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Persuasion through the Revelation of Self-Incriminating Information: An Examination of Inconsistencies in the Stealing Thunder Literature

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PERSUASION THROUGH THE REVELATION OF SELF-INCRIMINATING INFORMATION: AN EXAMINATION OF INCONSISTENCIES IN THE STEALING THUNDER LITERATURE

By

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ABSTRACT

PERSUASION THROUGH THE REVELATION OF SELF-INCRIMINATING INFORMATION: AN EXAMINATION OF INCONSISTENCIES IN THE STEALING THUNDER LITERATURE

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Past research on the outcomes of stealing thunder, or revealing incriminating information about oneself as part of a persuasive message, commonly resulted in inconsistent findings. This study attempts to reconcile some of the inconsistencies by varying stealing thunder messages in a crossed refutation, awareness, and communication context 2 (refutation) X 2 (aware) X 3 (context) mixed design with two offset controls (no information control and thunder control), with context being the repeated measure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the six experimental conditions. They read three vignettes describing a persuasive situation where the agent employs stealing thunder, after which they responded to measures of perceived persuasiveness, information valence, and perceived source credibility. Findings were not consistent with the proposed hypotheses. The findings do, however, suggest some insight into the cognitive processes that may be taking place in the target of a stealing thunder message.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

A common theme in much of the literature on persuasion strategies is the apparent importance of portraying the influence agent in a positive light. For example, the persuasive advantage of creating an early positive impression on the target has been repeatedly documented in the literature (Kelley, 1950; O'Keefe, 2002). There are, however, circumstances in which it may be impossible for the agent to be portrayed in a positive light. Picture a defendant on trial for manslaughter, or a major oil company that just received word an oil tanker of theirs spilled its contents off the coast of Alaska, or the ex-convict trying to make an entrance back into society. A common theme among these scenarios is that the sources want to convince someone, but all run the risk of being portrayed in a negative light before they attempt to persuade the prosecutor, the media, or the parole officer. Situations like these induced Williams, Bourgeois, and Croyle (1993) to ask the question of whether it could ever be adaptive to reveal negative or damaging information about oneself as part of a persuasive message before an outside source has the chance to reveal the negative information.

Williams et al.'s (1993) question subsequently gave rise to the explication of stealing thunder as a persuasion strategy. Specifically, whereas thunder involves the revelation of negative information about the agent by an outside source, stealing thunder involves the disclosure of negative information about oneself before it can be revealed through some other means (Williams et al., 1993), such as an outside agent. For example, juries have been found to give more favorable sentences to defendants whose lawyers stole thunder and revealed negative information about their client before the prosecution had the opportunity to do so than lawyers who did not steal thunder (Dolnik,

Case, & Williams, 2003; McElhaney, 1987; Williams et al., 1993). Furthermore, Williams & Dolnik (2001) present unpublished findings by Ondrus & Williams (1995) demonstrating when a political candidate stole thunder by admitting participation in a scandal, voters' willingness to vote for the candidate rose to a level almost as if there had been no scandal at all. The literature suggests the persuasive effects of stealing thunder are particularly robust, the effect being seem across context (Dolnik et al., 2003; Ondrus et al., 1995; Zablocki, 1996) and variation in message features (Dolnik et al., 2003; Williams et al., 1993). Nevertheless, the literature demonstrates some patterned variation in stealing thunder's effectiveness. These patterns suggest factors which mediate the effectiveness of the strategy.

Williams has produced a program of research attempting to address the causes of the variation in stealing thunder's effectiveness (Williams et al., 2001), however, upon reviewing the literature there appear to be several uncontrolled factors. For example, the effectiveness of stealing thunder exhibits considerable variation depending on the context in which it is used. Specifically, in an unpublished paper reported by Williams et al. (2001) the stealing thunder effect has been shown to be largest in relational communication settings (Zablocki, 1996) and smallest in legal settings (Williams et al., 1993), while interpersonal settings produce intermediate effects (Ondrus et al., 1995). When the methods of measuring stealing thunder's effectiveness are considered, however, the simple claim there are context effects becomes tenuous. The Zablocki (1996) study used a compliance measure as the dependent variable, Ondrus et al. (1995) employed a measure of perceived persuasiveness, and participants in Williams et al.

(1993) reported dichotomous guilt judgments. As a result, the effects of context are confounded with the method of measurement.

A closer examination of the literature reveals the study of stealing thunder has been restricted, in the main, to communication in formal settings such as the courtroom (Dolnik et al., 2003; Williams et al., 1993) and the political arena (Ondrus et al., 1995; White & Williams, 1998). These studies produce a common pattern, namely, the agent is perceived as being most persuasive when there is no revelation of negative information (control). The agent's persuasiveness in the control condition is followed by persuasiveness in a condition in which they reveal the information before an outside source has the chance (stealing thunder). Finally, when an outside source reveals the negative information before the agent has the chance (thunder) the agent is reported as being the least persuasive. Williams et al. (2001) mention one study (Zablocki, 1996) testing stealing thunder in a relational context in which the agent attempted to secure a date, the negative information being that the agent was recently diagnosed with a curable STD. Within the Zablocki (1996) study the agent in the stealing thunder condition was more persuasive (70% agreed to a date) than either the control (60% agreed to a date) or thunder condition (50% agreed to a date).

The focus on structured courtroom settings and the variability in the effectiveness of the strategy seen across context potentially restricts the generalizability of the strategy to these more formal communication constructs. Furthermore, research has demonstrated variable findings regarding whether or not an increase in perceived source credibility mediates the link between stealing thunder and persuasion (Dolnik et al., 2003; Williams et al., 1993). Nevertheless, concluding that the cognitive processes mediating the effect

of stealing thunder on persuasion are variable would be premature given the majority of the conflicting findings come from a limited number of independent studies in a limited array of contexts employing different measures of persuasiveness and credibility. Therefore, this experiment is designed to examine stealing thunder across three contexts (legal, interpersonal, and relational), while measuring the agent's perceived persuasiveness, perceived source credibility, and information valence in a consistent manner across those contexts.

As mentioned previously, research has demonstrated inconsistency in the degree to which perceived source credibility mediates the relationship between stealing thunder and persuasiveness. Perceived source credibility is defined as an individual's tendency to make two attributions towards an agent; one, that the agent is a source of a valid message and two, that the agent intends to deliver those messages they consider most valid (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). In other words, Hovland et al. (1953) suggests that credible sources are expert and trustworthy. Reinforcing Hovland et al.'s (1953) early work, O'Keefe (2002) suggests, expertise is an assessment of whether the agent is in a position to know the truth, to know what is right, or correct, and trustworthiness is an assessment of whether the communicator will likely be inclined to tell what they see as the truth. Although others have suggested various alterations to the factor structure of perceived source credibility (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1970; McCroskey, 1966; McCroskey, Hamilton, & Weiner, 1974), all contain features of Hovland et al.'s (1953) original conceptualization. Therefore, this study conceptualizes perceived source credibility in the Hovland et al. (1953) tradition.

Being partly interested in the effects of revealed information on source credibility, Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken (1978) had participants read the transcript of a presentation in which the agent argued for one of two positions. Prior to reading the transcript the participants were informed that the background of the agent was either consistent or inconsistent with the position advocated in the presentation. They were also told that the audience for the presentation was either for or against the position advocated in the presentation. In doing so Eagly et al. (1978) created the presence or absence of expected biases that the agent had for presenting the information in a manner consistent with what they believed and with what they thought the audience wanted to hear. When biases were expected but not fulfilled, Eagly et al. (1978) found that participants viewed the agent not only as more persuasive but also more honest, sincere, open-minded, and consistent than when the biases were expected and fulfilled. In other words, it could be said one of Eagly et al.'s (1978) findings was that agents who are perceived to speak against their own self-interest are seen as more credible.

Consistent with Eagly at al.'s (1978) findings, Cialdini (1993) presents an example of a waiter he observed who was consistently tipped more than the other waiters he worked with. The waiter's strategy was that when the dish a customer ordered was not particularly good, he would inform the customer of this and instead of recommending a more expensive meal, he was sure to recommend a meal slightly less expensive than the one the customer originally ordered. This way, instead of appearing as if he wanted to line his pockets by suggesting more expensive dishes, the waiter appeared to the customers as if he was making a sacrifice to himself in order to provide the best of what the restaurant had to offer. After all, waiters are commonly tipped as a percentage of the

total bill. In doing this, Cialdini (1993) concluded the customers made the attribution that not only was the waiter an authority on the restaurants fare for that evening, but also that the waiter was acting in the customers best interests. The creation of these attributions, lead to larger orders and proportionately bigger tips. Taken together, Eagly et al.'s (1978) and Cialdini's (1993) findings suggest that agent's who are perceived as relative authorities on a topic and who speak against one's own interests are likely to be perceived as more credible and hence more persuasive than those who do not.

Extending Eagly et al.'s (1978) argument Williams et al. (1993) hypothesized that stealing thunder derives its effectiveness in a similar manner. Specifically, they proposed a model in which stealing thunder leads to increased perceived source credibility which, in turn, leads to increased persuasion, and tested it in two experiments, one involving a criminal trial and the second involving a civil suit. Perceived source credibility was found to mediate the relationship as predicted in study one and in study two. Recently Dolnik et al. (2003) challenged this view. Specifically, they tested the possibility that perceived source credibility mediated the relationship using Baron and Kenny's (1986) criteria for mediation. The analysis involved demonstrating that (a) stealing thunder, relative to thunder, has a statistically significant effect on the persuasiveness of the message, (b) stealing thunder, relative to thunder, has a statistically significant effect on the perception of source credibility, and (c) when perceptions of source credibility are controlled, there is a statistically significant decrease in the effect of stealing thunder on the message's persuasiveness. When these analyses were conducted by Dolnik et al. (2003) it was found that perceived source credibility did not meet the third of Barron et al.'s (1986) criteria.

There are at least two reasons why Dolnik et al.'s (2003) test is inadequate. First, as conceptualized, source credibility is made up of two dimensions, expertise and trustworthiness. Thus, if the two dimensions have different effects on persuasiveness and credibility is not broken down across the two dimensions, it would be possible for the same credibility score to have different effects. For example, Williams et al. (1993) combined three single item measures of the agent's trustworthiness, preparedness, and convincingness because they were intercorrelated with r's $\approx$.7. In a separate instance, Dolnik et al. (2003) is ambiguous about how credibility was assessed. It appears that responses to a set of items were summed because they were intercorrelated and assumed to measure the same underlying factor. In neither study were indicies of reliability or evidence of construct validity presented. As a result it is possible that two numerically identical perceived source credibility scores on either of the two scales could represent different combinations of expertise and trustworthiness attributions. Additionally, the perceived source credibility scale in Williams et al. (1993) could be measuring a different construct than the scale employed in Dolnik et al. (2003). Consequently the possibility exists that perceived source credibility mediated the relationship between stealing thunder and persuasion in both Williams et al. (1993) and Dolnik et al. (2003), but the lack of reliability, validity, or both allowed them to identify the relationship in only one of the two studies. Second, Barron et al.'s (1986) third criteria for mediation does not allow for the fact that multiple mediators exist in the relationship, so that the effect of the first variable in a causal chain on the last variable in the chain can be statistically significant when controlling for the effect of a single mediator. Williams et al. (1993) briefly consider one possible additional mediator in their discussion. They suggest that targets

could also modify the meaning of the information to be consistent with their perception of the agent. Therefore, to resolve these issues, this study employs a two factor measure of perceived source credibility based on Hovland et al.'s (1953) conceptualization and considers a closer look at Williams et al.'s (1993) meaning change idea.

In addition to being placed in a situation where source credibility may be questioned, targets of a stealing thunder message are placed in a situation in which the positive impression of agents formed by revelation of negative information that appears to be against their best interests conflicts with the negative information revealed. Previous research suggests that people can and do change their perceptions of information depending on characteristics of the source of the information (Walster, Aronson, & Abrahams, 1966). One example is the halo effect (Erber & Erber, 2001), in which lasting impressions of others are affected by first impressions. Asch (1948) suggests that this effect may occur because the perceived valence of a message can change by changing the context within which it is expressed. Because speaking against one's self-interest causes the agent to be perceived as more honest (Cialdini, 1993; Williams et al., 2001), credible (Eagly et al., 1978), and likable (Ondrus et al, 1995) speaking against one's self-interest may also produce positive change in valence of the message presented by creating a positive context in which the message is revealed, and thereby cause the information to be perceived as less negative.

The idea that the negative information revealed through stealing thunder is perceived as less negative by its targets than when the information is revealed by an outside source is consistent with the literature (Dolnik et al., 2003; Williams et al., 1995). Change of meaning has not, however, been incorporated into a model of stealing thunder.

Given the extant literature, it is proposed the basic act of stealing thunder, that is, revealing information that apparently is against ones best interests, leads to a more favorable perception of source credibility, specifically trustworthiness and expertise (Cialdini, 1993; Eagly et al., 1978). More favorable perceived source credibility results in less negative views of the information revealed (Asch, 1948; Erber et al., 2001). To the extent that the information is seen as positive, persuasion follows resulting from the general positive halo surrounding the agent (Erber et al., 2001; Kelman & Hovland, 1953). Figure 1 presents a visual description of this model.

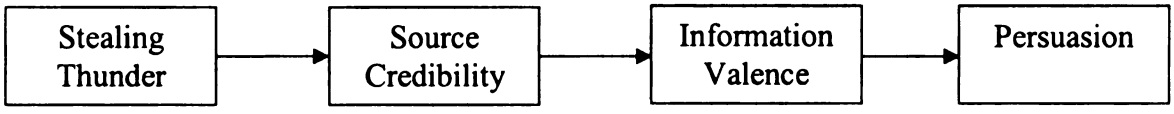

Figure 1. Proposed model: Influence of stealing thunder, source credibility, and information valence on persuasion.

This study attempts to control systematically the two factors of perceived source credibility, trustworthiness and expertise, in a manner consistent with past stealing thunder research. Such an effort, if successful, allows one to partition out their effects. Hovland et al.'s (1953) conceptualization of trustworthiness implies that an agent should be perceived as intending to deliver an honest message to the extent that the target perceives there would be no reason to do otherwise. If the target judges that the agent is delivering a message in an attempt to mislead or provide false information, the target will perceive the agent to be low in trustworthiness. O'Keefe (2002) points out that agents for whom the targets have no expectations are perceived to be the most trustworthy. Therefore, this study controls trustworthiness by varying whether or not the target was aware of the fact that negative information about the agent could be potentially be revealed by somebody else. This reasoning suggests that to the extent that the target is

aware and expecting that the information can be revealed by somebody else, the target will conclude that the agent is revealing the information for their own personal gain and thus be perceived as less trustworthy.

In some previous investigations of stealing thunder the target was aware, at least implicitly, that the information was likely to be revealed by another (Dolnik et al., 2003; Williams et al., 1993). Furthermore, in other studies participants were apparently unaware the negative information could be revealed by another (Ondrus et al., 1995; Zablocki, 1996). The effectiveness of stealing thunder in the studies in which the target was aware that the information could potentially be revealed by an outside source is typically less than those studies in which the target was naïve to the possibility that the information could be revealed. Thus, a main effect for the awareness induction is expected.

The second dimension of perceived source credibility, expertise, is controlled by varying whether or not the agent offers a refutation for the negative information revealed in the stealing thunder message. Expertise is considered to be the ability of an agent to communicate what is correct, or the ability to be in a position to know what is correct (Hovland et al., 1953). By offering a refutation, that is to deny the accuracy of the information by providing further evidence (McGuire, 1964), agents assert they have additional information and implicitly suggest they are in a better position to know what is correct, both of which should lead to more positive perceptions of expertise. Previous research has employed a method similar to providing a refutation. In one experimental condition in Dolnik et al. (2003) the agent put a positive spin on negative information and framed stealing thunder information about the agent drinking before driving by having

the agent state, "I had a couple of drinks at the bar, but not enough to become intoxicated. Therefore, I felt it was safe to drive." The authors reported an increase in perceived source credibility in this condition. Although drawing valid conclusions from this finding alone is tenuous given the measurement of perceived source credibility, the findings are intriguing in that stealing thunder studies including a refutation condition report the strategy more effective than when used without framing (Dolnik et al., 2003). Consequently, the existence of a main effect for the refutation induction is hypothesized.

Furthermore, it is hypothesized that awareness and refutation will have additive effects on source credibility. The additive main effects of awareness and refutation will result in high perceived source credibility when the awareness and refutation inductions are present, low perceived source credibility when the awareness and refutation inductions are absent, and moderate perceived source credibility when one or the other inductions. Table 1 presents the hypothesized relationship.

Table 1

Hypothesized Additive Relationship between Trustworthiness and Expertise Inductions and Perceived Source Credibility

	Trustworthiness	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware
Refutation	High	Moderate
No Refutation	Moderate	Low

Note. Levels reported in cells represent hypothesized level of perceived source credibility.

Given the model of stealing thunder specified earlier in this study, it is also hypothesized that the two main effects for refutation and awareness correspond with the levels of valence change as presented in Table 2 and perceived persuasiveness for each condition as presented in Table 3.

Table 2

Hypothesized Additive Relationship between Trustworthiness and Expertise Inductions and Information Valence Change

	Trustworthiness	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware
Refutation	High	Moderate
No Refutation	Moderate	Low

Note. Levels reported in cells represent hypothesized level of information valence change.

Table 3

Hypothesized Additive Relationship between Trustworthiness and Expertise Inductions Resulting Perceived Persuasiveness

	Trustworthiness	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware
Refutation	High	Moderate
No Refutation	Moderate	Low

Note. Levels reported in cells represent hypothesized level of perceived persuasiveness.

METHOD

Design

The study employs an awareness (naive, aware) X refutation (no refute, refute) X context (legal, interpersonal, relational) mixed groups design with two offset controls. The awareness and refutation inductions are independent groups factors and the context factor is a repeated measure. When crossed, the two levels of awareness and the two levels of refutation form independent groups. For each context there are two offset control conditions (no stealing thunder and thunder).

Participants

A convenience sample of 180 volunteer undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university were assigned randomly to one of the six sets of conditions with the constraint that all conditions contain an equal number of participants (*Ps*). *Ps* were given course credit to compensate them for their time. The sample consisted of 53 males and 127 females. *Ps* in the sample were on average 21.33 years old (SD = 2.75) and had attended college for 3.41 years (SD = 1.18). Furthermore, all but three *Ps* originated from the continental United States.

Procedure

The study was conducted in the students' classrooms. *Ps* agreed to participate in a study described as an investigation of the social perceptions of others. After greeting the *Ps* and soliciting their participation the experimenter (*E)* described the required tasks.

Next, every desk in the classroom was arranged to face the front of the room so as to limit interaction among the *Ps*. The *E* also directed the *Ps* to place everything under their desks. Subsequently, the *E* handed out pencils and consent forms. After reviewing

the consent form the *E* collected them and administered the study materials. The study materials for each of the six conditions were administered in a packet. To randomly assign *P*s to a condition, each packet was randomly assigned a number from 1 through 180. Packets were then administered in order of their number assignment.

The packet contained the three different interaction scenarios, each containing the assigned awareness X refutation inductions, or if the case, either of the two control conditions. Measures of perceived source credibility, perceived valence of the stealing thunder information and the agent's perceived persuasiveness separated each of the three vignettes. Finally, the induction checks and general demographic questions completed the packet. To control for order effects, the arrangement of the three vignettes in the packet was counterbalanced.

After reviewing the instructions the *E* solicited for any final questions. Immediately before directing them to begin, the *E* instructed them to remain seated until they finished their packet. At that time they handed in their packet and returned to their seat. The *E* subsequently took an unobtrusive position in the front of the room while the *Ps* worked through the study materials. When every *P* had finished, the *E* distributed debriefing forms. Upon dispensing the forms the *E* reviewed them with the *Ps* before fielding questions.

Interaction Scenarios

Each context (see Appendices A, B, and C) centered around an interaction scenario between two people, e.g., a manager and a potential hire, and defined the *P* as a third party. The format of the three contexts, exemplified by the control condition lacking the thunder information, involved the discussion of a topic or the argument of a

point that the *P* was asked to settle. Although each interaction context involved different people and situations, length and complexity of the structure remained similar across contexts.

There were six conditions for each context, the two controls and four stealing thunder conditions. The six conditions were the control condition-no information, the control condition-thunder, the naïve/unrefuted stolen thunder, the naïve/refuted stolen thunder, the aware/unrefuted stolen thunder, and the aware/refuted stolen thunder. The six conditions for a given context differ only in inclusion or exclusion of one to three sentences. For example, the refutation condition built upon the no refutation condition by taking the stolen thunder in the no refute condition and tagging a refutation onto it. Otherwise, the wording of the inductions retained as much consistency and similarity between conditions as possible. Nothing else changed between conditions for each interaction context.

Perceived Persuasiveness Instrument

After reading each scenario, *Ps* responded to an item assessing the perceived persuasiveness of the agent (Appendix D). Although thunder was not stolen in the no thunder control condition, *Ps* provided a judgment of perceived persuasiveness of the same agent who stole thunder in the other conditions of that context. The item requested that the *P* rate the agent's persuasiveness on a scale of 1 to 100, where 1 is the least persuasive and 100 is the most persuasive. This format was employed to replicate the successful use of similar items in previous work on the topic (Dolnik et al., 2003).

Source Credibility Instrument

The source credibility measure was a 20-item instrument (Appendix E) comprised of 10 expertise items and 10 trustworthiness items. *Ps* responded on a seven-point Likert response scale.

Information Evaluation Instrument

Ps also reported their evaluation of the valence of the stolen thunder. This measure assessed how positively or negatively *Ps* perceived the stolen thunder. A six-item Osgood semantic differential scale (Appendix F) with accompanying seven-point response scales was employed.

Induction Check Instrument

Ps also completed a short induction check consisting of six items (Appendix G). Item one asked whether or not the *P* was able to recall the stolen thunder. Items two and three checked on the awareness induction. Items four and five examined the refutation induction, and the last item measured the mundane realism of the scenarios. *Ps* completed the induction check items from memory without referring to the interaction scenario they just read.

Demographics Instrument

The final instrument was the demographics measures (Appendix H). There were four standard demographic questions including age, sex, years in college, and geographic origin.

RESULTS

Source Credibility Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis was employed to test the content validity of the source credibility measure. Initially, the two factor source credibility model was examined separately in each of the three contexts. It was found that deleting expertise items 2 and 9 as well as trustworthiness items 1, 2, 9, and 10 produced an acceptable two factor solution (legal: *RMSE* = .09; interpersonal: *RMSE* = .08; relational: *RMSE* = .08). Nevertheless, observing the correlation matrix, and noting the substantial correlation between the two factors (legal: $r = .94$, $r' = 1.13$; interpersonal: $r = .88$, $r' = 1.08$; relational: $r = .99$, $r' = 1.20$), suggested that either a one factor or a second order unidimensional solution was feasible. Therefore, the simplest model, the one factor model was also tested. Once again after the deletion of six items the data were consistent with the model (legal: *RMSE* = .08; interpersonal: *RMSE* = .07; relational: *RMSE* = .07). Factor loadings are presented in Table 4. Hence the source credibility measure was treated as single dimension and the fourteen items were summed to create an index. This index was distributed normally in each of the three contexts, and had means and standard deviations of: $M = 3.85$, $SD = .88$ (legal), $M = 3.93$, $SD = .86$ (interpersonal), and $M = 4.85$, $SD = .78$ (relational). Reliability was estimated by coefficient alpha and found to be: $\alpha = .90$ (legal), $\alpha = .88$ (interpersonal), and $\alpha = .90$ (relational).

Information Evaluation Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis was also employed to test the content validity of the information evaluation measure. The one factor information evaluation model was examined separately for each context. Deleting item 3 produced an acceptable one factor

Table 4

Factor Loadings for the Unidimensional Source Credibility Solution by Context

Item number	Legal	Interpersonal	Relational
Expertise #1	.56	.51	.55
Expertise #3	.52	.45	.69
Expertise #4	.75	.65	.77
Expertise #5	.79	.72	.76
Expertise #6	.46	.55	.47
Expertise #7	.42	.42	.35
Expertise #8	.58	.55	.64
Expertise #10	.67	.44	.57
Trustworthiness #3	.60	.68	.55
Trustworthiness #4	.71	.68	.69
Trustworthiness #5	.66	.63	.72
Trustworthiness #6	.66	.75	.73
Trustworthiness #7	.69	.57	.69
Trustworthiness #8	.78	.71	.70

Note. Expertise items 2 and 9 along with trustworthiness items 9 and 10 were removed because of consistently weak factor loadings in each of the three contexts. Trustworthiness items 1 and 2 were removed because those items had a tendency to produce large errors. Reviewing the face validity of these six items reveals they are all rather ambiguous in terms of what they were asking respondents to report on.

solution (legal: *RMSE* = .04; interpersonal: *RMSE* = .03; relational: *RMSE* = .02). Factor loadings are presented in Table 5. The remaining five items were summed to create an index. The index was distributed normally in all three contexts, and had means and

standard deviations of: $M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.46$ (legal), $M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.71$ (interpersonal), and $M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.43$ (relational). Reliability was estimated by coefficient alpha and found to be: $\alpha = .87$ (legal), $\alpha = .90$ (interpersonal), $\alpha = .87$ (relational).

Table 5

Factor Loadings for the Unidimensional Information Evaluation Solution by Context

Item number	Legal	Interpersonal	Relational
Valence #1	.72	.74	.66
Valence #2	.69	.75	.71
Valence #4	.79	.92	.78
Valence #5	.84	.91	.92
Valence #6	.71	.71	.71

Note. Valence item 3 was removed because the item had a tendency to produce large errors. Reviewing the face validity of item 3 supports this decision because the item is ambiguous in terms of what it asks respondents to report on.

Induction Checks

The *Ps* ability to recall presentation of the negative information across conditions was tested in each of the three contexts by examining responses to the first induction check item. In the legal context 84% of those presented with the negative information recalled the information in their response to the induction check, only .03% of the *Ps* in the no information control recalled negative information. Furthermore, a chi-square analysis performed on these legal context data revealed a statistically insignificant difference in ability to recall the negative information across the four awareness by

refutation conditions and thunder condition, χ^2 (4, N = 150) = 3.09, *ns*. Taken together, these analyses suggest the data are consistent with the claim that presentation of the negative information was effective in the legal context. Performing the same analyses on the interpersonal data revealed 98% of those presented with the negative information recalled said information and only .03% of the *Ps* in the no information control recalled negative information. A chi-square analysis demonstrated a statistically insignificant difference in ability to recall the negative information across the four awareness by refutation conditions and thunder condition, χ^2 (4, N = 150) = 2.05, *ns*. Again, these analyses suggest the data are consistent with the claim that presentation of the negative information was also effective in the interpersonal context. Similar results were found for the relational context data where 98% of those presented with the negative information recalled it on the induction check and none of the *Ps* in the no information control recalled negative information. A chi-square analysis performed on the relational context data revealed a statistically insignificant difference in ability to recall the negative information across the four awareness by refutation conditions and thunder condition, χ^2 (4, N = 150) = 2.05, *ns*. All together, these analyses suggest the data are consistent with the claim that presentation of the negative information was effective in the relational context.

The validity of the awareness induction was tested in each of the three contexts by examining its effects on the sum of responses to the two awareness induction check items. A two-way analysis of variance performed on the legal context data produced a main effect for the awareness induction, F (1, 116) = 4.78, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$, a statistically insignificant effect of the refutation induction, F (1, 116) = 1.19, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .01$, and no

evidence of an awareness X refutation interaction, F (1, 116) = 0, *ns*, $\eta^2 = 0$. Thus, the data are consistent with the claim that the awareness induction was effective in the legal context. Considering the interpersonal context data, a two-way analysis of variance performed also produced a main effect for the awareness induction, F (1, 116) = 5.87, $p <$ .05, $\eta^2 = .05$, a statistically insignificant effect of the refutation induction, F (1, 116) = .80, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .006$, and no evidence of an awareness X refutation interaction, F (1, 116) = .80, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .006$. Thus, these data are also consistent with the claim that the awareness induction was effective in the interpersonal context. Finally, a two-way analysis of variance performed on the relational context data produced a main effect for the awareness induction, F (1, 116) = 24.32, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .17$, a statistically insignificant effect of the refutation induction, F (1, 116) = .27, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .002$, and no evidence of an awareness X refutation interaction, F (1, 116) = .61, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .004$. Hence, the data are consistent with the claim that the awareness induction was effective in the relational context.

The validity of the refutation induction was tested in each of the three contexts by examining its effects on the sum of responses to the two refutation induction check items. A two-way analysis of variance performed on the legal context data produced a main effect for the refutation induction, F (1, 116) = 46.63, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .29$, a statistically insignificant effect of the awareness induction, F (1, 116) = .42, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .003$, and no evidence of a refutation X awareness interaction, F (1, 116) = .08, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .001$. Thus, the data are consistent with the claim that the refutation induction was highly effective in the legal context. Performing a two-way analysis of variance on the interpersonal context data also produced a main effect for the refutation induction, F (1, 116) = 250.73, $p < .05$,

$\eta^2 = .68$, a statistically insignificant effect of the awareness induction, $F(1, 116) = 2.84$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .008$, and no evidence of a refutation X awareness interaction, $F(1, 116) = .45$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .001$, revealing that the data are consistent with the claim that the refutation induction was highly effective in the interpersonal context. A two-way analysis of variance performed on the relational context data produced a main effect for the refutation induction, $F(1, 116) = 13.23$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .10$, a statistically insignificant effect of the awareness induction, $F(1, 116) = 1.28$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .01$, and no evidence of a refutation X awareness interaction, $F(1, 116) = .39$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .003$. Hence, the data are consistent with the claim that the refutation induction was effective in the relational context.

The ease with which *Ps* were able to imagine themselves in the role asked of them for each condition was tested by examining responses to the final induction check item separately for each context. A one-way analysis of variance conducted on the legal context data produced a statistically significant effect for condition, $F(5, 174) = 2.63$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$. A follow up two-way analysis of variance revealed a statistically significant refutation induction by awareness induction interaction, $F(1, 116) = 12.39$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .10$. Hence, the data are not consistent with the claim that ease of presence across conditions was equivalent. Even so, *Ps* were able to imagine themselves in the situation ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.42$). A one-way analysis of variance conducted on the interpersonal context data produced a statistically insignificant effect for condition, $F(5, 174) = 1.26$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .03$. Thus, the data in the interpersonal context are consistent with the claim that ease of presence across condition was equivalent. Additionally, *Ps* found it fairly easy to imagine themselves in the situation ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.74$). A one-way

analysis of variance conducted on the relational context data produced a statistically insignificant effect for condition, F (5, 174) = .84, *ns*, η^2 = .02. Therefore, the data in the relational context are also consistent with the claim that ease of presence across condition was equivalent. Furthermore, *Ps* found it fairly easy to imagine themselves in the situation (M = 5.53, SD = .90).

Hypothesis Tests

The hypotheses, that awareness yields lower credibility judgments than unawareness, refutation produces higher credibility judgments than no refutation, and the lack of a reason to expect an interaction were tested in each of the three contexts by examining the awareness and refutation inductions effects on the *P's* reports of source credibility. A two-way analysis of variance performed on the legal context data produced a statistically insignificant effect for the refutation induction, F (1, 116) = .66, *ns*, η^2 = .006, a statistically insignificant effect of the awareness induction, F (1, 116) = .45, *ns*, η^2 = .004, and no evidence of a refutation X awareness interaction, F (1, 116) = .02, *ns*, η^2 = .0001. Thus, the data are not consistent with the claim that refutation and naivety produce higher credibility judgments in the legal context. The same analysis was performed on the interpersonal context data which resulted in a statistically insignificant effect for the refutation induction, F (1, 116) = .49, *ns*, η^2 = .004, a statistically insignificant effect of the awareness induction, F (1, 116) = 1.70, *ns*, η^2 = .01, and no evidence of a refutation X awareness interaction, F (1, 116) = .32, *ns*, η^2 = .004. Consequently, these data are also not consistent with the claim that refutation and naivety produce higher credibility judgments in the interpersonal context. Performance of a two-way analysis of variance on the relational context data produced a statistically

insignificant effect for the refutation induction, F (1, 116) = .54, *ns*, η^2 = .004, a statistically insignificant effect of the awareness induction, F (1, 116) = .56, *ns*, η^2 = .004, and no evidence of a refutation X awareness interaction, F (1, 116) = 1.73, *ns*, η^2 = .01. The data do not support the claim that refutation and naivety produce higher credibility judgments in the relational context. Table 6 presents means and standard deviations.

The hypotheses, that awareness yields more negative information valence judgments than unawareness, refutation produces more positive information valence judgments than no refutation, and the absence of basis to expect an interaction were tested in each of the three contexts by examining the awareness and refutation inductions effects on the *P's* reports of information valence. A two-way analysis of variance performed on the legal context data produced a statistically insignificant effect for the refutation induction, F (1, 116) = .19, *ns*, η^2 = .002, a statistically insignificant effect of the awareness induction, F (1, 116) = .61, *ns*, η^2 = .005, and no evidence of a refutation X awareness interaction, F (1, 116) = 3.08, *ns*, η^2 = .03. Thus, these data are not consistent with the claim that refutation and naivety produce more positive valence judgments in the legal context. A two-way analysis of variance performed on the interpersonal context data also produced statistically insignificant effects for the refutation induction, F (1, 116) = .07, *ns*, η^2 = .0006, the awareness induction, F (1, 116) = 2.86, *ns*, η^2 = .02, and the refutation X awareness interaction, F (1, 116) = .001, *ns*, η^2 = .000004. Accordingly, the data are not consistent with the claim that refutation and naivety produce more positive valence judgments in the interpersonal context either. Performance of a two-way analysis of variance on the relational context data produced a statistically insignificant effect for the refutation induction, F (1, 116) = 2.25, *ns*, η^2 = .02, a statistically

Table 6

Observed Relationship between Experimental Inductions and Perceived Source Credibility

	Trustworthiness		Offset Controls	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware	No Information	Thunder
Refutation	$M = 4.00$ $SD = 1.05$	$M = 3.87$ $SD = .83$	$M = 3.90$ $SD = .85$	$M = 3.71$ $SD = .85$
No Refutation	$M = 3.85$ $SD = .97$	$M = 3.76$ $SD = .76$		

Note. Legal Context. Data reported in cells represent observed level of perceived source credibility.

	Trustworthiness		Offset Controls	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware	No Information	Thunder
Refutation	$M = 4.06$ $SD = .98$	$M = 3.78$ $SD = .63$	$M = 4.66$ $SD = .84$	$M = 3.44$ $SD = .76$
No Refutation	$M = 3.86$ $SD = .83$	$M = 3.78$ $SD = .62$		

Note. Interpersonal Context. Data reported in cells represent observed level of perceived source credibility.

Table 6 (cont'd).

	Trustworthiness		Offset Controls	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware	No Information	Thunder
Refutation	$M = 5.04$ $SD = .78$	$M = 4.75$ $SD = .82$	$M = 4.76$ $SD = .70$	$M = 4.56$ $SD = .79$
No Refutation	$M = 4.96$ $SD = .74$	$M = 5.04$ $SD = .82$		

Note. Relational Context. Data reported in cells represent observed level of perceived source credibility.

insignificant effect of the awareness induction, $F(1, 116) = .35$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .003$, and no evidence of a refutation X awareness interaction, $F(1, 116) = .53$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .004$. Hence, the data are not consistent with the claim that refutation and naivety produce more positive valence judgments in the relational context. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 7.

The hypotheses, that awareness yields less perceived persuasiveness than unawareness, refutation produces more perceived persuasiveness than no refutation, and the lack of grounds to expect an interaction were tested in each of the three contexts by examining the awareness and refutation inductions effects on the *P's* reports of perceived persuasiveness. A two-way analysis of variance performed on the legal context data produced a statistically insignificant effect for the refutation induction, $F(1, 116) = .56$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .005$, a statistically insignificant effect of the awareness induction, $F(1, 116) = .77$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .006$, and no evidence of a refutation X awareness interaction, $F(1, 116) =$

Table 7

Observed Relationship between Experimental Inductions and Information Valence Judgment

	Trustworthiness		Offset Controls	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware	No Information	Thunder
Refutation	$M = 2.65$ $SD = 1.35$	$M = 3.28$ $SD = 1.49$	$M =$ N/A $SD =$ N/A	$M = 3.43$ $SD = 1.64$
No Refutation	$M = 2.98$ $SD = 1.36$	$M = 2.74$ $SD = 1.20$		

Note. Legal Context. Data reported in cells represent observed level of information valence.

	Trustworthiness		Offset Controls	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware	No Information	Thunder
Refutation	$M = 2.99$ $SD = 1.46$	$M = 2.55$ $SD = 1.25$	$M =$ N/A $SD =$ N/A	$M = 3.03$ $SD = 1.54$
No Refutation	$M = 2.91$ $SD = 1.52$	$M = 2.49$ $SD = 1.29$		

Note. Interpersonal Context. Data reported in cells represent observed level of information valence.

Table 7 (cont'd).

	Trustworthiness		Offset Controls	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware	No Information	Thunder
Refutation	$M = 3.03$ $SD = 1.51$	$M = 3.06$ $SD = 1.24$	$M =$ N/A $SD =$ N/A	$M = 3.37$ $SD = 1.40$
No Refutation	$M = 3.60$ $SD = 1.52$	$M = 3.26$ $SD = 1.35$		

Note. Relational Context. Data reported in cells represent observed level of information valence.

.22, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .002$. Thus, the data are not consistent with the claim that refutation and naivety produce more perceived persuasiveness in the legal context. A two-way analysis of variance performed on the interpersonal context data also produced a statistically insignificant effect for the refutation induction, $F(1, 116) = .60$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .005$, a statistically insignificant effect of the awareness induction, $F(1, 116) = .11$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .0009$, and no evidence of a refutation X awareness interaction, $F(1, 116) = .32$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .003$. Therefore, the data are not consistent with the claim that refutation and naivety produce more perceived persuasiveness in the interpersonal context either. A two-way analysis of variance performed on the relational context data produced a main effect for the refutation induction, $F(1, 116) = 3.97$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$, a statistically insignificant effect of the awareness induction, $F(1, 116) = .33$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .003$, and no evidence of a refutation X awareness interaction, $F(1, 116) = .34$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .003$. Hence, the data are not consistent with the claim that refutation and naivety produce more perceived persuasiveness in the relational context. Table 8 presents means and standard deviations.

Table 8

Observed Relationship between Experimental Inductions and Perceived Persuasiveness

	Trustworthiness		Offset Controls	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware	No Information	Thunder
Refutation	$M = 43.40$ $SD = 25.13$	$M = 49.17$ $SD = 21.23$	$M = 47.83$ $SD = 24.55$	$M = 46.37$ $SD = 22.14$
No Refutation	$M = 42.17$ $SD = 25.74$	$M = 43.93$ $SD = 21.93$		

Note. Legal Context. Data reported in cells represent observed level of perceived persuasiveness.

	Trustworthiness		Offset Controls	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware	No Information	Thunder
Refutation	$M = 43.93$ $SD = 24.66$	$M = 47.90$ $SD = 22.16$	$M = 66.73$ $SD = 18.08$	$M = 53.23$ $SD = 30.05$
No Refutation	$M = 43.00$ $SD = 26.86$	$M = 41.93$ $SD = 23.72$		

Note. Interpersonal Context. Data reported in cells represent observed level of perceived persuasiveness.

Table 8 (cont'd).

	Trustworthiness		Offset Controls	
Expertise	Naïve	Aware	No Information	Thunder
Refutation	$M = 56.10$ $SD = 21.38$	$M = 51.20$ $SD = 22.84$	$M = 58.93$ $SD = 22.47$	$M = 50.30$ $SD = 23.00$
No Refutation	$M = 62.10$ $SD = 26.89$	$M = 62.13$ $SD = 21.85$		

Note. Relational Context. Data reported in cells represent observed level of perceived persuasiveness.

In order to make claims regarding the effects of stealing thunder on each of the three dependent variables, each of the control conditions were compared against all other conditions in that context using Dunnett's t in each context. Analyses performed on the data in the legal context revealed in the case of each of the dependent variables, statistically insignificant differences between both control condition means and each of the other condition means. Analyses on the interpersonal context data revealed insignificant differences between the thunder control condition and each of the experimental condition means for source credibility with the exception of the difference between the naïve by refutation condition and the thunder control condition means, $\hat{d}_D = |.49|$, $\hat{d}_O = .62, p < .05$. On the other hand, differences between the no information control condition and each of the experimental condition means for source credibility were significant. Table 9 reports the Dunnett's t values. Examination of the information valence variable revealed insignificant differences between the control conditions and

Table 9

Dunnett's T Results Comparing Source Credibility Mean Differences between the No Information Control and Other Groups in the Interpersonal Context

Condition	$\hat{d}_D$	$\hat{d}_O$	Significance
Thunder Control	|.50|	-1.21	$p < .05$
Naïve X No Refutation	|.50|	-.80	$p < .05$
Aware X No Refutation	|.50|	-.88	$p < .05$
Naïve X Refutation	|.50|	-.60	$p < .05$
Aware X Refutation	|.50|	-.89	$p < .05$

Table 10

Dunnett's T Results Comparing Perceived Persuasiveness Mean Differences between the No Information Control and Other Groups in the Interpersonal Context

Condition	$\hat{d}_D$	$\hat{d}_O$	Significance
Naïve X No Refutation	|15.46|	-23.73	$p < .05$
Aware X No Refutation	|15.46|	-24.80	$p < .05$
Naïve X Refutation	|15.46|	-22.80	$p < .05$
Aware X Refutation	|15.46|	-18.83	$p < .05$

each of the other condition means. Consideration of perceived persuasiveness exposed insignificant differences between the thunder control condition and each of the other conditions means. However, statistically significant differences between the no

information control condition and each experimental condition mean were found. Table 10 reports the Dunnett's t values. Analyses on the relational context data uncovered statistically insignificant differences in the case of each of the dependent variables, between both control conditions and each of the other conditions means.

DISSCUSSION

Primarily, the findings of this study question the robustness of the stealing thunder effect as reported by Williams et al. (2001). The typical research on the issue suggests that the revelation of a relevant piece of negative information about oneself will solicit a persuasive effect. The findings of this study suggest there may be certain conditions that must be met in order to elicit an effect. Contrary to expectations, the results of this study found stealing thunder made no sizeable impact on the agent's perceived source credibility, the valence of the presented information, or the agent's perceived persuasiveness when in conjunction with the presentation of a refutation or whether the target is naïve or aware of the existence of negative information. Furthermore, the same lack of effect was found when both of the control conditions are compared against all other conditions. Only two exceptions were found. The first was in the relational context where the agent was perceived to be significantly more persuasive when a refutation was not delivered as part of the stealing thunder message relative to when one was delivered. The second was in the interpersonal context where the agent's perceived source credibility and perceived persuasiveness were judged significantly lower when thunder was stolen than when no information was revealed.

Several features in the design of this study could account for these findings. One possible explanation for the lack of a stealing thunder effect may be linked to the method of measurement used to assess the agent's perceived persuasiveness. *Ps* were instructed to choose a number between 1 and 100 to represent how persuasive they felt the agent was. This large frame of reference could have resulted in different *Ps* assigning different meanings to the same number. If this were the case one would expect to observe

particularly large standard deviations and a lack of statistical power increasing the possibility of Type II error. Even though large standard deviations averaging approximately 24 units were observed in support of this line of thought, this does not seem to be an adequate explanation. Effects of stealing thunder on source credibility and information valence were also predicted and no effect was measured, even though the testing of the measurement models for both scales reported psychometric qualities superior to those of the persuasiveness instrument suggesting the problem lie elsewhere than the measurement.

Other possibilities are that either the construct validity of the scales used to measure the dependent variables was questionable resulting in invalid measurement of the intended concept or that the inductions were simply weak. Either of these situations could have resulted not finding a hypothesized effect. The evidence in the data suggests the inductions in this study did not have their intended effects rather than the alternative explanation of poor measurement. Support for this position comes from examining the correlations observed between scores on the perceived source credibility scale and the information valence scale in each of the three contexts (legal: $r = .25$, $r' = .28$; interpersonal: $r = .49$, $r' = .55$; relational: $r = .28$, $r' = .32$) as well as those between scores on the perceived source credibility scale and perceive persuasiveness ratings (legal: $r = .40$, $r' = .42$; interpersonal: $r = .42$, $r' = .45$; relational: $r = .26$, $r' = .27$). These correlations are not only sizeable but also in the direction that would be predicted by theory.

Additionally, the thunder control condition and the no information control condition had similar impacts on the dependent variables. One would at the very least

expect to see a negative impact on the *P's* perceptions of the agent in the thunder control condition where an outside source presents incriminating information about the agent, however, that was not the case. Furthermore, although the induction checks suggest that *Ps* were accurate in the recall of the various inductions they had or had not been presented, the effect sizes for several of the conditions were rather small. Therefore, it appears that although *Ps* were typically able to recall having seen the inductions, for some reason the inductions had little effect on the *Ps* evaluations of the agent and the information revealed.

It is feasible the inductions failed to have an effect on perceptions of the agent because stealing thunder effect may not rest in automatic cognitive processes. Studies conducted to investigate the cognitive processes resulting in the stealing thunder effect have reported conflicting results. Ondrus et al. (1995) found that when *Ps* were not cognitively busy, stealing thunder had a larger effect than when *Ps* were cognitively busy. Alternatively, Williams et al. (2001) reports that need for cognition is an unreliable predictor of stealing thunder's effectiveness. The conflicting findings could result if there is an unaccounted for intervening variable impacting the cognitive processes involved. The findings of this study in relation to others suggests that the intervening variable may be the target's level of motivation to process the information presented which in turn impacts the extent to which targets process the information presented in the situation.

Consider the experimental materials *Ps* received in this study, consisting of a 25 page instrument. Based on the *E's* observations of some *P's* reactions, the sheer amount of information contained in the instrument could have reduced the motivation of

participants to be particularly involved in the task. When verbalized by *Ps*, reactions to the instrument ranged from disillusionment to frustration due to the length. Furthermore, 33 of the 180 instruments administered had to be recollected due to substantial numbers of items left incomplete. While completion of the questionnaire did not take longer to complete (25 minutes) than was advertised (30 minutes) *Ps* at times would note their frustration with how long it would take to complete the instrument. There was no attempt by the *E* at that time to alter the method of data collection because taken individually the comments did not suggest a problem. Taken as a whole, however, the comments appear to be symptomatic of the *Ps* general lack of motivation to be actively involved in completion of the experimental tasks. Given that the presentation of scenarios was counterbalanced, the data were reanalyzed post hoc for an order effect only considering the scenarios that were presented first. No new effects emerged from these analyses and it appears order of presentation did not play a role. While one would expect an order effect to emerge if *Ps* were tiring of the task over the course of completing the instrument one would not emerge if *Ps* motivation to complete the task was eradicated upon initial exposure to the instrument when it was placed upon their desk. Given the evidence this could have easily been the case.

Contrast this with a typical stealing thunder study (Dolnik et al., 2003) in which *Ps* are given the very specific tasks of reading an abridged transcript of a courtroom trial, reporting the guilt or innocence of the defendant, and response on a scale measuring source credibility. In that study the *Ps* work on a single court case transcript and task that is more focused and not as hypothetical as the task in this study. Although, the greater amount of material presented in the present study would not have necessarily impacted

the ability to recall the presentation of the stealing thunder information because the information was presented at the conclusion of the vignette and *Ps* were asked to recall the information after reading only two pages it could have, however, limited the *Ps* processing of the information presented in a systematic manner.

This line of thought is consistent with Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model which suggests personal relevance, need for cognition, personal responsibility, issue involvement, etc. are important factors in whether or not individuals are motivated to process incoming information in a controlled fashion. Additionally, Schwarz (1995) suggests that in forming impressions, our memories of information from the situation are searched until one feels confident they have considered enough information to make a judgment. According to Kunda (1999) the level of needed confidence to stop the search may be determined by the extent to which people are motivated by an accuracy goal. Accuracy goals lead people to invest greater effort in the judgment task and to search more thoroughly for the best possible reasoning strategy (Kunda, 1999). A target's evaluation of the agent's message in a stealing thunder situation would be governed by accuracy goals particularly when the target feels their decision might cause the agent to be treated unfairly (Kunda, 1999). In sum, if the target were unmotivated to process in the situation they would be less concerned with whether or not the agent would be treated unfairly and hence less motivated to weigh all of the relevant information presented and rather use a heuristic or peripheral cue to make their evaluation of the agent's message, as suggested by either Petty and Cacioppo (1986) or Schwarz (1995) and Kunda (1999). It seems the likely heuristic targets of stealing thunder might rely on would be to evaluate based on the most salient information

presented. This would take the form of what the majority of the information suggests or what the most outstanding piece suggests.

The research findings of this study and those of other studies are consistent with this rationalization. For example, situations using hypothetical scenarios would solicit the smallest effect for stealing thunder. *Ps* would likely to be least motivated in this type of setting because there are few consequences of a poor judgment of the agent described in the vignette. The only time when one would expect to observe a stealing thunder effect in a hypothetical situation would be if the *E* did a good job of motivating *Ps* for the experimental task or the thunder information was so relevant to the decision at hand that it became the most salient piece of information revealed and even then there would be only an effect between when the negative information was revealed and when it was not revealed. Exactly such effects were observed in this experiment. In the main, no differences between any conditions were found except for some observed in the interpersonal context where a person was applying for a bank teller position and they had been fired in the past for stealing money.

One might expect the effectiveness of stealing thunder to be somewhat better in situations where targets or *Ps* are slightly more motivated. These conditions are typically found in stealing thunder studies conducted by Williams or one of his colleagues. Typically, *Ps* in these studies respond to a single scenario involving either a jury member scenario in which *Ps* make judgments about a defendant or a political scenario in which *Ps* make judgments about a potential candidate. In the vast majority of these studies stealing thunder was found to have an effect. Taken together, not only could the topics of the scenarios in the past studies be interpreted to have more at stake for the agent than

this study but they also are less demanding of the *Ps* allowing them to focus more on the single, shorter, task. Both of these differences between the past and present studies could lead the past studies to observe the very replicable effects of stealing thunder and the observations in the current study to fail replicate the effect.

Finally, based on the motivation rationale, in situations involving high motivation one would expect to observe a large discrepancy between the effectiveness of stealing thunder and thunder with the effectiveness of the simple persuasive request in the middle. This pattern of results was exactly what was found in Zablocki (1996). The situation created this study undoubtedly had the highest levels of motivation and involvement for *Ps* primarily because data collection in the Zablocki (1996) study involved face to face interactions between a confederate and *P* the stakes for making accurate evaluations of the agent could have been particularly high. The stakes for making accurate evaluations were particularly great because evaluating the agent based on a heuristic or peripheral cue would likely lead to less accurate judgments and taking action based on inaccurate judgments directly to the agent's face instead of reporting promised action on a questionnaire could be perceived as particularly damaging or high risk to the target.

Findings observed in the relational context in the present study are also consistent with this rationale. Examination of the agent's persuasiveness ratings in the traditionally studied stealing thunder conditions (the no information control, thunder, and the naïve X refutation condition) from the relational context reveals the pattern of means, which approach significance $F(2, 87) = 3.59$, $p = .06$, approximate the pattern found by Zablocki (1996) where stealing thunder is most persuasive, followed by the control condition, which was subsequently followed by the thunder condition. Even though *Ps*

motivation in this study may have been reduced, the motivation of *Ps* to evaluate the vignettes with an accuracy goal or in a controlled manner by weighing all of the information should have been greatest in the relational context and lowest in the other two. Kunda (1999) suggests the reason for this is because accuracy goals can arise also when judgments are made have personal relevance. Given the relational context in this study involved a dating situation which *Ps* may have been much more familiar with than the other two scenarios it is plausible that there was greater personal relevance in the relational context than in the other two.

Another interesting finding arising from the relational context data was that the agent was significantly more persuasive when the stolen thunder was not refuted than when it was refuted (although given the effect size the statistical significance of the finding may be due to Type I error). After a secondary look at the refutation message in the relational context it appeared that the refutation was not exactly a refutation but rather it made the agent appear to be providing an excuse for the thunder information. As a result, *Ps* could have paid more attention to the negative information because the weak refutation made the agent appear as if they were trying to weasel their way out of the situation. This finding is consistent with some past research where weak refutations were inadvertently used and no effect for the refutation was found (Williams et al., 2001). A finding like this is expected here if *Ps* are basing their judgments on their controlled processing of the information in the situation rather than on a heuristic.

Considered all together, this study holds some interesting implications for future work in the area of stealing thunder. Primarily, the findings suggest that motivation to process the information presented may play a central role in the effectiveness of the

strategy. While the development of the initial impressions the target has for the agent may be developed more or less automatically, the cognitive reevaluation of the incriminating information revealed via the stolen thunder, and the judgment that is required to be made based on all of that information may be carried out in a more controlled fashion. Future research examining this proposition may be quite successful in producing explanations for some of stealing thunder's unexpected effects.

One of those unexpected effects found in this study is that some information may be too negative or incriminating for stealing thunder to be effective. This implies that some information is better off being not told. This is not necessarily a bad idea considering some negative information may be considered relevant by some individuals but in fact be quite the opposite in reality. It would be interesting for future research to examine exactly how the severity of the negative information plays into the effectiveness of stealing thunder. The findings of this study also suggest that the perception of a personal familiarity between the target and agent may increase the effectiveness of stealing thunder beyond not revealing anything. Based on this information, stealing thunder's effectiveness could be increased, regardless, of context if the agent can employ communication previous to the revelation of negative information that creates the impression of a personally relevant bond between the target and agent. This in turn would increase the motivation to process the information presented in the situation by increasing the extent to which the target has accuracy goals governing their judgment. Also, this study suggests that weak refutations may exacerbate the effects of the negative information. Though some of these findings are only trends observed in the data that

were consistent with past research, new research specifically investigating them may lead to interesting results.

Although some of the limitations of this study have been addressed inline with the discussion there is one overall limitation found across stealing thunder research. There is a need to investigate stealing thunder behaviorally. There has been a substantial lack of work taking this perspective. Of approximately 13 stealing thunder studies reviewed, only one examined the topic by observing compliance with a request employing stealing thunder. Given the propositions forwarded in the discussion of this paper and the findings of the Zablocki (1996) study, investigation of stealing thunder in a face to face communication context may be very interesting.

APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A

Interaction Scenarios – Legal Context

Control – No Thunder Information

In some instances, legal disputes may be settled through the process of arbitration. Arbitration commonly is used to settle disputes between two parties or individuals. There is no jury in arbitration. Instead, an independent individual, called an arbitrator, listens to arguments from both sides of the dispute and settles the dispute by making a binding judgment in favor of one side or the other. When reading the following passage please read as if you were the arbitrator deciding upon the following matter.

Hays Bicycle Corp., a maker of upper mid-priced bicycles, is at the center of a class action lawsuit involving customers of theirs who have been injured by riding a Hays bicycle. The specifics of the injuries are as follows: The injuries experienced by the customers of Hays result from the pedals on the bicycle breaking off. Simply, the pedals are one of the parts involved in transferring the force exerted by the rider's feet to the chain enabling the bike to travel forward and as a result they must be strong. Recently the pedals on Hays bicycles have been breaking while the bicycle is being ridden resulting in injuries, some severe. For example, some riders have suffered severe groin injuries from falling onto the top bar of the bicycle due to the pedals breaking away from under them while riding the bicycle.

The attorney for the injured customers argue that no other bicycle manufacturer has recently experienced problems like the ones Hays is

experiencing with their pedals. They argue that the problems result from Hays Bicycle Corp.'s slow response to their customer's complaints and problems. Furthermore, the attorneys argue that is evidence of the fact Hays does not put the time and energy needed into producing a quality bicycle, thus resulting in the injuries being reported. Finally, the attorney for the injured customers argues that Hayes safety and construction standards are far below what would be expected from a large bicycle manufacturer.

On the other hand the attorney for Hays Bicycle Corp. has argued that Hays pedals have never in their history had problems like they are experiencing now and are working to correct the problem. Additionally, Hays attorneys argue that all bicycle companies see problems like this with their parts from time to time and it is not symptomatic of any specific quality problem with Hays Corp. Furthermore, Hays prides itself on producing a quality product and quality customer service and it has been slow in responding because of the time needed to deal with the recent problems with their pedals. Finally, Hays attorneys argue that the breaking pedals could be a result of customers riding their bikes in conditions they were not designed for.

For the remaining five conditions, insert text here.

While the remainder of the arbitration case is too extensive to report here, the previous text is a general summary of the important pieces of the case. Essentially, the attorney for the customers of Hays Bicycle Corp. would like to see the arbitrator decide for the customers and award them the monetary

settlement. Alternatively, the attorney for Hays Bicycle Corp. would like to see the arbitrator decide in favor of Hays, relieving them from blame.

Control – Thunder Information

During the process of the arbitration hearing an independent investigation, not associated with either Hays Bicycle Corp. or the customers of Hays, reveals that Hays Bicycle Corp. has recently been using pedals that are not as strong as they have used in the past.

Stealing Thunder – Naïve X No Refute

During the process of the arbitration hearing Hays Bicycle Corp. discloses that they have recently been using pedals that are not as strong as they have used in the past.

Stealing Thunder – Aware X No Refute

Both the attorneys for the customers of Hays and the attorneys for Hays Bicycle Corp. are aware the other has scientific evidence revealing the strength of the Hays pedals that have been breaking compared with Hays pedals from the past that have not broken. During the process of the arbitration hearing Hays Bicycle Corp. discloses that they have recently been using pedals that are not as strong as they have used in the past.

Stealing Thunder – Naïve X Refute

During the process of the arbitration hearing Hays Bicycle Corp. discloses that they have recently been using pedals that are not as strong as they have used in the past and their testing made them confident they would not be so weak as to lead to breakage.

Stealing Thunder – Aware X Refute

Both the attorneys for the customers of Hays and the attorneys for Hays Bicycle Corp. are aware the other has scientific evidence revealing the strength of the Hays pedals that have been breaking compared with Hays pedals from the past that have not broken. During the process of the arbitration hearing Hays Bicycle Corp. discloses that they have recently been using pedals that are not as strong as they have used in the past and their testing made them confident they would not be so weak as to lead to breakage.

APPENDIX B

Interaction Scenarios – Interpersonal Context

Control – No Thunder Information

Filling job vacancies and increasing staff size to keep up with demand become important tasks for any manager of a growing business. Occasionally, managers seek the advice of a human resource advisor in order to help make a decision of whether or not to hire an applicant. While you read the following passage please read as if you are the human resource advisor to the manager and may be asked for your opinion of whether or not to hire the applicant.

The bank manager, Irvine Ewart, of Birrell Bank & Trust, a small bank located in Birrell, Idaho, has for the past 4 months searched for a new bank teller in order to keep up with the increasing demand the growing city places on the bank. For Irvine, the relatively small size of the city makes qualified applicants for the position hard to find.

The application process involves two steps. First a written application, amounting to a basic personal history, must be submitted to Mr. Ewart for review. Second, all potential applicants must undergo a personal interview by Mr. Ewart. Typically, Mr. Ewart finds that applicants rarely make it through the first step of the application process. On this day, however, Mr. Ewart receives an application from an individual who appears right for the job. Tony Moyet's application appears to be all in order and Mr. Ewart decides to call him to set up a face-to-face interview.

At the interview Mr. Ewart is impressed with Mr. Moyet's education level. Mr. Moyet possesses an Associates Degree from a local college in Business Accounting and because a position as a bank teller involves keeping daily accounting ledgers of all transactions, Mr. Ewart finds this an important asset for Mr. Moyet to have considering most applicants thus far barely finished high school. Furthermore, Mr. Ewart feels that Mr. Moyet's age, 34, makes the prospect of hiring Mr. Moyet more attractive. Mr. Ewart feels that his elder status compared to most other applicants makes him more likely to be level headed and focused. This is an important consideration when the job being applied for involves the accurate handling of cash money. Finally, probably the most important feature that Mr. Moyet would bring to the job if hired pertains to his previous job experience. Although it not reported where the experience came from, Mr. Moyet states on his application he previously worked as a bank teller.

Although the interview between Mr. Ewart and Mr. Moyet is overwhelmingly positive, a couple things make Mr. Ewart slightly less than impressed with Mr. Moyet. For example, Mr. Moyet was five minutes late for the interview and he continually mispronounces Mr. Ewart's name even after hearing it said correctly by Mr. Ewart's secretary during the interview. Also, Mr. Moyet had a slightly disheveled appearance but Mr. Ewart attributes this to Mr. Moyet's tardiness.

Just before the interview concludes Mr. Moyet discusses his previous experiences as a bank teller. He informs Mr. Ewart of his responsibilities and tasks at his previous job and Mr. Ewart is pleased to learn that he will not need to

train Mr. Moyet on many of the responsibilities he would handle if hired given they are so similar to his previous job.

For the remaining five conditions, insert text here.

The manager, Mr. Ewart, concludes the interview by telling the applicant, Mr. Moyet, that he is not ready to make a final decision until he has some time to think about it and receive input from his advisors, but not to worry and that he will be hearing from them soon.

Control – Thunder Information

During the interview the bank manager, Mr. Ewart, receives a telephone call revealing that, the interviewee, Mr. Moyet had in the past been fired from the job similar to the one he is applying for stealing money.

Stealing Thunder – Naïve X No Refute

During the interview Mr. Moyet discloses that he had in the past been fired from the job similar to the one he is applying for stealing money.

Stealing Thunder – Aware X No Refute

Both the bank manager, Mr. Ewart, and the applicant, Mr. Moyet, are aware that a background check will be performed on all applicants to the bank teller position Mr. Moyet is applying for. During the interview Mr. Moyet discloses that he had in the past been fired from the job similar to the one he is applying for stealing money.

Stealing Thunder – Naïve X Refute

During the interview Mr. Moyet discloses that he had in the past been fired from the job similar to the one he is applying for stealing money but that he was wrongly accused and someone else had stolen the money.

Stealing Thunder – Aware X Refute

Both the bank manager, Mr. Ewart, and the applicant, Mr. Moyet, are aware that a background check will be performed on all applicants to the bank teller position Mr. Moyet is applying for. During the interview Mr. Moyet discloses that he had in the past been fired from the job similar to the one he is applying for stealing money but that he was wrongly accused and someone else had stolen the money.

APPENDIX C

Interaction Scenarios – Relational Context

Control – No Thunder Information

From time to time we all seek our friends for advice on our relationships. Sometimes we are asked for our opinion on what we generally think of our friend's significant other while other times see our friends seeking our support for a difficult decision they may have to make in their relationship. When reading the following passage, keep that role as a friend in mind as if you were to recommend to your friend what to do.

A couple weeks ago while out with a large group of friends your friend Chris was introduced to Kelly through a mutual friend. As the night went along they both seemed to hit it off great and by the end of the night had exchanged phone numbers and a brief kiss. Chris is fairly open about their relationships with you and from everything you have heard from Chris seems to suggest the two have been getting along well since they met. They have been out on a few dates and have met some of each others friends. The two of you both agree that up until a couple days ago Chris' budding relationship had been happily progressing as one would expect, although nothing too serious had happened yet.

Chris consistently raves about Kelly and talks of how fun and entertaining it is to be together. Chris is always telling you how attractive Kelly is as well. Not to mention how considerate Kelly seems. One of the most memorable things Chris has told you so far is how Kelly called the afternoon after they met to find Chris was not feeling well. After being invited over, Kelly proceeded to surprise

Chris and bring over Chris's favorite movie so they could relax together while Chris recovered from the night before. When hearing Chris talk to you about this, you cannot remember when the last time Chris had been so happy.

On the other hand Chris has also confided in you that they have been concerned about their new relationship with Kelly. Chris has always felt somewhat distant from Kelly and is unsure why, almost as though Kelly is keeping Chris at arms length. So far Chris has attributed this to the short life of their relationship and assumes it will go away with time. Furthermore, Kelly acts, although not extreme, in a more controlling way than Chris is used to. Recently, Chris has noticed that Kelly's behavior usually is tinged with a mild nervousness, almost as though Kelly is not comfortable.

Chris and Kelly have talked about this and Kelly says that Chris is not the direct cause of the strange behavior, Chris nonetheless does not find it altogether pleasing to deal with that. According to Chris, during their talk, Kelly expressed feelings for Chris and they were nothing less than positive. Kelly said the problem is simply that they had a lot on their mind.

For the remaining five conditions, insert text here.

Altogether, on one hand Chris seems to be extremely happy in the new relationship with Kelly, but at the same time is concerned with its future. Chris being an extremely close friend with you has confided all of this in you with the hope that you will help in the decision of what to do with their budding relationship with Kelly.

Control – Thunder Information

Just after their talk, Chris overhears a mutual friend say that Kelly's strange behavior is due to a curable sexually transmitted disease infection Kelly was recently diagnosed with.

Stealing Thunder – Naïve X No Refute

During their talk, Kelly revealed to Chris that the strange behavior is due to a curable sexually transmitted disease infection Kelly was recently diagnosed with.

Stealing Thunder – Aware X No Refute

The mutual friend that introduced Chris and Kelly to one another knows why Kelly has been acting distant and both Chris and Kelly are aware of this. During their talk, Kelly reveals to Chris that the strange behavior is due to a curable sexually transmitted disease infection Kelly was recently diagnosed with.

Stealing Thunder – Naïve X Refute

During their talk, Kelly reveals to Chris that the strange behavior is due to a curable sexually transmitted disease infection Kelly was recently diagnosed with but doesn't see how it is possible and is getting a second opinion.

Stealing Thunder – Aware X Refute

The mutual friend that introduced Chris and Kelly to one another knows why Kelly has been acting distant and both Chris and Kelly are aware of this. During their talk, Kelly reveals to Chris that the strange behavior is due to a curable sexually transmitted disease infection Kelly was recently diagnosed with but doesn't see how it is possible and is getting a second opinion.

APPENDIX D

Persuasiveness Instrument

Legal Context

Instructions: On the following item please think about the scenario you just read and indicate your opinion by writing your response on the blank space provided. Use a scale of 1 to 100 where 1 represents not very and 100 represents extremely. If you have any questions please ask the researcher.

1) How persuasive was the attorney for Hays Bicycle Corp.?

_____

Interpersonal Context

Instructions: On the following item please think about the scenario you just read and indicate your opinion by writing your response on the blank space provided. Use a scale of 1 to 100 where 1 represents not very and 100 represents extremely. If you have any questions please ask the researcher.

1) How persuasive was Mr. Moyet?

_____

Relational Context

Instructions: On the following item please think about the scenario you just read and indicate your opinion by writing your response on the blank space provided. Use a scale of 1 to 100 where 1 represents not very and 100 represents extremely. If you have any questions please ask the researcher.

1) How persuasive was Kim?

_____

APPENDIX E

Source Credibility Instrument

Instructions: On the items below please think about the scenario you just read and indicate your feelings about _____. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement by circling the response on the scale provided that most accurately represents how you feel about _____. If you have any questions please ask the researcher.

Expertise

1) I have confidence in what _____ had to say.

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

2) _____ is not very intelligent. (R)

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

3) _____ seems to be a competent individual.

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

4) I feel what _____ said is not reliable. (R)

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

5) There is little value in what _____ talked about. (R)

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

6) _____ is a well respected individual.

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

7) _____ has taken consideration of the factors involved in the situation.

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

8) I feel _____ did not have much skill in getting their point across. (R)

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

9) Not many individuals would be as poised as _____ was in this situation.

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

10) _____'s statements carry little clout. (R)

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

Trusworthiness

1) _____ does not appear to be an honest individual. (R)

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

2) I would be likely to believe what _____ has to say in most circumstances.

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

3) _____ is a person of character.

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

4) _____ does not seem to be very reputable. (R)

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

5) In my opinion _____ is not a very selfish individual.

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

6) Most people would be better off not being associated with _____. (R)

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

7) _____ gives the impression they are just.

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

8) Not many individuals are as honest as _____.

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

9) _____ is not an individual I would prefer to be like. (R)

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

10) I would not trust _____ to tell the truth when required to. (R)

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

Note. Reverse scoring should be performed for items with (R).

APPENDIX F

Information Evaluation Instrument

Instructions: On the items below please think about the final piece of information that was revealed by _____ in the scenario you just read. For each item, circle the number between the adjectives which best represents your feelings about that final piece of information relative to that pair of adjectives. Numbers '1' and '7' indicate a very strong feeling. Numbers '2' and '6' indicate a fairly weak feeling. Number '4' indicates you are undecided or do not understand the adjectives themselves. If you have any questions please ask the researcher.

Valence

Good	1	:	2	:	3	:	4	:	5	:	6	:	7	Bad (R)
Detrimental	1	:	2	:	3	:	4	:	5	:	6	:	7	Beneficial
Positive	1	:	2	:	3	:	4	:	5	:	6	:	7	Negative (R)
Unfavorable	1	:	2	:	3	:	4	:	5	:	6	:	7	Favorable
Destructive	1	:	2	:	3	:	4	:	5	:	6	:	7	Constructive
Advantageous	1	:	2	:	3	:	4	:	5	:	6	:	7	Disadvantageous (R)

Note. Reverse scoring should be performed for items with (R).

APPENDIX G

Induction Check Instrument

Instructions: On the items below, without going back and referring to the scenario you just read, please think about what you read and answer the questions by responding on the blank space provided. If you have any questions please ask the researcher.

1) What was the final piece of information revealed by _____?

_____

_____

2) Could the final piece of information that _____ revealed been revealed by someone other than _____?

_____

3) If so, was _____ aware the information could have been revealed by someone else?

_____

4) Did _____ give an explanation for the final piece of information they revealed?

_____

5) If so, what was _____'s explanation for the final piece of information they revealed?

_____

_____

6) It was easy for me to imagine myself in the position of _____.

Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Undecided	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Disagree Strongly

APPENDIX H

Demographics Instrument

Instructions: On the items below please answer the questions by responding on the blank space provided. If you have any questions please ask the researcher.

1) What is your age?

_____

2) What is your sex?

_____

3) How many years have you been in college?

_____

4) Where are you from? (City, State)

_____

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