, but as in Study 1 the highest average quality rating was in the combined condition ($M =$

4.89, $SD = 1.59$). Independent-samples t tests demonstrated that this value was significantly higher than the control condition ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.58$, $t = -4.08$, $p < .001$) and enthusiasm condition ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.84$, $t = -2.42$, $p < .05$), though not significantly higher than the skepticism condition ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.62$, $t = -1.51$, $p = .13$). It is likely that this is a function of the extremely limited nature of the impression management information that can be conveyed in a brief written communication. This context represents a relatively weak test for the power these self-presentation strategies because they are so limited in verbal and non-verbal information. The fact that the founders still rated the ideas as higher quality, with such limited self-presentation information, shows the strength of the relationship.

In summary, participants who were prompted to deliver their ideas with enthusiasm were judged to be warmer and participants who were prompted to use skepticism were judged to be more competent, with both leading to higher quality ideas as rated by the founders of the company. Participants who expressed both had the highest overall ratings, though the effect was not interactive as it was in Study 1. Taken together, these results support the proposition that individuals can effectively employ these self-presentation strategies in service of their goals.

CHAPTER 3

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Summary

This dissertation proposed a novel self-presentation strategy that focused on how actors can manage impressions by consciously structuring the way that they talk about their ideas, projects, and experiences. Drawing on theories of person perception, attitude change, and intellectual humility, I hypothesized that communicating a consideration of alternatives and a realistic understanding of challenges, a self-presentation strategy which I labeled *skepticism*, can achieve attributions of competence without incurring the penalties commonly associated with self-promotion. Additionally, I hypothesized that the cognitive strategy of skepticism can be enhanced when complemented by an affective strategy of displaying momentary expressions of positive emotion, which I labeled *enthusiasm*. Lastly, I hypothesized that the effects of enthusiasm in particular would be moderated by the gender of the actor, such that social role expectations and stereotypes would lead women to be perceived as warmer relative to men.

I tested my hypotheses around skepticism and enthusiasm using three studies. In Study 1, I used a crowdfunding context and an experimental design to explicitly manipulate the self-presentation strategies of skepticism and enthusiasm while varying gender and having participants judge the entrepreneur and the project campaign. Results generally supported my hypotheses, with both skepticism and enthusiasm predicting higher overall evaluations and the combination being the best strategy for both men and women. Consistent with gender stereotypes, women were perceived as warmer across most conditions relative to men. In Study 2, I conducted a field survey at a medical call

center to analyze how the self-reported use of skepticism and enthusiasm is related to successful persuasion, measured by an objective behavioral variable. Once again both strategies proved effective, and in this organizational context, I did not find evidence of the moderating role of gender. In Study 3, participants in a laboratory experiment were prompted to provide suggestions to an entrepreneur by presenting their idea for improvement in a skeptical, enthusiastic, combined, or neutral (control) manner. Responses were rated on warmth and competence by independent raters and the two company founders rated the overall quality of the ideas. Consistent with my predications, the skepticism presentation strategy resulted in higher attributions of competence, the enthusiasm strategy resulted in higher attributions of warmth, and the combination of the two was the most effective at producing both positive attributions and higher quality ideas.

Theoretical Implications

Impression Management

This dissertation contributes to the literature on impression management, the process by which individuals attempt to control how other people perceive them (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990a). First, it presents a novel self-presentation strategy, the communication of skepticism, that can be applied to many work contexts and does not involve targeting one specific individual for ingratiation or self-promotion, tactics which are difficult to employ without backfiring (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). Focusing specifically on the goal of conveying competence, skepticism expands on the current understanding of how individuals can actively manage this impression in work settings by structuring their communication in a way that demonstrates depth of thought

and a consideration of alternatives. Additionally, this research answers specific calls in the impression management literature to study more than one self-presentation strategy simultaneously, in settings where individuals have an incentive to manage more than one dimension of the audience's perception (Bolino et al., 2016; Leary et al., 2011). In many classic studies of self-presentation, actors are given specific goals (e.g., to be likeable) and are not asked to manage sometimes competing demands (e.g., Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Leary, Robertson, Barnes, & Miller, 1986). This dissertation acknowledges that the vast majority of work settings require individuals to manage impressions of both competence and likeability simultaneously, and uses the complementary self-presentation strategy of enthusiasm to better understand how individuals can infuse warmth into messages by expressing emotion and energy.

Social Judgment and Gender Stereotypes

The results of these studies reflect findings from the social judgement and stereotype content literatures that women and men face different expectations when striving for the same social goals (Cuddy et al., 2007, 2008). Previous research suggests that opportunities for women to avoid perceptions of gender role incongruity and resulting gender bias are limited. When women attempt to enact stereotypically male behaviors in pursuit of goals, they can incur a backlash effect (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 2001). This dissertation suggests that women may be able to employ the self-presentation strategy of skepticism without incurring the same backlash associated with more stereotypically agentic self-presentation. Skepticism conveys intelligence, but also signals intellectual humility in a manner that buffers against the stereotype-violating backlash. More research is needed on contextual factors and boundary conditions, but this

research offers the promising suggestion that both men and women can benefit from the relatively non-gendered skepticism strategy.

Leadership

Most fundamentally, these findings help inform the study of how people can actively influence the impressions of others, and how they might improve these skills of self-presentation. If lab participants can be nudged to frame their suggestions using these strategies with only short manipulations, it suggests that leaders may be able to help their employees improve their use of self-presentation to grow and succeed in their careers. Many theories of leadership include components related to the personal development of employees (e.g., individualized consideration within transformational leadership theory) (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006), and this dissertation provides insights into self-presentation strategies that might be improved over time with practice and feedback.

Limitations and Future Directions

A few methodological limitations should be highlighted from each study. Study 1 provided an initial test for how audience members perceive and judge skepticism and enthusiasm, but in a context that had no potential for actual interaction between actor and audience. The Kickstarter campaigns employed voice and written content but would have benefitted from video or in-person self-presentation displays. Additionally, the study would benefit from a stronger test of the behavioral implications of successful persuasion. Other studies of crowdfunding have utilized the success likelihood rating as a dependent variable (Kerr et al., 2014; Lee & Huang, 2018), but a behavioral dependent variable would provide better evidence that the consequences of these strategies are meaningful. In Study 2, the key variables of interest were only assessed using self-report

surveys which may or may not have accurately captured the self-presentation strategies that the employees actually used in their phone calls. Future studies should more closely measure the actual self-presentation strategies employed during a sample of persuasive interactions such as the membership phone calls.

In Study 3, an important limitation and direction for future research is that the skepticism manipulation may have influenced the way that participants processed the task itself, and therefore affected the content of the messages. The experiment specifically directed them to highlight both strengths and weaknesses in their suggestion, and this somewhat atypical instruction (as compared to more straightforwardly providing a suggestion) may have prompted a form of deeper engagement with the task, shifting from relatively more automatic to relatively more systematic processing (Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Evans, 2008). Even when the participants did not highlight weaknesses in the written suggestion, being asked to consider them may have improved the overall quality of the suggestion. In future studies, it will be important to more carefully measure the amount and form of skeptical statements, to more directly tie them to social judgements and persuasive outcomes. At the same time, even if it was the consideration of weaknesses (rather than the communication of weaknesses) that was partly responsible for the higher-quality suggestions, these results suggest that challenging employees to take on a skeptical lens may improve the quality of ideas, which should benefit both individuals and organizations.

Additionally, the relatively limited nature of self-presentation employed in Study 3, a short message of typically only a few sentences, likely limited the richness of self-presentation that can occur in more natural settings. This is a common problem in

impression management research (Leary et al., 2011), and a fruitful direction for future research could include applying the directives from Study 3 to a context more like that of Study 2 in a true field experiment, where actors would try out different strategies over time and test their persuasiveness. This would also allow for a deeper investigation of the relationship between internal processing and external presentation.

An important limitation to all these findings is that the participants in these studies were all residents of the United States, and it is likely that reactions to specific self-presentation strategies, including skepticism and enthusiasm, would vary across cultural contexts and influence their relative success (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In cultures with stronger modesty norms than the United States, where self-promotion is broadly accepted (Molinsky, 2013), skepticism may be an even more effective strategy for influencing others without violating those modesty norms. Researchers have also shown differences in the prevalence of enthusiasm and the reaction to it in job interviews (Bencharit et al., 2018), and these cultural patterns should be investigated across a wider range of persuasion contexts.

As with other self-presentation tactics, another important boundary condition on the effectiveness of skepticism and enthusiasm is likely to depend not solely on the behaviors but also on the actors' social skill, and ability to understand the appropriate and inappropriate settings to employ them (Ferris et al., 2002; Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007; Hogan & Shelton, 1998; Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007). An important avenue for future research is to better understand how these abilities vary across individuals, and how underlying traits and

abilities interaction with the effectiveness of self-presentation strategies and persuasion in general.

While each study in some ways varied the form of information to some degree, another important direction for research is to more systematically explore the influence of in-person vs. computer-mediated effects. Both are relevant to understanding how people manage impressions in the modern work environment and both were employed to some degree in these studies, but the presence of verbal and non-verbal information is likely to alter the effectiveness of self-presentation in critical ways (Klofstad, Anderson, & Peters, 2012; Ko, Judd, & Stapel, 2009). Future studies should also explore longer time horizons than were possible in these studies. The use of impression management tactics for purposes such as issue-selling should investigate how impressions stabilize over time, guide confirmatory behavior, and how those impressions interact with the complex social system in which issue-selling is embedded (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, & Lawrence, 2001; Kanter, 1984; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990).

Lastly, in both my theorizing and my experimental designs, I defined skeptical statements broadly to include multiple different avenues of information that an actor might go about using to convey underlying skepticism. Future studies should more carefully delineate between different kinds of skeptical statements and investigate the relative effects of each. The most straightforward would use the “strengths and weaknesses” approach, of highlight both positive and negative information. This most closely mirrors the studies in the marketing literature on two-sided messaging (Etgar & Goodwin, 1982; Golden & Alpert, 1987; Kamins & Assael, 1987; Kamins, Brand, Hoeke, & Moe, 1989). Relatedly, an additional dimension that should be considered is

whether the actor delivers a final synthesizing statement after describing strengths and weaknesses, that discounts the negative side of the arguments and closes the argument logic. It is likely that this synthesis is particularly for persuasion contexts, to redirect the audience attention to the net positive balance of the overall message. Lacking a synthesis statement, it is perhaps more likely that recency effects cause audience members to more heavily weigh the negative information and fail to be persuaded. Another type of skeptical statement that should be studied is the “conversation” form of a message, in which an actor conveys their own initial doubt, and the manner in which they have been persuaded by the evidence to believe a different position. This form may be particularly useful in contexts where the idea is high in novelty, in which the audiences’ initial reaction is to doubt the claims of the actor or usefulness of the idea. By indicating their own need to be persuaded, actors may in effect help the audience along in their elaboration on the information and willingness to also change their beliefs. It may be that certain forms of skeptical statements are more effective for certain situations and certain individuals, and should be investigated in future research.

Practical Implications

In short, this dissertation suggests that individuals could benefit from employing the self-presentation strategies of skepticism and enthusiasm when attempting to persuade other people at work. It is a practical question how well these strategies can be employed, and how much they might improve with feedback and coaching. Organizations could also consider changes that help individuals overcome their reluctance to communicate skepticism when considering ideas, especially in group settings. By creating psychologically safe cultures in which people can openly express skepticism about their

own and others' ideas (Edmondson, 1999, 2004), the overall quality of idea selection may improve to the benefit of individuals and the broader organization.

Conclusion

Despite nearly four decades of empirical research since the publication of Jones & Pittman's (1982) seminal taxonomy of impression management, normative guidance for self-presentation strategies and rigorous exploration of the audience judgements is still lacking. This dissertation argues for two such strategies, enthusiasm and skepticism, that can be broadly applied across organizational contexts where persuasion and interpersonal influence lead to beneficial outcomes for the individual and the organization. A better understanding of the factors that lead to positive image construction, and those that backfire, will help many individuals to better navigate Goffman's stage and put on the performance they intend.

TABLE 1**Study 1: Means and Standard Deviations by Condition**

#	Founder Gender	Enthusiasm/ Calm	Skepticism/ Certainty	Warmth	Competence	Success Likelihood	N
1	Female	Enthusiasm	Certainty	6.10 (0.81)	5.52 (1.16)	4.25 (1.16)	54
2	Female	Enthusiasm	Skepticism	6.00 (0.94)	5.91 (0.99)	4.38 (1.38)	53
3	Female	Calm	Certainty	5.04 (1.19)	4.99 (1.32)	3.65 (1.66)	52
4	Female	Calm	Skepticism	5.35 (1.24)	5.28 (1.06)	3.93 (1.23)	55
5	Male	Enthusiasm	Certainty	5.17 (1.06)	5.07 (1.08)	3.91 (1.24)	54
6	Male	Enthusiasm	Skepticism	5.23 (1.08)	5.73 (1.01)	4.30 (1.09)	54
7	Male	Calm	Certainty	4.51 (1.16)	5.06 (1.24)	3.48 (1.22)	53
8	Male	Calm	Skepticism	4.65 (1.36)	5.83 (0.94)	4.08 (1.59)	54

TABLE 2**Study 2: Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Cronbach's Alpha Reliabilities**

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Completion Rate	68.6%	7.8%	--									
2 Scheduled Per Day	13.45	2.79	-.16*	--								
3 Location	1.18	.39	.19	-.076	--							
4 Inbound/Outbound	1.10	.30	-.19**	.49**	-.155*	--						
5 Tenure	1.74	1.63	.36**	.11	-.04	.17*	--					
6 Age	41.87	14.12	-.01	.14*	-.06	.12	.18*	--				
7 Conscientiousness	5.47	1.08	.22**	.12	.13	.01	.07	-.08	(.71)			
8 Gender	0.63	.48	.04	.03	-.19**	.09	.11	.07	-.01	--		
9 Enthusiasm	5.75	0.98	.25**	-.14*	.01	-.13	.10	-0.06	.02	0.13	(.92)	
10 Skepticism	4.79	1.12	.29**	-0.13	.152*	-.10	.15*	-.22**	.19**	-.17*	.29**	(.81)

Note. $N = 215$. For gender, 0 = male, 1 = female. Internal consistencies are provided in parentheses. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 3

Study 2: Skepticism, Enthusiasm and Gender Predicting Completion Rate

Variables	Completion Rate											
	Step 1				Step 2				Step 3			
	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>
Intercept	66.0	3.82		17.3***	64.7	3.81		16.9***	63.8	3.90		16.4***
Scheduled Per Day	-.34	.20	-.12	-1.70	-.25	.20	-.09	-1.30	-.25	.20	-.09	-1.25
Location	1.39	1.25	.07	1.11	1.22	1.25	.06	.98	1.34	1.26	.07	1.06
Inbound/Outbound	-4.78	1.87	-.18	-2.55*	-4.32	1.84	-.16	-2.35*	-4.21	1.86	-.16	-2.27*
Tenure	1.83	.30	.38	6.11***	1.58	.30	.33	5.24***	1.57	.30	.33	5.20***
Age	-.01	.04	-.02	-.32	.01	.04	.02	.32	.01	.04	.02	.35
Conscientiousness	1.47	.45	.20	3.27***	1.28	.45	.18	2.87**	1.34	.45	.18	2.97**
Gender					.69	1.01	.04	.68	.81	1.02	.05	.80
Skepticism					1.00	.51	.13	1.99*	.28	.79	.04	.36
Enthusiasm					1.09	.47	.16	2.31*	1.36	.70	.20	1.93*
Gender x Skepticism									1.23	1.04	.12	1.19
Gender x Enthusiasm									-.41	.91	-.04	-.45
R ²			.238				.284				.289	
F(df)			10.8 (6,208)				9.0 (9,205)				7.5 (11,20.)	
R ² change							.046**				.005	

^aValues shown in bold reflect hypothesized results* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

TABLE 4

Study 2: Skepticism & Enthusiasm Interaction Predicting Completion Rates

Variables	Completion Rate											
	Step 1				Step 2				Step 3			
	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>
Intercept	65.6	3.90		16.8***	64.7	3.81		16.9***	64.6	3.79		17.1***
Scheduled Per Day	-.34	.20	-.12	-1.69	-.25	.20	-.09	-1.30	-.25	.19	-.09	-1.26
Location	1.52	1.28	.08	1.19	1.22	1.25	.06	.98	.97	1.25	.05	.78
Inbound/Outbound	-4.82	1.88	-.18	-2.57**	-4.32	1.84	-.16	-2.35*	-4.33	1.82	-.17	-2.37*
Tenure	1.82	.30	.38	6.02***	1.58	.30	.33	5.24***	1.49	.30	.31	4.90***
Age	-.01	.04	-.02	-.34	.01	.04	.02	.32	.02	.03	.03	.45
Conscientiousness	1.47	.45	.20	3.25***	1.28	.45	.18	2.87**	1.26	.44	.17	2.84**
Gender	.57	1.01	.04	.57	.69	1.01	.04	.68	.91	1.01	.06	.90
Skepticism					1.00	.51	.13	1.99*	1.22	.51	.15	2.38*
Enthusiasm					1.09	.47	.16	2.31*	1.18	.47	.17	2.52*
Skepticism x Enthusiasm									.80	.41	.12	1.95*
R ²			.239				.284				.297	
F(df)			9.3 (7,207)				9.0 (9,205)				8.6 (10,204)	
R ² change							.045*				.013*	

^aValues shown in bold reflect hypothesized results

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

TABLE 5**Study 3: Sample Suggestions from Participants**

1. Condition: Control	Low warmth	Average Competence	Low Quality Rating
<p>The product and website doesn't look very legitimate. It seems like a very small company, so I suggest having testimonials or other kinds of reviews that will help get the word out there more. I also recommend adjusting the tent itself, because from the video it doesn't seem very secure/stable.</p>			
2. Condition: Enthusiasm	High Warmth	Average Competence	High Quality Rating
<p>"I think this is a great idea! I'm from South Jersey so I grew up going ""down the shore,"" and I can say that this would be just as useful in Jersey as it has been for you and your testers in NC.</p> <p>With that in mind, I have a suggestion. If one of the claims of the Shibumi is that it can seat 5 people side by side comfortably, I think it would be good to see photo or video proof of that. That was one of the features I was most skeptical of. Also, if you are proud to have the products stitched in NC, feel free to make that part of the marketing campaign in the video (i.e. ""proudly USA produced""). I would love to be a trial user! "</p>			
3. Condition: Skepticism	Average Warmth	Average Competence	High Quality Rating
<p>I would like to suggest some aspect that could potentially adjust the angle of the shade depending on the sun's movement to avoid having to shift the shade every hour or so - however, this could be mechanically complex or could increase the weight or decrease the portability of the product.</p>			
4. Condition: Combined	High Warmth	High Competence	High Quality Rating
<p>Hi Dane! I had a thought about the setup of the Shibumi you might like to consider. I noticed that only the front end needs to have a pole going through it, which is great and helps keep setup time down. But I was thinking, what if you included an optional 'tail' pole for the back end? I admit, I don't know if this would completely ruin the design, but that's why it would be optional, for specific use cases! And at least it makes sense to test it out and see if it works. The use case in my mind is one in which there just isn't any wind blowing. In such cases, the 'flag' part of the Shibumi might falter and droop over the people beneath it. So with this optional attachment, you'd be prepared for the rare but possible scenario of low-wind!</p>			

TABLE 6**Study 3: Means and Standard Deviations by Condition**

#	Condition	Warmth	Competence	Quality Rating	N
1	Control	3.55 (1.08)	3.90 (.78)	3.67 (1.58)	57
2	Enthusiasm	3.97 (1.34)	3.94 (.91)	4.10 (1.84)	56
3	Skepticism	3.71 (.96)	4.45 (.98)	4.42 (1.62)	53
4	Combined	4.61 (1.00)	4.35 (.84)	4.89 (1.59)	55

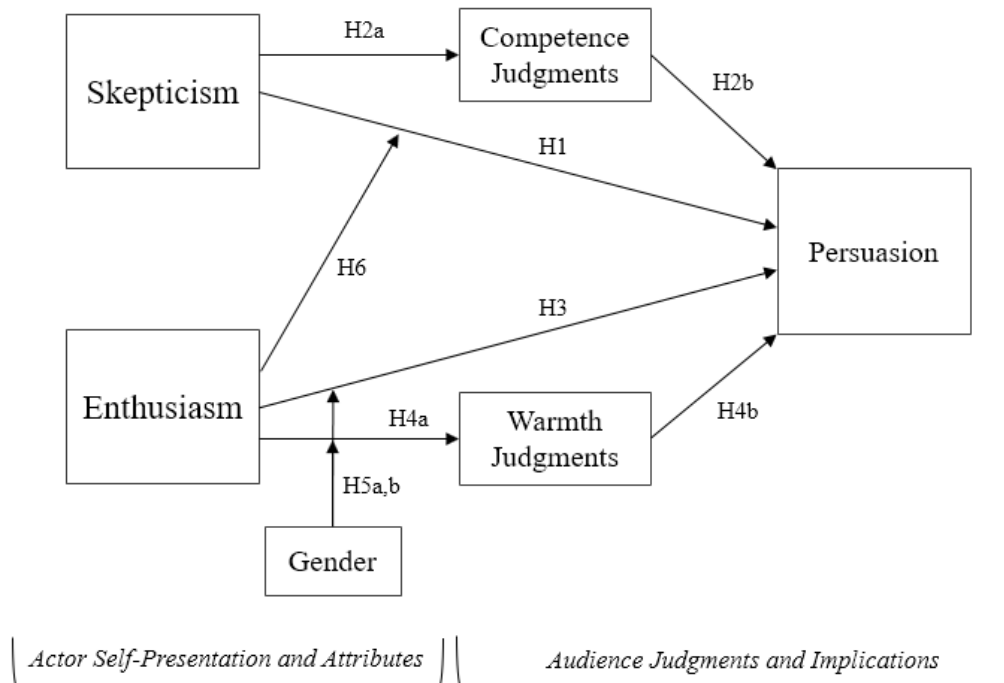
FIGURE 1**Visual Summary of Hypotheses**

FIGURE 2

Study 1: The Relationship between Skepticism, Enthusiasm, Gender, and Competence Judgements

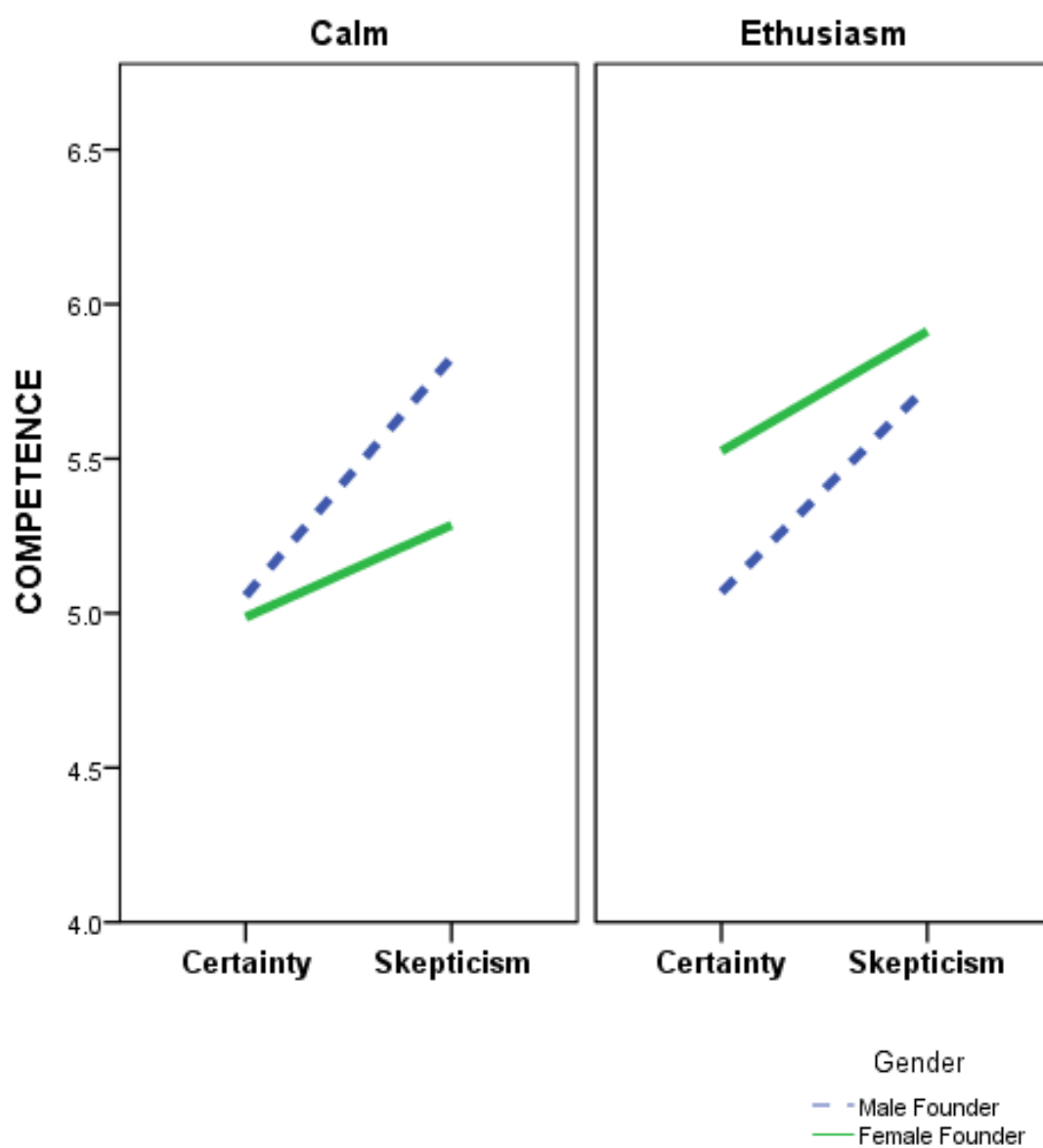


FIGURE 3

Study 1: Competence Judgements by Condition

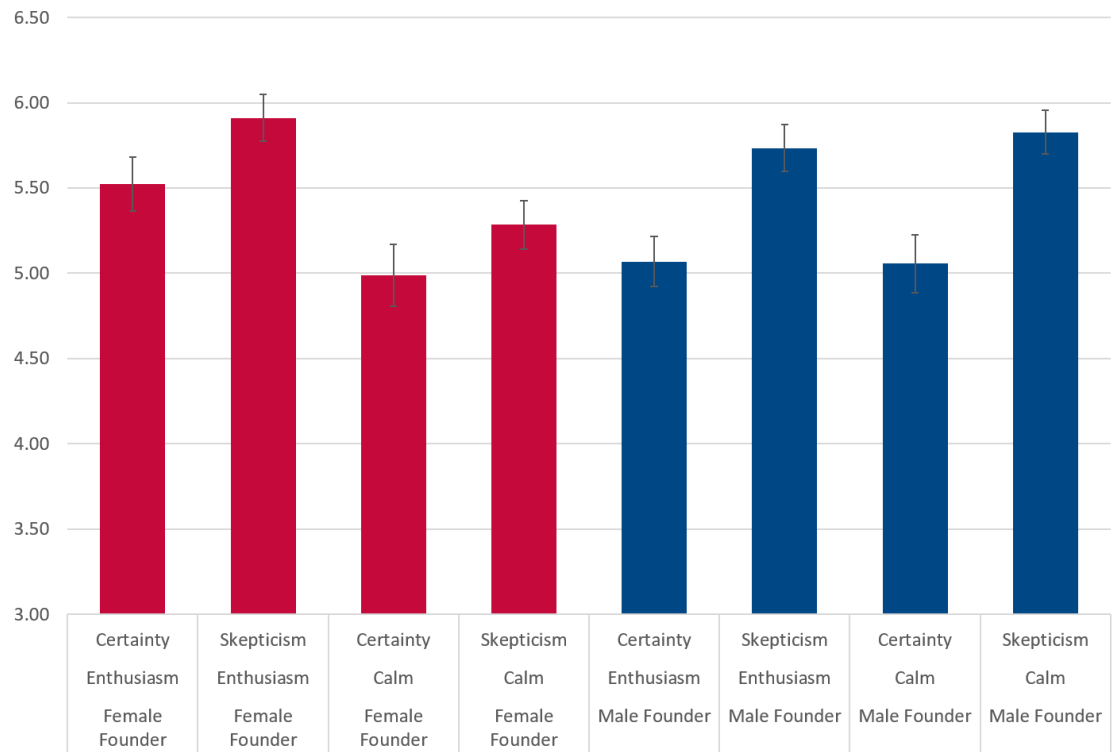


FIGURE 4

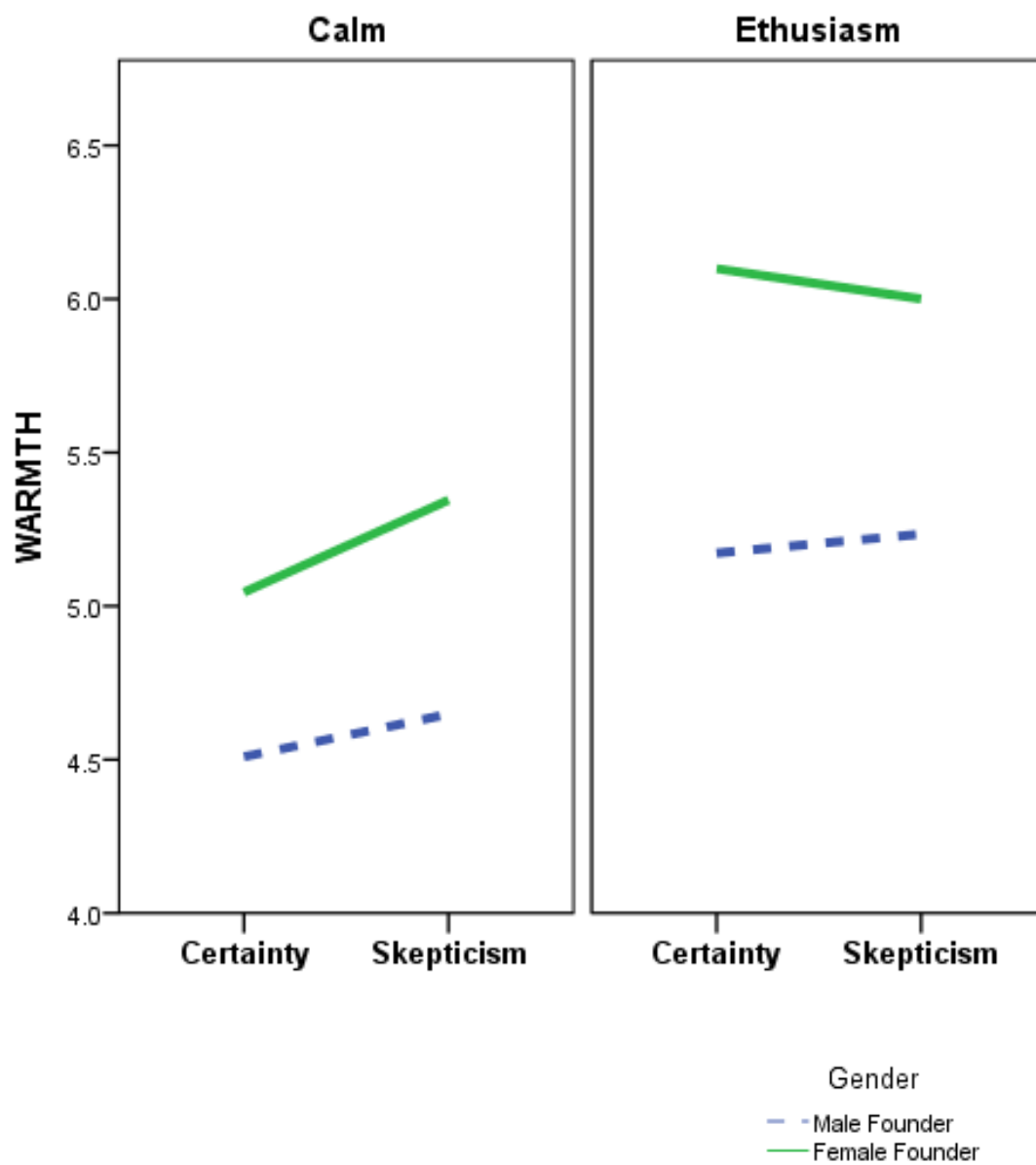
Study 1: The Relationship between Skepticism, Enthusiasm, Gender, and Warmth Judgements

FIGURE 5

Study 1: Warmth Judgments by Condition

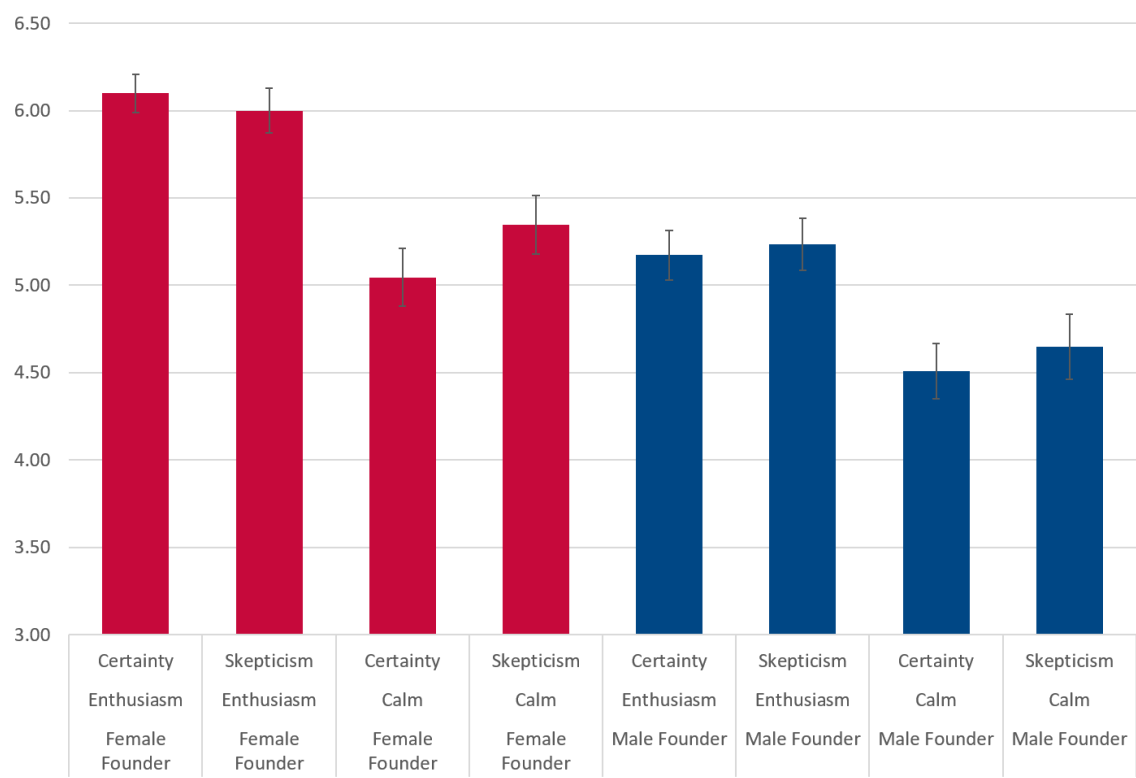


FIGURE 6

Study 1: Success Likelihood by Condition

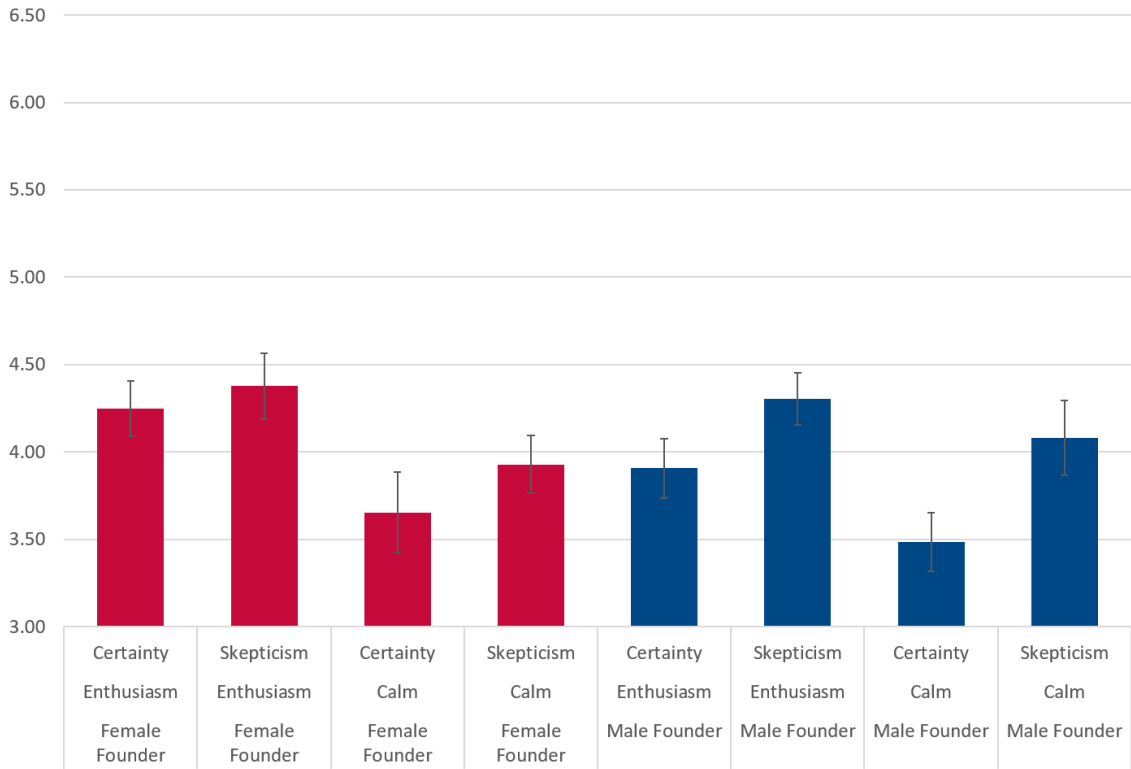


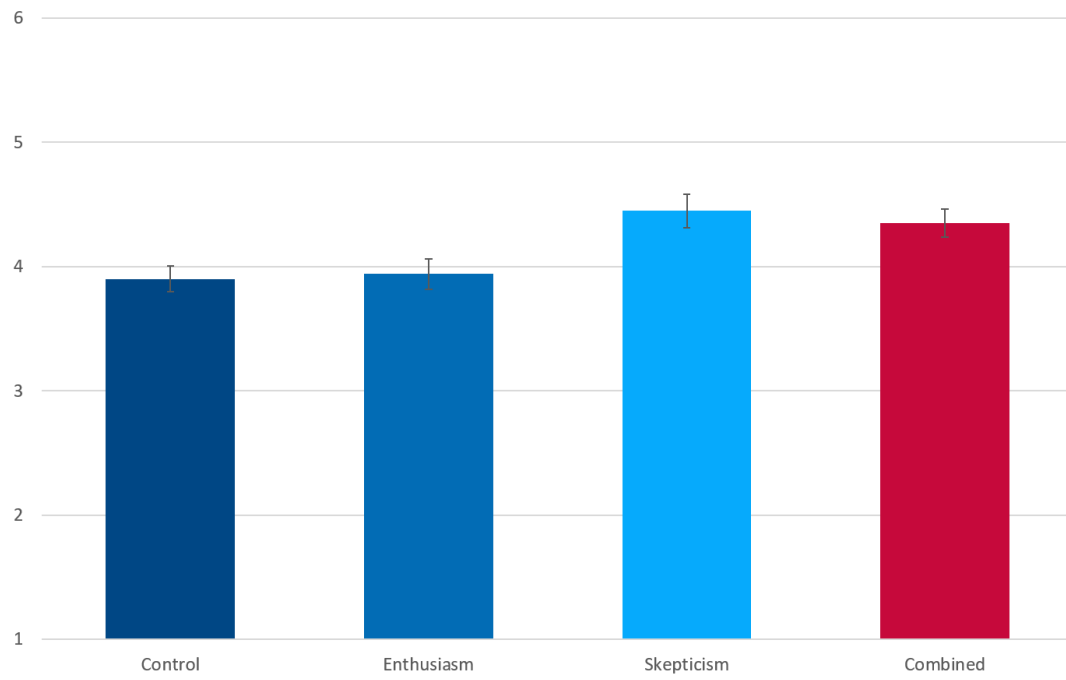
FIGURE 7**Study 3: Competence Ratings by Condition**

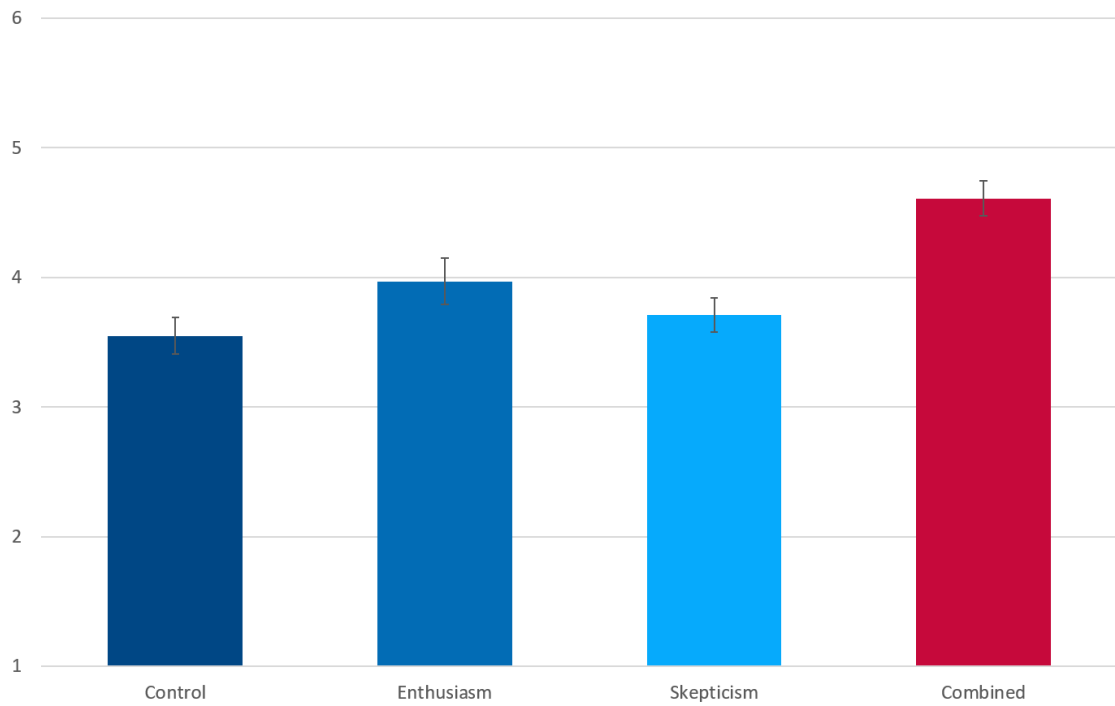
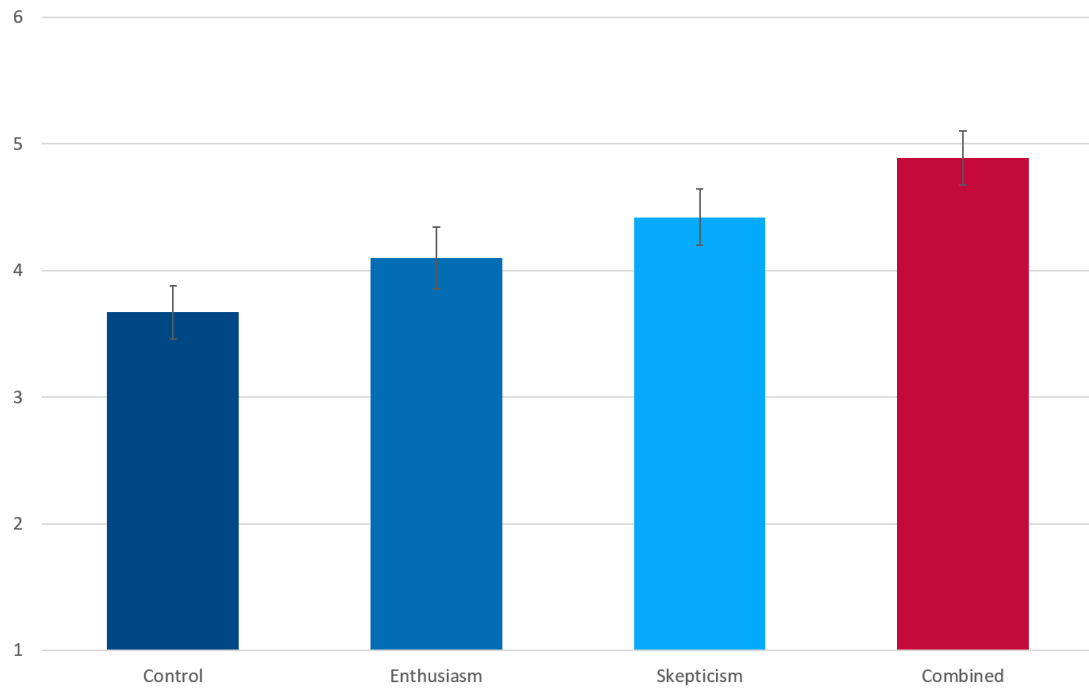
FIGURE 8**Study 3: Warmth Ratings by Condition**

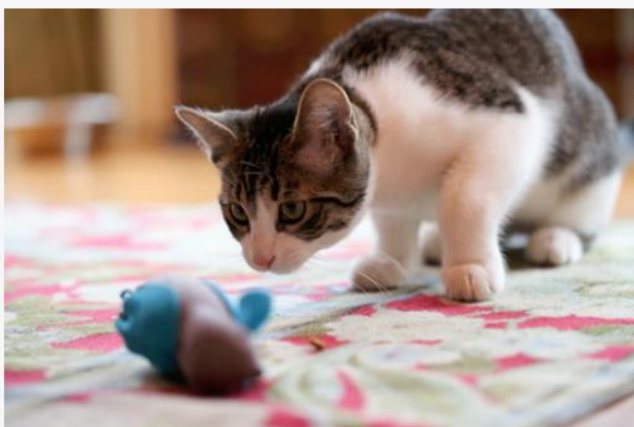
FIGURE 9**Study 3: Overall Quality by Condition**

APPENDIX

Study 1 Materials: The NoBowl Feeding System Images

KICKSTARTER

NoBowl Feeding System: A Brilliant Solution for Cat Wellness



Revolutionary veterinarian-designed product for cats. The NoBowl Feeding System enables cats to fulfill their natural hunting instinct.



The NoBowl Feeding System

Inspired by Nature. Based in Science. Loved by Cats.™

Study 1 Materials: Sample Veterinarian Bios**Veterinarian, Dr. Eric Sorenson**

📍 Philadelphia, PA

Hello! I am a practicing veterinarian with a special interest in animal wellness. One of the things that has bothered me most about the wellbeing of indoor cats is that they cannot hunt naturally and this instinct to hunt is hard wired into their souls. It was with this in mind that I came up with the idea of the NoBowl Feeding System and the mission to nourish the natural hunter in our indoor cats.

Connect:



I blog at TheCatvocate.com, have an 'Ask the Vet' column on CatingtonPost.com and contribute regularly to Cat Talk magazine. Please join me!

**Veterinarian, Dr. Erica Williams**

📍 Philadelphia, PA

I am a practicing veterinarian with a special interest in animal wellness. One of the things that has bothered me most about the wellbeing of indoor cats is that they cannot hunt naturally and this instinct to hunt is hard wired into their souls. It was with this in mind that I came up with the idea of the NoBowl Feeding System and the mission to nourish the natural hunter in our indoor cats.

Connect:



I blog at TheCatvocate.com, have an 'Ask the Vet' column on CatingtonPost.com and contribute regularly to Cat Talk magazine.

Study 3 Materials: The Shibumi Shade



Study 3 Materials: Shibumi Shade Background Information

So Much Shade

The Shibumi Shade seats 5 adults comfortably side by side, with plenty of room leftover for coolers, beach gear, dogs and kids.

2-Minute Setup

Easy setup and take-down means more time to relax on the beach. Connect the poles, slide on the canopy, and you've got it made in the shade.

Wind Powered

All other beach umbrellas and tailgate tents break in high wind, but the Shibumi Shade was built to use the wind, not fight it.

Highest-Quality Materials

We developed the Shibumi Shade with the best components we could find. The canopy is made from ripstop polyester (the same material used in parachutes) for lightweight durability. The poles are powder-coated aluminum so they're super strong, light, and resist corrosion.

Impossibly Light

Weighing only 3.75 pounds, the Shibumi Shade comes with a convenient carrying case to toss over your shoulder. (Try that with a tailgate tent).

Unmatched Durability

We built the Shibumi to stand up to tough conditions. Our patent-pending design incorporates only high-quality materials and workmanship, meaning the Shibumi will stand up to the strongest breeze when you're on the beach. You won't need any extra buckets, sand bags, or elaborate methods for wind resistance. Just the Shibumi.

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