THE PRICE OF PASSION
Emphasizing work passion lowers job applicants’ negotiated salary

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“On [the hiring] question, I look for passion. Only thing that can’t be taught.”

–Jack Dorsey, CEO Twitter & Square

RESEARCH QUESTION
Is emphasizing work passion an effective self-presentational strategy for job applicants?

ABSTRACT
Organizations frequently promote passion for work as a desirable employee attribute [1]. Yet we know little about the effectiveness of passion as a self-presentation strategy during the hiring process. We explore how displays of work passion (compared to competence- and motivation-emphasizing presentation strategies) effect hiring (evaluator), salary offer (evaluator), and subsequent salary counter (candidate). We find evaluators prefer candidates who present as passionate and offer equitable initial salaries across presentation strategies. However, we find that candidates who present passion subsequently self-discount by suggesting less aggressive salary counters.

BACKGROUND
• Self presentation or impression management (IM) strategies can significantly impact hiring outcomes [2].
• Claiming to be “passionate” has been shown to have strategic presentational value at work [1].
• In a pretest measuring lay beliefs, we find that people associate passion with higher intrinsic motivation, an association also supported in the literature [3].
• Research suggests interviewers respond favorably to expressions of intrinsic motivation [4]. Yet intrinsic motivation has also been linked with lower wages [5].
• We test if evaluators prefer presentations of passion, and if those presentations drive lower salary outcomes due to (a) evaluators’ offers & (b) candidates’ counters.

HYPOTHESES

H1: Presenting passion will increase evaluators’ preference to hire. ✓

H2: Presenting passion will decrease salary offers from evaluators. x

H3: Presenting passion will decrease salary counters from job candidates. ✓

STUDY 1: A Hiring Preference for Passion
• N = 94 executives and mid-level managers
• Evaluated 3 comparable resumes (pre-tested) with differing self-summaries presenting passion, competence, or motivation
• DV: preferred candidate to hire

Study 1 Results: Preferred Candidate to Hire

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✓ H1

STUDY 2: Evaluator’s salary offer (Meta)
• 5 studies (between & within-subject), N= 1804
• Evaluated & made salary offers to candidates presenting passion, competence, or motivation
• DVs: Salary offer (restricted & open range)
• Meta-analysis indicates non-significant effect

Study 2 Results: Salary offer by self-presentation strategy (meta-analysis)

STUDY 3: Candidate’s salary counter
• N = 230 community college students
• Wrote cover letters for a job they were interested in pursuing post-grad
• Advised to emphasize their passion, competence (ctrl 1), or motivation (ctrl 2)
• DV: counter to an initial salary offer (Supported by subsequent internal meta-analysis)

Study 3 Results: Salary counter as a result of recommended presentation strategy

CONCLUSION
• Presenting passion may help job candidates get their foot in the door, but with a self-inflicted cost.
• Evaluators preferred presentations of passion (√H1) but did not attempt to exploit this passion through lower pay (xH2).
• Yet candidates countered less aggressively after presenting passion (√H3).
• Future work will focus on understanding the psychological phenomenon mediating this self-discounting (e.g. desire to maintain consistent external presentation vs. intrinsic effects)

References: