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ASSESSING CREATIVITY IN HOLLYWOOD PITCH MEETINGS: EVIDENCE FOR A DUAL-PROCESS MODEL OF CREATIVITY JUDGMENTS

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This study addresses an important but neglected topic by investigating the social judgment processes that experts (studio executives and producers in Hollywood) use to assess the creative potential of unknown others (relatively unknown screenwriters) during "pitch" meetings in which screenwriters attempt to sell their ideas. The findings suggest a dual-process social judgment model. In one process, person categorization, the experts used behavioral and physical cues to match "pitchers" with seven creative and uncreative prototypes. In another process, relationship categorization, the experts used relational cues and self-perceptions to match pitchers with two relational prototypes.

Organizational researchers and managers alike have long held the view that individual creativity is critical for organizational success. The frequently touted organizational benefits of individual creativity include higher-quality products, more effective decision making, better group performance, and more innovative solutions to organizational problems (Kelley, 2001). Moreover, people associate creativity with a variety of other positive attributes, including superior intelligence, humor, and leadership ability (Sternberg, 1999). Such beliefs have helped spawn a virtual cottage industry of management books and business school courses that extol the virtues of creativity and provide suggestions for eliciting higher levels of creativity (e.g., Ray & Myers, 1986; Robinson & Stern, 1998; Sternberg & Lubart, 1995; Sutton, 2002).

One important approach to enhancing creativity in organizations is to better identify prospective employees with high creative potential. In some instances, judging others' creative potential is made easier by the existence of objective evidence regarding that potential. Thus, judgments about individuals' potential creativity can sometimes be rendered on the basis of tangible products they've produced, such as actual product designs, written reports, or innovative programs (Caves, 2000; Kelley, 2001). In other instances, individuals' creative potential may be inferred on the basis of available cues regarding their role, status, or reputation in an organization (Kasof, 1995b). Creative potential also can be assessed using standardized personality tests (Torrance, 1966). These studies suggest a

number of attributes associated with creative output by individuals, including divergent thinking ability, self-confidence, diverse expertise, and a problem-finding orientation.

There are many situations, however, in which judgments regarding others' creative potential must be made before any actual products are produced or before reliable reputational information is available to decision makers. In fact, in many industries and businesses—including product design, marketing, film production, and venture capital funding—assessing the creative potential of new ideas and their proponents is done initially and primarily on the basis of subjective assessments made during face-to-face interviews, or "pitches" (Hibbert, 2001; Stross, 2000). For example, researchers have found that outside experts who "pitch" ideas for new marketing campaigns or product designs may be evaluated primarily on the basis of judgments of their creative potential formed in pitch meetings (Caves, 2000; Collins & Porras, 1994; Kelley, 2001). Similarly, research suggests that interviews involving unestablished professionals (such as junior research faculty, new advertising designers, and young video game designers) often involve judgments of creative potential in the absence of creative evidence (Stevens & Kristoff, 1995).

Despite the regularity with which organizational decision makers judge others' creative potential using such subjective impressions, the underlying bases of these judgments have received no systematic attention from organizational researchers. It should be noted that we are not referring here to

objective assessments of individuals' actual creativity, but rather, to *subjective perceptions of individuals' creative potential*. In fact, no general theory or conceptual framework currently exists that explicates the judgmental processes expert organizational decision makers use when assessing others' creative potential in organizational contexts such as those described above (London, 2001). Further, very little agreement exists even among experts about the particular attributes or cues that judges should or do pay attention to when making such assessments. Relatedly, there exists little agreement on universally accepted or empirically established standards for evaluating creative potential (Katz & Giacommelli, 1982). Thus, researchers know virtually nothing about the particular individual attributes, interpersonal behaviors, and social cues that decision makers in organizations find salient and relevant when assessing others' creative potential, or about how they use such cues.

A primary aim of the present study, accordingly, was to investigate how expert decision makers judge the creative potential of other people in situations in which such assessments must be made on the basis of purely subjective evidence provided during interpersonal interactions. To do so, we selected perhaps one of the most interesting contexts in which such assessments are routinely made and are enormously consequential: Hollywood pitch meetings. To motivate our study further, we first review existing theory and research on the assessment of individual creativity, identifying important gaps in the literature that limit understanding of this important process. We then describe the rationale for the study and the setting.

EXISTING THEORY AND RESEARCH ON CREATIVITY ASSESSMENT

Extant research on the assessment of individuals' creative potential has tended to focus almost exclusively on personality attributes presumed to be correlated with the generation of creative products, such as dispositional correlates of creativity (Feist, 1998; Ford, 1996; Glynn, 1996; Kasof, 1995a; Sternberg, 1985, 1999). On the basis of this research, personality measures of creativity have been developed and incorporated into standardized tests designed to measure creative potential (Torrance, 1966). Although an important approach to assessing creative potential, testing suffers from two important limitations from the standpoint of the present study. First, standardized tests are, in fact, seldom employed in many of the situations where assessing creative potential is most important and consequential (for example, aspiring junior faculty,

Hollywood writers, and individuals seeking venture capital are never given personality tests to measure their creativity). Second, regardless of their internal or external validity, formal personality measures provide little insight into the actual judgmental processes that organizational decision makers use when assessing individuals' creativity during face-to-face encounters (although there is a substantial body of research on impression management and social judgment more generally; see London [2001], Tedeschi [1981], and Schlenker [1980] for reviews).

A more recent and fruitful approach, therefore, has been to use social judgment theory and research to understand the process of creativity assessment (Kasof, 1995a). Although sparse, this work does provide a couple of suggestive clues about the processes that influence creativity judgments. First, these studies show that, at least for lay social perceivers (people in day-to-day situations), assessments of others' creative potential are likely to be influenced by a variety of stereotypes based upon appearance and personality. Thus, when individuals attempt to assess another person's creative potential, they compare or match the person's perceived attributes (for instance, the level of passion or quirkiness they convey through their verbal and nonverbal behavior) with the features of their "implicit model" of creativity (Sternberg, 1990). Second, this research suggests that such implicit models of creativity are typically organized in terms of a small number of basic categories or *prototypes* of creative people (Runco & Bahleda, 1986). As a result, as Katz and Giacommelli argued, "a 'creative person' schema or stereotype, activated when a person comes close to fulfilling the prototype, may cause observers to engage in biased top-down information processing in which they see people as being creative according to how they act or present themselves" (1982: 20).

Although this previous research provides some insight into how experts in organizational settings might evaluate others' creative potential, it is limited in two important respects. First, prior research has not primarily involved professional decision makers, but laypersons, such as undergraduate students participating in a laboratory experiment in exchange for course credit. For example, Katz and Giacommelli (1982) developed their framework of creativity perceptions by asking undergraduates to evaluate a picture of an artist in a studio and then sort adjectives into piles that described that picture. Similarly, Sternberg (1985) asked undergraduates to rate the creativity of persons described in hypothetical letters of recommendation. Thus, it is far from clear how well, if at all, findings from these

laboratory studies using nonexperts generalize to organizational contexts involving expert judges who may use concrete information of their own choosing in face-to-face creativity assessments.

A second major limitation of this existing research is that its reliance on laboratory settings required participants to assess others' creativity on the basis of purely abstract, hypothetical information and, equally important, in the absence of any contextual information or cues that may arise from *interaction* between targets and assessors. For example, although Runco and Giacomelli (1982) did employ professional artists in their study of creativity assessments, they did so by asking these experts to sort a list of adjectives describing their perceptions of ideally creative problem solvers, rather than by having them evaluate creativity in an interactive problem-solving task. Thus, from the standpoint of their external validity, an important limitation of these studies is the failure to consider the possible influence of the dynamic context in which creativity assessments occur in real-world settings.

Recognizing such limitations, Csikszentmihalyi (1996, 1999) has argued that theory and research on creativity should adopt a more "systemic" view of the process of assessing creative individuals and their products. According to this perspective, any creative field (whether it be art, theoretical physics, or organizational science) is made up of a "network of interlocking roles" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999: 330). This network includes both those who create new ideas for a domain of knowledge and those who serve as gatekeepers to the domain. New ideas and those who advocate them will be judged as creative only if they "pass muster" with these designated experts or gatekeepers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996: 43).

One important implication of this systems view is that "creativity is located in neither the creator nor the creative product, but rather in the *interaction between the creator and the field's gatekeepers who selectively retain or reject original products*" (Kasof, 1995b: 366; emphasis added). Thus, an essential determinant of whether original ideas (and those who pitch them) are viewed as creative or not is whether gatekeepers perceive the ideas (and the individuals) as creative on the basis of the cues that these experts decide are important. Thus, "it may be useful to think of creativity as a form of persuasive communication, in which the creator is the source, the original product is the message, and the judge [gatekeeper] is the recipient" (Kasof, 1995b: 366).

To summarize, although it has been widely assumed that accurately assessing people's creative potential confers important organizational benefits, no research has systematically examined the specific judgmental processes organizational decision makers actually use when trying to assess such potential. Further, although there has been some research on creativity assessment in laboratory settings, the extent to which findings from these studies generalize to organizational assessments of creativity remain unclear. Together, these shortcomings in current theory and research underline the lack of a clear understanding of how expert decision makers assess others' creative potential in organizational settings.

The present study focuses on two important research questions in an attempt to fill these gaps in the literature. First, how do expert decision makers use perceived attributes and industry prototypes to assess the creative potential of others? In other words, *When assessing creative potential in real-world organizational settings, what cues and prototypes do experts actually attend to and use?* Second, how does the interpersonal (dynamic) nature of the assessment process—the interaction between experts and targets—affect creativity assessments? That is, *To what extent do experts who assess others' creativity use cues that arise from the dynamic context of their interaction with a target in judging that target's creative potential?*

A STUDY OF CREATIVITY ASSESSMENT IN HOLLYWOOD PITCH MEETINGS

Rationale and Setting

Because of the absence of any previous systematic research involving expert decision makers operating in real organizational settings, we regarded it as essential to adopt a qualitative and inductive approach to our inquiry. In particular, we would argue that previous, laboratory studies have been inadequate for examining two important features of judgmental processes that occur in real-world settings. First, interpersonal judgments of creativity typically involve dynamic processes that are strongly dependent on context (that is, they are subject to localized and situated norms and expectations about creativity). Second, these judgmental processes unfold over time and involve extensive interaction between two (or more) people. Traditional survey research designs and statistical analyses are static and therefore not readily suited to examining such dynamic and evolving phenomena. In contrast, qualitative research designs have been shown to be particularly well suited to analyzing dynamic, interactive processes (Lee, 1999). Following this logic, we chose the qualitative approach of "theory elaboration" (Lee, Mitchell, &

Sablynski, 1999). According to Lee and his colleagues, theory elaboration results in extensions to theory in cases where "preexisting conceptual ideas or a preliminary model [notions about the use of prototypes in creativity judgments, for example] drives the study's design" (1999: 164).

To inductively explore the research questions guiding our study, we decided to focus on an organizational context in which creativity assessments are routinely made and also one in which such decisions are enormously consequential: Hollywood pitch meetings. These are meetings in which screenwriters attempt to sell their ideas. For ease of exposition, we label the person pitching a project (typically a screenwriter) the "pitcher" and refer to the person listening to and deciding about the pitch (typically a producer or studio executive) as the "catcher."

In these meetings, pitchers not only try to persuade catchers that their ideas for a film screenplay or television pilot are fresh and unique; they also try to convince the catchers that they, the pitchers, are creative enough to reliably produce creative ideas for a weekly series or an evolving screenplay. These two objectives must be accomplished, moreover, in a very short time, as the average pitch lasts less than 20 minutes. For pitchers, the prize for being judged as creative in these meetings is often a lucrative and coveted development deal. For the catchers who listen to such pitches daily, assessments of pitchers' creative potential are no less consequential. Production companies and film studios are able to "greenlight" (approve for development) only a handful of the hundreds of projects pitched to them each year. Thus, the consequences of poor decisions are very high. Failing to identify someone as creative who goes on to success or acclaim elsewhere is a recurring fear for executives who listen to pitches. Accounts of catchers who "passed" on eventual mega-hits, such as *ET, Star Wars, Titanic, The Truman Show,* and *Seinfeld,* are legendary within the industry (Bach, 1985).

Despite the importance of the pitching process, very little is known about the judgmental criteria that decision makers actually use to assess creative potential in such contexts. Portrayals of pitching in such movies as *The Player, The Big Picture,* and *The Mistress* and on television (in the series *Seinfeld,* for instance) have promoted a highly stereotypical image of catchers as uncreative executives who are often swayed by flash (versus substance) in pitch meetings. For example, in a now-famous episode of *Seinfeld,* the characters of George Costanza and Jerry Seinfeld, both depicted as having no prior writing experience, are able to sell a TV pilot about "nothing" to NBC, merely because they appear unconventional and because a show about nothing had never been done before. The implication of this story is that catchers don't really understand what makes a television show work and depend as much on their judgments of pitchers as on their judgments of scripts in their decision making. For these reasons, the Hollywood pitch provides a rich organizational context in which to study how real-world decision makers assess the creative potential of others in high-stakes settings on the basis of subjective interpersonal impressions.

The film and television industries. We conducted this study in the television and feature film industries in Hollywood, California, from the fall of 1996 to the summer of 2001. The television industry primarily produces weekly series and full-length television movies for network and cable stations. The feature film industry produces full-length motion pictures that are shown at theaters or turned directly into videotapes.

The screenplay pitch. Most pitches take place in the office of a development executive working for a television network, production company, or film studio. In some cases, the executive will have read a synopsis, or "spec script," of the script for the proposed film prior to the pitch. In most instances, however, no spec script is available. Instead, the initial evaluation of pitchers and their ideas is based entirely on what happens during the pitch itself. The present study focused on these latter cases. In addition, the present study focused on pitches involving pitchers who were relatively unknown to the catchers evaluating them. We were interested in how such evaluators would assess a person's creativity during a brief, first-time encounter, with little or no prior knowledge about the person's creative output. To simplify our examination of this complex process, and because they are the most common form of pitch, our study focused on instances in which single pitchers interacted with single catchers.

Procedures

Informants. We interviewed 36 informants for this study. Informants were drawn from three groups of people who are most commonly cast as either pitchers and/or catchers: (1) screenwriters, (2) agents who represent writers, and (3) producers involved in project development. We interviewed 17 writers (7 from TV series, 7 from feature films, and 3 from TV movies), 13 producers (6 from TV series, 5 from feature films, 1 from documentary films, and 1 from TV movies), and six agents who represented both television and film writers. Al-

though we selected informants on the basis of personal contacts, they represented a wide range of expertise, training, and experience. The producers came from all three major television networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS), and several of the major motion picture studios (Warner Brothers, MGM, and Paramount). The agents came from large agencies (including William Morris, ICM, and UTA), as well as from smaller agencies, and they had all observed and been involved in hundreds of pitches. The writers had a broad range of specialties (movies, television, documentaries), training (they included film school graduates and waiters), and ages (from 20-something to 60-something). The primary characteristic the writers shared was relative obscurity: they were generally not known by reputation to the catchers. We interviewed all of the sampled writers, producers, and agents about their observations and experiences as both pitchers and catchers (when applicable). Although most of the writers had acted primarily as pitchers, most of the producers and agents had acted as both pitchers and catchers.

Interviews. We conducted open-ended interviews with all informants. In an initial set of 22 individual interviews with 12 of the writers, 9 of the producers, and 1 agent, we asked informants to describe the types of pitches in which they had been involved as pitchers or catchers. We then asked them to describe how a typical pitch unfolded. In many cases, their accounts involved reenacting parts of actual pitches for us. We next asked informants to describe a successful pitch and comment on what made it a success. We asked if there was anything about the way the pitch was presented and how writers presented themselves that affected the success of the pitch. We also asked informants for examples of unsuccessful pitches and explanations for their failure, and we asked how the image of creative potential projected by a writer influenced the outcome of a pitch. Additionally, we asked informants to describe how interactions between pitchers and catchers changed the course of pitches. We also asked them how they presented and/or assessed images of creative potential during a pitch and what cues they could recall that affected their assessments of pitchers' creativity. We asked informants to give us examples of pitches in which these images were important and of tactics they had used themselves or had observed others using to promote these images. We also asked informants if their assessments of images of creative potential varied over the course of pitches and what factors would lead to changes in these assessments. Finally, although we began our interviews asking about successful and unsuccessful

pitches (as a means to motivate pitchers' memories), we focused our later questions on the creativity of pitchers in general (regardless of their success or failure), to separate insights about individuals' creativity from thoughts about the success or failure of their pitches.

Drawing on findings emerging from our first round of interviews, we conducted a second set of interviews with the remaining 5 writers, 4 producers, and 5 agents. In addition to asking all of the questions above, we asked these informants to describe catcher-based cues (that is, what they noticed about themselves) and prototypes related to a catcher's relationship with a pitcher and to recall cues they had encountered that led them to believe that their (catchers') perceptions of their own creativity had changed. Most of the informants had mentioned the importance of such cues in the first set of interviews, but these cues had not been an explicit focus of questioning in those interviews (see the subsections on stages 3 and 4 under "Data Analysis," below).

Observation of pitches. Observation helped us to follow how specific pitches unfolded and how creativity was projected and assessed during a pitch. We observed 28 pitches for film or television projects. Seven were videotaped live pitches that were made at a major television production company and recorded by the head of program development. Five were live pitches we sat in on at two different independent production companies that produce major motion pictures for larger studios. We interviewed informants after each live pitch as to what they had liked or disliked, and what cues had signaled creativity. Each videotaped or live pitch included interaction between a writer and a studio executive. Finally, 16 of our 28 observations were recreated or reenacted pitches that informants performed for us during interviews. All of the reenactments were of specific, but typical, pitches, providing us with glimpses of fairly well-rehearsed pitcher-catcher interactions. Although these reenactments may not have been completely true to their originals (as a consequence of recollective bias), they nevertheless indicated pitchers' and catchers' *perceptions* of the pitch process—which was our central interest. Further, in the reenactments, unlike in the live pitches, we could stop informants "midpitch" and ask questions about the process. Most pitches lasted about 20 minutes. All were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Screenwriting classes. The first author attended three classes about pitching presented by three informants to their screenwriting students at two Southern California film schools. These classes each lasted approximately two hours and were

tape-recorded and transcribed. The instructors had all been both catchers and pitchers in real-world settings.

Archival data. We also extensively searched for firsthand accounts of pitches in books written by experts on both screenwriting and producing (e.g., Bach, 1985; Dunne, 1997; Linson, 1996; Long, 1997). Additionally, we studied the teaching materials that three informants used in their screenwriting classes.

Data Analysis

Both authors and a research assistant performed all data analysis. Our analysis followed an iterative process of moving back and forth between our emerging framework of creativity assessment, extant theory on creativity assessment and social judgment, and our growing body of data. This analysis fell into the four stages described below.

Stage 1. In early iterations, we looked at our text data (the interview transcripts from the first 22 interviews, the transcriptions of the 28 pitches, the transcriptions of the three pitching classes, and excerpts from the popular books and class materials on screenwriting and pitching) seeking variance in descriptions of what influenced perceptions of creativity in pitchers. In particular, we searched for general attributes of creative pitchers and cues that indicated the possession of these attributes. This analysis suggested that pitchers were evaluated not only for creativity, but also for lack of creativity, or what some called "uncreativity." Informants' comments defined *creativity* as the *potential to create original, unique, unexpected, and/or emotionally moving phenomena* and *uncreativity* as the lack of such potential.

We then performed a more detailed analysis of the text data, defining cues as strong or moderate indicators of creativity or uncreativity. We inferred strong evidence that an attribute was important to perceptions of creativity or uncreativity when it was mentioned consistently in most of our sources (that is, it was clearly described in the interviews, observations, and archival sources). For example, for the attribute "passionate," we found that many of the interviews, observations, text excerpts, and class transcripts specifically noted that observing a person as "passionate" about the project being pitched was important to assessments of creativity. We inferred moderate evidence that an attribute was important to perceptions of creativity or uncreativity when it was mentioned and described consistently in a single source (that is, it was clearly described in most of the interviews, or in most of the observations, or in most of the archival sources).

At least two of the three researchers analyzed all of the data and discussed interpretations of these data. Identification of attributes was based on discussion, with all discrepancies discussed until agreement was reached. This analysis revealed 15 different cues that catchers used to make judgments about pitchers' potential creativity and 4 cues used to judge potential uncreativity.

Stage 2. In the next stage of our analysis, we looked for descriptions of pitching prototypes. As noted in our introduction, previous research has shown that people use prototype identification and matching to form judgments of others. We believed such prototypes were likely to be based on the salient cues identified in stage 1 of our analysis. Accordingly, we returned to our text data to search for descriptions of prototypes and prototype matching that relied on the 19 cues identified above. In coding our data, we only looked for instances in which the pitcher was presumed to be the writer (or at least a writer) on the project being pitched. We noted strong and moderate evidence of a prototype in the same fashion as we noted strong and moderate evidence of creativity attributes in stage 1. This analysis revealed seven different pitcher prototypes that were widely perceived in Hollywood. We gave these prototypes names based on consistencies in informants' labels of pitching types; for example, the storyteller prototype came from descriptions like the following: "There's this one guy, he's kind of a storyteller" and "This guy is the type that weaves stories in his pitches."

The creative/uncreative potential level for each prototype was based primarily on comments from interviewees. High/moderate/low creativity prototypes were defined as those whose defining cues were, respectively, high/moderate/low in creativity. We found consistent reports throughout the interviews concerning cues indicating high, moderate, or low creativity.

Stage 3. In examining the data in our first two stages, we found that, rather than solely relying on prototypes and the cues of pitchers, catchers were paying attention to their own behavior and self-perceptions during pitches. Thus, many catchers had mentioned that, during pitches in which they rated the pitcher high in creativity, they found themselves becoming excited, passionate, or engaged in the pitch, or having a creative inspiration of their own. In contrast, during pitches in which they rated the pitcher high in uncreativity, they found themselves either "tuning out" or "lecturing" the pitcher, as if they were in a student-teacher relationship. This evidence led us to examine the data again and focus on the relationship between pitcher and catcher, as well as on the catchers'

self-perceptions, in our later analysis. Therefore, we coded the data a third time, looking for evidence that both cues about the pitcher-catcher relationship and cues about the pitcher alone were used in assessments of creativity. In our interview data alone, we found 33 instances in which informants stated that both categorization of a target (a pitcher) and categorization of self (a catcher), based on interaction or relationship with the target, influenced their judgments about a pitcher's creative potential. The interviews alone contained at least one remark about the use of both target-based (pitcher-based) and self-based (catcher-based) cues from 20 of the 22 initial informants.

Stage 4. In view of the emerging evidence that both relational and self-perceptual cues were important, we interviewed a second set of 14 informants to seek further evidence of these two processes (see "Informants" above for details). This set of informants included people from all three groups (agents, writers, and producers) and did not differ significantly from the first set in terms of their experience or status in the industry (that is, the writers were relatively unknown, the producers had experience as both pitchers and catchers, and the agents were experts in both pitching and catching). In particular, we asked respondents to recall any instances of relationship categorization cues to which they had paid attention (such as how they had categorized the interaction with a pitcher during a pitch). We asked them to recall instances, if any, in which "relationship categorizations" occurred and how these affected assessments of the pitchers' creativity. We then coded the data a final time to identify all relationship categorization cues that seemed to enhance catchers' judgments of pitchers' creativity and uncreativity. Specifically, we identified 67 instances of relationship categorization cues (at least 2 instances for each of the 14 informants) that appeared to influence creativity/uncreativity judgments. These cues appeared to define two primary relational prototypes (that is, prototypes of pitcher-catcher dyads).

Poststudy interviews with experts. To obtain further evidence of the validity of our inferences about the importance of both person categorization and relational categorization cues in the creativity assessment process, we selectively interviewed four additional industry experts who estimated that they had listened to hundreds of pitches during their careers. These experts included a former head of a major motion picture studio, a leading Hollywood agent, an Academy Award–winning writer-producer, an Emmy-winning television writer-producer, and a writer-director. We described our

dual-process model and asked them to comment on the model's overall explanatory adequacy.

FINDINGS: HOW EXPERTS JUDGE THE CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF OTHERS

Our analysis of creativity assessment in Hollywood pitch meetings suggests that judgments of creative potential involve two processes. In one process, catchers match pitchers, using behavioral and physical cues displayed by the latter, with a small set of relatively well-established prototypes that vary as to their attributions of creativity *and* uncreativity. In the other process, catchers use cues about their engagement with the pitchers to categorize the pitcher-catcher interaction in terms of two relational prototypes, which also vary in terms of creativity and uncreativity.

Our data suggest that both of these processes influenced catchers' judgments of pitchers' overall creative potential. Given that our assessment process was cognitive, however, we found it difficult, if not impossible, to state with any certainty that the two processes occurred either sequentially or concurrently. We do know that both processes start early and that some pitcher-based prototype cues are evaluated in the first few seconds of a pitch, but our data also suggest that the relationship cues are noticed early on as well, and that the assessment of the relationship and relational prototype matching may begin within the first seconds of an interaction, concurrently or sequentially.

Our interviews with four industry experts supported our general dual-process model, in that they all agreed that both cues about a pitcher and cues about the pitcher-catcher relationship were important. In a typical comment, one expert noted:

> [When I am listening to a pitch] I do pay a lot of attention to my own reactions as well as to what the pitcher seems to be actually saying or doing.

We describe these two creativity assessment processes in more detail next and summarize the evidence in support of them.

Process 1: Person Categorization and Prototype Matching

Our analysis revealed that in evaluating unknown writers' creative potential, catchers used a set of physical and behavioral cues to match each pitcher with one of seven well-known prototypes of screenwriters. Each of these prototypes reflected specific levels of creativity and uncreativity. Table 1 summarizes the cues and prototypes used to assess pitchers. Below, we elaborate the

TABLE 1
Process 1: Person Categorization

Prototype	Description and Cues[a]	Perceived Creative Potential[b]	Strength of Evidence[c]	Examples
Artist	Brilliant writer but poor pitcher and businessperson. Cues: Quirky (8), unconventional (8), unpredictable (4), passionate (10), extreme (5), obscure (5), unpolished/anxious (8)	High	Strong	Interview: "There's this one guy, a real artist. But he's one of those kinds of guys whose social graces are not so in tact, he's just like that. He's a bit of a nonconformist and certainly, and his hair might be wild, and things like that, at any given time. And when you talk to him, he's incredibly shy. He doesn't come across much—and, you know, there have been great writers who just would choke in social situations." Observation: "Look at you, . . . I mean look at you guys and look at all the other guys we bring in, I mean you guys are different, you're much edgier . . . much more artistic." Archival: "Well, you know, sometimes the more dull a writer is in a room, the better their writing is because they have an internal world that they, and that's what they sort of do, they put it to page and don't waste time figuring out how the presentation should be. It's just a different skill."
Storyteller	High-concept writer who is theatrical and dramatic. Cues: Used drama (5), writerly (5), witty (5), charismatic (10), natural (4), funny (5), obscure (5), passionate (9)	High	Moderate	Interview: "A good storyteller is a person with energy—a charismatic person, someone who really knows how to speak and is good on their feet, someone who's cordial, um, someone who's enthusiastic and passionate can make a regular story sound spectacular." Interview: "I need to make a judgment call on a writer, about his storytelling abilities, because I think if you can tell a story in the room, I think you have a little better chance of being able to tell a story on a page."
Showrunner	Creative leader who writes and manages TV series. Cues: Charismatic (8), witty (12), passionate (10), natural (5)	Moderate	Strong	Interview: "This is a business. And it's a volume business. And, unlike furniture, or maybe like designing furniture, you've gotta keep coming up with new models every year. Sometimes, the art and the passion get combined and you end up with a Seinfeld. Or you end up with the Emmy award or Oscar award kind of movies. But, what it often is, it's filler in between commercials. So, on the one hand, you want somebody who's terribly passionate about their work, but somebody who also has the flexibility to realize that this is a collaborative medium. So you really want a showrunner." Observation: "Have you got any evidence that you can run this show. Because beyond ideas, we like to have evidence that you can run a show." Archival: "If you're a showrunner . . . you're prepared, you have the answers to the questions . . . you know where you're going, you have some ideas about the kinds of people you see in the parts. You have an idea for the pilot episode, you have an idea for a couple of stories later on. . . ."

Prototype	Description and cues			Supporting quotes
Neophyte	Young writer, fresh ideas, little practical experience. Cues: Passionate (10), young (5), unpolished (7), extreme (4)	Moderate	Strong	*Archival:* "I used to write out my pitches. I'd say, 'I'm not very good at this sort of thing . . . so if you'll just go along with me.' I thought then I could evoke sympathy. It worked pretty well until I got so good I couldn't use that line anymore." *Observation:* "I'm not going to pitch you a formulaic show—mainly because I've never done one. But I think my inexperience here might be a blessing. I think this is really something that hasn't been done before. . . . But you can help me to work out the details." *Interview:* "So, no matter how knowledgeable you are, go in there being a little naive, even if it's just an act. And I think I did that and it actually was great. Because it kind of put us, it created a hierarchy in the relationship that the other person wanted to be in. They get something out of it just from being in the role of the teacher."
Journeyman	Low-concept writer good at execution and business. Cues: Writerly (4), used drama (4), natural (5), formulaic (10)	Moderate	Moderate	*Interview:* "A journeyman who's creative, can take what is a formulaic story, tell it uniquely in a room. Even if it's gonna end up as a formulaic movie, um, I don't feel it in the room. And you get that sense from somebody who, the way they spin characters, or spin scenes, that says OK, it's a formulaic movie. An example is *First Wives' Club*. It is a formulaic movie, but if you hear Robert Holling tell the story, you never feel that in a room. It's very formulaic, but it still works because, within that formula, he spun it so uniquely. Because I think formulas are part of this because they are successful." *Archival:* "In television you've got to understand the format of the sitcom. It's not enough to just have a good idea. In the first act you have to set up the conflict, and over the course of the act bring that conflict to a head. That's the act break, the commercial break which you use as a cliff hanger. Then you save the block comedy scene for the second act, which is the big payola, after which you wrap everything up. . . . A journeyman writer knows this."
Dealmaker	Seller of others' ideas, focus on commercial appeal. Cues: Charismatic (8), arrogant (5), business-focused (10)	Moderate	Moderate	*Interview:* "If they start talking about ratings, and the business aspect in that way, I think limited is best. And it also depends, though. I think you stay away as much as possible and you say I just wanna do this because I care about it. But if, early on, you have the executives excited about the idea, and they're already on board with it, then you have some leeway to, at the end of the conversation, at the end of the meeting, position yourself saying first and foremost, I wanna do this because I love it, but some business things I was thinking about are. . . ."
Nonwriter	No real writing talent, "pitches by the numbers." Cues: Slick (7), formulaic (10), jaded (12), desperate (10)	Low	Strong	*Interview:* "You know, you don't want to come off as a used car salesman, you don't want it to be a laundry list; you don't wanna do—well, I could do one of these, or if you don't like that, I got it in blue, or if you don't like that. . . ." *Archival:* "You must not memorize any of your 'pitch.' You want to appear spontaneous, bright and very well informed about your project. Don't memorize. You want to scream you're 'not a huckster.'" *Observation:* "[catcher [in lecturing tone] "Are you guys crew guys? OK, let's just do one of these ideas."]

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a Each cue is followed, in parentheses, by the number of informants who identified this prototype and mentioned it as an indicator of this prototype (maximum possible = 32).

b Prototypes are listed from high to low creative potential, but the order does not reflect a "strict" ordering of level of creativity (e.g., we do not have evidence that "showrunner" was more creative than "neophyte").

c Strong evidence that an attribute was important was inferred when it was described in all three sources of information (interview, observation, and archival). Moderate evidence was strongly indicated in a single source type.

evidence regarding these cue and prototype-matching processes.

Target-based cues facilitating creative prototype matching. Our findings reveal several pitcher-based cues, linked to our two more creative prototypes, that are consistent with people's implicit theories about creative individuals being quirky and interpersonally inept artists. Thus, pitchers who were categorized as matching the *artist* prototype (the most creative prototype) exhibited behaviors and appearances that were unconventional and unpolished. As one producer recalled:

> Sometimes the more dull a writer is in a room, the better you think their writing is because you assume they have an internal world they're in, and that's what they do. They put it down on paper and don't waste time figuring out how the presentation should be.

This finding suggests that having a perceived handicap (such as being unpolished) sometimes leads catchers to judge a pitcher as more creative than individuals who appear more conventional. This phenomenon might be termed the "Woody Allen effect" after the famously neurotic but talented writer, director, and actor. As Kasof noted:

> The deaf composer; the paralyzed cosmologist; the rags-to-riches entrepreneur; the 7-year old composer; the mentorless young clerk creating scientific breakthroughs in his spare time; the destitute, mentally ill, untrained painter rejected by his contemporaries. . . . Such creators are considered geniuses not only because of their creations but also because of their handicaps. (1995a: 317)

Interestingly, this finding also shows that, in making judgments of creativity, experts often rely on cues that indicate characteristics (for instance, lack of polish or anxiety) that are the *opposite* of those known to be correlated with *actual* creativity (good communication skills, self-confidence) and consistent with traits that may constrain creativity (anxiety, for instance; Ford, 1996).

In addition to cues that signal unconventionality or social handicaps, cues that were construed as proxies for writing skills were used by catchers to categorize writers in terms of the creative prototypes. Thus, an expert would view a cue such as speaking in a "writerly" manner by using devices like metaphor and poetry in describing a screenplay as evidence that a pitcher fit the *storyteller* prototype. Other cues indicating a storyteller were "making obscure references" in the pitch, such as describing the characters by their horoscope signs and setting a "dramatic scene" at the beginning of a pitch by describing the sights, sounds, and smells of a setting. As one agent noted:

> There's another guy, that I really admire his type of pitching. He's very animated and he's kind of a storyteller, even when he first meets you and is just telling you what the pitch is about, he gives you the opening scene, you know. Rather than say this could be a series about these two guys . . . he says, "All right, there's this man and this woman, and they're driving down the street, and all of the sudden they get hit from behind." And you're sitting back, wow, I can see that. You still don't have a clue what the story's going to be about, or what his concept is, but he's engaged you and he's given you a visual and it's very exciting. . . . That says, in my opinion, you're a good storyteller and that's what this business is about, it's storytelling.

If these storytelling skills were combined with some perceived charisma and professional demeanor, the pitcher might be categorized as representing the *showrunner* prototype. Being a showrunner was linked to the ability to work effectively with producers and other writers, an ability viewed as very important in Hollywood (especially in television, where weekly scripts must be developed, often by a team of writers, actors, and producers working together [Long, 1997]). As one executive noted in discussing the importance of being a showrunner:

> It's one thing to have good ideas, it's another thing to be able to tell them, and it's another thing to be able to run a show. And, for a variety of reasons, what networks want is show runners . . . someone who can write, and pitch, and manage the daily grind of running a television series.

As noted earlier, we found that lack of experience and sophistication along these lines was not always perceived as a serious handicap. If, for example, novice pitchers were viewed as passionate about their ideas and committed to their projects, they might be categorized as industry *neophytes*, and attributed with moderately high levels of creative potential. For neophytes, naiveté was often viewed as an asset as much as a handicap, because it was associated with freshness and originality. As one seasoned producer noted:

> A lot of people that create new shows are naive. It's that naive sort of approach that allows them to try these things.

Again, however, such lack of experience runs counter to what researchers have found to lead to actual creativity, such as extensive and diverse expertise (Ford, 1996).

The last two categorizations we observed in our data, which we labeled the *journeyman* and *dealmaker* prototypes, were associated with only moderate levels of creative potential. These categoriza-

tions appeared to follow from cues that a pitcher had a disproportionate focus on business and efficiency, rather than a focus on writing as a creative art form. Thus, a pitcher perceived as a journeyman was likely to be viewed as a seasoned writer who was good at turning out sound but formulaic scripts for established television series or movies of the week. For example, one pitcher was described as:

> An episodic writer . . . a guy who's been in the business 20 years, and the 30-year olds don't want to go to lunch with him because he's not fun, but they respect him and they feel like they owe it to him. And they don't necessarily want him around, but boy, in a pinch, it sure wouldn't hurt for this guy to knock out a script for you.

In contrast, pitchers categorized as matching the dealmaker prototype were perceived as "concept" people, as often peddling other writers' work or as collaborating with other writers. Dealmakers focused on commercial appeal, knew the industry lingo, and were often charismatic and self-assured in their presentation of story concepts. As one dealmaker noted,

> I would find a network and find out what their weak spot is. Let's say Tuesday, at 8:00, they were suffering. They were third. I'd go in and I'd say I know how to cure your Tuesday 8:00 problem. That's like me as a doctor saying, well, I can cure your arthritis. You wanna hear that. And then I tell them a story and how that's going to fix their problem.

Thus, dealmakers were perceived as highly experienced and competent professionals because they clearly possessed good schematic knowledge regarding the pitching process. However, they were generally attributed lower levels of creative potential because they were perceived as rather conventional writers who lacked the originality and flair of the prototypic artist.

Target-based cues facilitating uncreative prototype matching. In addition to attending closely to behavioral and physical cues indicating that a pitcher matched one of the above creative prototypes, we also found that catchers were alert to cues suggesting that pitchers lacked creative potential and could be matched to the one *uncreative* prototype we observed in our study: the *nonwriter* prototype. As noted above, we found evidence of only 4 widely agreed upon cues for categorization as a nonwriter (versus at least 15 for the more creative prototypes). These cues were displaying jaded attitudes or a lack of passion for one's ideas, appearing formulaic in one's pitching, seeming too slick, and appearing desperate.

Despite the small number of cues for uncreativity (or perhaps because the count was low), catchers

seemed to weight these cues very heavily in their assessments of pitchers' creative potential. Expert catchers typically wrote off pitchers as nonwriters if they displayed one or more of these uncreative cues during the early parts of a pitch. Further, it appears that pitchers could not recover from these early negative categorizations later in a pitch. For example, one catcher noted how being too slick was easily recognized in a pitch and was costly to the pitcher:

> It's really about first impressions, if they don't believe in their idea, if they're trying too hard, if it's super jaded—people who are really good at packaging but not necessarily coming up with the goods. I don't know, it just feels like they're not focusing on the right thing right from the start of the pitch, and then it's hard to get excited about the rest of the pitch.

In addition to being too slick, pitchers' uncreativity could be signaled by three other behaviors. First, another catcher recalled a pair of pitchers whom he categorized as nonwriters because they appeared too desperate to be real writers,:

> I mean, someone who works too hard and gets all dressed up—I don't like it. I feel like you're working too hard, you're too needy, you [don't] have confidence in yourself as a writer. . . . I mean there's a couple of female writers I've met that wear these sort of fancy hats when they pitch, and I know that you can't go home and dress like that when you're on the computer. That's not what real writers do.

Another producer talked about the impression made by individuals who "pitch by the numbers":

> You can tell it in the room if somebody's learned pitching by rote. It doesn't work. It's not organic. You can almost feel it and there's this . . . "Joe goes here, then he goes here, then he goes here," without peppering it with the right amount of creativity and the right amount of humor, or seriousness, or drama; because you are spinning a story by rote.

Finally, another producer noted that pitching a "laundry list of ideas" was a strong cue that the person was not a passionate artist. As he noted,

> You should never pitch more than one, maybe two projects at a time. Never, never, never. There's not a buyer in the world that you can convince that you have the same passion for five different projects. What you're selling is your passion. You're rarely selling the idea. You are selling you. You are selling your commitment, your point of view.

As these quotes suggest, when executives detected any of these uncreative cues, assessments of the pitcher's creative potential suffered. These findings suggest that identifying cues indicative of

the opposite of a desired trait (versus cues indicative of the desired trait) was easy because the former were better agreed-upon than the latter. Thus, when agreement about the trait in question (here, creativity) is not high, identifying the opposite trait (uncreativity) may be easier, and cues for the opposite trait may carry more weight in assessments. Interestingly, at least one of the uncreativity cues, pitching too many ideas, suggests qualities that are known to be aligned with actual creativity, such as diverse experience and achievement goals (Ford, 1996).

In sum, the above findings provide some insight into our first research question, which asks about the nature of the cues and prototypes that experts use when assessing others' creative potential. Specifically, our findings suggest that experts attend to a large number of cues that signal creativity and that help define a small number of creative prototypes. In addition, experts attend to fewer cues that signal lack of creativity (uncreativity), and define a single uncreative prototype. Although fewer in number, however, these uncreative cues and prototypes appear to carry more weight in assessments of creative potential because they are more salient and are better agreed upon by industry experts. Finally, at least some of the cues used to judge creativity and uncreativity are aligned with skills that are the opposite of those known to lead to actual creativity (Ford, 1996).

Process 2: Relationship Categorization and Prototype Matching

Although we found strong evidence that catchers' judgments of pitchers' creative potential were influenced by target-based cues, we also found provocative evidence that this person categorization and prototyping process told only part of the story. In particular, we found strong evidence that catchers' categorizations of their *relationships* with pitchers, based on cues from their *own behavior and self-perceptions,* also influenced their judgments about pitchers' creative potential. The importance of this process was affirmed by all four of our industry experts. As one remarked,

> I would have to say I pay a lot of attention to my own reactions when I listen to a pitch. In a really good pitch, you are swept along, and get caught up in it. I think the model is right on about that.

Similarly, another expert reported:

> The relational part [of the model] is key—really fundamental—because [in television] you are not just buying the idea, but the person who goes with it. So connecting with the person at that level is very

important. You have to have the sense you can work with this person creatively to develop the ideas because, even in the best pitch imaginable, the idea is never perfect. It's going to have to be developed a lot before it makes it to your television screen.

Thus, in relation to our second research question, which asks what role the interactive context plays in creativity assessments, our data strongly suggest that the interpersonal nature of the pitching process is an important factor in experts' assessments of a pitchers' creativity. In particular, our data suggest that when catchers perceived themselves as engaged in a pitch—for instance, that they noticed that they were excited about the pitch and found themselves contributing their own ideas—they felt more creative themselves. As a consequence, they were more likely to categorize their relationship with the pitcher as one of mutual creative collaboration. In contrast, if catchers reported being aware of their greater expertise and ability during a pitch, they were likely to categorize their relationship with the pitcher as one between a high-status expert and a low-status incompetent. We present the evidence indicative of this relationship categorization and prototyping-matching process in Table 2 and discuss it below.

Creative collaborators categorization and prototype matching. Our evidence suggests that cues that catchers were engaged in pitches led them to make more positive judgments regarding pitchers' creative potential. As the cues listed in Table 2 document, we found that this relationship categorization process was facilitated both by cognitive cues of engagement (like catchers' observing themselves contributing ideas) and by affective cues of engagement (such as catchers' finding themselves feeling excited or enthusiastic). In these pitches, catchers came to perceive themselves as creative artists who were involved in the mutual creation and refinement of the proposed products. They reasoned that, if the pitchers were able to inspire creativity in them, those pitchers must have creative potential themselves. One producer described this process:

> I remember one pitch where I ended up adoring the writer. I mean he went 30 minutes and I didn't want him to stop. You want more and, before you know it, you're like tapping him—well what do you think of that? What do you think of this? You're talking about 20 different things. There's a unique dynamic you're both involved in.

Similarly, another producer discussed the "magic" that happens when one becomes so fully engaged by a pitcher that the process resembles a mutual collaborative exchange:

TABLE 2
Process 2: Relationship Categorizations

Catcher-Pitcher Relationship Categorization	Definition and Cues[a]	Perceived Creative Potential	Strength of Evidence[b]	Examples
Creative collaborators	Interacting pair creating and refining original ideas distinct from those either member created alone. *Cues:* Enthusiasm (23), competing (10), "we" language (12), asking questions (18), "a-ha" experience (7), contributing ideas (20)	High	Strong	*Interview:* "I think it's very important to pay very close attention to whether or not they're listening. A lot of people, and I think this comes from communications skills, certain people perk up when they hear something they like and they give a tell as to whether or not—their eyes open up a little wide, or maybe they smile, or maybe they nod their head—there are a lot of different things that people do when they respond." *Interview:* "When people want to hear more, and they're asking questions, and they're really getting into it and smiling, enjoying the experience, that's a good sign. And it happens. Both ways happen. So, if I'm giving advice to a client to go and pitch something, you want to feed off of the response a little bit." *Archival:* "In that sense, the process of presentation is very important. It has to flow pleasantly. So, for me, in a good pitch, the best approach is sort of relational in that I have to feel good and feel as if I've 'won' something as well." *Observation:* [Catcher: "So we're with Johnny Wad, and he's our host, and we're having fun with this, and he's kind of irreverent? . . . And can we make the questions educational?] [Pitcher: Yeah, and they'll be the sort of things people should know anyway] . . . [Catcher: I love it]"
Expert-incompetent pair	Catcher is seasoned producer who knows more about screenwriting than the non-writer pitcher. *Cues:* Lecturing (10), tuning out (6), arguing (14), making bureaucratic requests (5)	Low	Strong	*Interview:* "When people are wandering, they're losing interest. When people are kind of trying to rush—oh, that's great—but they're really tuning out, they're losing interest. This happens in every business." *Archival:* "You can sink it by arguing with them. If that arguing is really not productive and about the story, but about some minor detail. It really kills the enthusiasm and they probably feel like they're not having fun anymore." *Observation:* [Catcher, in lecturing tone—"So what does this have to do with the world of television . . . 'cause that's our business."

[a] Each cue is followed, in parentheses, by the number of informants who mentioned it as an indicator of this prototype (maximum possible, 32).

[b] Strong evidence was inferred from description in all three information sources.

There's a weird energy that exists in a sitcom pitch. It's this weird exchange of who can be funny, way underneath it all it's a competition, and if you jump in and start this funny repartee that's really good.

Another well-known Hollywood producer, Art Linson, has perceptively observed the following:

The pitch has to be long enough to get the [catchers] to participate, to contribute to the idea. . . . They want to believe that they figured it out. It makes them feel creative. . . . They only buy into the game if they say it. (Linson, 1996: 44)

Finally, one Oscar-winning writer, director, and producer noted:

I think that magic is perhaps the most important part of the pitch. And in a sense . . . it's a seduction, a promise of what lies ahead. At a certain point the writer needs to pull back and let the producer project himself as the creator of the story. And let him project what he needs onto your idea that makes the story whole for him.

Art Linson, who has played both roles in the pitching game, summarized the collaborative process this way:

Whatever the execs add to your pitch should be greeted with a great deal of enthusiasm and—if you can muster it—awe, because once they start investing their own creative juices, you are getting closer to the money. (1996: 45)

In further support of the notion that a perception of high engagement plays an important role in influencing catchers' assessments of pitchers' creative potential, several experienced pitchers we interviewed indicated they explicitly recognized the importance of these relational dynamics. Accordingly, they would attempt to strategically tailor their own behavior during a pitch in the hope of activating such relational cues. As one writer noted,

You wanna get them in a mode of them asking you questions as quickly as possible. Because then you're controlling the meeting. Now you did the pitch, now they're asking the questions and you're filling in the gaps with more good stuff. . . . You want to stimulate them, you want to get their curiosity going. And then you want them to be a team player with you. Say I change a character to a Chinese lady. You know, I'm just swinging you around the room, but you'll say now that's creative. And you'll interpret that as creativity, and it could be very creative—and you'll say that's interesting the way you changed the face of the character. . . . That's what you want to happen.

Expert-incompetent pair categorization and prototype matching. As noted in Table 2, our data also indicate that, if catchers encountered cues sug-

gesting that they themselves were: (1) less engaged or involved in a pitch, (2) irritated or annoyed with a pitcher's inability to be responsive to their suggestions or ideas, and/or (3) feeling more expert or knowledgeable about the industry than the pitcher, they were likely to construe the relationship in terms of the expert-novice pair prototype, which was associated with low creative potential. Thus, just as we found that negative target-based cues (behavioral and physical cues from a pitcher) led to a categorization of the pitcher as uncreative, so also we found strong evidence that negative relationship cues resulted in lower creativity ratings. For example, recognizing that they perceived themselves as experts and professionals in relation to a pitcher, several catchers noted that they came to view the pitcher as an amateur writer who lacked the necessary creative potential and/or professional experience needed to carry through on execution of the idea being pitched. As one producer noted,

In an unsuccessful pitch, the person just doesn't yield or doesn't listen well. My time is valuable and if I start to tell someone my concerns and they aren't listening, I start to get tuned out to them and then my mind starts to drift. And when I realize I am not really listening to them anymore, and thinking about other projects, then I know they are in trouble. . . . I don't like to hurt people's feelings but I don't have a lot of time to waste *and I start thinking about other things.*

Further, because the catchers did not categorize such relationships as creative collaborations, they often ended up perceiving themselves as less creative than they did in those pitches that successfully invoked the creative collaborative prototype. These self-perceptions of creative inferiority and disengagement (resulting from an uncollaborative interaction) led catchers to make less positive evaluations of the pitchers' creative potential, because those pitchers were uninspiring. As one agent summarized,

You're a painter, OK? And I tell you, I want you to paint the house green and you know that green is not a pretty color, and you'd rather paint it yellow. You can say to me, you know, I think yellow would look better. But at the end of the day, I don't care, I want green. Now if you're gonna say I'm not painting it green—no discussion, then you shouldn't be painting my house. And at the end of the day if you're going to make me feel bad about my green, then I don't want you to paint my house either- . . . because you don't understand what I want and you're not going to do a good job.

Another important cue of disengagement was catchers' finding themselves making rather routine

requests of the pitchers as if merely acting in accord with politeness norms and "going through the motions" of the pitching process. For example, one writer told us how he could tell an executive to whom he had been pitching had written off the pitch and his creative skills when the catcher began to make what he called "bureaucratic requests" for changes in the screenplay instead of engaging in creative brainstorming during the pitch. As he put it,

> He just didn't get it. And so suddenly he starts saying, "we need this" and "we need that." You know, things like, we need an outline, etc. Doing all the things that an executive does to try and protect himself. At that point he was just trying to find things that he can use to quantify and justify his rejection of the script.

According to our model, such bureaucratic requests serve as cues to executives that they have expert status relative to pitchers and must advise, correct, or educate them. Significantly, they do not view themselves as engaged with the pitchers in relationships of creative collaboration.

Toward a Dual-Process Model of Creativity Assessment

Viewed in conjunction, the findings from this study suggest strongly that creativity assessments in organizational settings can be characterized in terms of a dual-process judgment model, as depicted in Figure 1. According to this model, judgments of creative potential entail two distinct categorization processes. In one categorization process, judges search for, and are attentive to, target-based cues indicative of creative potential or lack of creative potential in others. In other words, individuals are categorized on the basis of specific at-

FIGURE 1
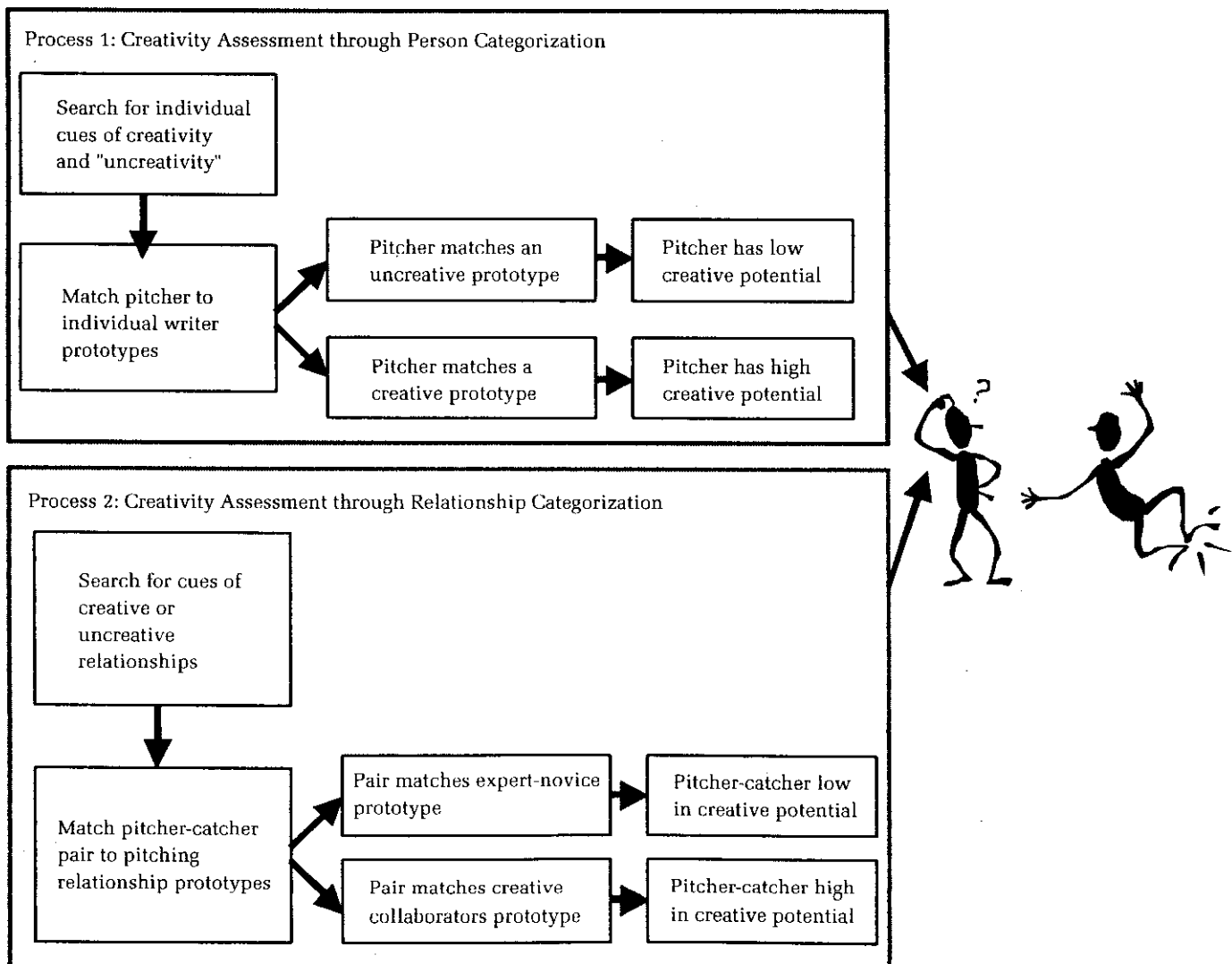
tributes they project during a face-to-face interaction. In the second categorization process, judges are attentive and responsive to self-perceptual cues during their interaction that tell them something about their role in their relationships with the targets. Thus, assessment of a target's creative potential is influenced by how engaged an evaluator is during the interaction. As the figure indicates, both categorization processes strongly influence the judge's assessment of the target's creativity.

DISCUSSION

The primary aim of the present study was to investigate how expert judges assess others' creative potential in organizational settings, especially in contexts in which preexisting objective evidence, such as work products, reputational information, or personality test results, are not available or appropriate. Evidence from this study of creativity assessment in Hollywood pitch meetings suggests that expert judgment regarding an individual's creative potential should be conceptualized as a complex process that involves at least two distinct but interrelated and co-occurring categorization processes. One of these categorization processes involves target-based cues. Our findings have convergent validity with and provide strong support for previous laboratory research suggesting that target-based cues play an important role in creativity assessments.

Importantly, however, our findings also strongly indicate that such target-based categorization processes, although perhaps necessary for creativity assessments, do not completely explain how experts make such judgments. In particular, they show that evaluator-based and interactive (relational) cues also influence creativity assessments. Our results thus identify a number of important contextual cues influencing creativity assessments that have not been observed in previous studies. Specifically, they demonstrate that dynamic, relational cues perceived as indicating collaborative potential also play a central role in this assessment process. In the following sections, we elaborate on some of the theoretical and practical contributions of this dual-process model of creativity assessment.

Theoretical Contributions and Implications

Using a theory elaboration approach proposed by Lee, Mitchell, and Sablynski (1999), we began our study with the assumption that expert judges rely on implicit models of creativity when attempting to assess others' creative potential, especially when more tangible information and/or objective indica-

tors of their creative potential are not readily available. This assumption was based on previous research suggesting that creativity assessments are influenced primarily by the extent to which individuals being judged display cues corresponding to judges' preexisting prototypes about creative and uncreative people. Our study supports the idea that prototype matching plays a central role in this assessment process and is one of the few studies to do so outside the laboratory. Our findings also extend previous research by identifying specific forms of creative cues and prototypes used in at least one organizational setting, Hollywood. Further, we would argue that the prototypes held by the experts we studied were considerably richer and more nuanced than those encountered in laboratory studies involving inexperienced undergraduates.

Our findings also extend prototype-matching theories by indicating that cues about uncreativity are particularly diagnostic of pitchers' creative potential (or, more accurately, their *lack* of creative potential). We found that displaying any of the attributes associated with the uncreative prototype—appearing too slick, mechanical, or rehearsed—had an immediate and lasting impact on experts' judgments of a pitcher's creative potential. Although other studies have also shown asymmetric effects of positive and negative information on social judgments (Snyder & Stukas, 1999), our study is the first to do so in the domain of creativity judgments.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, our findings suggest that creativity assessment by experts in organizations is a much more complex and dynamic process than those described in previous studies reported in the social judgment literature. Specifically, we found that expert judges' assessments of a target person's creative potential were shaped not only by the kinds of target-centered categorization processes identified in previous studies, but also by the use of internal, self-referential cues and, further, by how the judges categorized their relationships with the targets. We view this finding as consistent with and supportive of recent social psychological research on the positive effects of *relational* categorizations on social judgment and interaction (see Aron, Aron, Tudor, and Nelson [1991], Dovidio, Gaertner, Validzic, Matoka, Johnson, and Frazier [1999] for overviews of this empirical literature). These studies have shown that when individuals categorize themselves and others in terms of *differentiating* categories like social categories that highlight the salience of status or role distinctions, perceived social distance is increased, which in turn evokes less positive evaluations. In contrast, when individuals cat-

egorize themselves and others in terms of *inclusive* or shared social categories, perceived social distance is reduced and relationships are more likely to be construed positively. One implication of this research is that shifting levels of self- and other-categorization during a social evaluation process can have substantial judgmental consequences for those being evaluated. In particular, shifting from a differentiating categorization scheme that highlights the difference between self and other (such as "me expert, you incompetent") to a more inclusive scheme, or an "overlapping prototype" (cf. Aron et al., 1991: 251) such as "both creative collaborators" raises social judgments.

We should note also that our findings raise significant questions regarding the external validity of at least some of the conclusions that emerge from conventional laboratory investigations of social judgment processes. In particular, the interactive or dynamic features of the assessment process that were found to play such an important role in this study would more likely than not have escaped our notice had we adopted one of the more traditional, laboratory-based paradigms employed in past studies. In this way, we think our findings affirm the importance of using a qualitative approach for theory elaboration, much as Lee, Mitchell, and Sablynski (1999) proposed. Along these lines, Kasof (1995a: 169) noted that laboratory procedures have generally been designed to eliminate the "contaminating" and "messy" influences of contextual information. Thus, context is treated as something to be ignored or controlled rather than measured and explained. As a result of this methodological constraint, many important contextual and interactive cues may simply never be addressed, including those that judges actively use to shape an evaluation process. Judges, for instance, may try to elicit diagnostic cues through their probing and interrogation of targets. These issues may explain, at least in part, why a taxonomy of such cues and an articulation of the role they play in social judgment is absent in extant theories of the creativity assessment process.

Practical Contributions and Implications

The importance of being able to identify individuals with high creative potential is obvious. One significant practical implication of our findings and model is that they might help organizational decision makers make more accurate or discriminating assessments of others' creative potential when objective information is not readily available. In this regard, is important to note that some of the entertainment industry prototypes of high creativ-

ity (artists, neophytes) identified in our study appear to be based on some cues that run counter to traits that empirical research has associated with actual creativity (or its absence) in individuals (Ford, 1996). Consequently, by using these cues, industry experts may routinely make less accurate assessments of a person's actual creativity and hire uncreative individuals who fit the creative prototypes, while passing on truly creative individuals who don't fit well into these prototypes.

A second practical implication of our findings is that they may help individuals successfully project images of creativity to others. As our results suggest, individuals may be most effective in conveying images of creative potential if they tailor their behavior to fit or match the preexisting prototypic expectancies held by those who evaluate them. Thus, those individuals who have accurate and detailed knowledge regarding industry- or organization-specific prototypes will be in a better position to know which attributes to emphasize (or to downplay) in their impression management activities. In contrast, individuals whose knowledge about such prototypes is poor are likely to make costly mistakes when trying to convey impressions of their creative potential. Thus, unintended leakage of behavioral cues suggesting slickness, lack of passion, or being too rehearsed may result in lower assessments of creative potential. As Kasof noted, "Both in their occasional major blunders and in their more numerous and subtle behaviors, many creators inadvertently cause others to . . . attribute creative products less dispositionally than they would otherwise" (1995b: 347).

A second way in which our findings might help individuals convey impressions of creativity is through the use of relational cues aimed at influencing judges' self-perceptions and eliciting their active involvement. Thus, organizational actors who are consciously trying to convey impressions of their creative potential may reap considerable benefits if they can successfully activate judges' own desires for positive creative identity. In some respects, this strategy may be particularly effective in Hollywood, where those in positions of power (who are sometimes derisively characterized as "the suits") may be insecure or defensive about their creative status (cf. Bach, 1985; Dunne, 1997). These strategic implications did not escape the notice of many successful pitchers. As one savvy agent advised a writer about to make an important pitch, "You're never selling the pilot. You're never selling the idea. . . . You're selling yourselves. You're saying, 'Hey, we're players in the big game, get in business with us'" (Long, 1997: 64).

When viewed from this strategic perspective, of

course, there is a potential dark side to the creativity assessment process. Individuals who become adept at conveying impressions of creative potential, when in fact lacking creative potential, may gain entry into and reach prominence in organizations via their social influence and impression management skills, rather than via actual creativity. Their success may lead to poor organizational outcomes. In our interviews with studio executives and agents, we heard numerous tales of individuals who had developed reputations as great pitchers, but who had trouble actually producing usable scripts.

Study Limitations

As noted earlier, pitching is used in many kinds of organizations to make new project and resource allocation decisions, including decisions about approval and funding of projects, hiring, and venture capital funding, to name just a few. Although we have emphasized how our findings might be generalized to these other settings, we should note several possible limitations to our study. One prominent feature of the film and television industries is the close professional connections and social ties that exist among producers, agents, and writers. Hollywood is a "small town" where everyone seemingly knows everyone, and today's waiter may be tomorrow's William Goldman or Joe Eszterhas. Word of mouth—and cell phone—keeps industry insiders closely informed about "hot" pitches and pitchers. Writers, producers, agents, and studio executives make it a point to stay abreast of current trends and to remain attuned to the latest "buzz" regarding marketable players, projects, and shifts in public tastes. In such a small world, it is not surprising that considerable knowledge of, and consensus regarding, the prototypes of creative and uncreative writers exists. In less closely knit organizational communities (such as manufacturing industries), however, such prototypes may not be as widely known or agreed upon.

A second feature of the industry studied here is the relatively small number of projects that can be funded, and the large costs associated with project development. Because of these factors, experts in this industry tend to be very careful about which writers and projects they select. Accordingly, it is not surprising that cues pertaining to uncreativity should be weighted so heavily in initial decision making. In some respects, given the steep opportunity costs, it is better to be safe than sorry and to choose writers and projects about which one can feel considerable passion and commitment. Thus, it is not surprising that relational cues should be so

heavily weighted as well. As one producer we interviewed stated, "You better be careful what you go for [approve for development]—you are going to live with this person and this project for several years of your life. It takes years to bring a film to the screen and there is going to be a lot of agony and angst in the process." Future studies of the pitching process, including cross-organizational, comparative investigations, would be helpful in identifying universal dimensions of the process of creativity assessment.

Concluding Remark

In his 1983 memoir about Hollywood, the legendary screenwriter William Goldman asserted that, when it came to picking hit ideas for movies, "Nobody knows nothing." The results of the present study suggest, to the contrary, that experts have well-developed perceptions about the prototypes of writers they believe are likely to produce creative ideas, as well as the kinds of cues that signal those prototypes. Being savvy to such judgmental processes, therefore, may make the difference between a mere pitch, and a hit.

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