The Negative Side of
Corporate Social Responsibility

by

Jingzhi Shang

M.Sc., University of Lethbridge, 2007
B.Econ., East China Normal University, 2006

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Approval

Name: Jingzhi Shang

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy (Marketing)

Title of Thesis: The Negative Side of Corporate Social Responsibility

Examing Committee: Chair: Olga Volkoff
Associate Professor

John Peloza
Senior Supervisor
Associate Professor
College of Business
Florida State University

Colleen Collins
Supervisor
Associate Professor

Peter Tingling
Internal Examiner
Associate Professor

Peggy Cunningham
External Examiner
Dean
Faculty of Management
Dalhousie University

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Abstract

Although corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly important to a company’s success, the relationship between CSR and corporate financial performance is equivocal. The purpose of this research is to explore additional conditions under which CSR can lead to negative outcomes for both the firm and consumers. Specifically, different from other papers examining the negative effects of CSR that focus on either perceived negative motivations or perceived unethical behavior by the firm, this research examines how CSR that is, on the surface, perceived positively by consumers, leads to negative outcomes. The first paper, “Who’s working in the kitchen today”, explores the potential for CSR activities to lead to negative financial outcomes through producer contagion between stigmatized populations and products they produce. The results show that although consumers admire companies that hire stigmatized populations, they actually tend to avoid products produced by stigmatized populations. Consumers believe that this CSR practice decreases the value of products because stigmatized populations may contaminate the products by transferring their negative properties to the products through the production process. Further research identifies the mediating effect of disgust and the moderating effects of product intimacy and end user vulnerability. Finally, a choice task reveals that the negative producer contagion effect can be mitigated by implicit information such as color. The second paper, “Can ‘Real’ Men Consume Ethically?” complements the first paper by examining the outcomes from the consumers’ perspective. This paper examines how observers make judgments about consumers on the basis of their CSR support. Across four experiments it reveals that, in addition to being viewed as socially responsible, consumers are viewed as less masculine and more feminine when they consume ethical products. It also identifies two boundary conditions to this effect, including the use of self-benefit advertising appeals and the use of descriptive norms to signal gender appropriate behavior. It also identifies how consumers resolve the conflict of prosocial and gender-congruent impression management objectives. It shows that when consumers are in the presence of observers of the opposite sex, they are more likely to prioritize prosocial identity even when it threatens their gender orientation.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility; consumer behavior; inference making; negative producer contagion
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Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly important to a company’s success. Many managers support CSR not only because they may have sincere concern about the well-being of others and want to solve some deep-seated social problems but also because they believe that there is a positive relationship between CSR and corporate financial performance (CFP). Researchers working in the field of CSR provide evidence that investments intended to enhance CFP may be justified. For example, consumers will have increased loyalty (e.g., Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007), be willing to pay premium prices (e.g., Creyer & Ross, 1996), and be less likely to blame a crisis on the company (e.g., Klein & Dawar, 2004) when the company has a good CSR reputation. Moreover, supporting CSR can also create a competitive advantage for companies by building strong brand image and bolstering relationship between customers and firms (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; 2004).

However, research also demonstrates that consumer and other stakeholder support for CSR is equivocal. For example, some studies show a negative relationship between CSR and CFP (Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Consumer support is complex and may be moderated or mediated by some third variable such as perceived motivation of the company (e.g., Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Peloza & Shang, 2011), with some consumers actually avoiding companies who engage in CSR.

The purpose of the two papers in this dissertation is to further examine additional conditions under which CSR can lead to negative outcomes for both the firm and consumers. Different from other papers examining negative firm effects that tend to focus on either perceived negative motivations (e.g., Ellen et al., 2006), or perceived unethical behavior by the firm (e.g., Lichtenstein et al., 2004), the current papers examine CSR that is, on the surface, perceived positively by consumers. In doing so, this examination is particularly informative for understanding the attitude-behavior gap prevalent in CSR research (for a review, see Trudel & Cotte, 2009) and opening the
black box of the equivocal relationship between CSR, stated consumer support for CSR, and ultimate firm financial performance.

The first paper, “Who’s working in the kitchen today?”, explores the potential for CSR activities by firms to lead to negative financial outcomes through producer contagion between stigmatized populations and products they produce. For example, Luchs et al. (2010) find that adding a sustainability attribute improves consumer perceptions of quality in some categories but diminishes those perceptions in other categories. They find that in categories such as snow tires, where strength and durability are premium, a sustainability message leads to perceptions of lower quality but in categories where gentleness is premium, such as skin cleansers, the same message enhances perceptions of quality. Paper 1 further examines this attitude-behavior gap by introducing a new means by which CSR can impact quality perceptions. Namely, it examines the potential for producer contagion – the potential for something in the production process to lead to perceptions of inferior quality – to lead to inconsistency between consumers’ stated support for the CSR and subsequent purchase intentions. The manipulation used to create perceived producer contagion is hiring programs that provide employment to stigmatized populations. Although such hiring programs represent, in theory, a perfect blend of social and economic objectives, consumers may not be willing to support such programs if they believe that stigmatized populations negatively impact the value of products through the production process.

The second paper, “Can ‘Real’ Men Consume Ethically? The Unintended Consequences of Impression Management,” complements the first paper – and the CSR literature – by examining the outcomes from the consumers’ perspective. One of the motivations for consumer support of CSR is the social value it creates when others observe the behavior (Peloza & Shang, 2011). This paper examines the potential for such support to create undesirable judgments by others and thus potentially reduce the social value of CSR support. The potential for consumers to use CSR support to create self-identity can not only lead to unintended perceptions by others but also lead to negative evaluations of which the consumer may not even be aware. This paper specifically focuses on inferences of femininity and masculinity. It proposes that consumers who support CSR activities may be perceived as having high femininity and
low masculinity whereas those who refuse to support CSR may be perceived as having high masculinity and low femininity.

1.1. References


Chapter 1.

Who is working in the kitchen today?
How the hiring of stigmatized populations can lead to a CSR backfire effect with consumers

Empirical research generally demonstrates that CSR activities lead to positive consumer responses such as increased purchase intentions (e.g., Barone, Norman, & Miyazaki, 2007), enhanced consumer loyalty (e.g., Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen 2007), and willingness to pay a premium price (e.g., Creyer & Ross, 1996). However, consumer support for CSR is equivocal, and CSR research has been criticized as suffering from an attitude-behavior gap (Peloza & Shang, 2011). Although consumers report intentions to support companies that engage in CSR activities, their behaviors often do not reflect these intentions. One explanation for this incongruence has recently emerged: CSR activities can have negative impacts on perceptions of product quality. For example, Obermiller and colleagues (2009) find that although consumers rate the taste of fair trade and conventional coffee as similar, prior to tasting they expect that fair trade coffee will taste worse. Further, because environmental attributes are perceived as adding a quality of gentleness and purity to a product, consumers will prefer products with environmental attributes where gentleness is a salient attribute in the category (e.g., facial soaps). In product categories where durability and strength and preferred (e.g., snow tires), environmental attributes can repel consumers (Luchs et al., 2010).

The purpose of this paper is to extend recent research that examines how CSR activities can lead to a backfire effect with consumers. Specifically, the current research examines consumer responses toward CSR that associates the firm with stigmatized groups. Stigmatized groups are groups of people whose behavior or appearance violates the society’s expectations (Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). The homeless, the unemployed, ex-convicts, Native Americans, drug addicts, obese, mentally ill, and
the blind are all examples of stigmatized groups (Towler & Schneider, 2005). Companies, which are expected to provide innovative solutions to social problems through CSR activities, often include stigmatized populations as beneficiaries. For example, clothing manufacturer Volcom collects used jeans and forwards them to the homeless.

Other companies go further than mere corporate philanthropy: their CSR activities include active hiring programs for stigmatized groups. Greyston Bakery in New York trains the homeless as bakers. Bushnell hires former offenders and reports that they are very good employees. Governments also encourage companies to hire stigmatized groups through incentive programs. For example, Industry Canada states on its web site that companies should promote diversity and human rights: “when hiring, think creatively about where to advertise the job and whether there are any local employability schemes to help find work for people who are homeless or disabled” (Corporate Social Responsibility: An Implementation Guide for Canadian Business 2006, p.39). The U.S. government has incentive programs such as offering employers the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which allows a company to claim up to $2,500 per year on its tax return for every ex-convict they hire. Moreover, workplace diversity and human rights are usually considered as two basic indicators of corporate social performance (e.g., KLD Research & Analytics). Different from corporate philanthropy, hiring stigmatized groups provides a stigmatized person financial supports and an opportunity to get back into the society. In some cases, having a job can even help a stigmatized person (e.g., the unemployed, the homeless) to get rid of the stigma. Because CSR that creates positive social impact has the potential to create long term advantage for firms (Porter & Kramer 2006), such hiring programs represent, in theory, a perfect blend of social and economic objectives espoused by CSR proponents. However, using contagion theory as a lens for viewing this popular CSR activity, this paper proposes that consumers may tend to avoid products produced by stigmatized populations. Therefore, the purpose of the current research is to explore how CSR can have a backfire effect on consumers, examine when and how this effect occurs, as well as opportunities for marketers to overcome this effect.
1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. The Backfire Effect of CSR

Although previous research demonstrates at least a modest correlation between CSR and firm profitability (Orlitzky, Schmidt, and Rynes 2003), marketing research in the CSR field reveals that the influence of CSR activities on consumer behavior is complex. For example, mediators such as consumer trust (e.g., Castaldo et al. 2009; Pivato, Misani, and Tencati 2008) and attributions (e.g., Ellen, Webb, and Mohr 2006) are important elements behind consumer support for firms that engage in CSR activities. Peloza and Shang (2011) propose that stakeholders’ reactions to CSR activities vary because different activities provide different sources of value for stakeholders. For example, a CSR activity can create other-oriented and/or self-oriented value depending on whether the value is related to some relevant other or whether value directly benefits the self. A company’s charitable donation can enhance other-oriented value while a hybrid vehicle can enhance both other and self-oriented value.

Many of the activities that provide other-oriented value – from philanthropy to fair trade practices – rely on consumer identification to generate an emotional bond between the consumer and the firm, and subsequent support behaviors such as purchase intention and loyalty (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen 2005; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Peloza and Shang 2011). Identification is defined as “a cognitive link between the definitions of the organization and the self” (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994, p. 242). Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) point out that consumers are more likely to identify with a firm when the firm’s identity is more positively remarkable or conspicuous, and that firm identity often manifests itself through CSR activities. As consumers perceive that organizational activities signal interests congruent with their self-identity, they are likely to identify with the organization (Maignan and Ferrell 2004). Much research that finds a positive relationship between CSR and financial performance supports the importance of consumer identification (e.g., Currás-Pérez, Bigné-Alcañiz, and Alvarado-Herrera 2009; Marin, Ruiz, and Rubio 2009). Similarly, disidentification (conflict between individual and organizational attributes; Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002) is one explanation offered for the ineffectiveness of CSR activities in delivering profitability (Peloza and Papania 2008).
However, mere identification is clearly not enough to stimulate consumer support for CSR. For example, although consumers claim that they are willing to pay premium price for fair-trade coffee (De Pelsmacker, Driesen, and Rayp 2005) – seemingly because they identify with fair trade organizations and what they stand for – sales of fair trade coffee suggest that many of these same consumers do not choose fair trade when purchasing. Obermiller’s finding of expected inferior taste of fair trade coffee suggests that consumers view other-oriented value (i.e., subsistence pricing paid to farmers) as created at the expense of self-oriented value (i.e., taste). Previous findings that CSR attributes can lead to consumer aversion are extended here and are labeled as the backfire effect of CSR activities. The backfire effect occurs when consumers support a CSR activity and identify with the firm behind the activity, but avoid the firm’s products because of that CSR activity.

In order to examine the backfire effect, hiring of stigmatized populations is used as the focal CSR activity. The word stigma is used to label any perceived or inferred deviations in physical attributes, character, behavior, and so forth that have undesirable qualities (Weiner et al. 1988). Thus, an individual will be stigmatized and defined as “deviant, flawed, limited, spoiled, or generally undesirable” (Weiner et al. 1988, p. 738) if the individual does not conform to the society’s expectations. Although people typically have strong negative attitudes such as disgust and fear toward stigmatized groups they also have high level of compassion (e.g., Barnett, Quachenbush, and Pierce 1997). Therefore, although many consumers support the hiring of stigmatized populations, and potentially identify with firms that hire stigmatized populations, their positive perceptions of the practice and the firm behind it do not translate into support behaviors. Indeed, this paper proposes that despite identification, consumers often actively avoid products from firms that hire stigmatized populations. This CSR activity is ideal for studying the backfire effect because it is widespread across an array of product categories, and not dependent on product attributes highly specific to any one product category (e.g., gentleness of ingredients). Further, the examination of stigmatized populations allows us to understand the backfire effects not only on the perception of physical product characteristics, but the production of those products, as well as the delivery of services.
1.1.2. Negative Producer Contagion

The “magical law of contagion” is one of the laws of sympathetic magic that influence people’s principles of thinking and are believed to be widespread in both primitive and advanced societies (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994). The “law of contagion” holds that when a source and a recipient come into direct or indirect contact with each other, the source may influence the recipient by transferring its properties to the recipient (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994). This is a permanent influence because the transferred properties are perceived to still exist in the recipient even after the physical contact has ended. Transferable properties can be either physical or moral and also can be harmful or beneficial. Thus, the nature of transferred properties determines the consequence of contagion: positive contagion increases the value of recipient, whereas negative contagion decreases the value of recipient (Rozin Millman, & Nemeroff, 1986).

According to Nemeroff and Rozin (1994), the concept of magical contagion is a result of human development. The “contact causes influence” principle may originate from physiology: People learn it from their early experiences that they must keep away from harmful microbial contamination in order to survive and reproduce. Fallon, Rozin, and Pliner (1984) find that a person’s perception of contamination and willingness to clean increases with age. This finding suggests that the formation of contagion belief needs knowledge of how contamination works (Morales & Fitzsimons, 2007).

Although contagion belief is originated from biomedical germ theory, it has been extended and applied to other domains in which real contamination does not occur. Rozin et al. (1986) examine the contagion effect in both object domain (e.g., a roach in a glass of juice) and interpersonal domain (e.g., disliked person’s blouse or liked person’s toothbrush). They find that people’s evaluations of the contagion event and the recipient can be either positive or negative depending on one’s attitude towards the contact source. Moreover, the results suggest that the effect of negative contagion is more salient than the effect of positive contagion. Their findings reveal that transferred properties can act both forward to influence the recipient (e.g., wearing a sweater that belonged to Hitler) and backward to influence the source (e.g., scorching a lock of a person’s hair to cause harm). Stein and Nemeroff’s (1995) study of the “you are what you eat” principle provides additional evidence to support the contagion effect: people
judge others based on the foods they eat because they believe that the properties of foods can be transferred to the eater.

Another example of how contagion works for food products is found in the Hua tribe of New Guinea (Meigs, 1984). The Hua believe that a person's essence exists in products he grows in his garden and children he creates and nourishes. When a Hua woman gets married and moves to her husband's community, people in that community will not eat the food she produces. People refuse to eat the food because they believe the woman's properties have been transferred to the food when she is preparing it. So people will be polluted by the woman's properties if they eat the food.

In marketing, contagion has been used to explain consumer responses toward products previously touched by other shoppers (i.e., consumer contagion; Argo, Dahl, & Morales, 2006), products previously having contact with a disgusting product (i.e., product contagion; Morales & Fitzsimons, 2007), and products previously having contact with a celebrity (i.e., celebrity contagion; Newman, Diesendruck, & Bloom, 2011). Results show that consumers generally have negative evaluations of products previously touched by other shoppers because consumers view the contact as a negative contamination event (Argo et al., 2006). The more salient a contamination cue, the greater the influence of the negative contamination on consumer evaluations is (Argo et al., 2006). For example, a product will receive lower consumer product evaluations and purchase intentions if it is believed to have had contact with many (vs. one) consumers. Moreover, the negative contamination even occurs when products are objectively unharmed and when consumers do not actually see the contact (Argo et al., 2006). However, contagion can also lead to more positive product evaluations when products are physically touched by highly attractive shoppers (Argo, Dahl, & Morales, 2008).

Morales and Fitzsimons (2007) examine the role of product contagion and find that participants rated a neutral product (e.g., breakfast cereal) lower when it was in contact with a disgusting source product (e.g., feminine napkins) because participants believed that the disgusting product polluted the neutral product by transferring disgusting properties through physical contact. Moreover, they find that the influence of product contagion on consumer perceptions is somewhat stable and durable over time.
Newman et al. (2011) look at why consumers are willing to buy objects that were owned by celebrities and find that it can be explained by the contagion theory. Both the degree of physical contact between a celebrity and an object and contagion sensitivity determine consumer responses to the object. Thus, a producer’s properties, immaterial qualities, essence or soul stuff, can be transferred to the product in a third way; during the production process. Just as the Hua example, hiring stigmatized groups as producers can be viewed as negative producer contagion because stigmatized groups own negative properties which are believed to be transferrable to the products during the production process. As a result, despite demonstrating support for firms that hire stigmatized populations, consumers will respond negatively to the “polluted” products.

H1: Consumers perceive that firms that hire stigmatized populations are more socially responsible than firms that do not.

H2: Hiring stigmatized populations leads to lower product evaluation, which in turn leads to lower purchase intention than hiring non-stigmatized populations.

1.3. Study 1

1.3.1. Method

Pretest. A pretest was conducted to choose a real brand in order to ensure generalizability of the results. Thirty undergraduate students were asked to indicate their identification with and purchase intention of a list of fast food restaurants on 7-point scales. Four items measuring identification with a Brand X were: “The way I am fits in with what I perceive of [X],” “I am similar to how I perceive [X],” “I am similar to what I think [X] represents”, and “The image I have of [X] overlaps with my self-image” (1 = “Strongly Disagree”, 7 = “Strongly Agree”; Currás-Pérez et al., 2009) (α = .97). Purchase intention was measured by one item from 1 = “very unlikely” to 7 = “very likely”. The results indicate that participants had a moderate level of identification with (t-test versus the scale midpoint: $M = 3.69$, $t(29) = -1.03$, $p > .05$) and purchase intention of Subway ($M = 4.68$, $t(29) = 1.89$, $p > .05$). Identification and purchase intention of other fast food restaurants (i.e., A&W, Burger King, KFC, Quiznos Subs, Tim Horton’s, McDonald’s, and
Taco Time) were either significantly higher or lower than the midpoint. Thus, Subway was chosen as the focal restaurant for the proposed main experiment.

Procedure. Study 1 used a two-condition (hiring practice: CSR versus Non-CSR) between-subjects design. Two different scenarios describing a Subway restaurant’s hiring practice were created (See Appendix A for the scenarios). Subway was described as either hiring homeless people (i.e., CSR condition) or hiring employees through an employment agency (i.e., Non-CSR condition). The scenarios specifically emphasized the company’s product safety policies, health exam and training program in order to rule out the possibility of physically contamination. Fifty-four undergraduate students (52.5% female) participated in the experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. They were asked to first read a scenario and then answer a list of questions regarding product evaluation, purchase intention, and perceived social responsibility of the described Subway restaurant.

Measures. Perceived social responsibility was measured by asking participants about their agreement with three statements (1 = “Strongly Disagree”, 7 = “Strongly Agree”): “Subway is a socially responsible company”, “Subway is concerned to improve the well-being of society”, and “Subway follows high ethical standards” ($\alpha = .91$) (Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz, 2009). Purchase intention was measured by three items (1 = “unlikely”, “improbable”, “definitely not”, and 7 = “likely”, “probable”, “definitely”; $\alpha = .94$). Product evaluation was measured by three items (1 = “very poor quality”, “very poor taste”, “not at all delicious”, and 7 = “very good quality”, “very good taste”, “very delicious”; $\alpha = .97$) (Elder & Krishna, 2010). For scales with multiple items, an evaluation score was calculated for each participant as the mean of all the items.

1.3.2. Results

Independent sample t test revealed a significant effect of hiring practice on perceived social responsibility ($t(52) = 2.71$, $p < .01$). The restaurant that hires homeless people was rated as more socially responsible than the restaurant that does not ($M_{CSR} = 5.71$, $M_{NONCSR} = 4.78$). H1 was supported. Independent sample t test also revealed the significant effect of hiring practice on product evaluation and purchase intention. Hiring homeless people lead to significantly lower product evaluation ($M_{CSR} = 4.17$, $M_{NONCSR} = 4.78$).
4.91; \( t(48) = 2.46, p < .05 \) and lower purchase intention \( (M_{CSR} = 3.42, M_{NONCSR} = 4.73; \ t(52) = 2.73, p < .05) \) than hiring through an employment agency. Bootstrapping analysis (Hayes and Preacher 2013) was used to test the mediating role of product evaluation. Results based on 5000 bootstrapped samples indicated that product evaluation mediated the effect of hiring practice on purchase intention \( (B = -.73, SE = .29, CI = -1.33 \text{ to } -.17) \). Thus, H2 was supported. Further analyses showed that age, gender, year of enrolment had no impact on the dependent variables.

1.3.3. Discussion

The results of Study 1 indicate that consumers view companies that hire stigmatized populations as more socially responsible than companies that hire through corporate recruiter. However, they also perceive that products from such “socially responsible” companies would have worse quality and are less likely to buy the products. It suggests that hiring stigmatized populations does generate negative producer contagion effect. This finding offers an extension to recent research that try to understand why a good CSR reputation does not necessarily lead to consumer support of products (e.g., Luchs et al., 2010). To further explore the underlying mechanism in this negative producer contagion effect, Study 2 turns to examine the mediating role of disgust and explore the boundary condition of the negative producer contagion effect.

1.4. Study 2

Study 2 seeks to uncover the process behind the backfire effect from Study 1. Specifically, the role of disgust as a mediator between evaluation of the hiring practice and evaluation of product quality is examined. Disgust is defined as “a revulsion at the prospect of (oral) incorporation of an offensive substance” (Rozin et al., 1986, p. 704). They differentiate four types of disgust based on the nature of offensive substances: Core disgust is caused by noxious objects such as animal products; Animal nature disgust is elicited by activities that are related to people’s animal origins (e.g., eating habits); Socio-moral disgust is triggered when a person’s violent behaviors harm others (e.g., domestic violence); Interpersonal disgust is related to the prospect of contact with strangers or undesirables (e.g., wearing a sweater belonged to a disliked person).
Disgust induced by stigmatized groups is interpersonal disgust because it “discourages contact with other human beings who are not intimates, and can serve the purpose of maintaining social distinctiveness and social hierarchies” (Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 1993, p. 643).

Although there is no basic positive emotion in positive contagion events, disgust is generally considered as a basic negative emotion in negative contagion events (Rozin et al., 1986). Disgust has been examined as a key mediator in negative contagion in a variety of contexts. For example, juice becomes undesirable if it has contacted a sterilized, dead cockroach because people feel disgusted (Rozin et al., 1986). An objectively unharmed T-shirt becomes less favorably if it has been touched by other shoppers because consumers think it is disgusting (Argo et al., 2006). Consumers perceive a neutral product as disgusting if this product has physical contact with a disgusting product (Morales & Fitzsimons, 2007).

Disgust is also a basic reaction people have to stigmatized groups. Krendl et al. (2006) find that people feel disgusted when they see the picture of unattractive, transsexual, pierced, or obese persons. fMRI scanning provides additional evidence that viewing pictures of extreme out-groups (e.g., drug addicts) can activate insula and amygdale, a pattern consistent with disgust (Harris & Fiske, 2007). Moreover, their research shows that when the amygdale and insula were active, the medial prefrontal cortex, which is related to thinking about people and social situations, became less active. This additional evidence suggests that “disgust goes some way to trumping empathy and compassion” (Jones, 2007, p.770). More studies reveal that people show feelings of disgust toward persons with AIDS (Valdiserri, 2002) and the homeless (Barnett et al., 1997; Guzewicz & Takooshian, 1992). Although people’s negative reactions to stigmatized groups also include ambivalence, dislike, fear, anger, and avoidance (Jemmott III, Freleicher, & Jemmott, 1992), they do not influence product evaluations in negative contagion situations (Morales & Fitzsimons, 2007). Morales and Fitzsimons (2007) find that the only negative reaction leading to lower product evaluations is disgust because other negative emotions are unrelated to contamination induced by offensive properties.
When studying consumer contamination, Argo et al. (2006) propose that the intimacy of a contamination event positively influences the impact of contamination effects. They specifically examine the influence of contamination cues (i.e., proximity, time, and number of contact sources) that signal the contact between a product and another shopper. The results show that people have stronger feelings of disgust and negative responses when the product has been close (vs. far away) to others shoppers, when other shoppers have touched the product recently (vs. long time ago), and when many (vs. a few) shoppers have touched the product. Morales and Fitzsimons (2007) do not specifically examine the role of intimacy but they find that physical contact (vs. no physical contact) with disgusting objects makes consumers generate stronger feelings of disgust. Moreover, their studies show that when perceived physical contact between a neutral product and a disgusting product is enhanced, consumers tend to have stronger feelings of disgust and lower evaluations of the contaminated product.

Supporting these studies, Angyal (1941) suggests that people’s feelings of disgust are strongly influenced by intimacy of contact: The strength of disgust increases with the degree of intimacy of contact. This is because disgust is primarily related to the sense of oral incorporation of certain substances (Angyal, 1941; Rozin et al., 1993). Therefore, the mouth becomes a particularly sensitive focus (Rozin et al., 1993). Different from previous research, the current study will examine the intimacy of contact by testing the role of physical contact between the consumer and the product itself, with products ingested orally being at the extreme high end of physical contact.

H3a: When consumers have high degree of intimacy of contact with a product, hiring stigmatized populations leads to stronger feelings of disgust which result in lower product evaluation, and, in turn, lower product evaluation leads to lower purchase intention than hiring non-stigmatized populations.

H3b: When consumers have low degree of intimacy of contact with a product, hiring stigmatized populations or not has no impact on disgust, product evaluation and purchase intention.

1.4.1. Method

Procedure. Study 2 used a 2 (hiring practice: CSR versus Non-CSR) X 2 (product intimacy: high versus low) between-subjects design. One hundred and ninety three
undergraduate students (53.7% female) participated in the survey and were randomly assigned into one of four experimental conditions. Four different scenarios were created, using the same template as Study 1 (see Appendix B for scenarios). The only difference is that the scenarios in the current study briefly describe the job responsibility of the new employees. The purpose of this job description is to hold the producer-product physical contact at a constant level. The degree of product intimacy was manipulated by product category because of the strong relationship between intimacy and product category (Argo et al., 2006). The contagion effect is stronger when consumers have high degree of intimacy of contact with a product (e.g., food) and is weaker when they have low degree of intimacy of contact with a product (e.g., notebook paper) (Angyal, 1941; Morales et al., 2007; Rozin & Fallon, 1987). For this experiment, cookies (high intimacy) and clocks (low intimacy) were chosen as the two product categories because oral incorporation is expected to generate the highest degree of contact (Morales et al., 2007). After reading the scenario, participants were asked to indicate feelings of disgust, product evaluations, purchase intentions and other negative emotions. Other negative emotions were measured in order to rule out the possibility that negative emotion other than disgust accounted for the results. The perceived level of physical contact between producers and products was measured as manipulation check.

Measures. Argo et al.’s (2006) disgust index was adapted to measure disgust: “disgusted”, “revolted”, “unclean”, and “gross” (1 = “not at all”, 7 = “very”; $\alpha = .93$). Argo et al.’s (2006) other negative emotions index was also adapted but one more item (i.e., fear) was added to this index. The final scale has six items: “frustrated”, “bad”, “annoyed”, “angry”, “mad”, and “fear” (1 = “not at all”, 7 = “very”; $\alpha = .93$). Because the experiment involved two different products, overall product evaluation was measured by five items (1 = “bad”, “negative”, “undesirable”, “unfavorable”, “dislike”, and 7 = “good”, “positive”, “desirable”, “favorable”, “like”; $\alpha = .92$) (Argo et al. 2006). All other variables used the same scales as in Study 1.

1.4.2. Results

Manipulation check. Respondents did not perceive that employees have higher level of physical contact with cookies than with clocks during the production process.
(M_{COOKIE} = 5.16, M_{CLOCK} = 5.45, t(99) = .85, p > .05). Thus, the manipulation was successful.

**Test of Hypotheses.** Three two-way ANOVA were conducted with hiring practice and product intimacy as the independent variables, and disgust, product evaluation, or purchase intention as the dependent variables in each two-way ANOVA (see Figures 1A, 1B, and 1C). The results revealed that hiring practice and product intimacy together had significant interaction effect on disgust ($F(1, 189) = 24.84, p < .001$), product evaluation ($F(1, 189) = 8.20, p < .005$), and purchase intention ($F(1, 189) = 20.67, p < .001$).

Further analyses on simple main effect revealed that when the product category was clocks, hiring practice had no significant impact on feeling of disgust ($M_{CSR} = 1.77, M_{NONCSR} = 1.86, F < 1, p > .05$), product evaluation ($M_{CSR} = 4.82, M_{NONCSR} = 5.01, F < 1, p > .05$), and purchase intention ($M_{CSR} = 4.04, M_{NONCSR} = 3.98, F < 1, p > .05$). However, when the product category was cookies, hiring homeless people lead to stronger feeling of disgust ($M_{CSR} = 3.28, M_{NONCSR} = 2.01, F(1, 189) = 43.08, p < .001$), lower product evaluation ($M_{CSR} = 4.32, M_{NONCSR} = 5.28, F(1, 189) = 24.97, p < .001$), and lower purchase intention ($M_{CSR} = 3.01, M_{NONCSR} = 4.47, F(1, 189) = 37.60, p < .001$).

**Figure 1A.** The Interaction effect of hiring practice and product intimacy on disgust

![Graph showing the interaction effect of hiring practice and product intimacy on disgust](image)
Bootstrapping analysis (Hayes, 2012) was then conducted to examine whether disgust mediated the moderating effect of product intimacy and hiring practice on product evaluation ($0 = \text{NonCSR}, 1 = \text{CSR}$). Results based on 5000 bootstrapped samples indicated that when the product category was clocks, disgust did not mediate
the impact of hiring practice on product evaluation \((B = .04, SE = .07, CI = -.10 \text{ to } .19)\). When the product category was cookies, feeling of disgust mediated the impact of hiring practice on product evaluation \((B = -.53, SE = .12, CI = -.80 \text{ to } -.32)\). A Sobel test also supported the results \((z = -3.95, p < .001)\).

Another bootstrapping analysis was conducted to examine whether product evaluation mediated the moderating effect of product intimacy and hiring practice on purchase intention. Results based on 5000 bootstrapped samples indicated that when the product category was clocks, product evaluation did not mediate the impact of hiring practice on purchase intention \((B = -.06, SE = .06, CI = -.20 \text{ to } .04)\). When the product category was cookies, product evaluation mediated the impact of hiring practice on purchase intention \((B = -.31, SE = .11, CI = -.58 \text{ to } -.14)\). A Sobel test supported the results \((z = -2.28, p < .05)\).

Further, a regression model predicting purchase intention with hiring practice, product intimacy, disgust, product evaluation and the interaction of hiring practice and product intimacy revealed a significant effect of product evaluation on purchase intention \((t(187) = 3.40, p < .001)\) while the effect of disgust was not significant \((t < 1, p > .05)\). Taken together, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were supported.

Finally, two-way ANOVA was conducted to rule out the possibility that other negative emotions rather than disgust mediated the process. The results indicated that the interaction effect of hiring practice and product intimacy on other negative emotions was not significant \((F(1, 189) = .81, p > .05)\), neither the main effects of hiring practice \((F(1, 189) = .26, p > .05)\) and product intimacy \((F(1, 189) = 2.52, p > .05)\).

### 1.4.3. Discussion

Study 2 extends the first study by demonstrating a boundary condition of negative producer contagion. Hiring stigmatized populations leads to negative consumer responses to the products when consumers have high degree of intimacy of contact with the products (e.g., cookies). This replicates the effects demonstrated in Study 1. However, when consumers have low degree of intimacy of contact with the products (e.g., clocks), hiring stigmatized populations or not has no impact on consumers. It suggests that not all products would be influenced by negative producer contagion and
certain level of product intimacy is a premise to induce the negative producer contagion effect. Study 2 also extends Study 1 by identifying the underlying mechanism of negative producer contagion. Consumers have stronger negative responses to products produced by stigmatized populations because such products will induce their feelings of disgust. These findings, together with previous research on different forms of negative contagion (e.g., Argo et al., 2006; Morales & Fitzsimons, 2007) demonstrate that disgust is a key mediator in negative contagion events. Study 3 further explores the underlying effect by examining a different moderator, end user vulnerability.

1.5. Study 3

Study 2 examines how disgust mediates lower product evaluation and purchase intention when the degree of intimacy of contact between product and consumer is high. However, implicit in the theory of contagion is the vulnerability of the consumer to the source of contamination. For example, Newman et al. (2011) find that consumers’ willingness to purchase an object which has contact with a celebrity is moderated by their level of sensitivity to contagion. Celebrity contagion has greater influence on consumers when consumers have higher degrees of contagion sensitivity. The purpose of Study 3 is to further examine the underlying effect of negative producer contagion by looking at the role of perceived end user vulnerability: whether end users are perceived as more likely to be influenced by the essential properties (inmaterial qualities, essence or soul stuff) of other people.

A product’s attributes will be weighted differently when the end user of the product changes. For example, gentleness-related attributes in shampoo become more important than strength-related attributes when the shampoo is physically applied to babies (baby shampoo) than cars (car shampoo; Luchs et al., 2010). Moreover, product attributes such as purity, safety, and gentleness will be particularly emphasized when the end users are perceived as vulnerable (e.g., babies and children). This is because people generally perceive vulnerable people as more likely to be “contaminated” by the outside environment and thus should be protected from potential contamination sources. In the current case, stigmatized groups are believed to “pollute” the products by transferring their negative properties to the products during the production process.
Therefore, the negative properties of stigmatized groups and feelings of disgust become more salient when the end users of the products are perceived as vulnerable. More vulnerable end users are less able to protect themselves and thus are more likely to be contaminated by the transferrable negative properties. As a result, hiring stigmatized groups will be particularly problematic for products whose end users are considered vulnerable.

H4a: When the end users are perceived as vulnerable, hiring stigmatized populations leads to stronger feelings of disgust which result in lower product evaluation, and, in turn, lower product evaluation leads to lower purchase intention than hiring non-stigmatized populations.

H4b: When the end users are perceived as not vulnerable, hiring stigmatized populations or not has no impact on disgust, product evaluation and purchase intention.

1.5.1. Method

Study 3 used a 2 (end user vulnerability: vulnerable versus non-vulnerable) x 2 (hiring practice: CSR versus Non-CSR) between-subjects design. One hundred and thirty-nine undergraduate students (51.8% female) participated in the survey and were randomly assigned into one of four experimental conditions. Participants were first asked to image that they are in a purchase situation to choose a train model as a birthday gift for either their five-year old nephew (vulnerable condition) or 40-year old uncle (non-vulnerable condition) (i.e., manipulation of end user vulnerability). Then, they read a magazine article that introduces a popular model train and describes the hiring practice behind the product (i.e., manipulation of hiring practice) using the same template as Study 1 (see Appendix C for scenarios). Ex-convicts rather than homeless people are chosen as the stigmatized population in order to increase generalizability of the results. After reading the article, participants responded to a series of measures to capture disgust, product evaluation and purchase intention along with other negative emotions. All measures are the same as in Study 2.
1.5.2. Results

Three two-way ANOVA were first conducted with hiring practice and user vulnerability as the independent variables, and disgust, product evaluation, or purchase intention as the dependent variables in each two-way ANOVA (see Figures 2A, 2B, and 2C). The results showed that the interaction effect of hiring practice and user vulnerability on disgust was not significant \((F(1, 135) = 3.73, p > .05)\), neither the main effect of user vulnerability on disgust \((F(1, 135) = 1.80, p > .05)\). The main effect of hiring practice on disgust was significant \((F(1, 135) = 589.50, p < .001)\). Hiring ex-cons resulted in stronger feelings of disgust than hiring through an employment agency \((M_{CSR} = 4.08, M_{NONCSR} = 1.68)\). Hiring practice and user vulnerability had significant interaction effect on product evaluation \((F(1, 135) = 46.05, p < .001)\). When the user was child, hiring ex-cons lead to significantly lower product evaluation than hiring from an agency \((M_{CSR} = 2.89, M_{NONCSR} = 4.87, F(1, 135) = 151.27, p < .001)\). When the user was uncle, hiring ex-cons also lead to significantly lower product evaluation \((M_{CSR} = 4.68, M_{NONCSR} = 5.12, F(1, 135) = 7.59, p < .01)\) but the impact of hiring practice under this condition was much smaller than that under the child condition. The interaction effect on purchase intention was also significant \((F(1, 135) = 122.91, p < .001)\). When the user was uncle, hiring practice had no impact on purchase intention \((M_{CSR} = 4.71, M_{NONCSR} = 4.58, F < 1, p > .05)\). When the user was child, hiring ex-cons resulted in significantly lower purchase intention than hiring from an agency \((M_{CSR} = 2.18, M_{NONCSR} = 4.78, F(1, 135) = 220.74, p < .001)\).
Figure 2A. The Interaction effect of hiring practice and end user vulnerability on disgust

Disgust

4.05
4.11
1.84
1.51

CSR
NonCSR

Child
Uncle

Figure 2B. The Interaction effect of hiring practice and end user vulnerability on product evaluation

Product Evaluation

4.68
5.12
4.87
2.89

CSR
NonCSR

Child
Uncle
Bootstrapping analysis (Hayes, 2012) was conducted to examine whether product evaluation mediated the moderating effect of end user vulnerability and hiring practice on purchase intention (0 = NonCSR, 1 = CSR). Results based on 5000 bootstrapped samples indicated that when the user was child, product evaluation did not mediate the impact of hiring practice on purchase intention ($B = .18$, $SE = .20$, $CI = -.20$ to .57). When the user was uncle, quality evaluation did not mediate the impact of hiring practice on purchase intention ($B = .04$, $SE = .05$, $CI = -.04$ to .16) but the effect was much smaller. Product evaluation was not a mediator. Hypotheses 4a and 4b were partially supported.

Finally, two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether other negative emotions mediated the process. The results indicated that the interaction effect of hiring practice and user vulnerability on other negative emotions was not significant ($F(1, 135) = .12, p > .05$), neither the main effects of hiring practice ($F(1, 135) = 1.04, p > .05$) and user vulnerability ($F(1, 135) = .001, p > .05$).

### 1.5.3. Discussion

The results show that hiring stigmatized populations has greater negative impact on product evaluation and purchase intention when the end users are perceived as
vulnerable (e.g., children) than when the end users are perceived as not vulnerable (e.g., adults). Although hiring stigmatized populations does negatively influence product evaluation under the non-vulnerable user condition, the impact is much smaller compared to its impact under the vulnerable user condition. These findings demonstrate that the degree of negative producer contagion effect is moderated by the perceived vulnerability of end users. When consumers perceive that the users would be influenced by the negative properties of stigmatized populations, they tend to protect the users away from the potential contamination and that lead to lower product evaluations and lower purchase intentions. When consumers believe that the users are immune to the contamination, they are more likely to purchase products produced by stigmatized populations and give higher product evaluations. However, Study 3 failed to identify the underlying mechanism of this effect. Although hiring stigmatized populations did induce stronger feelings of disgust than hiring from an agency, disgust did not mediate the process. Neither did product evaluation mediate the moderating effect of hiring practice and end user vulnerability on purchase intention.

1.6. Study 4

Study 2 and Study 3 explore the underlying mechanism of negative producer contagion. Two variables moderate the contagion effect and disgust has been identified as a mediator in Study 2. The purpose of Study 4 is to identify an opportunity for marketers to overcome this backfire effect from CSR.

Previous research and Study 2 demonstrate that disgust is a key mediator in negative producer contagion. Thus, the key of eliminating the negative producer contagion effect is reducing consumers’ feelings of disgust. Nemeroff and Rozin (1994) examined a list of purificatory actions which are expected to purify items contaminated by interpersonal/moral sources such as enemy and evil. Purificatory actions include physical cleaning (e.g., hanging on clothesline for two hours), structural change (e.g., unravelling into a pile of yarn or burning to ash), spiritual opposite-contact (e.g., asking your lover to wear a contaminated sweater for half an hour), and timing (e.g., one year elapsed). Although their results show that these purificatory actions are effective to some extent, they are not applicable for marketers (i.e., most users are not willing to wait a
year for an effect to dissipate, and burning a product to purify it is simply not feasible). Therefore, a more contemporary and practical solution is needed to help firms support social activities while maintaining customers. In their study, Luchs and colleagues (2010) attenuate the negative impact of sustainability by explicitly guaranteeing the strength of the sustainable product. Study 4 takes a more subtle approach to attenuate consumers’ feelings of disgust, manipulating the use of color in advertising to achieve the same effect.

Color theory proposes that individuals generate specific associations to colors “when they repeatedly encounter situations where different colors are accompanied by particular experiences and/or concepts” (Mehta & Zhu 2009, p. 1226). For example, red is often associated with dangers, mistakes, and forbidden (e.g., stop signs and warnings) whereas blue is often associated with openness, peace, and tranquility (e.g., sky and ocean) (Mehta & Zhu, 2009). Color influences cognition and behavior through associations. For instance, compared to white walls, blue walls can reduce anxiety and increase appraisal and perceived service quality (Verhoeven, Pieterse, & Pruyn, 2006). Blue also elicits feelings of relaxation whereas red is the color that can elicit excitement (Gorn et al., 1997). Moreover, Gorn and colleagues (2004) find that perceived quickness of the download is higher with blue than yellow because blue induces greater feelings of relaxation than yellow. The current study examines whether the use of color which is associated with purity and cleanliness can reduce the negative producer contagion effect.

H5: A color (not) associated with purity and cleanliness will result in weaker (stronger) feelings of disgust, higher (lower) product evaluations, purchase intentions, and choices of products made by companies that hire stigmatized populations.

1.6.1. Method

Pretest. Twenty one undergraduate students were recruited to participate in the pretest. Participants were asked to evaluate the degree of associated of a list of colors with purity/cleanliness and disgust on 7-point scales from 1 “very low” to 7 “very high”. The results indicated that white is highly associated with purity/cleanliness (t-tests versus the scale midpoint; \( M = 6.05, t(20) = 9.64, p < .001 \)), and brown is dissociated with purity/cleanliness (t-tests versus the scale midpoint; \( M = 2.10, t(20) = -6.04, p < .001 \)). Moreover, brown is fairly neutral on disgust (t-tests versus the scale midpoint: \( M = 4.43 \),
\( t(20) = 1.40, p > .05 \) but white is not associated with disgust (t-tests versus the scale midpoint: \( M = 1.86, t(20) = -8.22, p < .001 \)). Thus, white and brown were chosen for the experiment. It is expected that a white color can overcome the negative impact of negative producer contagion by reducing consumers’ feelings of disgust.

**Procedure.** Study 4 used a two-condition (Background Color: White vs. Brown) between-subjects design. Fifty eight undergraduate students participated in the survey (48.3% female). Participants were randomly assigned into two conditions. First, they read a short scenario describing that Gordon’s Bakery recently hired homeless people, the same scenario as in Study 2. Participants were then shown a printed ad of Gordon’s Bakery handmade cookies with a headline saying that “We help homeless people in our community find their way back”. The background color of the printed ad was either white or brown (see Appendix D for the printed ads). After that, participants answered a list of questions regarding feeling of disgust, product evaluation, purchase intention and compassion for the homeless. At the end of the experiment, participants were given an opportunity to choose either Gordon’s Bakery handmade cookies (worth $2) or $2 cash as a gift for their participation. Compassion for the homeless was measured by three items (i.e., compassion, sympathy, pity) on a 7-point scale (1 = “no”, 7 = “a lot”; \( \alpha = .78 \)) (Valdesolo and DeSteno 2011). All other measures are the same as in previous studies.

### 1.6.2. Results

One-way ANCOVA revealed that color did not influence feeling of disgust \( (F(1, 55) = .95, p > .05) \), product evaluation \( (F(1, 55) = 1.61, p > .05) \), and purchase intention \( (F(1, 55) = .36, p > .05) \) while compassion for the homeless was a significant covariate (all \( ps < .05 \)). Color significantly influenced consumer choice \( (F(1, 55) = 5.79, p < .05) \) but compassion was not a significant covariate \( (F(1, 55) = 1.23, p > .05) \). Participants in the white condition (66%) were significantly more likely to choose cookies over cash than participants in the brown condition (34%). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was partially supported.

### 1.6.3. Discussion

The results of Study 4 demonstrate that the color of printed ad can mitigate the negative effect of producer contagion related to stigmatized populations. More specifically, the white ad was more effective in encouraging choices of products
produced by homeless people than the brown ad. However, the underlying mechanism of this effect could not be explained by disgust as hypothesized. Color did not change consumers’ feelings of disgust, product evaluations, and purchase intentions. It suggests that there may be other possible explanations of this color effect. Participants may simply have more positive attitudes toward the white ad than the brown one. It also suggests that although disgust is a key mediator, as in Study 2, reducing feeling of disgust is not the only way to overcome the negative producer contagion effect. An interesting finding is that although compassion for the homeless people did influence consumers’ self evaluations, it did not influence consumers’ actual product choices. Moreover, the results indicate that purchase intention was not a good predictor of product choice in this case. Consumers may experience different decision processes depending on their level of involvement in a purchase situation (i.e., evaluating purchasing in the future vs. making a product choice at the moment).

1.7. General Discussion

Across four studies the current research demonstrates that although consumers view hiring stigmatized populations as a socially responsible corporate practice, their positive attitudes toward the CSR practice do not lead to positive attitudes toward the products. The research examines the backfire effect of CSR and reveals that consumers may actually tend to avoid products produced by stigmatized populations because they believe that the producers can contaminate the products. This perception stems from negative producer contagion that stigmatized population’s negative properties are believed to be transferrable to the products during the production process and thus decrease the value of products.

This research also identifies product intimacy as an important boundary condition for the negative producer contagion effect. More specifically, hiring stigmatized populations results in negative consumer responses to the products when consumers have high degree of intimacy of contact with the products. However, when consumers have low degree of intimacy of contact with the products, the negative producer contagion effect does not occur. This is because the degree of product intimacy positively influences the strength of feeling of disgust, which in turn, negatively
influences product evaluation and purchase intention. Some product categories such as food (i.e., high product intimacy) induce stronger feelings of disgust which then lead to more negative responses to the products whereas other product categories such as clocks (i.e., low product intimacy) are less likely to induce feelings of disgust and thus have no impact on consumer responses to the products.

End user vulnerability is examined as another moderator of the negative producer contagion effect. When end users are perceived as vulnerable (e.g., children), hiring stigmatized populations results in lower product evaluations and purchase intentions than hiring from an employment agency. When end users are perceived as non-vulnerable (e.g., adults), hiring stigmatized populations or not does not have an obvious impact on consumers’ responses to the products. However, Study 3 failed to identify the underlying mechanism of this process. Disgust did not mediate the impact of end user vulnerability and hiring practice on consumer responses to the products.

This research also finds a way to overcome the negative producer contagion effect in Study 4. Compared to brown ad, white ad can increase consumer choices of products produced by stigmatized populations. However, Study 4 failed to identify the underlying mechanism of this effect. Although color did influence product choice, it had no impact on consumers’ feelings of disgust, product evaluations and purchase intentions.

This research provides four important contributions. First, it offers an extension to recent research that seeks to understand the attitude-behavior gap in CSR research. It examines the underlying process by which positive perceptions of CSR activities can lead to inconstant consumer actions, and not only a lack of preference for firms with CSR activities, but avoidance of such firms. The examination of this inconsistency helps understand why some studies not only report neutral but negative relationships between CSR and profitability (Peloza, 2009).

Second, by examining the effect of CSR activities on perceptions of product quality this research demonstrates that perceptions of CSR activities influence both corporate level and product level attitudes. Further, it demonstrates that the effects at these two levels may be inconsistent. Consumers may “reward” the company with
positive evaluations (socially responsible companies) but actively avoid products from the company. In doing so, this article extends recent research that examines how CSR can alter perceptions of product quality through product category (Luchs et al., 2010) by examining consumer characteristics that also lead to negative product perceptions. Broadly, this research responds to the call of Peloza & Shang, (2011) for a better understanding of how CSR can provide different forms of value for consumers, and how those forms of value can influence each other.

Third, this research contributes to contagion theory by exploring the role of a new form of contagion, producer contagion. Previous marketing research on the contagion effect has examined consumer contagion (i.e., the effect of other consumers touching a product; Argo et al., 2006) and product contagion (i.e., the proximity of one product to another; Morales & Fitzsimmons, 2007) but the opportunity for the producer (i.e., employees) to create contagion remains unexplored in the marketing literature. Furthermore, this research identifies two boundary conditions of negative producer contagion. Hiring stigmatized populations has limited impact on consumers when consumers have low degree of intimacy of contact with the products (e.g., clocks) or when the end users are perceived as non-vulnerable (i.e., less likely to be influenced by negative properties).

Finally, this paper shows that consumers’ negative expectations of products produced by stigmatized populations can be mitigated. When a white ad is present, consumers are more likely to choose the ethical products than when a brown ad is present. Previous research demonstrates that explicit information such as stating that the quality of ethical products is as good as the quality of conventional products is effective in reducing the negative impact associated with ethical attributes (Luchs et al., 2010). The current research shows that implicit information such as color can also overcome consumers’ negative perceptions of ethical products.

The current research only examines negative producer contagion related to homeless people and ex-cons. Future research can further explore the role of other stigmatized populations. Different stigmatized populations may have different impact on consumers depending on the type of perceived negative properties they have. Moreover, future research can also extend to examine positive producer contagion. For example,
does a consumer perceive that food prepared by a thin chef is healthier than food prepared by an obese chef? Or, is food prepared by an obese chef believed to be more delicious than by a thin chef?

Future research can also explore whether disgust is the only key mediator in negative producer contagion. The results of Study 3 show that end user vulnerability moderates the impact of hiring stigmatized populations on consumer responses but this process is not mediated by disgust. Study 4 shows that although white color encourages consumers to choose products produced by stigmatized populations, it does not reduce consumers’ feelings of disgust. It is possible that there is another mediator that can better explain the underlying mechanism of these findings.

In this paper the scenarios implied that the motive of the company to hire stigmatized populations is other-benefit. This may lead to more positive responses to the company and its products. However, when consumers do not have sufficient information of the motive of a company’s CSR practice, they may make self-benefit inferences. In most cases, companies that hire stigmatized populations (especially ex-cons) can get financial benefits such as tax credit. When consumers make self-benefit inferences, they may also view the company as cheap. Thus, future research can examine whether hiring stigmatized populations would have any negative impact on brand image.

The findings also have implications in the marketplace. Hiring stigmatized populations can enhance a company’s reputation on social responsibility but it may induce negative producer contagion effect. It is important for managers to decide whether they should launch this program or whether they want to release the information of the program to the public. The research also shows that not all product categories suffer from the backfire effect of this CSR practice. For example, consumers may have more negative responses to food especially when the food is for babies than for adults. On the contrary, hiring stigmatized populations may not influence consumers when they purchase computer keyboards or lamps. Therefore, managers who want to hire stigmatized populations should first consider whether the product categories are “immune” to the negative producer contagion effect.
This paper also provides marketers with a way to mitigate the negative producer contagion effect. The research suggests that using implicit information in advertisement can effectively reduce the negative impact. For example, using white color in printed ads is more effective in encouraging consumers to choose products produced by stigmatized populations than using brown color. Previous research also shows that using explicit information can mitigate the negative impact of CSR practices. Therefore, managers can consider including both implicit and explicit information in ad to maximize the effectiveness.
1.8. References


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Appendix A.

Study 1 Scenarios

Please read the following article from the Vancouver Courier and then answer the following questions. The Courier is a community newspaper that is particularly focused on the social and economic issues facing downtown Vancouver’s East Side.

**East Side Continues to Develop**

As the downtown east side continues to be “revitalized”, a major restaurant chain today opens its doors in a new location directly across from the new Woodward’s building on East Hastings.

Subway’s latest location is a sign of both economic recovery in the province, and particular economic recovery and investment into the downtown East Side. “This location is more than a typical new opening for us,” says Subway’s Regional Manager Mark Woods. “This store represents an investment in our communities perhaps more than any other store in the country. We are proud to be a part of the economic development of this community, and plan for a very successful partnership with our customers and the rest of the community.”

Mayor Gregor Roberston was on hand for the official ribbon cutting ceremony, and said the following: “It is wonderful to see this community developing in such a positive way. Subway has demonstrated its commitment to local communities across the country, and their investment is a sign of their confidence that our revitalization plan is working.”

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<th>Hiring Practice: CSR</th>
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<td>Manager Mark Woods stated that the biggest challenge in opening the restaurant was staffing. “The labour market is surprisingly tight in the downtown core,” he says. “That, and the fact that we wanted to showcase this location as a benchmark for our community involvement led us to our benchmark program to employ the homeless people from the area in our restaurant.”</td>
<td>Manager Mark Woods stated that the biggest challenge in opening the restaurant was staffing. “The labour market is surprisingly tight in the downtown core,” he says. “For the first time ever we’ve had to turn to an employment agency to help us find people to work in our new location. We worked with two companies to help find the people we need to staff the location across all shifts.”</td>
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<td>“As far as I know it’s the first program of its kind,” explains UBC Sociology professor Debi Andrus. “Most companies shy away from employing homeless people, especially in such a public setting as a restaurant.”</td>
<td>“As far as I know it’s the first time a company like Subway has used an external agency for staffing purposes,” explains UBC Sociology professor Debi Andrus. “Most companies try to stay away from this route because it tends to be much more expensive than hiring people directly through the restaurant location.”</td>
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<td>But Mark Woods is committed. “We have confidence that we can help homeless people in this community find their way back. We also want to try our best to satisfy our customers.”</td>
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We strictly follow food safety policies. The people we've hired under this program have passed the health exam and have gained all sorts of skills in all parts of our business, from food preparation to cooking and handling to customer service. It’s a real win-win for everyone.”

Two employees, hired under the program to provide jobs to the homeless on the downtown East Side, share a smile during a break.

program will help us find employees that will remain with us for a long time. That lowers our long term costs because we save on rehiring and retraining people each year. We also want to try our best to satisfy our customers. We strictly follow food safety policies. The people we’ve hired under this program have passed the health exam and have gained all sorts of skills in all parts of our business, from food preparation to cooking and handling to customer service. It’s a real win-win for everyone.”

Two employees, hired through a corporate recruiter by Subway for the first time, share a smile during a break.
Appendix B.

Study 2 Scenarios

The following article appeared last week in a special section of the Orlando Sentinel that featured highlights on local small businesses. The feature contained a spotlight of one particular local business with an innovative approach to hiring.

High Intimacy Condition:

The Sweet Smell of Success
Gordon’s Bakery has always been a pioneer in the baking world. “People don’t think there is much innovation possible in the bakery business when it comes to how it is managed,” says owner Gordon Williams. “But I have a degree in business administration, so right from the business plan I tried to find ways to be creative not only in the kitchen with products but in how I run the business as well.”

“Being creative with the products we sell certainly matters. We spend lots of time coming up with new ideas for our main products like breads, pastries, and cakes. But where we put most of our time is in our cookies. We are known around the world for our cookie creations. I have one customer that visits from Japan about twice a year and he always stops in for his cookie fix,” says Gordon.

But for Williams, being profitable doesn’t just mean coming up with cookies that people will line up for. “One thing I learned in business school is that labour costs are the biggest part of almost any business. So I try to also be creative with how I hire people.”

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<td>“Although the labor market is good for employers right now, it’s always tough to find good employees,” he says. “So I partnered with a nonprofit agency that serves the homeless in the inner city to give them jobs. Half of my workforce is in that program at the moment, and it has turned out great. I know they have a hard life outside of work, but while they are here they feel a sense of purpose and are among the best employees I’ve ever had in 20 years of this business.”</td>
<td>“Although the labor market is good for employers right now, it’s always tough to find good employees,” he says. “For the first time ever we’ve hired an employment agency to help us find people to work in our new location. We worked with two companies to help find the people we need to staff the location across all shifts.”</td>
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<td>“As far as I know it’s the first program of its kind,” explains UCF Sociology professor Debi Andrus.</td>
<td>“As far as I know it’s the first time a small business like a bakery has used an external agency for staffing purposes,” explains UCF Sociology professor Debi Andrus. “Most companies try to stay away from this route...”</td>
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Andrus. "Most companies shy away from employing homeless people, especially in roles where the public sees their presence in a retail setting."

But Williams is committed. "We have confidence that we can help homeless people in this community find their way back. We also want to try our best to satisfy our customers. We strictly follow food safety policies. The people we’ve hired under this program have passed the health exam and have gained all sorts of skills in all parts of our business, from food preparation to the actual baking and handling to customer service. It’s a real win-win for everyone.”

Low Intimacy Condition:

_Gordon’s Bakery is now known for two things: Their cookies and their innovative hiring practices. Three employees, hired under their homeless program, share a smile._

But Williams is committed. "We have confidence that the investment we make in this program will help us find employees that will remain with us for a long time. That lowers our long term costs because we save on rehiring and retraining people each year. We also want to try our best to satisfy our customers. We strictly follow food safety policies. The people we’ve hired under this program have passed the health exam and have gained all sorts of skills in all parts of our business, from food preparation to the actual baking and handling to customer service. It’s a real win-win for everyone.”

_Gordon’s Bakery is now known for two things: Their cookies and their innovative hiring practices. Three employees, hired through an employment agency, share a smile._

_Time For a Change_

Williams TimePieces has always been a pioneer not only in the clock business but in the retail business. “People don’t think there is much innovation possible when it comes to the clock business,” says owner Gordon Williams. “But I have a degree in business administration, so right from the business plan I tried to find ways to be creative not only in the products I stock but in how I run the business as well.”
“Being creative with the products we sell certainly matters. We spend lots of time coming up with new ideas for our timepieces. We are actually known around the world, and have been featured in magazines in Asia and Europe,” says Gordon.

But for Williams, being profitable doesn’t just mean coming up with timepieces that draw praise and move off the shelves. “One thing I learned in business school is that labour costs are the biggest part of almost any business. So I try to also be creative with how I hire people.”

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<td>“Although the labor market is good for employers right now, it’s always tough to find good employees,” he says. “So I partnered with a nonprofit agency that serves the homeless in the inner city to give them jobs. Half of my workforce is in that program at the moment, and it has turned out great. I know they have a hard life outside of work, but while they are here they feel a sense of purpose and are among the best employees I’ve ever had in 20 years of this business.”</td>
<td>“Although the labor market is good for employers right now, it’s always tough to find good employees,” he says. “For the first time ever we’ve hired an employment agency to help us find people to work in our production studio. We worked with two companies to help find the people we need to staff the location across all shifts.”</td>
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<td>“As far as I know it’s the first program of its kind,” explains UCF Sociology professor Debi Andrus. “Most companies shy away from employing homeless people, and even fewer make a point of publicizing it.”</td>
<td>“As far as I know it’s the first time a small business like this has used an external agency for staffing purposes,” explains UCF Sociology professor Debi Andrus. “Most companies try to stay away from this route because it tends to be much more expensive than hiring people directly through the company.”</td>
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But Williams is committed. “We have confidence that we can help homeless people in this community find their way back. We also want to try our best to satisfy our customers. We strictly follow product safety policies. The people we’ve hired under this program have passed the health exam and have gained all sorts of training through clock production, which is actually requires a high degree of skills. It’s a real win-win for everyone.”

But Williams is committed. “We have confidence that the investment we make in this program will help us find employees that will remain with us for a long time. That lowers our long term costs because we save on rehiring and retraining people each year. We also want to try our best to satisfy our customers. We strictly follow product safety policies. The people we’ve hired under this program have passed the health exam and have gained all sorts of training through clock production, which is actually requires a high degree of skills. It’s a real win-win for everyone.”
Williams TimePieces is now known for two things: Their creative clock designs and their innovative hiring practices. The company hires homeless people to help create staffing solutions.
### Appendix C.

### Study 3 Scenarios

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<th>End User: Child</th>
<th>End User: Adult</th>
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<td>Imagine your nephew Rick’s 5th birthday is coming up next week. You have a close relationship with him and want to get something special this year. One of his favourite things is trains, and he has quite a collection; 22 train pieces and counting. He started the collection after reading his first Thomas the Train Engine storybook when he was 3 years old. He even sleeps with a train tucked right up next to his chin, and spends a lot of time playing trains with his younger 3-year old brother.</td>
<td>Imagine your Uncle Rick’s 40th birthday is coming up next week. You have a close relationship with him and want to get something special this year. One of his hobbies is collecting model trains and he has quite a collection; 22 train pieces and counting. He started the collection after going to a collector model trains show when he was in his 30s. He sometimes spends the entire afternoon in the room he designed to house his collection.</td>
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A new model train piece is just about the perfect gift so you are keeping your eye out for something special. Since you don’t know much about model trains yourself, you pick up a magazine that specializes in model trains hoping to find some good ideas. You come across the following article:

A new model train piece is just about the perfect gift so you are keeping your eye out for something special. Since you don’t know much about model trains yourself, you pick up a magazine that specializes in model trains hoping to find some good ideas. You come across the following article:
One of the hottest gifts this season is the replica 1910 steam engine from the Continental Train Company. The company has been in business for over 50 years, but has never seen a train model this popular. "It's just flying off the shelves," says company President Tony Bennett. "It hands down the most popular thing out there right now in trains. The moving parts and detail of the model is really takes things to a new level, and I think that explains the popularity." Another reason for the popularity is that the trains are produced in North America, a rarity in the most businesses these days. "We were founded here in Baltimore, Maryland, and we are committed to operating here for many years to come."

But having the most popular train on the market comes with its own challenges. Bennett explains: "The tough thing about this business is to figure out demand, and plan production accordingly. This model is particularly labour intensive, so we need to find people to ramp up production."

After the train rocketed to popularity, the company decided to try a new approach to production staffing.

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<td>The program, titled <em>On Track to Help Ex-Cons</em>, is unique because the company hires ex-convicts to work in its production and assembly departments. &quot;It started a couple of months ago and we are quite happy with the way things are working out. I think a job gives someone who is ex-convict a sense of purpose, and gives them a better chance at improving their lives. It's also the right thing to do for the local communities,&quot; says Bennett.</td>
<td>The program, titled <em>New Hiring Practice</em>, is unique because it is the first time that the company has hired an employment agency to help them find people to work in its production and assembly departments. &quot;It started a couple of months ago and we are quite happy with the way things are working out&quot; says Bennett.</td>
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kind,” explains UCF Sociology professor Debi Andrus. “Most companies shy away from employing ex-convicts, and even fewer make a point of publicizing it.”

Bennett is committed. “We have confidence that we can help ex-convicts find their way back. We also guarantee that we will provide high-quality products to our customers. The people we’ve hired under this program have passed the health exam and have gained all sorts of training through train production, which is actually requires a high degree of skills. It’s a real win-win for everyone.”

stay away from this route because it tends to be much more expensive than hiring people directly through the company.”

Bennett is committed. “We have confidence that the investment we make in this program will help us find employees that will remain with us for a long time. That lowers our long term costs because we save on rehiring and retraining people each year. We also guarantee that we will provide high-quality products to our customers. The people we’ve hired under this program have passed the health exam and have gained all sorts of training through train production, which is actually requires a high degree of skills. It’s a real win-win for everyone.”
Appendix D.

Study 4: Printed Ads

We help homeless people in our community find their way back.
Gordon's Bakery
handmade cookies

We help homeless people in our community find their way back.
Chapter 2.

Can “real” men consume ethically? The unintended consequences of impression management

Impression management motivates many consumption decisions. For example, consumers sometimes choose music, hairstyles or menu items in a restaurant, or even pay higher prices for goods, in order to communicate their desired identities (Ashworth, Darke, & Schaller, 2005; Berger & Heath, 2007; White & Dahl, 2006). Equally pervasive are the inferences observers make about consumers based on those consumption behaviors (Belk, Bahn, & Mayer, 1982; Calder & Burnkrant, 1977; Holman, 1981). This tendency to infer personal qualities from consumption behaviors is described by Belk and colleagues (1982, p. 4) as “one of the strongest and most culturally universal phenomena inspired by consumer behavior.”

However, most impression management research examines the motivations of actors rather than the inferences of observers (Bolino et al., 2008). Implicit in consumers’ impression management behaviors is the expectation that those behaviors will successfully promote a desired identity to others. For example, Burroughs and colleagues (1991) find that people make inferences about others based on their personal possessions (e.g., clothing) and their inferences highly agree with the owners’ self-ratings. Similarly, in the workplace, engaging in organizational citizenship behaviors in the workplace can lead to enhanced supervisor ratings (Bolino et al., 2006). In the domain of prosocial consumer behavior, individuals portray a socially responsible image through ethical consumption such as preference for environmentally friendly products (e.g., Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010).
While the impression management literature shows that consumers can successfully project desired identities, evidence from research on inference making suggests that inferences by others are not limited to the specific images consumers intend to project. For example, while individuals who eat healthy food such as vegetables and meat may intend to project the image of a smart, health-conscious consumer, they are also perceived as more moral, more feminine, and more attractive than those who eat unhealthy food such as hamburgers and French fries (Stein & Nemeroff, 1995). Argo and Main (2008) show that observers even make inferences about consumers based on the behavior of those in close proximity. In other words, observers make identity-specific inferences whether consumers intend to project those identities or not. Although attribution theory has been used to demonstrate when impression management tactics fail (e.g., Yoon, Gurhan-Canli, & Bozok, 2006), the potential for unintended inferences, or “side effects” of impression management, are understudied in the literature. This paper examines how consumers’ impression management behaviors can lead to unintended, even negative inferences by observers. It is particularly interested in consumers’ motivation to present a prosocial identity to others through ethical consumption.

When consumers engage in impression management through ethical consumption, the intent is for observers to infer that the consumer is a socially responsible/ethical person with compassion for others and the environment (e.g., Griskevicius et al., 2010). However, such behaviors can lead to additional inferences from observers. Specifically, it argues that in addition to ethics-related inferences (i.e., moral, compassionate), observers make unintended inferences as well (i.e., gender role orientation: femininity and masculinity). This is because socially responsible activities are usually described as soft-hearted, compassionate, gentle, friendly, protective, and caring (e.g., Gildea, 1994), and these qualities are typically viewed as feminine traits (Bem, 1974; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974). Because people have strong negative attitudes toward being associated with the opposite sex (Nosek, Banaji & Greenwald, 2002), the potential for such inferences can be highly de-motivating for consumers.

The current research explores unintended impression management outcomes related to gender inferences across four studies. Study 1 demonstrates that observers view individuals who consume ethically, both male and female, as more feminine and
less masculine than those who do not. Study 2 demonstrates a boundary condition for this effect with male consumers by demonstrating that such inferences do not occur when the benefit from ethical consumption is positioned as self-benefit (vs. other-benefit). Study 3 further demonstrates that observers’ inferences can be attenuated through the use of descriptive norms, with higher rates of male participation leading to lower inferences of femininity in male consumers. Finally, Study 4 demonstrates that consumers, when faced with conflicting impression management objectives concerning gender orientation and prosocial identity, will prefer prosocial identities when in the presence of observers of the opposite sex.

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Impression Management and Inference Making

Impression management theory (Tedeschi, 1981) suggests that individuals engage in specific behaviors designed to place the self in a favorable light, or to avoid unfavorable associations (Leary, 1995; Schlenker, 1980). Consumers buy products not only for their functional value, but also for what the symbolic nature of those products contributes to their self-concept and social identity (e.g., Bearden & Rose, 1990; Belk, 1988; Berger & Heath, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; Solomon, 1983). For example, consumers who buy organic food may want to highlight that they are well educated, altruistic and have a healthy lifestyle.

One way that individuals use impression management to convey a positive image to others is through ethical consumption. Ethical consumption is defined as “the conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values” (Crane & Matten, 2004, p. 290). Ethical consumption allows consumers to express their values (or the values they want others to perceive) by supporting or boycotting companies or purchasing products that demonstrate their moral, ethical, and social concerns (Szmigin & Carrigan, 2006). For example, bringing a reusable travel mug to Starbucks not only gives consumers a 10-cent discount but also allows consumers to show others that they are trying to protect the environment. The [I’m] program by the Microsoft Network (MSN) allows users to demonstrate their care of
certain causes. Users choose a cause and put a green [I'm] icon beside their display name. The company donates a portion of advertising revenue generated from the user’s usage (i.e., sending and receiving messages) to the cause selected by the user, allowing the user to both make donations and simultaneously inform others about their behavior. Although self-identity can motivate consumption without the presence of others, self-identity motives in consumption are particularly strong when others view the behavior. For instance, consumers show stronger preferences for green products when shopping in public (vs. private) because buying green products can present a positive self-image to others (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Peloza, White, & Shang, 2013).

On the other side of impression management behaviors are observers who make inferences about consumers based on those behaviors. Shavitt and Nelson (2000, p. 55) find that “perceivers can and will infer considerable dispositional (personality/individuating) information from product attitudes.” People make inferences about others based on their cars, clothing, leisure activities, food preferences, home decorating choices, drinks, and so on (Solomon et al., 2007). However, some of these inferences are unintended on the part of the consumer, and may be negative. For example, instant coffee users are viewed as working people, cheap and hurried but automatic drip users are regarded as middle-income, older, and office workers (Shavitt & Nelson, 2000).

Calder and Burnkrant (1977) use attribution theory to account for how observers make inferences about other consumers. They suggest that observers will use visible cues and behaviors to infer personal dispositions of the consumer. For example, adults may infer that others who are successful in business are “mean” (Belk et al., 1982). Jones and Davis (1966) suggest that the degree to which a consumer’s behavior is atypical of expected behavior, or descriptive norms, is positively related to the strength of inferences. Observers’ attributions, therefore, are critical to impression management because “attributions amount to judgments about the consumer” (Calder & Burnkrant, 1977, p. 30). Since inferences are driven by what observers perceive as the underlying motives of consumers, which may differ from actual motives, it is expected that observers’ identity-related inferences may differ from the identity intended. In particular, when behaviors suggest cues of gender roles, observers may make inferences related to the masculinity or femininity of the consumer.
2.1.2. **Unintended Gender Signals Through Impression Management**

A gender stereotype is typically defined as a constellation of characterizations about personality, physical traits, roles, occupations, and gender role orientation (Deaux & Lewis, 1984). Gender (or sex) role orientation is “a personal trait or attribute conditioned by a traditional social system in which men are expected to think and behave as men (masculine) and women are expected to think and behave as women (feminine)” (Mueller & Conway Dato-on, 2008, p. 6). Masculinity has an instrumental orientation (i.e., a cognitive focus on “getting the job done”) and is associated with self-confident, independent, and competitive attributes. Femininity has an expressive orientation (i.e., an affective concern for the welfare of others and the harmony of the group) and is described as emotional, gentle and understanding of others (Bem, 1974, 1981; Constantinople, 1973).

Previous research suggests a link between gender and ethical behaviors. People who are high in femininity have more empathic concern (Skoe et al., 2002). Women are more likely than men to have concern for environmental protection (e.g., Dietz, Kalof, & Stern, 2002), participate in a variety of green behaviors (Davidson & Freudenburg, 1996), have higher expectations of corporate social performance (e.g., Burton & Hegarty, 1999), and purchase or recommend ethical products such as fair trade products to others (Morrell & Jayawardhena, 2010). This gender difference can be explained by gender socialization theory, which proposes that “females are socialized into more communal principles such as selflessness and a general concern for the wellbeing of others, while males are more socialized into principles involving aptitude, personal growth, and aggression” (Dalton & Ortegren, 2011, p. 74).

Research also suggests that there is a positive relationship between socially responsible companies and (perceived) femininity. Ringov and Zollo (2007) find that companies in more masculine cultures have lower levels of social and environmental performance than similar companies based on feminine cultures. This is because highly masculine cultures value achievement, assertiveness, and material success but undervalue caring for others, cooperation, and solidarity (Hofstede, 1980). Feminine cultures, on the contrary, place importance on caring for the weak, interpersonal harmony, and social relationships (Hofstede, 1980). Moreover, consumers tend to
associate socially responsible companies with feminine attributes such as safe, friendly, protective, and gentle (Gildea, 1994). Because of the underlying relationship between male and female gender orientation and norms concerning ethical behaviors, it proposes that observers will infer gender identities of consumers based on ethical consumption. Or more formally:

\[ H1: \text{Observers will infer higher (lower) femininity and lower (higher) masculinity when an individual (does not) consumes ethically.} \]

2.2. Study 1

2.2.1. Method

Pretest. Since gender inferences are based on perceived social responsibility of ethical consumption, a pretest was conducted in order to ensure that consumers who consume ethically are viewed as more socially responsible than those who do not. Three different videos that depict a customer-salesperson interaction in a coffee shop were created. In the videos, the focal consumer either chooses an ethical option, a non-ethical option, or chooses in a control condition where there is no ethical option. In the ethical consumption scenarios, the salesperson recommends two blends of coffee, the Columbia Blend ($9.95) and Fair Trade Blend ($10.95). The Columbia blend is described based on a taste profile, and the Fair Trade Blend is described as being sourced directly from the growers to promote healthier working conditions and greater quality of life. Scripts for the videos are provided in Appendix A. The same customer was used in all videos. Seventy-nine undergraduate students were randomly assigned into one of three experimental conditions. After watching the videos, participants were asked to rate the social responsibility of the customer using a four-item, 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) point Likert scale adapted from Webb, Mohr, and Harris (2008): “The customer generally tries to buy from socially responsible companies”, “When given the chance to switch brands, the customer will generally choose a socially responsible option”, “When the customer is shopping, the social performance of the company is an important buying criterion”, and “The customer generally avoids products that harm others or the environment” (\( \alpha = .95 \)). Results of the pretest indicate that the customer who opted for the Fair Trade option was viewed as more socially responsible than the same customer.
in the neutral condition and the condition where the Fair Trade option was not selected 
\((F(2, 76) = 176.04, p < .001; M_{ETHICAL} = 5.86, M_{NONETHICAL} = 1.98, M_{NEUTRAL} = 3.73, \text{ all } ps < .001)\). Thus, the manipulation of perceived social responsibility was successful.

**Procedure.** Two hundred and sixty six undergraduate students (52.5% female) participated in Study 1 in exchange for extra course credit. Study 1 uses a 3 (Ethical Consumption Choice: Ethical vs. Non-Ethical vs. Control) x 2 (Focal Consumer Gender: Male vs. Female) between-subjects design. A control condition was included to provide a baseline of gender role orientation outside of an ethical consumption context. Participants were randomly assigned into one of six experimental conditions based on the same video scripts used in the pretest described in Appendix A. The videos were shown under the guise of evaluating a customer service interaction in a retail environment. The same male consumer is depicted in all male-consumer videos, and the same female consumer is depicted in all female-consumer videos.

**Measures.** Two scales measuring masculinity and femininity were developed based on the short version of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) (Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp 1974) using semantic differential scales. Masculinity was measured by five 7-point semantic differential scales (i.e., dependent/independent, not competitive/competitive, not self-confident/very self-confident, feels inferior/feels superior, not at all masculine/very masculine; \(\alpha = .87\)), and femininity was also measured using five items (i.e., not emotional/emotional, rough/gentle, not aware of feelings of others/aware of feelings of others, not understanding of others/understanding of others, not at all feminine/very feminine; \(\alpha = .78\)).

### 2.2.2. Results

A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction of customer gender and ethical consumption choice on masculinity \((F(2, 260) = 18.79, p < .001)\) and femininity \((F(2, 260) = 24.49, p < .001)\). Both customer gender and ethical consumption choice had significant main effects on masculinity (customer gender: \(F(1, 260) = 297.26, p < .001\); ethical consumption: \(F(2, 260) = 357.72, p < .001\)) and femininity (customer gender: \(F(1, 260) = 128.47, p < .001\); ethical consumption: \(F(2, 260) = 256.99, p < .001\)). As shown in figure 3a, the male customer who did not purchase the Fair Trade blend was viewed as
significantly more masculine than the male customer in the control condition, who in turn was viewed as more masculine than the male customer who purchased the Fair Trade blend ($F(2, 260) = 124.14, p < .001; M_{ETHICAL} = 3.97, M_{CONTROL} = 4.46, M_{NONETHICAL} = 5.39, all ps < .001$). Similarly, the female customer who did not purchase the Fair Trade blend was viewed as more significantly masculine than the female customer who purchased the Fair Trade blend and who in the control condition ($F(2, 260) = 248.96, p < .001; M_{ETHICAL} = 3.01, M_{CONTROL} = 3.16, M_{NONETHICAL} = 4.89, ps < .001$) although there was no difference between the female customer who purchased the Fair Trade blend and the one in the control condition ($p > .05$).

Figure 3A. Consumers who do not consume ethically are viewed as more masculine than those do.

As shown in figure 3b, both the male and female customers who purchased the Fair Trade blend were viewed as significantly more feminine than the customers in the control condition, who in turn were perceived as more feminine than the customers who did not purchase the Fair Trade blend (Male: $F(2, 260) = 84.91, p < .001; M_{ETHICAL} = 4.38, M_{CONTROL} = 3.73, M_{NONETHICAL} = 3.23, all ps < .001$; Female: $F(2, 260) = 193.47, p < .001; M_{ETHICAL} = 5.01, M_{CONTROL} = 4.73, M_{NONETHICAL} = 3.35, all ps < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported. Further analysis shows that observers’ gender and age had no influence on their perceptions of the customer’s gender role orientation.
2.2.3. Discussion

The findings of Study 1 complement previous research by showing that consumers can successfully create a socially responsible image through purchasing ethical products. Although the videos did not imply impression management motives on the part of the customer, participants inferred higher social responsibility in the customer who chose the ethical product.

However, Study 1 also demonstrates that ethical consumption generates other, ancillary inferences. Consumers who engage in ethical consumption are viewed as more feminine and less masculine than consumers who do not consume ethically. This association with the opposite gender may be negative to consumers because both men and women have strong negative attitudes toward being associated with the opposite gender (Nosek et al., 2002; White & Dahl, 2006). For example, men are less likely to seek help than women because they view help seeking as a feminine behavior (e.g., McCusker & Galupo, 2011; Vogel et al., 2011). Although consumers engage in ethical consumption, in part, due to impression management concerns (e.g., Griskevicius et al., 2010; Peloza et al., 2013), the research demonstrates that observers infer additional consumer traits from these behaviors. Importantly, dissociative gender inferences typically conflict with the positive ethics-related identity.
The majority of research examining impression management focuses on the motivations of the individual to present a specific image to others (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2007; White & Dahl, 2006). A limited body of research examines whether or not impression management behaviors create inferences by observers in the intended manner (e.g., Ashworth et al., 2005; Yoon et al., 2006). To our knowledge, this research is the first to examine the potential for impression management behaviors to create unintended inferences from observers. To further explore the underlying mechanism behind this effect, Study 2 examines how observers interpret ethical consumption that is positioned in a fashion more typical of masculine traits.

2.3. Study 2

Previous research examining impression management through prosocial behavior suggests that consumers take into account the normative acceptance of the appeal behind the prosocial activity, in addition to the activity itself, in an effort to project a specific identity to others. For example, White and Peloza (2009) find that donors are more likely to contribute to a charity in response to an other-benefit appeal when they are publicly accountable, and more likely to donate in response to a self-benefit appeal in private conditions. They attribute the effect under public accountability conditions to impression management motives, since donations to charity are normatively expected to be motivated by the desire to help others and not oneself. Study 2 extends their research and the findings from Study 1 by examining how appeal type influences observers’ inferences of the gender role orientation based on ethical consumption.

Although ethical consumption is associated with the traditionally feminine qualities of caring and compassion, prosocial behavior can be effectively promoted on the basis of self-benefit appeals. For example, hybrid vehicles can be promoted using the cost savings benefit from fuel efficiency (self-benefit appeal) or the reduction in emissions (other-benefit appeal; Peloza & Shang, 2011). It is expected that ethical consumption promoted using other-benefit appeals will have strong associations with feminine traits such as gentleness and awareness of feelings of others because observers will infer consumers’ motives through the promotional appeal. On the other hand, ethical consumption promoted using self-benefit appeals will have strong
associations with masculine traits such as independence and competitiveness because the perceived motive meets expectations of male behavior (Jones & Davis, 1966). When ethical products are promoted using self-benefit appeals, ethical consumption by males is likely to align with observers’ expectations and therefore not result in any dissociative gender inference. On the other hand, ethical consumption by males in response other-benefit appeals is likely to conflict with observers’ expectations and therefore generate lower evaluations of masculinity and higher evaluations of femininity. Or, more formally:

H2a: Observers will infer higher (lower) femininity and lower (higher) masculinity when a male (does not) consumes ethically in response to an other-benefit appeal.

H2b: Ethical consumption by males in response to self-benefit appeals will have no effect on observers’ inferences of masculinity and femininity.

2.3.1. Method

Pretest. A pretest of benefit statements that highlight either self-benefit or other-benefit appeals was conducted. Organic coffee was chosen as the focal product for Study 2 because of its ability to provide benefits to both the self (e.g., taste, perceived health benefits) and others (e.g., ecosystem protection). Twenty-one undergraduate students were asked to read two benefit statements that position the consumption of organic coffee through a self-benefit appeal (“Because it is organic you really taste the richness of the flavor and the clean, crisp aroma.”) or an other-benefit appeal (“The production of organic coffee doesn’t cause soil erosion and ecosystem loss.”). Participants evaluated these benefit statements using a four-item, 1 to 7 point Likert scale adapted from White and Peloza (2009): This appeal: “highlights the benefit a customer receives personally”, “appeals to customers who want to look out for their own interests”, “highlights the benefit to someone other than a customer”, and “appeals to customers who want to look out for the interests of others.” The first two items were reverse-coded and indexes were created for both the self-benefit items (α = .87) and other-benefit items (α = .86). The self-benefit appeal that focused on the taste was evaluated as significantly more focused on self-benefits than was the other-benefit appeal (MSELF = 5.99, MOTHER = 2.67, t(20) = 11.17, p < .001). Conversely, the other-benefit appeal that focused on the ecosystem protection was evaluated as significantly
more focused on other-benefits than was the self-benefit appeal ($M_{\text{other}} = 5.33, M_{\text{self}} = 2.01, t(20) = 11.17, p < .001$). Therefore, the manipulation of appeal type was successful.

Procedure. Study 2 uses a 2 (Ethical Consumption Choice: Ethical vs. Non-Ethical) x 2 (Appeal Type: Other-benefit vs. Self-benefit) between-subjects design. Two hundred and seventeen undergraduate students (47.5% female) participated in the experiment in exchange for extra course credit. The procedure again used video scenarios to depict an ethical consumption scenario. In the videos, the salesperson recommends either the Columbia Blend ($9.95) or the Organic Blend ($10.95). The salesperson promotes the organic coffee on the basis of environmental friendliness (i.e., other-benefit) or taste (i.e., self-benefit). Video scripts are presented in Appendix A. Study 2 limited the examination to male consumers because males will incur greater social ramifications for exhibiting feminine traits (Brooks, 2000; Elling & Knoppers, 2005; White & Dahl, 2006), and Study 1 demonstrates equivalent effects for both male and female consumers. The same gender measures from Study 1 were used again to assess observers’ perceptions of consumer gender role orientation.

2.3.2. Results

A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction of ethical consumption choice and appeal type on masculinity ($F(1, 213) = 75.29, p < .001$) and femininity ($F(1, 213) = 82.19, p < .001$). As shown in figure 4a, when the organic coffee was promoted through an other-benefit appeal, the customer choosing organic coffee was viewed as less masculine ($M_{\text{YES}} = 3.86, M_{\text{NO}} = 5.23, F(1, 213) = 158.03, p < .001$) and more feminine ($M_{\text{YES}} = 4.63, M_{\text{NO}} = 3.23, F(1, 213) = 165.40, p < .001$) than those customers who did not select the ethical option. However, as shown in figure 4b, when a male customer was presented with a self-benefit appeal for organic coffee, the decision to select organic coffee had no impact on either masculinity ($M_{\text{YES}} = 4.69, M_{\text{NO}} = 4.71, F < 1, p > .05$) or femininity ($M_{\text{YES}} = 3.81, M_{\text{NO}} = 3.82, F < 1, p > .05$). Thus, Hypotheses 2a and 2b are supported.
Figure 4A. Males who consume ethically in response to other-benefit appeals are viewed as less masculine and more feminine

![Graph showing perceived gender orientation for ethical and non-ethical products.]

Figure 4B. Ethical consumption in response to self-benefit appeals result in no difference in gender inference

![Graph showing perceived gender orientation for ethical and non-ethical products.]

Masculinity vs Femininity
2.3.3. Discussion

Study 2 extends the first study by demonstrating that the inference of gender role orientation by observers is due not only to consumers’ support of ethical products, but to the inferred motives behind that support. When observers evaluate a male consumer responding to an other-benefit appeal, they view the customer as more feminine and less masculine. This replicates the effects demonstrated in Study 1. However, when a male consumer responds to an appeal that highlights self-interest, observers’ perceptions of masculinity were higher than perceptions of femininity regardless of his choice. Male consumers who do not choose ethical products are judged as masculine regardless of appeal type, as shown in Study 1.

This study extends previous research that examines how the use of specific promotional appeals guides consumers’ impression management objectives. Study 2 demonstrates that when male consumers engage in public prosocial behavior in response to a normatively-approved, other-benefit appeal, they also create inferences of femininity. In doing so, one impression management tactic designed to create positive observer inferences (i.e., prosocial) also creates another, unintended negative inference (i.e., dissociative gender) from observers. Although White and Peloza (2009) did not consider gender in their discussion of normatively approved prosocial behavior, it can be expected that a relevant social norm that is gender-specific will attenuate the dissociative gender inference on the part of observers. In other words, if the normatively acceptable action is for men to prefer ethical products, men who consume ethically will incur lower inferences of femininity and higher inferences of masculinity from observers. Study 3 turns to examine this.

2.4. Study 3

Study 3 further elucidates the process by which observers generate gender inferences based on consumers’ ethical consumption. Specifically, it examines the role of social norms in shaping observers’ inferences. Cialdini and Trost (1998, p. 152) define norms as “rules and standards that are understood by members of a group and that guide and/or constrain social behavior... these norms emerge out of interaction with
others; they may or may not be stated explicitly, and any sanctions for deviating from them come from social networks." Researchers differentiate between two types of norms: injunctive norms and descriptive norms. Injunctive norms refer to “perceptions of what is commonly approved or disapproved within the culture” (i.e., what people ought to do) (Schultz et al., 2011, p. 430). These are the norms that typically guide consumers to respond positively to other-benefit appeals like those presented in Study 2. Descriptive norms, on the other hand, refer to “perceptions of what is commonly done in a given situation” (i.e., what people actually do) (Schultz et al., 2011, p. 430).

Although ethical consumption is often associated with injunctive norms (i.e., it’s the right thing to do), descriptive norms tell individuals what actions are effective and adaptive in a particular situation (Cialdini et al., 1990). Both injunctive and descriptive norms influence consumer behavior (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), but within the ethical consumption domain, descriptive norms experience greater variance. The descriptive norm for prosocial behaviors varies from very high degrees of participation (e.g., recycling behaviors) to very low degrees of participation (e.g., environmentally friendly laundry detergent). Further, research shows that descriptive norms are generally more effective in influencing attitude and behavior (Borsari & Carey, 2003). For example, descriptive norms are effective in curbing binge drinking behavior among college students, while injunctive norms are not (e.g., Barnett et al., 1996; Borsari & Carey, 2003; Schroeder & Prentice, 1998). Thus, a descriptive norm where men typically consume ethically will lead observers to view ethical consumption as an appropriate male behavior.

Because of the variability in descriptive norms in the ethical consumption domain, descriptive norms of ethical consumption in a given situation may conflict with observers’ expectations of consumer choice. For example, previous research suggests that males are not expected to ethical consume because related qualities such as helpfulness and caring are not viewed as masculine traits (Deaux & Lewis, 1984). Instead, men are expected to have an instrumental orientation not an affective concern for the well-being of others (Bem, 1974; Constantinople, 1973). Thus, when a male makes an ethical consumption choice, observers will view the behavior as unexpected and therefore draw upon relevant descriptive norms to help account for the atypical behavior (Jones and Davis, 1966). If the relevant descriptive norm is a low rate of participation by others,
males who consume ethically will be viewed as less masculine because their behavior does not meet expectations nor can it be explained through a relevant descriptive norm. In the absence of a descriptive norm that suggests the behavior is not atypical for males, inferences of lower masculinity will result. However, the same unexpected ethical consumption will not generate the same inferences when the behavior is typical of other males in a given situation. In this scenario, observers' inferences of lower masculinity will be attenuated by the descriptive norm that provides information related to typical male behavior. Conversely, when a male does not consume ethically (i.e., meets expectations), a relevant descriptive norm of strong participation can result in a contrast effect. If the norm is a high rate of male participation, not consuming ethically generates even greater inferences of higher masculinity and lower masculinity. Or, more formally:

H3a: When a male consumes ethically, observers will infer higher (lower) femininity and lower (higher) masculinity when the descriptive norm for ethical consumption is a low (high) degree of male participation.

H3b: When a male does not consume ethically, observers will infer lower (higher) femininity and higher (lower) masculinity when the descriptive norm for ethical consumption is a high (low) degree of male participation.

2.4.1. Method

Pretest. A pretest was conducted to establish a baseline of ethical consumption expectations from male consumers. Twenty-eight undergraduate students were asked to indicate their expectations of a list of activities when thinking of a typical male on a 7-point scale (1 = “Not Expected at All”, 7 = “Highly Expected”). Three items were used to measure the expectation of ethical consumption: “purchase Fair Trade products”, “donate to breast cancer charities”, and “purchase ethical products” (α = .73). The results suggest that ethical consumption by males is not an expected behavior (t-test versus the scale midpoint: M = 2.60, t(27) = -11.01, p < .001).

Procedure. Study 3 uses a 2 (Ethical Consumption Choice: Ethical vs. Non-Ethical) X 2 (Descriptive Norm: High Participation vs. Low Participation) between-subjects design. One hundred and sixty five undergraduate students (57% female) participated in the experiment in exchange for extra course credit. Similar to the previous study, Study 3 also focuses on the behavior of males since Mahalik (2000) proposes that
men are influenced by normative masculinity messages communicated through descriptive, injunctive, and cohesive masculine norms.

Similar to previous studies, customer service interactions were presented to participants. In Study 3, the videos were set in a sports store instead of a coffee shop in order to help establish a descriptive norm in a typically male consumption setting. In the videos, a male consumer inquires about a baseball glove. The salesperson introduces a promotion where the consumer either receives a free bottle of glove treatment worth $10 (non-ethical choice) or the company donates $10 to breast cancer research (ethical choice). Breast cancer research was chosen as the ethical consumption choice because it is highly dissociative for males. It allows us to examine whether the strong association between supporting breast cancer research and femininity can be attenuated by a relevant descriptive norm or not and therefore a good test of our theory. In order to manipulate the descriptive norm, the salesperson also mentions that most consumers chose the free glove treatment (low participation norm) or the donation (high participation norm). The norm is specific to males in two ways. First, males are more likely than females to purchase a baseball glove. Second, in the video the salesperson states that “most guys take the…” when presenting the promotional items, further highlighting a male descriptive norm. At the end of the video the consumer chooses either the treatment or donation option under the two norm conditions. Scripts for the videos are presented in Appendix A. The same gender measures from Study 1 were used again to assess observers’ gender inferences.

2.4.2. Results

A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction of ethical consumption choice and the descriptive norm on perceived masculinity ($F(1, 161) = 15.62, p < .001$) and femininity ($F(1, 161) = 7.42, p < .01$). As shown in figure 5a, when a male customer chooses the ethical option, he is perceived as less masculine ($M_{LOW} = 3.58, M_{HIGH} = 4.84, F(1, 161) = 154.24, p < .001$) and more feminine ($M_{LOW} = 4.47, M_{HIGH} = 3.63, F(1, 161) = 35.66, p < .005$) when the descriptive norm is a low (vs. high) degree of support for the ethical option. Similarly, as shown in figure 5b, when the male customer does not choose the ethical option, he is viewed as less masculine ($M_{LOW} = 5.02, M_{HIGH} = 5.71, F(1, 161) = 42.81, p < .001$) and more feminine ($M_{LOW} = 3.28, M_{HIGH} = 2.99, F(1, 161) =
3.99, \( p < .05 \) when the descriptive norm is a low (vs. high) degree of support for the ethical option. The above results suggest that the relevant descriptive norm influences observers’ gender inferences by changing observers’ perceptions of “typical” male behavior in general. Thus, Hypotheses 3a and 3b are supported.

Figure 5A. Males who consume ethically when the descriptive norm is high participation are viewed as more masculine and less feminine

![Graph showing gender inference vs. male consumption]

Figure 5B. Males who do not consume ethically are viewed as more masculine and less feminine despite relevant descriptive norms

![Graph showing gender inference vs. male consumption]
2.4.3. Discussion

Study 3 demonstrates that descriptive norms, which identify appropriate behaviors for a specific gender, can overcome the dissociative gender inferences made by observers in Studies 1 and 2. Namely, even under ethical consumption scenarios where male consumers' masculinity is under threat (i.e., donation to breast cancer research), a descriptive norm of male support for ethical consumption suppresses judgments of higher femininity and restores judgments of masculinity. Although Study 3 did not examine inferences about female consumers, it can be expected that when female consumers' femininity is under threat (i.e., choosing non-ethical options), a descriptive norm of low female participation in ethical consumption may help restore a feminine image. Taken together, Studies 1 to 3 demonstrate that if consumers engage in impression management in an attempt to portray a prosocial image to others, they may run the risk of association with the opposite gender. However, the promotion appeal or the descriptive norm associated with ethical consumption may be altered to attenuate this inference by observers.

It must be noted that the studies presented thus far do not presume impression management as a motive when consumers engage in prosocial behavior. Although there is widespread support for such a motive (e.g., Griskevicius et al., 2010; White & Peloza, 2009), our focus thus far has been on the unintended consequences of ethical consumption on the inferences of observers. The final study turns to the behaviors of consumers who engage in impression management, and examines how consumers reconcile the potential for competing observer inferences.

2.5. Study 4

The first three studies demonstrate that ethical consumption leads to both positive and "negative" inferences from bystanders. Consumers were judged as more socially responsible when they selected ethical options. However, observers also evaluated consumers' gender role orientation on the basis of their ethical consumption. Both men and women who consume ethically were judged as less masculine and more feminine, and those who did not consume ethically were judged as more masculine and
less feminine. These inferences create a conflict for consumers who are motivated to present a prosocial image to others, but similarly motivated to avoid association with the opposite gender. Although Studies 2 and 3 demonstrate that the promotional appeal and the relevant descriptive norm both moderate the inferences of lower masculinity/higher femininity of male consumers, these appeals and salient norms are not always present in consumption settings. The objective of Study 4, then, is to examine how consumers resolve competing impression management objectives (i.e., pursue a prosocial inference versus avoid a gender dissociative inference).

Previous research demonstrates that men and women tend to portray different identities to others depending on whether the observers are male or female (e.g., Snell, 1989). For example, males align their impression management tactics with societally sanctioned behaviors such as stoicism and aggressive play (Fisher & Dube, 2000; Oransky & Marecek, 2009). Further, the alignment with societally sanctioned behavior is particularly strong when others in the context are from the opposite gender (Leary et al., 1994). For example, Klein and Wilnerman (1979) find that females exhibit less dominance when interacting with males than with females, a finding they contribute to the social norm that women be deferential to men. Similarly, males may tend to display more feminine qualities when they interact with females because feminine qualities such as gentleness and emotionality are more attractive to females than to males (Rhodes, Hickford, & Jeffery, 2000). In either case, individuals will adopt specific consumption patterns in order to present themselves more favorably to members of the opposite sex (Sundie et al., 2011). Therefore, the attractiveness of observers will govern consumers’ prioritization of impression management objectives. Because individuals are motivated by positive reactions from attractive or otherwise socially desirable others, they especially value the judgments of those attractive others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Costly signaling theory, which has its basis in the animal kingdom, can be used to explain how observers’ gender predicts ethical consumption. This theory proposes that certain traits, such as a colorful peacock tail, serve the function of communicating information to potential mates (e.g., Miller, 2000). When individuals engage in costly behavior (such as paying higher prices for ethical products), they signal their status as a desirable mate. Behaviors related to ethical consumption are particularly useful for communicating desirability to the opposite sex, since both prosocial qualities and
resources are attractive to a romantic partner, especially women (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997; Brase, 2006; Buss, 2003; Green & Kenrick, 1994). Griskevicius and colleagues (2007) demonstrate that men primed to think about dating spend more money than those not primed, and women who are similarly primed are more likely to exhibit helping behaviors than those in a neutral condition. Further, costly signaling theory suggests that behaviors designed to make oneself more attractive to the opposite sex should be focused in situations that are likely to be seen by others (Griskevicius et al., 2007; Smith & Bird, 2000). However, under conditions where consumers are unaware of the competing impression management objectives, consumers will default to a prosocial impression management goal regardless of the gender of observers. Therefore:

H4a: When faced with a conflict between socially responsible and gender dissociative impression management objectives, consumers will be more (less) likely to consume ethically in the presence of observers of the opposite (same) sex.

H4b: When conflicting impression management objectives are not present, the gender of observers will not influence consumers’ decision to consume ethically.

2.5.1. Method

Pretest. In order to ensure that consumers don’t already reconcile competing impression management objectives when considering ethical consumption, a pretest was conducted in which participants were asked to rate the potential for specific activities to generate observers’ inferences about gender. Thirty-one undergraduate students were asked to indicate their attitudes toward the following statements on a 7-point scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree”, 7 = “Strongly Agree”). If I choose Fair Trade coffee rather than conventional coffee, I will be viewed as: “feminine by other consumers”, “having more in common with females”, “masculine by other consumers”, and “having more in common with males.” The first two items were used to measure femininity inference (α = .83) and the last two items were used to measure masculinity inference (α = .87). The results suggest that, in the absence of specific information, participants did not expect that ethical consumption (in the form of Fair Trade purchases) will result in gender orientation inferences by observers. For both femininity and masculinity,
participants did not expect observers to infer gender dissociation (t-tests versus the scale midpoint; $t(30) = 7.46, p < .001, M_{\text{FEM}} = 2.04$; $t(30) = 11.99, p < .001, M_{\text{MAS}} = 1.78$).

**Procedure.** Study 4 uses a 2 (Impression Management Motive: Neutral vs. Competing) x 2 (Observer Gender: Male vs. Female) x 2 (Customer Gender: Male vs. Female) between-subjects design. Two hundred and twenty eight undergraduate students (53.5% female) participated in the experiment in exchange for extra course credit. Participants were asked to complete two short surveys. In each survey participants read a short article first and then answered questions based on that article. Impression management motives were manipulated through the first survey in which participants read a newspaper article that presented either the findings from Study 1 (competing motives condition) or a story about customer service (control condition; see Appendix B). In the second survey, participants read a scenario that describes customer-salesperson interaction using the same coffee shop scenario used in Study 1. In the male observer condition, the salesperson and two other customers in close proximity are male. In the female condition, the salesperson and two other customers in close proximity are female (See Appendix B for examples of the scenarios).

**Measures.** In order to reduce social desirability bias, participants were asked to estimate the probability (out of 100) that the consumer in the scenario will choose the Fair Trade option. This projection technique has been used in previous research where social desirability bias is a concern (e.g., Fisher, 1993; Luchs et al., 2010). The probability of selecting the Fair Trade option (out of 100) served as the dependent variable for the study. Also, after reading the newspaper story, participants reported their attitudes toward the source credibility of the article. Source credibility was measured by three items (not trustworthy/trustworthy, dishonest/honest, not credible/credible) on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Eisend, 2010). In order to account for gender impression management effects predicted in Hypotheses 4a and 4b, only female participants were given scenarios where the focal consumer was female, and only male participants read scenarios where the focal consumer was male (manipulation of customer gender).


2.5.2. Results

Manipulation Check. The manipulation check of source credibility showed that respondents perceived the article was credible (t test versus the scale mid point: \( M = 5.17, t(227) = 19.51, p < .001 \)). Therefore, the manipulation was successful.

Test of Hypotheses. A three-way ANOVA with probability of selecting the Fair Trade option as the dependent variable and customer gender, observer gender, and impression management motive (competing versus neutral) as independent variables revealed a significant three-way interaction (\( F(1, 220) = 22.55, p < .001 \)). When the customer was male, observer gender and impression management motive had a significant interaction effect on the probability that the customer would select the Fair Trade option (\( F(1, 220) = 11.14, p < .001 \)). Male respondents were more likely to predict selection of the Fair Trade blend when the male customer was in the presence of female observers (versus male observers) and when they had competing impression management motives (\( M_{OBS-FEMALE} = 60.41, M_{OBS-MALE} = 26.25; F(1, 220) = 30.12, p < .001 \)). In the neutral impression management motive condition, observer gender had no impact on males’ predictions of Fair Trade selection (\( M_{OBS-FEMALE} = 49.60, M_{OBS-MALE} = 43.96; F(1, 220) = .93, p > .05 \)). When the customer was female, observer gender and impression management motive had a significant interaction effect on the prediction of the Fair Trade selection (\( F(1, 220) = 11.45, p < .001 \)). Female respondents were more likely to predict the selection of the Fair Trade blend in the presence of male observers (versus female observers) when experiencing competing impression management motives (\( M_{OBS-FEMALE} = 35.73, M_{OBS-MALE} = 63.29; F(1, 220) = 24.11, p < .001 \)). Observer gender had no impact on product choice in the neutral condition (\( M_{OBS-FEMALE} = 52.66, M_{OBS-MALE} = 53.38; F(1, 220) = .02, p > .05 \)). Thus, Hypotheses 4a and 4b are supported.
Figure 6A. Male consumers report higher intentions to consume ethically when in the presence of female observers

Figure 6B. Female consumers report higher intentions to consume ethically when in the presence of male observers
2.5.3. Discussion

Study 4 demonstrates that consumers in general do not hold the perception that their own ethical consumption is a feminine (masculine) behavior. When faced with a conflict between creating a socially responsible image and being associated with femininity, consumers’ ethical consumption depends on the gender of observers. More specifically, both male and female consumers are more likely to consume ethically while in the presence of observers of the opposite gender, whereas they are more inclined to choose the non-ethical option in the presence of observers of the same gender. Although the opposite gender typically holds dissociative properties, the findings suggest that consumers do not always avoid association with the opposite gender. In fact, consumers strategically use impression management tactics, even preferring association with the opposite gender. This represents a boundary condition to previous research that suggests consumers will avoid dissociative reference groups (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2007; White & Dahl, 2006). Namely, when qualities associated with the dissociative reference group can aid in more global impression management motives, consumers will opt for choices that may directly align with dissociative reference groups.

2.6. General Discussion

Across four studies the current research demonstrates that although observers make positive inferences of social responsibility on the basis of consumers’ ethical consumption, they also make inferences that can be “negative” for consumers. Previous research suggests that consumers tend to avoid being associated with the opposite sex (e.g., Nosek et al., 2002; White & Dahl, 2006). Thus, the fact that observers infer lower masculinity and higher femininity from consumers’ ethical consumption may lead consumers to resist ethical choices. In order to avoid presenting a more feminine identity, for example, male consumers may avoid ethical options preferring to maintain a masculine identity.

The current research identifies two important boundary conditions for this effect which allow for consumers to engage in ethical consumption while simultaneously maintaining desired gender identity. The results demonstrate that observers’ inferences
are influenced by the perceived motives behind ethical consumption. In particular, when male consumers respond positively to ethical consumption choices positioned using a self-benefit appeal, no inference of higher femininity or lower masculinity occurs. This is because the use of self-benefit appeals suggests self-enhancement motives, typically associated with a masculine gender identity. Similarly, observer inference is influenced by the relevant descriptive norm of a given gender. Namely, when the descriptive norm is higher rates of ethical consumption among males in general, inferences of lower masculinity and higher femininity are attenuated. This is because the ethical consumption is no longer perceived as atypical for the given gender.

Because many consumption settings do not allow for these attenuations of gender inference from observers, this paper also examined how consumers reconcile competing impression management objectives of both prosocial and gender-congruent identities. It revealed that the gender of observers dictates consumers’ ethical consumption intentions, with consumers more likely to engage in gender-incongruent behaviors when in the presence of the opposite gender. This finding can be attributed to costly signalling theory, and the desire for consumers to use ethical consumption as a means to demonstrate positive qualities to potential romantic partners.

The research makes a number of contributions to the impression management literature. First and foremost, although previous research examines consumers’ use of impression management tactics, relatively few studies examine how those tactics actually influence the inferences made by others. In examining both impression management objectives and observer inferences, this research represents an initial bridge between the impression management literature (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2006; Leary, 1995; White & Dahl, 2006) with the vast literature on consumer inference-making on the basis of others’ consumption (e.g., Belk et al., 1982; Calder & Burnkrant, 1977).

In addition, this research is the first to our knowledge to examine how impression management behaviors can create inferences related to multiple identities. In particular, it examines the potential for impression management behavior to result in not only an intended identity (e.g., ethical consumption creates a prosocial identity for observers), but other relevant identities (e.g., masculine/feminine). This examination extends prior research that considers identity inferences related to a focal consumer behavior such as
coupon usage and perceived cheapness (e.g., Argo & Main, 2008; Ashworth et al., 2005). Importantly, although the potential for ethical consumption to create potentially negative inferences from observers exists, the findings demonstrate that consumers are not generally aware of the potential for this inference-making to occur.

The research also builds upon the extant impression management literature by examining how consumers resolve conflicting impression management motives. Although prior research examines when stigma associated with impression management behavior will be attenuated, such as coupon redemption in the presence of well-known others where there is less need to create a positive impression through consumption (e.g., Ashworth et al., 2005), the current research presents conflicting motives across two positive social identities, a prosocial identity and a gender-congruent identity, and examines how consumers prioritize one over the other. It demonstrates that identity priority is malleable, and the observers’ gender is used by consumers as a means to prioritize more costly prosocial identity objectives in order to appear more attractive to others. Perhaps counter-intuitively, using costly signalling theory, it demonstrates that pursuit of a gender-incongruent identity is the means by which consumers enhance their attractiveness to members of the opposite gender.

Finally, this research demonstrates that dissociative reference groups, such as members of the opposite gender, do not always have stigmatic properties for consumers. White and Dahl (2007) differentiate between outgroups and dissociative groups, and suggest that avoidance of dissociative groups is of particular importance to consumers’ impression management concerns. Although prior research shows that consumers generally avoid behaviors that align them with dissociative reference groups (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2007; Nosek et al., 2002; White & Dahl, 2006), this research demonstrates that the characteristics of these dissociative identities can have positive utility for consumers, and that consumers will approach dissociative reference groups under certain conditions. For example, when association with the opposite gender communicates a social identity that is positive to potential romantic partners, consumers will knowingly engage in behavior that communicates a gender-incongruent identity.

Although previous research does not examine the gender of observers in the context of impression management, this finding is expected to subject to boundary
conditions. For example, overt association with the opposite gender without the corresponding positive costly signal (e.g., ordering a ladies’ cut steak in a restaurant) is less likely to produce the same effect of male preference for behavior that is characteristic of dissociative reference groups. Future research can examine such boundary conditions. Future research can also explore the potential for overt impression management motives to alter consumer choices and observer inferences demonstrated here. For example, although Study 4 did not examine observer inferences, if female observers suspect a male makes an ethical consumption choice as a means of presenting a specific identity, the effect of such behaviors on the inferences of others may be diminished or even reversed.

Another promising area for future research is the potential for the behavior of others to impact observers’ inferences. For example, it would be fruitful to examine the role of spontaneous association which Argo and Main (2008) use to find that the stigma of cheapness is inferred for both coupon redeemers and non-coupon redeemers in close proximity. It is possible that observers’ inferences concerning gender about one consumer are influenced by the behaviors of others, either through spontaneous association (e.g., inferences of greater femininity based on ethical consumption of others) or contrast effects (e.g., inferences of greater femininity when consuming ethically in the presence of others who do not).

Our findings also have implications for the promotion of ethical consumption in the marketplace. Although the findings show that consumers are not actively aware of the gender signals associated with ethical consumption, the use of techniques to minimize negative dissociative referent groups will help ensure consumers’ ethical consumption choices and, if anything, serve positive impression management objectives. For example, many ethical consumption options can be positioned on the basis of either self-benefit or other-benefit appeals. Although previous research demonstrates that other-benefit appeals are more persuasive in public settings, a finding White and Peloza (2009) ascribe to impression management motives concerning normatively expected reasons to behave prosocially, the use of self-benefit appeals can provide “psychological cover” for consumers who seek to project a more masculine identity. It suggests that marketers who wish to promote ethical choices consider the impression management priorities examined here, and tailor persuasion appeals accordingly. For example,
marketers can include gender role orientation as another segmentation variable in traditional segmentation systems such as VALS (Mitchell, 1983) to identify consumers who adhere to more specific gender roles, and be more or less likely to demonstrate concern over possible association with the opposite gender.

Similarly, brands with a more masculine or feminine orientation can offer ethical consumption choices consistent with the brand personality. Although this paper did not examine how consumers make inferences about companies that promote ethical products, the results do suggest that companies seeking a specific orientation use appropriate persuasion appeals. Thus, a masculine brand such as Old Spice may not benefit from its socially responsible practices because such practices may have a negative impact on its masculine brand image. However, these brands can still get a “license” to be prosocial if they use appropriate communication strategies such as self-benefit appeal or highlighting the high participation of male consumers. Moreover, Griskevicius et al. (2007) find that males are more likely to exhibit helping behaviors when such behaviors allow them to display heroism or dominance. Considering most advertisements tend to emphasize the feminine aspects of ethical consumption (e.g., warm, gentle, caring, etc.), marketers may highlight the heroic qualities associated with ethical consumption to overcome the potential for femininity inferences to dissuade male consumers.
2.7. References


Green, B. L., & Kenrick, D. T. (1994). The attractiveness of gender-typed traits at different relationships levels: Androgynous characteristics may be desirable after all. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 2*(3), 244-53.


Appendix A.

Scripts for customer service videos

Study 1 and Study 2: Coffee Shop Scenarios

Server: Hi, what can I do for you?
Customer: Hi, I'm looking for some coffee beans.
Server: OK. Do you have anything in mind?
Customer: Not really, what do you have?
Server: We have a couple of different options. The first is our Columbian blend, which is medium bodied bean with a clean balanced flavor. Perfect for any occasion, great during a breakfast or after a meal. This one is $9.95.

Study 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(Ethical Choice)</th>
<th>(Non-Ethical Choice)</th>
<th>(Control Condition)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S:</td>
<td>We also have our Fair Trade blend, which is similar</td>
<td>We also have our Fair Trade blend, which is similar</td>
<td>We also have an Ethiopian, which is very similar and also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to the Columbian blend. But it is sourced directly</td>
<td>to the Columbian blend. But it is sourced directly from</td>
<td>has very similar and also has very balanced flavor. It's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>from the grower to promote better working condition</td>
<td>the grower to promote better working condition and greater</td>
<td>also great for breakfast and after a meal. This one is also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and greater quality of life. And this one is</td>
<td>quality of life. And this one is $10.95.</td>
<td>$9.95.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$10.95.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C:</td>
<td>I’ll go with the Fair Trade coffee.</td>
<td>I’ll go with the Columbian blend.</td>
<td>I’ll take the Ethiopian.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study 2:

Server: We also have our Organic blend, which has a different flavor profile.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(Self-Benefit Appeal)</th>
<th>(Other-Benefit Appeal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S:</td>
<td>And because it's organic, you really taste the</td>
<td>And because its production doesn't cause soil erosion or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>richness of the flavor and the clean, crisp aroma.</td>
<td>ecosystem loss, so it's good for the environment. This</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This bag is $10.95.</td>
<td>bag is $10.95.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C:</td>
<td>I’ll go with the Organic blend.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(Ethical Choice)</th>
<th>(Non-Ethical Choice)</th>
<th>(Ethical Choice)</th>
<th>(Non-Ethical Choice)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C:</td>
<td>I’ll go with the Organic blend.</td>
<td>I’ll go with the Columbian blend.</td>
<td>I’ll go with the Organic blend.</td>
<td>I’ll go with the Columbian blend.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study 3: Sporting Good Store Videos

Server: Hi, how's it going?
Customer: Good. I need a new ball glove.
Server: Sure, do you have a brand that you are looking for?
Customer: Yeah, I know exactly what I want, an Easton 12 inch pitcher's glove.
Server: OK, a man who knows what he wants. I like it. We have them for $79. You're in luck, too, because Easton is running a promotion right now. You can choose one of two bonuses when you buy this glove. The company is running a promotion where you get either a bottle of glove treatment to help you break in the glove, or the company will make a $10 donation to breast cancer research. The treatment is worth 10 bucks too, so it's the same value either way.

(High Male Participation Norm): Most guys take the free glove treatment.
(Low Male Participation Norm): Most guys take the charity donation.

Customer: (Ethical choice condition): I'll go with the donation.
(Non-Ethical choice condition): I'll take the treatment.

Server: Sounds good, come over and I'll ring it up.
Appendix B.

Study 4 Manipulation of Gender Inference

Survey 1 – Competing Condition

How Helping Behavior Impacts How Others See You

In a new study published last month in the Journal of Marketing, researchers presented findings that demonstrate that doing the “right” thing may have an unintended consequence for consumers. Darla Carlson, researcher with CIO Metrics and lead author of the study, explains that when people see other people doing helpful things, they generally see them as helpful people. So what’s the problem? Wilson goes on to explain that being seen as helpful also comes with some unexpected baggage. “We find that when someone is viewed as helpful, they are also viewed as more feminine and less masculine, since helping behaviors are typically associated with female qualities such as compassion and caring for others.”

The research asked people to rate the masculinity and femininity of people who were asked to support a wide variety of social initiatives. “We tested a lot of different types of what we call prosocial behaviors,” explains Carlson. “Everything from donations to charity to purchasing organic coffee to carpooling. The results are strong and consistent across all of them.”

Our society has long held gender stereotypes that males are expected to be “tough” and aggressive, while females are expected to be nurturing and care for others. This new research confirms the presence of this stereotype in behaviors that people typically associated with one gender.

The Flip Side

On the flip side, the researchers also found that when consumers turn down opportunities to engage in helpful behavior, others see them as more masculine. Researcher Carlson suggests that this has implications for stereotypes in our society. “We know that women, for example, often want to break down gender norms and push for equality. And men may not always want to adhere to the norm that they should be competitive, and instead be comfortable showing a softer side.”

Survey 1 – Neutral Condition

Customer Service Becoming a Top Priority

In a new study published last month in the Journal of Marketing, researchers presented findings that demonstrate that managers are putting an increasing priority on frontline customer service experiences for consumers. Darla Carlson, researcher with CIO Metrics and lead author of the study, explains that customer service can have a direct and material impact on the bottom line for virtually every firm. Importantly, the study finds positive impacts of customer service training for companies where customer service isn’t traditionally associated. Wilson explains, “We find that for customer service encounters in situations where people do not expect a high level of customer service, the effect is even greater. When people get an unexpectedly high level of customer service from a pest control technician, for example, it creates a halo for the entire company that leads to loyalty and strong word of mouth.”
The research asked managers to describe the level and type of investments they are making into customer service, and the impacts they see. "We see a lot of variation in the type of training that firms are doing," explains Carlson. "Everything from sending employees to week long customer service training seminars to bringing in consumer psychologists to critique customer service training manuals for staff."

Managers have often talked about the importance of customer service, and the need to create a positive customer experience. This new research confirms that managers are using innovative techniques, and investing real dollars behind the training.

The Flip Side

On the flip side, the researchers also found that not all customers are seeing the pay off in customer service training when they have encounters with company staff. Researcher Carlson suggests that this might be a matching problem, where some customers in some types of transactions have very high expectations. "We know that when someone is spending, say, $50,000 on a new car they expect a very high level of service. So what we are seeing is that even though customer service staff in these situations are highly trained, the very high expectations means they need to do even more to please the customer."

Survey 2 – Male Customer / Male Observer Scenario

A young man, David, walks into a coffee shop. David has recently started a new job, and along with the new early schedule of the job has started drinking coffee. Today he is looking for a bag of coffee that he can use in his own coffee maker back home.

As David browses the options on the shelf, the young man working at the store – Rick – approaches and offers help. "Can I help you find something?" he asks. "Yes, please," replies David. "I'm looking for some coffee to take home. Just for everyday use to help me get up in the morning. What do you recommend?"

As they talk, two young men enter the store. They seem to be interested in Rick’s recommendation, and move closer to David so they can also hear what he says.

"There are two options that I can highly recommend. The first is our Columbian blend. It's medium bodied bean with clean balanced flavors. It's good for everyday occasions, breakfast or after a meal. This bag is $9.95. We also have our Fair Trade blend, which has a lot of the same characteristics of the Columbian blend, with the same basic flavor profile. The difference is this blend is sourced directly from the growers to promote healthier working conditions and greater quality of life. This bag is $10.95."

One of the two young men that walked into the store interjects: "Can you get either bag in whole bean or ground?" "Yes," replies Rick, who then turns back to David. "So which one will it be?"

Survey 2 – Female Customer / Female Observer Scenario

A young woman, Rebecca, walks into a coffee shop. Rebecca has recently started a new job, and along with the new early schedule of the job has started drinking coffee. Today she is looking for a bag of coffee that she can use in her own coffee maker back home.

As Rebecca browses the options on the shelf, the young woman working at the store – Ashley – approaches and offers help. "Can I help you find something?" she asks. "Yes, please," replies Rebecca. "I'm looking for some coffee to take home. Just for everyday use to help me get up in the morning. What do you recommend?"

As they talk, two young women enter the store. They seem to be interested in Ashley's recommendation, and move closer to Rebecca so they can also hear what she says.
“There are two options that I can highly recommend. The first is our Columbian blend. It’s medium bodied bean with clean balanced flavors. It’s good for everyday occasions, breakfast or after a meal. This bag is $9.95. We also have our Fair Trade blend, which has a lot of the same characteristics of the Columbian blend, with the same basic flavor profile. The difference is this blend is sourced directly from the growers to promote healthier working conditions and greater quality of life. This bag is $10.95.”

One of the two young women that walked into the store interjects: “Can you get either bag in whole bean or ground?” “Yes,” replies Ashley, who then turns back to Rebecca. “So which one will it be?”
General Conclusion

CSR is usually rewarded by marketers and researchers for the positive relationship between CSR and CFP but recent research also demonstrates that companies and consumers cannot always benefit from CSR support. This dissertation aims to reveal the negative side of CSR by exploring the additional conditions under which CSR practise can result in negative outcomes for both the firms and consumers. Two papers examine this phenomenon from two different perspectives. Paper 1, “Who’s working in the kitchen today”, studies consumer responses to products produced by stigmatized populations. The results show that although consumers in general reward companies that hire stigmatize populations, they tend to avoid products produced by stigmatized people. However, this negative effect of CSR has boundary conditions and can be mitigated by using implicit information. Paper 2, “Can Real Men Consume Ethically”, studies how observers make inferences about others on the basis of their CSR support. The results show that although consumers who support (do not support) CSR are viewed as socially responsible, they are also inferred as high-feminine (low-feminine) and low-masculine (high-masculine). This inference can be negative to some consumers because people tend to avoid being associated with the opposite sex. Further research suggests that this inference making is subjected to boundary conditions and under some situations consumers even tend to create a self-image associated with the opposite sex. Although these research findings can help us further understand the negative side of CSR, more future research needs to be done to get a more complete view of this phenomenon.