



**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands

Understanding enthusiasm: structure, function, and social regulation

Vogelaar, M.

Citation

Vogelaar, M. (2026, May 27). *Understanding enthusiasm: structure, function, and social regulation*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4304380>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter 5

Discussion

The present dissertation set out to advance the scientific understanding of enthusiasm by examining its structure, functions, and social regulation. As documented in the historical and philosophical overview that I provided in the introductory chapter, enthusiasm has long occupied an ambiguous position. It was celebrated as a divine spark in ancient Greek thought, feared as a source of religious excess during the Enlightenment, and revalued in Romanticism as a creative force. In modern contexts, it is sometimes framed as a driver of motivation in professional and educational domains, yet it is also regarded with suspicion when displayed in inauthentic, exaggerated, or manipulated forms.

My own professional experience in applied research, combined with growing empirical evidence, suggests that enthusiasm plays a meaningful role across domains and warrants closer scientific examination. In education, teachers' enthusiasm enhances student enjoyment and learning outcomes; in organizational settings, leaders' enthusiastic displays increase follower motivation and team performance; in consumer research enthusiasm predicts brand engagement and loyalty; while in politics it drives voter mobilization and sustains civic participation.

While these insights assign a prominent role to enthusiasm, systematic research on enthusiasm remains relatively limited. Compared with the extensive work on negative emotions and on more commonly studied positive states, enthusiasm has received far less empirical attention. The studies that have been conducted are dispersed across different disciplines and employ varied approaches, making it difficult to integrate their insights into a coherent understanding. This fragmentation highlights the need for developing a clearer and more integrative account of enthusiasm as a psychological construct, which this dissertation has sought to provide. To address this lacuna, the empirical chapters presented in this dissertation examined enthusiasm from three complementary angles: its internal structure as revealed through prototype analyses, its appraisal patterns and response types in comparison with related positive emotions, and its experience and perceived appropriateness across contexts and cultures. The remainder of this chapter integrates these findings and reflects on their broader implications.

Summary of the findings

Chapter 2: What is the structure of enthusiasm?

The first empirical contribution of this dissertation was a set of five studies that employed prototype methodology to examine the internal structure of enthusiasm. Prototype analysis offers a way to uncover how laypeople conceptualize a psychological construct, identifying the most central features that define it and distinguishing these from more peripheral or idiosyncratic associations. Applying this approach to enthusiasm was intended to determine whether it is cognitively represented as a coherent emotion concept, and if so, what its defining characteristics are.

Study 1.1 provided the building blocks by asking participants to freely generate features of enthusiasm. The generated features covered a wide spectrum, ranging from affective states such as joy and good feeling to motivational elements like drive and eagerness, to expressive behaviors such as smiling, laughing, and talking loudly, and finally to interpersonal aspects such as inspiring others and spreading positivity. These responses were compiled into 28 feature categories. Study 1.2 examined which of the features identified in Study 1.1 were considered most central to the concept of enthusiasm. Participants rated features such as joy, motivation, and eagerness as most typical, indicating that positive valence, high arousal, and goal orientation are core components of enthusiasm. Interpersonal features such as laughing, being sociable, and sharing were also rated as central, indicating that enthusiasm is not merely a private feeling but also an outward-facing, socially oriented state. By contrast, features such as impatience, restlessness, and naivety were rated as peripheral, indicating that while some people associate them with enthusiasm, they are not seen as defining. Together, these results established the central-peripheral distinction, with 14 central and 14 peripheral features.

Study 2.1 confirmed that central features of enthusiasm are cognitively more accessible than peripheral ones. Participants read sentences linking enthusiasm to either central or peripheral features, completed a filler task, and were then tested on both free recall and recognition. Central features were more often falsely recalled than peripheral features, while no significant difference emerged in correct free recall. Signal detection

analyses further indicated that participants were more biased toward recognizing central features. Study 2.2 showed that participants were quicker and more consistent in identifying central features as characteristic of enthusiasm. Although peripheral features were also recognized as related, they were less consistently and more slowly classified. Study 2.3 showed that the prototype structure is also reflected in people's real-life experiences. Participants recalled either an enthusiastic episode or a neutral everyday situation and subsequently rated the presence of central and peripheral features in that situation. Both types of features were reported as more present in enthusiastic than in neutral episodes, and central features were consistently rated as more present than peripheral ones. However, the interaction between condition and feature type was not significant, suggesting that the relative salience of central features holds across contexts. A possible explanation is that when people are asked to recall an ordinary weekday, they may nonetheless be inclined to recall a moment that involved enthusiasm, thereby reducing the contrast between conditions.

Together, the five studies establish that enthusiasm is cognitively represented as a structured prototype characterized by four core elements: positive valence, high arousal, goal conduciveness, and interpersonal orientation. The convergence across independent samples (panel members, students), multiple methods (generation, ratings, recall, recognition, reaction time, autobiographical recall), and substantial participant numbers provides strong evidence for the robustness of this structure. Importantly, the inclusion of interpersonal features among the central elements marks a novel contribution, suggesting that enthusiasm is not only an intrapersonal state but also fundamentally social.

Chapter 3: What is the profile and distinctiveness of enthusiasm?

The second empirical chapter of this dissertation explored the unique characteristics of enthusiasm by examining its cognitive appraisals and response tendencies. It also compared enthusiasm with two closely related positive emotions: joy and hope. Although these emotions are partially overlapping in their experiential and motivational features, little is known about how enthusiasm differs from them in terms of how it is appraised and what kinds of responses it elicits.

Study 1 focused on the cognitive appraisal structure of enthusiasm in comparison to joy and hope. Using an autobiographical task, participants recalled and described an event in which they had felt enthusiasm (or joy or hope). The findings revealed that enthusiasm typically arises in pleasurable, intense situations that are closely linked to desirable goals. Participants also reported feeling connected to something personally meaningful and experienced a strong urge to share their enthusiasm with others. Situations in which enthusiasm was felt were generally perceived as socially safe and appropriate for emotional expression. They appraised the environment as supportive and saw their display of enthusiasm as aligning with prevailing social norms. These findings suggest that enthusiasm not only prepares individuals for goal-directed action, but also exhibits a strong interpersonal dimension rooted in social sharing and norm sensitivity. Compared to joy, enthusiasm was less about enjoying the fulfillment of a goal and more about the energizing prospect of achieving it. Compared to hope, enthusiasm was associated with greater certainty, stronger perceived control, and more immediate relevance, suggesting that it is experienced when outcomes are not only desired but also within reach, expected, and actionable.

Study 2 examined, again with an autobiographical task, the response tendencies associated with enthusiasm (or joy and hope) and found that it evokes a highly active and outward-directed motivational profile. Participants described enthusiasm as an energetic state marked by smiling, presence, and thoughts of positive outcomes. This fits with the notion that enthusiasm prepares individuals for confident engagement and immediate action. In contrast, joy was more often linked to savoring, connection, and emotional fulfillment following goal achievement. Hope, on the other hand, prompted more passive or reflective responses, such as waiting or internal coping in the face of uncertain outcomes. Enthusiasm thus stands out as the most action-oriented of the three emotions, propelling people to act when success appears both desirable and attainable.

Together, these findings indicate that enthusiasm is a distinct positive emotion characterized by a combination of high intensity, goal orientation, and social expressiveness. It typically arises in situations that are perceived as both meaningful and attainable, marked by a sense of control, low uncertainty, and energizing anticipation. Enthusiasm involves a readiness to act, frequent smiling, and a desire to share one's

feelings, especially when the social environment is perceived as safe and supportive. Unlike joy, which tends to follow goal attainment, or hope, which emerges under uncertainty and distance, enthusiasm is experienced when goals are within reach and action feels both appropriate and rewarding. This unique configuration of appraisals and response tendencies supports the classification of enthusiasm as a separate emotional state within the broader spectrum of positive affect.

Chapter 4: Social norms and the experience of enthusiasm

This chapter examines how the perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm relates to the subjective experience of the emotion across different social contexts and cultures. Drawing on a large-scale cross-cultural survey ($N = 12,851$) conducted in 51 societies across the globe, the study tested the idea that enthusiasm, as a socially expressive and high-arousal emotion, is regulated by social norms and context-specific expectations.

Respondents completed two sets of ratings across three social contexts: private life, work settings, and public spaces. First, they indicated how often they experienced enthusiasm in each of these contexts. Second, they rated how appropriate they considered it to openly express enthusiasm in each of the same contexts. Results showed that experienced enthusiasm was highest in private settings, followed by work and public contexts. This supported the hypothesis that enthusiasm is more likely to be experienced in situations characterized by familiarity and psychological safety. However, contrary to expectations, perceived appropriateness was rated highest in work settings, rather than in private ones. This suggests that enthusiasm may be perceived as more socially expected in work settings.

Across all three contexts, perceived appropriateness was positively associated with experienced enthusiasm. However, the strength of this relationship differed by context: it was weakest in private settings, stronger in work contexts, and strongest in public settings. These differences suggest that in public life, where emotional displays are more socially scrutinized, individuals are more likely to feel enthusiastic when they believe it is appropriate. In contrast, enthusiasm in private settings appears to be less contingent on social norms. This pattern suggests that people in private contexts rely less on social norms

and more on their own feelings, as these familiar environments provide psychological safety and allow emotions to arise naturally. In public settings, however, enthusiasm depends more on how acceptable it is to show such emotions in front of others. Work settings showed yet another pattern. Although enthusiasm was considered most appropriate at work, people reported feeling less enthusiastic there than in private life. This may indicate that enthusiasm at work often reflects social expectations rather than genuine emotion. In some workplaces, enthusiasm is viewed as a professional requirement, and when employees feel obliged to display it without truly experiencing it, this can lead to emotional strain and reduced well-being.

The study also examined cultural differences using society-level indicators of individualism–collectivism and power distance. Perceived appropriateness did not vary systematically with these cultural dimensions. However, experienced enthusiasm was positively associated with collectivism in private and work settings and positively associated with power distance in all three contexts. This indicates that people in collectivistic and high power-distance societies tend to report more enthusiasm, possibly due to different emotion regulation norms or varying social expectations surrounding emotional engagement.

Taken together, these findings suggest that enthusiasm is not merely a private emotional state but is also regulated by perceptions of what is socially acceptable. Both the frequency with which enthusiasm is experienced and the extent to which it is considered appropriate to express vary systematically across settings and cultures.

Conceptual and practical reflections

The three empirical chapters of this dissertation examined enthusiasm from complementary perspectives. The prototype analysis in Chapter 2 revealed that enthusiasm is cognitively represented as a multidimensional construct, defined by positive valence, high arousal, goal conduciveness, and interpersonal orientation. Chapter 3 established that enthusiasm constitutes a distinct emotional state within the broader family of positive emotions, based on a unique profile of cognitive appraisals and response tendencies

that differentiate it from joy and hope. Chapter 4 demonstrated that the experience of enthusiasm is shaped by perceived appropriateness, which varies systematically across private, work, and public settings, and interacts with broader cultural value patterns. Together, these findings offer a coherent picture of enthusiasm as a psychological construct.

Having clarified the structural features of enthusiasm, its appraisal and response profile, and its sensitivity to social norms, the remainder of this chapter turns to a broader conceptual and practical reflection. First, a working definition of enthusiasm is proposed that synthesizes findings from the three empirical chapters. Second, the theoretical position of enthusiasm is examined by situating it within contemporary emotion theory. Third, the potential evolutionary origins and adaptive functions of enthusiasm are discussed to understand its role within a functional emotion framework. Fourth, the socially embedded nature of enthusiasm is explored, including its regulation by context-dependent norms and the moral question of whether enthusiasm should be considered inherently good or potentially problematic. Finally, the practical implications of these insights are discussed for personal development, education, leadership, organizational behavior, consumer engagement, and political participation.

Towards a working definition of enthusiasm

Although various definitions of enthusiasm exist in psychological and applied literature, as discussed in Chapter 2, they tend to emphasize its high arousal and affective tone, and sometimes its motivational potential. However, they rarely articulate its goal-related function in a consistent way, and they generally neglect its social dimension. As such, these definitions fall short of capturing the multidimensional nature of enthusiasm. Drawing on the converging results from the prototype analysis, comparative emotion studies, and contextual regulation research presented in this dissertation, I propose the following integrative definition of enthusiasm. The core definition is followed by a brief elaboration of typical situational characteristics:

Enthusiasm is a positive, energetic emotion that arises when a desirable outcome is perceived as attainable. It typically involves active engagement and outward expression, particularly in social contexts that feel safe and supportive.

This definition brings together the structural, motivational, and social dimensions of enthusiasm into a single, integrative framework. As such, it highlights the distinctiveness of enthusiasm within the broader landscape of positive emotions. As empirically demonstrated in Chapter 3, enthusiasm can be differentiated from related affective states such as joy and hope by its unique pattern of appraisals and response tendencies.

Enthusiasm in contemporary emotion theory

The definition described in the section above also provides a theoretical foundation for situating enthusiasm within contemporary emotion theory and examining how it relates to existing frameworks. In this following section, I explore how enthusiasm aligns with, extends, or diverges from prevailing models of emotion. In Scherer's (2005) componential interpretation of the circumplex model, enthusiasm is positioned as a positive, high-arousal emotion characterized by high goal conduciveness and strong coping potential, or perceived control. These dimensions are broadly consistent with the present findings, which emphasize positive valence, high energy, and goal orientation as central features. Whereas the prototype analysis did not provide direct evidence for the control dimension, the appraisal study reported in Chapter 3 did: participants typically described enthusiastic episodes as situations in which they felt in control of what was happening. Thus, across studies, enthusiasm appears not only goal-conducive but also linked to a sense of agency and efficacy.

Similarly, scholars working from an evolutionary perspective, such as Shiota et al. (2014), describe enthusiasm as an anticipatory state that motivates appetitive behavior directed toward rewarding outcomes. This view is consistent with the present definition, which emphasizes enthusiasm's anticipatory and action-oriented qualities, yet the inclusion of interpersonal orientation extends its functional interpretation beyond individual goal pursuit to encompass social coordination and shared engagement.

In contrast to its alignment with the circumplex model and evolutionary perspectives, the present findings indicate that enthusiasm does not fully conform to the assumptions of the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001, 2013). According to this framework, positive emotions typically broaden an individual's thought–action repertoire and promote cognitive flexibility. Enthusiasm, however, appears to operate differently. Consistent with prior research (Domachowska et al., 2016; Gable & Harmon-Jones, 2008) it is characterized by high motivational intensity and a narrowed attentional focus directed toward goal-relevant cues. Rather than broadening attention, enthusiasm sharpens it, channeling energy and cognition toward meaningful action.

The function of enthusiasm

From a functional perspective, emotions are mechanisms that help organisms respond to environmental challenges and opportunities (Darwin, 1872; Frijda, 1988; Scherer, 2009). Evolutionary psychologists have described enthusiasm as a motivational amplifier that evolved to support survival-related functions such as resource acquisition (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Shiota et al., 2014). One of the most basic triggers of enthusiasm may be the anticipation of food. Humans share this excitement with many other species, suggesting that the underlying motivational system evolved hundreds of millions of years ago. The functional value of this response seems straightforward. For example, when a monkey sees bananas, it may start jumping and screeching before climbing the tree to retrieve them. From an evolutionary standpoint, enthusiasm is the emotion that activates the monkey to act and obtain the food. If the bananas merely evoked joy, the animal might simply lie in the grass and admire the fruit without acting. In such a situation, an emotion that motivates action seems useful. Furthermore, the jumping and screeching likely serve an additional social function, signaling to others in the group that food has been found and prompts collective effort to transport the bananas. This suggested elementary function of enthusiasm may also present in humans. Children often display intense enthusiasm at the prospect of receiving an ice cream, and adults too continue to experience enthusiasm related to food. In modern life, this is also reflected in consumer enthusiasm, for example among food or wine enthusiasts who engage with their passion in exploratory and knowledgeable ways (Johnson & Bastian, 2015; Moreo et al., 2022).

Although enthusiasm might share its roots with other species, it could also take on a uniquely human form. A defining feature of human cognition is the capacity for abstract thought and mental time travel. This cognitive flexibility enables people to experience enthusiasm for creative ideas, sudden insights, and imagined futures, even in the absence of immediate external stimuli. Enthusiasm thus could play a role not only in the pursuit of biologically essential outcomes but also in energizing action toward self-determined aims such as creative expression, intellectual discovery, ideological commitment, and adventurous experience. For example, the anticipation of riding a roller coaster has no immediate adaptive or survival value, yet it can elicit strong feelings of enthusiasm (Milona et al., 2024).

Beyond such externally triggered excitement, many people may also recognize that enthusiasm can emerge from within. Internally generated enthusiasm may arise when reflection, memory, and imagination converge into an emotionally charged sense of direction or insight. Such moments can evoke a sudden urge to act or share, as when Archimedes, whose story opened the introduction of this dissertation, ran into the streets exclaiming Eureka upon realizing a principle he could not keep to himself. In humans, the object of enthusiasm does not need to be immediately present, like a piece of desirable food. It can also exist in the mind's eye as a possibility or imagined scenario. When people become enthusiastic about a future prospect, this emotion may motivate them to act in the present, engaging in behaviors or planning activities that increase the likelihood of realizing that prospect. Likewise, recalling moments of past enthusiasm can reactivate similar feelings, and re-experiencing enthusiasm may encourage individuals to seek out comparable experiences again. Thus, beyond being pleasurable, reliving past enthusiasm may also serve a functional purpose.

While enthusiasm may support individual goal pursuit, it can also serve as a social catalyst, energizing collective endeavors and reinforcing shared bonds. Possible evolutionary roots of enthusiasm can help explain why it so readily takes on social forms in human life. Expressive displays of enthusiasm, such as animated gestures, elevated tone of voice, and shared excitement, may originally have served to capture attention and align group action (Miller, 2000). In modern society, such signaling patterns may still be visible when teammates cheer each other on, when concert audiences move in unison, or when

football supporters erupt in collective joy. In fact, in our autobiographical recall experiments such events were often described as typical situations in which participants experienced enthusiasm. In each of these settings, enthusiasm continues to synchronize perception, emotion, and movement, linking individuals within a shared field of engagement. What once enabled cooperation for survival might now connect people through collective meaning and communal experience. Understanding this possible continuity between biological and social functions provides a foundation for examining how enthusiasm operates in modern collective life, as explored in the following section.

The social dimension of enthusiasm

One of the earliest explorations of enthusiasm already emphasized its inherently social nature. In Plato's dialogue *Ion*, Socrates compares the enthusiastic performer of poetry to a magnetic chain: the divine inspiration (the Muse) enters the poet, who then transmits this energy to others (Verhoeven, 1972). In this view, enthusiasm was not merely a private experience but a communicative force, intended to pass on meaning and emotion from one person to another. Well over two millennia later, Durkheim (1912/2015) provided a sociological description of a similar phenomenon in his concept of collective effervescence, which describes how emotionally charged group experiences (what we might today call shared enthusiasm) promote social unity and strengthen group bonds. Such collective expressions likely played a critical role in early human societies by reinforcing cooperation, shared identity, and cultural cohesion. Although these early accounts of enthusiasm, both philosophical and sociological, recognized its social dimension, more recent definitions and scientific descriptions have largely overlooked this aspect. In contemporary psychological research, enthusiasm is typically conceptualized as an individual emotion characterized by high arousal and positive valence, focusing primarily on personal motivation and affective experience.

The empirical chapters in this dissertation have demonstrated that the social element is a fundamental component of enthusiasm. Across studies, enthusiasm consistently emerged as an emotion characterized by an interpersonal orientation. In the prototype analysis presented in Chapter 2, features such as "bursting with" or the urge to express and share were identified as central to the concept. When people feel enthusiastic,

they want to talk about their experience and share it with others. The same analysis also revealed that honesty and kindness were among the most typical features, further underscoring the inherently social nature of enthusiasm. This interpersonal dimension was corroborated in Chapter 3, where the emotional profile of enthusiasm included a strong urge to share one's feelings with someone.

Enthusiasm is not only experienced within a social context but also shaped by it. In the prototype analysis, several central features reflected this contextual dimension. For example, good atmosphere appeared as an exemplar of the core feature Good Feeling, and the element Free (Uninhibited) also emerged as central. Evidence for the influence of social context was also found in the appraisal study, where participants indicated that they perceived the situation that sparked enthusiasm as a safe environment in which they could express their feelings. This pattern was further supported in Chapter 4, which showed that social context significantly shapes both the experience and the expression of enthusiasm.

These findings hold significant theoretical implications. If enthusiasm is both intrinsically social and interpersonally contagious, it may play a central role in explaining how collective motivation and coordinated action emerge. This perspective suggests that enthusiasm can serve as a driving force behind social movements and collaboration, transforming individual intentions into collective momentum. Despite its potential importance, enthusiasm as a catalyst of collective behavior has received relatively little attention in mainstream emotion theory. Recognizing the collective power of enthusiasm provides new opportunities for understanding the affective foundations of teamwork and organizational engagement, as well as the dynamics of political mobilization, mass gatherings, and social change. At the same time, this social and mobilizing power raises a critical question. If enthusiasm can unite and energize groups, does it always do so in a positive or constructive way?

Is enthusiasm good or bad?

Although enthusiasm is typically experienced as a positive emotion by the individual, this does not necessarily imply that the object or goal toward which it is directed is morally good. Enthusiasm, while affectively positive, is not inherently virtuous. Its moral value depends on the aims it serves and the social contexts in which it is

expressed. Enthusiasm can inspire cooperation, creativity, and social progress, but it can also legitimize conformity, fanaticism, or violence when aligned with harmful ideologies. Historical examples illustrate how enthusiasm can be harnessed for destructive purposes. The Nazi regime, for instance, systematically appropriated the symbols and rhetoric of collective enthusiasm, turning it into a political tool for mass mobilization and control (Bösel, 2008; Kershaw, 2001).

Aristotle's concept of *ethos* provides an early framework for understanding this moral complexity. He argued that emotional expression acquires moral and persuasive legitimacy only when it is grounded in ethical character and directed toward virtuous ends. In his broader framework of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, moral action emerges when emotion is moderated by reason and guided by concern for the common good. Applied to enthusiasm, this suggests that its moral value lies not in its intensity but in its alignment with wisdom and integrity. When guided by *ethos*, enthusiasm becomes a constructive force that inspires noble action. When detached from such ethical grounding, however, it risks devolving into mere passion or collective fervor devoid of moral direction. People, of course, differ in their understanding of what is moral or not. In a world increasingly polarized by political and ideological divisions, enthusiasm is often found on both sides of a debate. This is not so different to earlier centuries, when thinkers such as Henry More, John Locke, and David Hume warned against what they saw as the delusions of religious fanaticism in its opponents, as discussed previously in the introduction. When enthusiasm is directed solely toward self-interest or the interests of one's own group, it can become a dangerous force that fuels conflict, division, and even war.

This perspective is also relevant to contemporary debates about the moral and cultural role of enthusiasm. As discussed in the introduction, several philosophers have expressed concern about the role of enthusiasm in contemporary culture (Han, 2015; Simon, 2014; Verhoeven, 1972). Their critiques focus on how social and economic systems can distort the emotion's original vitality. In the context of late modernity, enthusiasm is often no longer seen as an authentic expression of inner conviction but as a social expectation tied to performance, productivity, and market value. Today, these cultural dynamics are increasingly amplified by digital technology. Algorithms, social

media platforms, and interactive design features are deliberately structured to capture and sustain our excitement. When the enthusiasm switch remains constantly on, balance is lost.

In sum, enthusiasm is neither inherently good nor bad. It is a powerful human emotion whose effects depend on the intentions and contexts in which it is evoked. History shows how it can unite or divide, inspire solidarity or fuel hostility. In commerce, enthusiasm is frequently cultivated to capture attention and drive profit, sometimes undermining genuine engagement or well-being. At the same time, it can also be harnessed for constructive purposes, such as promoting healthy behavior, encouraging learning, or supporting personal growth. Like any powerful instrument, it demands care, reflection, and ethical awareness in its use.

Practical implications: Applying insights on enthusiasm

When directed toward virtuous ends, enthusiasm can have positive and far-reaching effects. As discussed in the introduction, it enhances motivation, learning, and cooperation across diverse domains. In education, teachers' authentic enthusiasm enhances students' motivation and achievement while supporting teachers' own engagement and well-being (Keller et al., 2014; Patrick et al., 2000; Taxer & Frenzel, 2018; Valentín et al., 2022). In organizations, leader enthusiasm strengthens perceptions of charisma, encourages cooperation, and enhances commitment among followers (Bono & Ilies, 2006; Damen et al., 2008; Rego et al., 2009). Beyond schools and workplaces, enthusiasm also drives consumer and civic engagement. Enthusiastic customers demonstrate greater loyalty and more positive brand attitudes (Moreo et al., 2022; So et al., 2014), while in politics, enthusiasm mobilizes citizens to participate and engage in public debate (Brader, 2005; Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Valentino et al., 2011). These studies demonstrate that enthusiasm can have a meaningful impact across multiple domains. The insights derived from this dissertation extend this understanding by clarifying the mechanisms through which enthusiasm operates and by offering guidance on how it can be applied responsibly and effectively in practice.

As shown in the empirical chapters, enthusiasm often functions as a motivating and activating emotion. It energizes behavior, directs attention, and sustains persistence in goal-oriented activity. This activating quality distinguishes enthusiasm from more passive

or self-reflective positive states. Whereas joy reflects satisfaction with achieved goals and hope involves anticipation of uncertain outcomes, enthusiasm arises when goals are attainable and action feels both possible and desirable. Therefore, in both educational and organizational settings, intentionally nurturing enthusiasm can enhance performance and vitality. This may be achieved by recognizing and acknowledging moments of enthusiasm, creating opportunities to reflect on them, and encouraging their open expression.

Authenticity plays a central role in these processes. As demonstrated in the prototype analysis of Chapter 2, Honest (Sincere, Authentic, Real, Fair) emerged as a defining feature of enthusiasm. Research indicates that enthusiasm is most effective when it is genuinely felt and expressed, as authentic displays enhance charisma, competence, and performance, whereas inauthentic expressions can undermine motivation and well-being (Bono & Ilies, 2006; Keller et al., 2014; Taxer & Frenzel, 2018; Totterdell & Holman, 2003). For those in leadership roles, whether as teachers, executives, or politicians, maintaining awareness of what genuinely inspires them and sustaining that connection over time is relevant for both effectiveness and personal well-being. Leaders can further play an important role in recognizing and nurturing enthusiasm in others, while helping them understand the value of connecting with their own authentic sources of energy. Professional development programs for leaders and other professionals could therefore benefit from explicitly addressing the role of enthusiasm, how to maintain it, express it authentically, and use it to inspire others.

Across our studies, enthusiasm emerged not only as an individual emotion but also as an interpersonal phenomenon. The prototype analysis presented in Chapter 2 showed that enthusiasm is frequently described in social terms, including qualities such as honest, kind, and bursting with energy, with exemplars such as sharing and talking about it. Chapter 3 further supported this perspective, showing that enthusiasm tends to arise in situations perceived as socially safe and is accompanied by a strong desire to share one's feelings with others. Chapter 4 extended this understanding by demonstrating that the experience and expression of enthusiasm are shaped by contextual and cultural norms. For organizations it may be beneficial to recognize and make use of this collective potential. Creating psychologically safe environments enables enthusiasm to be expressed more freely and shared more effectively. One finding that deserves particular attention is

that enthusiasm was considered more appropriate at work but was reported less frequently than in private life. This pattern suggests that organizational expectations may sometimes encourage inauthentic expressions of enthusiasm. Although such displays may occasionally serve a functional purpose, sustaining them for too long can undermine both performance and well-being. Organizations may therefore benefit from paying explicit attention to authentic enthusiasm, not only by recognizing its value but also by creating conditions in which it can be expressed naturally. In doing so, organizations can help bridge the gap between experienced and expected enthusiasm, thereby contributing to healthier, more engaging, and sustainable work environments.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this dissertation collectively demonstrate that enthusiasm is a distinct, multidimensional, and socially embedded emotion that plays an important role in human motivation and interaction. Across the prototype, appraisal, and cross-cultural studies, enthusiasm emerged as a positive, high-energy state that connects affective experience, goal-directed action, and interpersonal expression. It bridges the gap between cognition and behavior, transforming interest into engagement and inspiration into action. Although enthusiasm is universally valued, its expression and experience are context-dependent, shaped by social norms and cultural expectations.

The theoretical and practical analyses further indicate that enthusiasm serves adaptive functions at both individual and collective levels. It activates behavior, stimulates learning, enhances leadership and cooperation, and can ignite social movements. At the same time, enthusiasm becomes less effective and may lead to emotional exhaustion when it is not authentic. A deeper understanding of the structure, function, and social regulation of enthusiasm, together with recognition of its benefits, can enable educators, leaders, and policymakers to apply enthusiasm in ways that promote authentic engagement, psychological health, and sustainable performance.

