

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-presentational strategy during the hiring process. We explore how displays of work passion (compared to competence- and motivation-emphasizing presentational 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.

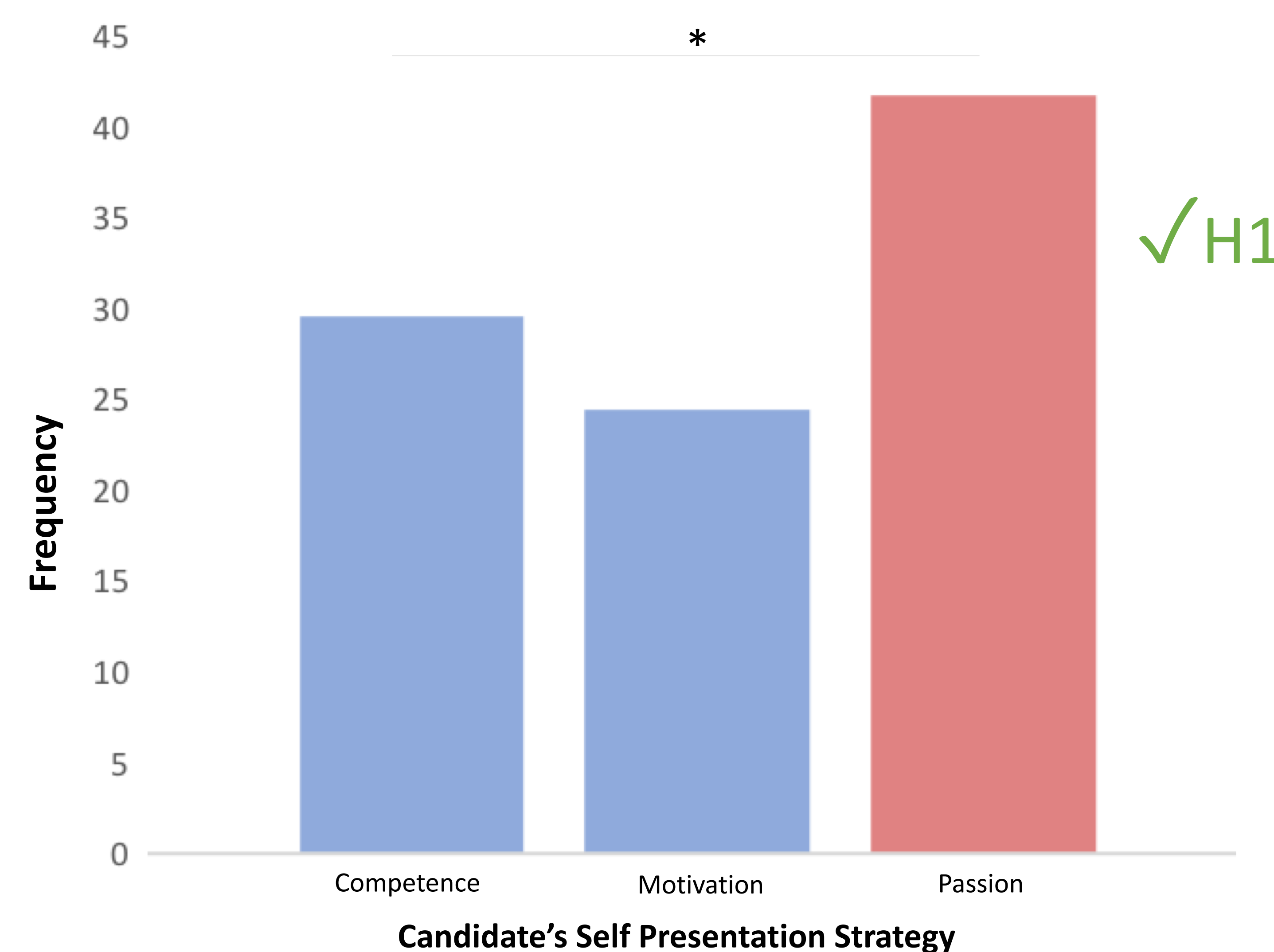
HYPOTHESES

- H1:** Presenting passion will increase evaluators' preference to hire. ✓
- H2:** Presenting passion will decrease salary offers from evaluators. ✗
- 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

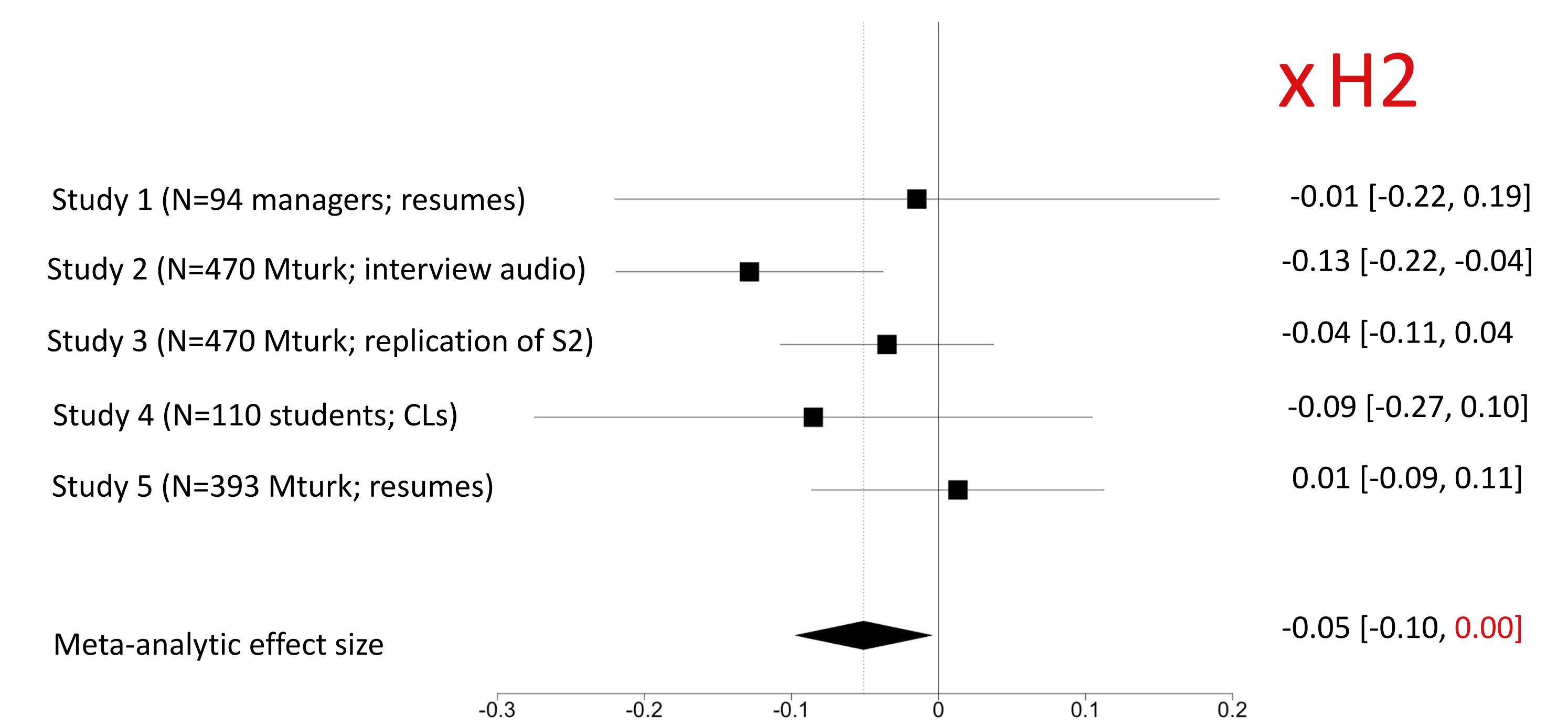
Study 1 Results: Preferred Candidate to Hire



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

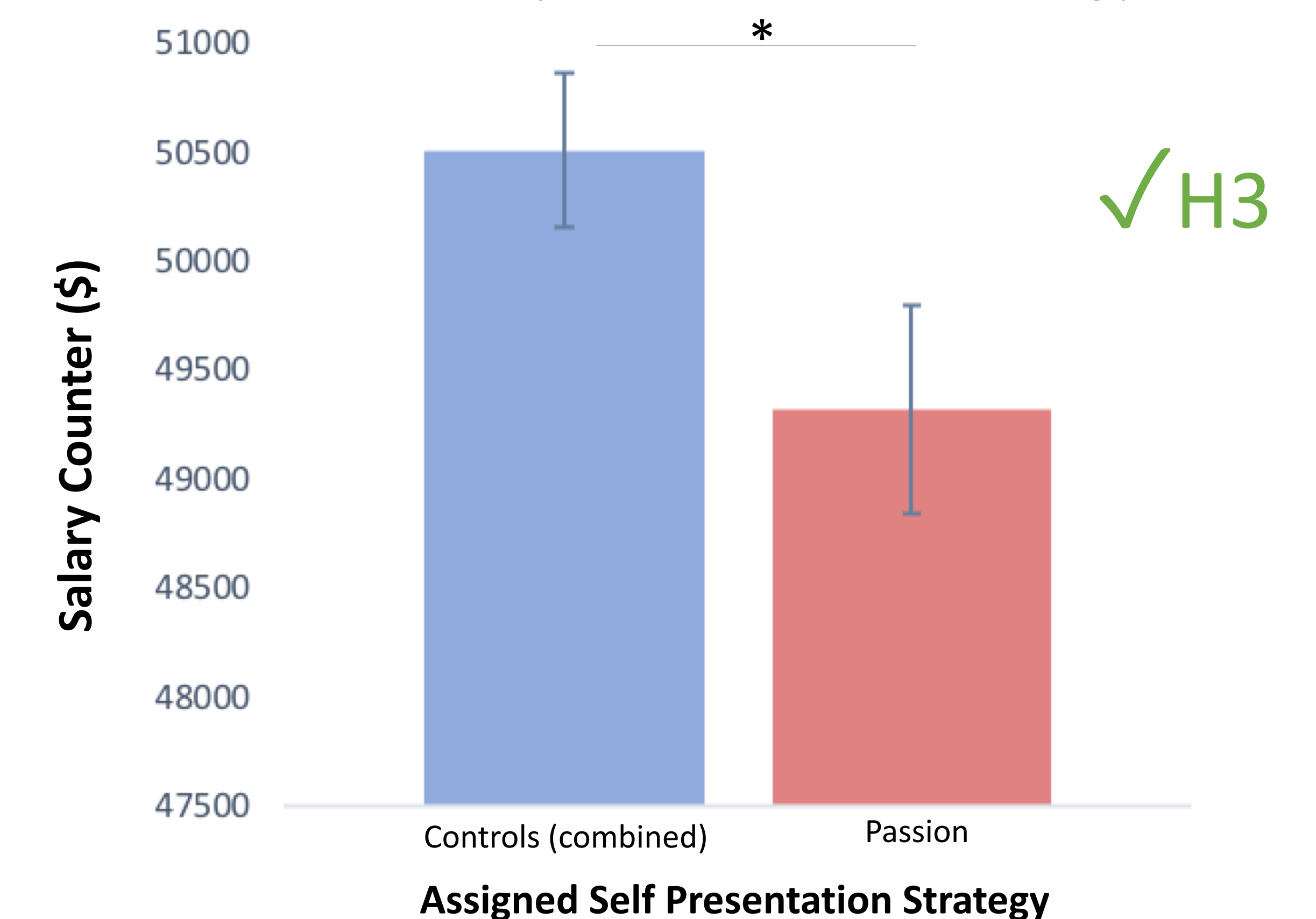
Study 2 Results: *Salary offer* by self-presentation strategy (meta-analysis)



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 (✗H2).
- 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)

Feedback? Questions?
Contact me at freund@stanford.edu

Test statistics: [Study 1] Uncombined controls: $\chi^2(2, N=94)=4.87, p=0.087$ | Combined controls: $\chi^2(1, N=94)=4.47, p=0.034$
[Study 2] Metanalysis suggests effect size of $z=0.05$; confidence interval contains zero [-0.10, 0.00]
[Study 3] Uncombined controls: $F(2, 227)=3.17, p=0.044$ | Combined controls: $F(1, 228)=3.8, p=0.053$
Meta-analysis (4 studies, N=726) indicates effect size of $z=-0.14$; 95% CI does not contain zero [-0.22, -0.07]

References: [1] Wolf, E. B., Lee, J. J., Sah, S., & Brooks, A. W. (2016). Managing perceptions of distress at work: Reframing emotion as passion. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 137, 1-12.
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