Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Science

of

HUAN HE

BA (University of British Columbia, 2013)

“The Art of Persuasion: Self-Esteem, Message Framing, and the Persuasiveness of Prosocial Messages”

Department of Psychology

Wednesday, December 16, 2015
10:00AM
Cornett Building
Room A228

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Danu Stinson, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Elizabeth Brimacombe, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Daniel Rondeau, Department of Economics, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Andre Smith, Department of Sociology, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Our planet currently faces an environmental crisis. Thus, understanding how to persuade people to donate their time and money to environmental organizations has become an ever-pressing concern. Prior research has shown that personality factors such as the behavioural inhibition system (BIS) and the behavioural activation system (BAS) along with promotion and prevention orientations can interact with message frame (i.e., gain- versus loss-framing) to induce regulatory or affective fit, thereby increasing the persuasiveness of the message (e.g. Higgins, 2000; Updegraff, Sherman, Luyster, & Mann, 2007). I propose and test the hypothesis that self-esteem will also interact with message frame to increase persuasion, even when BIS/BAS and promotion/prevention are controlled. I test this hypothesis in two experiments (Ns = 828 and 1614). In each study, participants completed a series of questionnaires assessing BIS/BAS, promotion/prevention, and self-esteem and then read either a gain- or loss-framed environmental message. Then participants completed a memory test concerning the message content. Finally, they completed a donation task in which they apportioned a lump sum of money to five different environmental charities, including one environmental charity. Contrary to my hypotheses, there was no interaction between self-esteem and message frame in either study. However, participants in the loss-framed condition donated more money to the environmental charity than did participants in the gain-framed condition, and this difference was explained by participants' greater memory for the loss-framed message. Moreover, the second experiment demonstrated that participants also reported stronger intentions to behave pro-environmentally when they had donated money to the environmental charity. Thus it appears that loss-framed messages are more effective at persuading people to donate time and money to environmental causes. Due to the paucity and mixed-results of research on gain- and loss-framing in the environmental field, my research can help contribute to the few studies on this topic. The practical application of these results may prove useful to environmental charities and organizations.