The Impact of Employee Appearance on Consumer Responses to Flattery

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We investigate the influence of employee appearance on consumer reactions to appearance-related compliments. Three studies show that consumers respond more negatively to flattery when the flatterer is attractive, and that this effect is especially pronounced among consumers high in susceptibility to normative influence.

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It Takes Two – Novel Examinations of Social Influence Within Dyads

Paper #1: The Impact of Employee Appearance on Consumer Responses to Flattery
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Paper #2: Power to the People: Consumer Influence Tactics in a Retail Setting
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Paper #3: Meeting in the Middle: Social Influence Effects on the Compromise Effect
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Paper #4: How Do I Love Thee (And Who Should I Tell?) – The Implications of Emotional Suppression Due to Audience Size
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SESSION OVERVIEW
Despite increasing evidence suggesting that our behaviors can be impacted by the presence of other people (Kristofferson & White, 2014), many questions remain regarding the subtle forms of influence occurring across interpersonal interactions, particularly within dyads. In this session, we examine how nuances within and surrounding dyadic interactions can shape retail, service, decision making and emotional experiences. In exploring these questions, we look at a diverse set of factors that are part of dyadic interactions, such as compliments, gender composition of dyads, and the size of an audience outside of the dyad. This session provides new insights into dyadic exchanges, focusing both on the effect of dyadic interactions on decision-making and the influence of other people on dyadic decision-making.

First, Wu, Samper and Morales examine how employee appearance affects consumer reactions to appearance-related compliments. Although research on source credibility suggests that consumers would respond more positively to appearance-related compliments from an attractive and hence highly credible source, the authors show that consumers respond more negatively to flattery when the flatterer is attractive, and that this effect is especially pronounced among consumers high in susceptibility to normative influence.

Shifting to customer-initiated dyadic exchanges, Lavoie, Main and Guo study the impact of consumer influence tactics on employee reciprocation and satisfaction. They find that tipping increases tangible reciprocation (e.g. amount of food served) but decreases employee motivation and enjoyment, whereas paying the employee compliments results in a reversed pattern of results.

The final two papers move beyond retail contexts to novel theoretical and substantive domains. Nikolova and Lamberton demonstrate that in joint decisions the gender composition of the dyad is an important moderator of the compromise effect. The authors show that the compromise effect emerges in decisions made by male-female and female-female dyads but not in those of male-male dyads, and that men’s belief that compromising is non-normative for males appears to underlie this effect.

Finally, Weber, Moore, MacDonnell and Argo study the impact of audience size on emotional regulation and emotional intensity. In the important dyadic context of weddings, the authors show that couples who share their emotions with a large audience regulate their wedding-day emotions via suppression, resulting in less positive emotional intensity and shorter marriages.

We expect this session to appeal to a broad audience, including researchers interested in social influence, retailing, persuasion, emotions, and consumer judgment and decision-making. By bringing together a breadth of papers that address unexpected forms of interpersonal influence in dyadic relationships, we expand our knowledge of the implications of social influence for managerial and consumer decision-making.

The Impact of Employee Appearance on Consumer Responses to Flattery

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
How do consumers respond to flattery during interpersonal retail exchanges? While past work has largely focused on the relative sincerity of the compliment and the accessibility of ulterior motives (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000), the literature remains silent on whether the flatterer’s own standing on the flattered dimension even matters. For example, if a salesperson compliments a consumer on how she is dressed, would the employee’s own appearance have any bearing on how the praise is evaluated? We examine the impact that employee appearance has on consumer reactions to appearance-related compliments, while holding perceived sincerity constant. We identify both for whom the effect is strongest and examine the underlying process.

Research on source credibility suggests that, all things being equal, consumers should respond more positively to flattery from an attractive (vs. less attractive) salesperson. To the extent that attractive salespeople are perceived to have greater source credibility in the appearance domain, their compliments should be more persuasive and result in more favorable consumer responses (Sternthal et al., 1978). However, other work has found that merely seeing an attractive other in the retail environment can result in negative social comparisons and lower product evaluations (Dahl et al. 2012). In the current research, we predict that receiving compliments from an attractive salesperson on one’s looks can be highly threatening, as it makes appearance-related concerns salient and highlights social comparisons with the flatterer. Since threats to an important self-view can temporarily shake one’s confidence in that particular self-view (Gao et al., 2009), we predict that receiving appearance-related compliments from an attractive salesperson would momentarily cast doubt on the way consumers view their own appearance, which in turn would drive negative consumer responses.

Importantly, we hypothesize these effects are most pronounced among consumers high in susceptibility to normative influence (SNI; Bearden et al., 1989). Wooten and Reed (2004) found that SNI is associated with self-protection, or the desire to avoid assailable self-presentations that may garner disapproval. Specifically, SNI predicts concerns about public appearances and involves efforts to make impressions that are unlikely to be challenged or even noticed by others. Given high SNI consumers’ disdain for attention from others for fear of disapproval, even when the attention is intended to be positive, we
predict that a compliment from an attractive salesperson would be especially threatening to these individuals, who are more likely to engage in negative social comparisons (Bearden et al., 1989). Specifically, we propose that whereas low SNI consumers will respond positively to a compliment from an attractive salesperson, high SNI consumers will respond negatively, resulting in lower self and product evaluations. Consistent with prior work (McFerran et al. 2010), we focus only on women, who have been shown to be particularly concerned about physical attractiveness (Oberg & Thornston, 1999).

Study 1 demonstrates that high and low SNI consumers respond differently to flattery depending on the appearance of the flatterer. Undergraduate participants were asked to imagine shopping for a pair of jeans and receiving compliments from an attractive (vs. unattractive) salesperson on their fashion sense. Subsequently, participants rated their satisfaction with their purchase (3 items, α=.74) and then completed the SNI scale. A 2 x continuous regression on the satisfaction index revealed a significant appearance X SNI interaction. Spotlight analyses revealed that whereas high SNI individuals experienced greater dissatisfaction when they were flattered by the attractive salesperson, low SNI individuals were not significantly affected.

We then tested the underlying process in Study 2, a 2 (appearance: attractive, unattractive) X 2 (flattery: yes, no) X continuous (SNI) design. The design was identical to Study 1 but included a no-flattery, control condition to rule out an account based solely on the salesperson’s appearance. Participants responded to the same satisfaction measure from Study 1. In addition, they rated themselves on their own attractiveness and responded to four behavioral intention items (likelihood of shopping there again, attending a store-organized fashion show, joining their loyalty program, and overall store evaluations), which we combined with return likelihood to create a store loyalty index (α=.76). A 2 x 2 x continuous regression on satisfaction and store loyalty revealed significant 3-way interactions. As predicted, high SNI individuals expressed lower satisfaction and loyalty intentions when they were flattered by the attractive salesperson, but this pattern was reversed among the low SNI. Importantly, the interaction of appearance and SNI was not significant in the control condition. Bootstrapping mediation analyses revealed that only in the flattery condition did self-ratings of attractiveness mediate the effect of employee appearance on satisfaction and loyalty intentions among the high SNI; self-ratings did not mediate among low SNI individuals or in the control condition.

To enhance the generalizability of our results, we conducted Study 3 in an actual retail setting. Undergraduate participants were run individually at the campus bookstore. After completing the SNI measure, participants were asked to try on a particular sweatshirt, ostensibly for marketing research purposes. A female salesperson confederate, who had intentionally altered her own appearance to look either attractive or unattractive depending on the condition, approached participants while they tried on the product and complimented their appearance. Subsequently, participants rated how the sweatshirt looked on them. A 2 x continuous regression on product evaluations revealed a significant interaction. Replicating prior studies, high SNI individuals thought the sweatshirt looked worse on them after receiving flattery from an attractive salesperson, but this pattern was reversed among the low SNI.

In sum, three studies reveal that high SNI individuals respond more negatively to appearance-related compliments from an attractive salesperson, and that this effect was mediated by changes in self-views in the appearance domain.

### Power to the People:

**Consumer Influence Tactics in a Retail Setting**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Although tipping is a widely-accepted convention in North America, some restaurants are experimenting with no-tip policies. While tipping policies impact the company, its employees, and its customers, little is known about the efficacy of tipping as a consumer influence strategy and the implications it has for various organizational stakeholders. In the literature, service relationships have typically been analyzed from the perspective of service agents, with the focus being on how they can influence service outcomes (e.g. Lynn & Mynier 1993).

We suggest that consumers can influence service agents by using both economic and social influence tactics (Argo, Dahl & White 2011). Priming effects facilitate the categorization of stimuli based on a concept that was made previously accessible (Higgins et al. 1985). We hypothesize that, via a priming effect, the first consumer influence tactic utilized will provide information that is used by servers to understand the nature of their relationship (Higgins & Brendl 1995). Tips should prime perceptions that the interaction is less about becoming socially connected (economic exchange), while compliments should prime perceptions of greater social connectedness (communal sharing) (Belk 2010).

Across three experiments using real and imagined behavior we provide evidence that tips lead to decreased social connectedness, while compliments lead to increased social connectedness. Tips lead to an increase in tangible reciprocation (i.e., amount of food given, Studies 2 and 3), but a decrease in motivation, enjoyment, and relationship development (Studies 1 and 3) as mediated by social connectedness. In contrast, compliments lead to a decrease in tangible reciprocation, but an increase in motivation, enjoyment, and relationship development as mediated by social connectedness. However, when tips happen early in an interaction they are perceived as less trustworthy than compliments (Study 1), and their effectiveness in obtaining tangible reciprocation is attenuated (Studies 2 and 3).

Study 1 employed an imagined scenario method. Participants saw a video of a restaurant interaction and imagined themselves as the server. Participants (N= 300, Mage=20.12, 56.6% Male) were either tipped $5 early, complimented early, tipped $5 early and complimented late, or complimented early and tipped $5 late. The dependent measures were server motivation, enjoyment of the interaction and desire to serve the customer again. We hypothesized that when tips come first they decrease perceptions of trustworthiness, decreasing social connectedness and negatively influencing the dependent measures. We ran a serial mediation model (Hayes 2012) on the relationship between the first influence type and the dependent measures through perceptions of trustworthiness and social connectedness. The serial mediation model was significant for each dependent measure: relationship development (b= -.07, SE=.04, [95% CI= -.15 to -.01]), enjoyment (b= -.07, SE=.04, [95% CI= -.16 to -.0040]) and motivation (b= -.05, SE=.03, [95% CI= -.11 to -.01]).

In Study 2, we measured real behavior by setting up two mock dining settings in separate rooms and two mock kitchens. Participants worked as the servers and the customers were confederates. Servers were randomly assigned to one of four conditions within a 2 (influence type: compliment vs. tip) x 2 (influence timing: late-dessert vs. early-drink) between-subjects design (N= 106, Mage=20.64, 45.7% male). We measured how much food (in grams) the server gave the customer. Social connectedness was coded based on server behaviors in the video footage (adapted from Jiang, et al. 2010). A univariate ANOVA of influence timing x influence type on
the amount of food given in grams revealed a significant interaction (F(1, 101) = 3.94, p = .05). Servers in the early flattery condition gave significantly more food (Mg = 134.64g) than those in the early tipping condition (Mg = 114g, F(1, 101) = 6.3, p = .014). A bootstrapping procedure revealed the indirect path from influence type to amount of food given through level of social connectedness was significant (b = 7.79, SE = 1.19, 95% CI = 1.18, 17.64).

Study 3 followed the same design as study 2 but with participants (N = 132, Mage = 21.25, 44.7% male) playing both customers as well as servers to provide a more natural setting and to measure the customer’s perspective of the interaction. We included the perceptual measures of study 1 (for both servers and customers), the amount of food given and the amount of time taken to bring the food to the customer. We included a self-report measure of social connectedness to mediate the perceptual findings. ANOVA results revealed only a main effect of influence type such that compliments were superior to tips for each dependent measure. A bootstrapping mediation analysis revealed that social connectedness mediated the main effects of influence type on each of the DVs for both customers and servers. Social connectedness mediated server motivation (b = -.21, SE = .13, 95% CI = -.56, -.02), server enjoyment (b = -.22, SE = .11, 95% CI = -.48, -.06), server perception of relationship development (b = -.19, SE = .12, 95% CI = -.53, -.02), customer enjoyment (b = -.33, SE = .17, 95% CI = -.75, -.05), and customer perception of relationship development (b = -.51, SE = .26, 95% CI = -1.11, -0.07). ANOVA results on the amount of food given replicated study 2. Servers in the early compliment condition gave more food (Mg = 139.75) than those in the early tipping condition (Mg = 118.4, F(1, 62) = 4.55, p < .05). Experience as a bartender/server was measured (yes/no). When included in the ANOVA models, experience did not interact with the independent variables or have a direct effect on any of the dependent measures.

Together, this research enriches our understanding of "service sweethearing" and its impact (Brady et al. 2012) by demonstrating that such behavior transcends friendships and can happen between strangers, and contributes to an emerging literature showing how consumers can act as agents of persuasion in the marketplace (Kozinets et al. 2010).

Meeting in the Middle:
Social Influence Effects on the Compromise Effect

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The compromise effect, describing how consumers are more likely to select the middle option in a choice set rather than the extreme options, is a well-documented and robust phenomenon in marketing (Simonson and Tversky 1992). Past research has investigated the cognitive processes leading to this effect and the different individual, task, and social context moderators of its magnitude (Simonson and Nowlis 2000; Simonson 1989).

However, the bulk of this research has focused on uncovering the drivers behind the compromise effect in choices made by individual decision makers. In reality, many purchase decisions where compromise effects could emerge are made by dyads (married couples, pairs of friends). Such dyads routinely make decisions in which both partners provide input into the decision-making process and ultimately reach one decision or buy one product.

Our work sheds light on the compromise effect in dyadic decisions and demonstrates that the degree to which compromise effects emerge is determined by the gender composition of the dyad. Specifically, we examine the tendency of differently-composed dyads (male-male, male-female, female-female pairs) to exhibit different susceptibility to the compromise effect.

In Study 1 we asked participants (N = 222, M age = 20.2 years, 38% male) to choose from a set of three electric grills. Participants either made this decision jointly with another participant (20 male-male dyads, 32 male-female dyads, 43 female-female dyads) or alone (10 male individuals, 22 female individuals). Following Simonson and Sela (2011), the choice set was constructed so that one item represented the compromise option, not dominating on either attribute provided but instead, falling between two more extreme options, both of which were dominated on one attribute. A logistic regression predicting choice (1 = middle option; 0 = one of the extreme options) revealed a main effect of dyad composition, such that male-female (72.1% chose the middle option) and female-female dyads (68.8%) were not significantly different from one another (p = .09), but were significantly more likely to choose the compromise option than were male-male dyads (40%, p = .01). We also found that male-male dyads were significantly less likely to select the compromise option than were individual males (70%) or females (72.7%, p = .01). These findings suggest that when males make joint decisions, their willingness to choose a compromise option decreases, both relative to other types of pairs and relative to the decisions they usually make alone.

Following Mourali et al. (2007), Study 2 tested the magnitude of the compromise effect in different dyads by examining the change of the compromise option choice share between the core (2-item) and extended (3-item) sets. In the core set, dyads chose between two brands of printers (A, B); dyads in the extended set selected among three brands (A, B, C). Thus, Study 2 (N = 386, M age = 20.6 years, 41% male) followed a 3 (male-male, female-male, female-female pairs) x 2 (core vs. extended set) design. Results reveal a significant interaction of dyad type x choice set (p < .04): male-female and female-female dyads both exhibited the compromise effect with the compromise option choice share increasing significantly in the extended versus the core set (male-female: 10% in core vs. 60% in extended set; female-female: 10% in core vs. 58.5% in extended set, p < .0001); however, the compromise effect does not replicate in male-male dyads (12.5% in core vs. 12.5% in extended set, p = .99).

A post-test revealed that men are more knowledgeable than women about the products (grills and printers) used in the first two studies (p < .0001). Thus, the objective of Study 3 (N = 251, M age = 29.6 years, 72% male) was to examine whether this effect would replicate in a product domain where men are less knowledgeable than women. The study was conducted with virtual dyads (104 male-male dyads, 99 male-female dyads, 48 female-female dyads) and all participants had to choose among three types of figure skating tickets. Replicating our prior findings, results revealed that male-male dyads were less likely to select the compromise option than both male-female and female-female dyads (p < .04); there was no difference between the latter two dyads (p = .93).

So why is this effect occurring? Across these three studies, we captured a variety of exploratory ancillary measures. Consideration of these measures suggest that for men, the presence of another man in the dyad may heighten the sense that compromise, in general, is non-normative. For example, in Study 2, men hold the idea that “compromising is a sign of a weak man” more strongly than women (p < .0001). We explored this explanation more directly in Study 4 where we asked participants (N = 224, M age = 33.3 years, 53% male) to imagine a scenario in which a male/female character was choosing jointly with a male/female coworker among three options (one of which was a compromise option as in prior studies). Participants imagined the focal character recommended choosing the medium option and then were asked to evaluate his/her choice using items such as “he/she is compromising too much,” “giving up too easily,” “too willing to compromise.” Results revealed that male partici-
pants judged the male character’s inclination to choose the middle option more harshly when the decision was made with a male than a female co-worker ($p=.05$); none of the other contrasts were significant ($p>.09$). This study provides further evidence for the idea that males perceive that compromising is non-normative for them especially when they make joint decisions with other males.

Based on these results, we are currently conducting a fifth study to: (1) demonstrate the effects with a consequential choice; (2) test interventions that challenge men’s belief that only weak men compromise, which will help us to provide stronger evidence of the mechanism underlying the aversion to compromise seen in male-male dyads.

Our work contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating that in joint decisions the gender composition of the dyad is an important moderator of the compromise effect. Furthermore, given the practical implications of the compromise effect for product introduction and deletions, positioning, and product assortments (Kivetz, Netzer, and Srinivasan 2004) and the fact that many purchase decisions are made by pairs of people, this project also has the potential to offer valuable insights for marketing practitioners.

**How Do I Love Thee (And Who Should I Tell?) – The Implications of Emotional Suppression Due to Audience Size**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Marriage is a major life event (Levinson 1986) that couples mark publically through a ceremony and celebration: their wedding. Given its importance, couples want their wedding to be perfect (Carr 1993). To achieve this, couples typically spend a great deal of time and effort—and an increasing amount of money ($28,427 on average; Fraiman 2013)—planning their special day. Importantly, the bulk of wedding expenses are related to guests (79.3%; Fraiman 2013). In the present research, we explore whether spending on guests benefits the couple, or whether more wedding guests is deleterious for marital outcomes. This research provides insight for those planning a wedding, and addresses the theoretical questions of how and why audience size impacts emotions and associated outcomes. There is a paucity of consumer research on weddings (but see Belk and Nguyen 2013) and on audience size (but see Berger and Milkman 2012), and neither stream of work has examined how audience size affects consumers’ emotions. Using the context of weddings, this research contributes to our understanding of how social and situational factors influence emotional regulation and emotional intensity.

We propose that sharing emotions with close others allows couples to be authentic in their expression (DePaulo and Kashy 1998), and to capitalize on their positive emotions (Gable et al. 2004; Langston 1994). This will increase the positivity and intensity of those emotions. In the context of weddings—where couples share their love for their partner with others—these increased positive emotions may carry over into their marriage, given that emotional capitalization can have long-term effects (Langston 1994). Indeed, one might predict increased benefits from larger guest lists: the more guests there are, the greater the opportunities will be for sharing and thus capitalizing.

On the other hand, research has shown that individuals engage in emotional suppression more around those with whom they are not close (Gross, Richards, and John 2006), and that humans can only truly feel close to approximately 150 other people (Dunbar 1992). Emotional suppression has been linked to negative social (Butler et al. 2003) and marital outcomes (via stonewalling; Gottman and Levenson 1992). As such, we predict that as wedding guest lists increase beyond approximately 150, couples will feel less close to their guests and will engage in more emotional suppression at their wedding. This will ultimately diminish their emotional intensity for their spouse, with detrimental outcomes for their marriage.

In sum, we predict a curvilinear effect wherein weddings with more guests result in more positive emotional intensity and longer marriages, but only up to a certain number of guests. Beyond approximately 150 guests, couples may begin to suppress their emotions on their wedding day, resulting in less positive emotional intensity and shorter marriages. We hypothesize that this suppression will occur due to a lack of felt closeness with larger numbers of guests, and we measure and test closeness as a mediator. We use two divorced samples, a sample of still-married individuals, and a sample of engaged individuals planning their wedding to test our predictions and rule out alternate explanations.

**Studies 1a and 1b**

Our first two studies examine whether wedding guest number predicts the length of divorced individuals’ first marriage. In study 1a (n = 92), we controlled for marriage year, age when married, education level of the couple, wedding cost, and wedding religiosity, and added the linear and polynomial terms in separate regression steps. We found no linear ($\beta = 0.182, t(78) = 1.59, p = .117$) or quadratic effects of guest number ($\beta = -0.101, t(77) = -.30, p > .250$), but found a significant cubic effect ($\beta = -2.345, t(76) = -2.00, p = .049$), such that the largest guest lists corresponded with the shortest marriages; the turning point in the data was 200 guests.

In study 1b, using a larger sample (n = 297), we replicated Study 1a’s results before additionally controlling for the presence of children, the existence of a prenuptial agreement, another measure of religiosity (whether the marriage was in a church or not), the couple’s age difference, and the respondent’s total number of separations and divorces (to control for a pattern of divorce behavior). Even with the inclusion of these variables, the cubic effect was significant ($\beta = -1.036, t(271) = -1.994, p = .047$) and showed that the largest weddings were associated with the shortest marriages. The turning point in this data was 205 guests.

**Study 2**

A sample of married individuals (n = 184) assessed whether a) guest number directly corresponded to emotional intensity within the marriage, and b) if this effect was mediated by closeness with one’s wedding guests. Controlling for all of the same variables as in study 1a, and adding marriage length, we again found a cubic effect ($\beta = -1.204, t(166) = -2.147, p = .033$) of wedding guest number predicting positive emotions for one’s spouse. Bootstrapping revealed that closeness to one’s wedding guests mediated this effect (indirect effect = -.0.017; LCI = -.0494, UCI = -.0012).

**Study 3**

To rule out an alternate explanation that couples who feel initially less positive toward one another plan larger marriages (perhaps as a distraction from their ailing relationship), we surveyed engaged couples who were planning their first wedding, using age, educational level, and anticipated cost of wedding as control measures. The engaged couple’s emotional intensity for one another did not predict their anticipated guest number ($\beta = - .973, t(60) = -.911, p > .250$).

Marriage has implications for well-being (Gove et al. 1983), health, and mortality (Kaplan and Kronick 2006; Lillard and Waite 1995)—yet a large proportion of marriages end in divorce (CDC 2013). This research suggests that couples planning a wedding may
want to carefully consider how many guests they invite to their big day—not only for monetary reasons, but also for emotional ones. Indeed, oversharing the experience of one’s wedding may have implications for emotional intensity toward one’s partner and ultimately the outcomes of the marriage.

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