Victim of Circumstance?: Stealing Thunder and Attribution Theory

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCE?
STEALING THUNDER AND ATTRIBUTION THEORY

By
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in partial fulfillment of the
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For my family:

Everything I accomplish is because of you.
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ABSTRACT

In situations in which an indiscretion can be revealed to another party, a person has the ability to either divulge the information first or wait until he or she is confronted. Divulging the negative information first – i.e., stealing thunder - has been supported as a way to minimize the impact of the negative information. The following study coupled stealing thunder with attribution theory in an attempt to determine how stealing thunder affects perceptions of causality. Stealing thunder was associated with increased credibility ratings but did not result in greater external attribution or lower probability of guilt ratings. Credibility was positively correlated with external attribution, regardless of thunder condition.
INTRODUCTION

In 1998, reports of an affair between President Bill Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky surfaced in the now-infamous Starr Report (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2002). Although he claims to have never engaged in intercourse with Lewinsky, President Clinton did participate in acts that are considered “unfaithful” under even the most liberal of definitions. When these allegations were brought to light, President Clinton denied having “sexual relations with that woman” but later rescinded his comment (Berlant & Duggan, 2001, p. 25). He apologized to the American people, and became the second President in history to be impeached (Berlant & Duggan, 2001).

Infidelity has become as much an American institution as marriage and is cited as the number one reason for divorce (Betzig, 1989). Even outside of the institution of marriage, infidelity is a seemingly pervasive problem. In a poll conducted by American Demographics, almost one-third of Americans admitted to being unfaithful during a relationship (Covel, 2003). With all these cheating hearts, a study assessing the impact of divulging negative information such as infidelity in a romantic relationship is highly warranted.

Stealing thunder, often promoted by legal trial strategy books, is a persuasion tactic employed to diminish the impact of potentially damaging information when the information will be revealed indefinitely. To steal thunder, one must reveal “negative information about oneself…before it is revealed or elicited by another person” (Williams, Bourgeois & Croyle, 1993, p. 597). Within the stealing thunder literature appears an idiom from a trial techniques author regarding the importance of revealing negative information first; “If you don’t, your opponent will, with twice the impact” (Mauet, 1992, p. 48).

Research supports the effectiveness of stealing thunder, and results have indicated that one who steals thunder is viewed as more credible and subsequently evaluated more favorably overall than one who does not steal thunder (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2001; Dolnik, Case & Williams, 2003; Dolnik & Williams, 2001; Ondrus, 1998; Williams et al., 1993). Furthermore, when applied to courtroom settings in which a jury must return a
verdict, stealing thunder has often led to a lower probability of guilt and fewer guilty verdicts (Dolnik, Case & Williams, 2003; Williams, 1993).

Former President Clinton will often be remembered as a partner to America’s “cultural revolution” through a series of significant firsts (Berlant & Duggan, 2001, p. 26). These firsts include the appointments of the first female US Attorney General, the first female Secretary of State, and the first openly gay man to serve as a US Ambassador (Berlant & Duggan, 2001). But despite these vast accomplishments, Clinton’s name will be forever correlated with dishonesty, infidelity and most importantly impeachment because of his extramarital behaviors. This begs the question, if President Clinton had stolen thunder (i.e., revealed his affair with Lewinsky before it was leaked through the Starr Report), would he have been more easily forgiven and could he have avoided impeachment? The literature on stealing thunder would predict that he would have been.

The present study seeks to determine if stealing thunder will be effective in a situation of interpersonal infidelity. Calling upon attribution theory, it will also explore how a person’s perception of causality varies between situations in which thunder is stolen and situations in which thunder is not stolen.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Image restoration is an attempt to regain positive perceptions of one’s character if and when a suspected wrongdoing occurs (Benoit, 1995). Ware and Linkugal (1973) offer the theory of *apologia* which identifies strategies by which a person defends against damage to his or her reputation. Benoit (1995) enumerates the four strategies that comprise the theory of apologia: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence.

When a person uses the strategy of denial, he or she will repudiate the alleged transgression. In bolstering, the person will associate him or herself with something positive in an attempt to reduce the impact of the wrongdoing. Differentiation and transcendence are different types of apologia because of their reliance on confession. In differentiation, the transgressor separates himself or herself from the context of the wrongdoing in hopes that it was the context and not the alleged transgression that impugned his or her reputation. Conversely, transcendence places the transgression into a larger context that is held positively by others (Benoit, 1995).

Apologia is a theory of image restoration and rhetorical self-defense; therefore, a study testing the possible effects of apologia is justified. This study looks at how people defend their image and stave off possible consequences of their transgressions by confessing. However, this study goes one step further. It identifies a persuasive tactic called stealing thunder to discover how the timing of the confession, after discovery of the transgression versus unsolicited admission, affects a person’s perception of the transgressor.

Stealing thunder is a tactic borrowed from courtroom literature and was initially studied within that context; however, researchers have applied the strategy to other domains such as interpersonal, political, and organizational communication. As a relatively new area of research, the breadth of potential studies on stealing thunder would seem expansive.

Williams, Bourgeois, and Croyle (1993) developed the first formal study to assess the efficacy of stealing thunder. This two-part experiment found empirical support that
stealing thunder affects the impact of negative information in a courtroom context when used by either the plaintiff or the defendant in a criminal or civil case. In both studies, mock jurors reported higher credibility ratings (including trustworthiness, honesty and convincingness) and subsequently delivered more favorable verdicts for parties who stole thunder. Furthermore, mock jurors reported lower probability of defendant guilt.

In their two-part study, Dolnik, Case and Williams (2003) also found support for the stealing thunder tactic in a courtroom context. Mock jurors who read transcripts in which a driver killed a young mother reported higher levels of defendant credibility and lower probability of guilt when the driver admitted that he had been drinking (stolen thunder) than when the prosecution extorted the information (thunder).

Zablocki (1996) explored stealing thunder within an interpersonal domain. This study found that when a female confederate disclosed information about having a sexually transmitted infection (STI), she stole thunder, the male participant was more likely to join her for a second date than if her STI medication was “inadvertently” seen by him. The results were not statistically significant; however, the study provides an interesting direction for future research within this context.

Ondrus (1998) broadened the stealing thunder context to political scandal and media coverage thereof. In a four-part study, it was determined that politicians who stole thunder were viewed more favorably by the public, and their integrity-based transgressions were far less interesting to members of the news media. Reporters and editors who read an article regarding a fictitious political candidate indicated much less interest in featuring the story when the politician stole thunder than when the reporter or editor personally uncovered the indiscretion. In a content analysis of the Washington Post, incidents in which politicians stole thunder received fewer follow-up stories than those in which politicians did not steal thunder. When asked to create new stories from fact sheets, journalism students were more likely to write fewer articles and create fewer negative statements about politicians who stole thunder. Finally, readers of the aforementioned articles rated politicians who stole thunder as more honest than when the reporter disclosed the indiscretion.

To further explore the efficacy of stealing thunder in various settings, Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2001) applied the tactic to organizational disclosure of crises. Basing
their study on stealing thunder and crisis communication literature, the researchers found that organizations that broke news about a fictitious product crisis were seen as more credible, and participants perceived the crisis as less severe.

Although the stealing thunder tactic has been studied in the aforementioned contexts, it has not been studied in a situation of interpersonal infidelity. It will be the focus this study for several reasons. Infidelity is considered the most severe of transgressions within a romantic relationship (Metts, 1994). Researchers describe infidelity as a “major rule violation”; and therefore, when a partner is unfaithful (sexually or emotionally), his or her infidelity has strong implications on the current and future status of the relationship (Pittman, 1989). In addition, studies have indicated high infidelity rates among university undergraduate students. More than thirty-eight percent of students polled at a major southern university admitted to cheating on their partners (Knox, Zusman, Laluzny, & Sturdivant, 2000). Since the pool of respondents for this study were university undergraduates, it seemed likely that infidelity was a topic with which students had personal experience or some knowledge of its existence in a university setting.

Regardless of context, studies have supported the overall effectiveness of stealing thunder; however, researchers are attempting to determine the mechanisms that underlie this persuasion tactic. In the seminal article on stealing thunder, Williams et al. (1993) offer several reasons as to why the strategy is effective: framing, counterargument formation/inoculation, commodity theory, change of meaning, and increased credibility. Previous research in this arena has found that framing, counterargument formation/inoculation, and commodity theory have not been supported; therefore they will not be discussed. However, change of meaning and increased credibility have garnered support in the stealing thunder literature and are worth noting.

The change of meaning hypothesis has been the focus of two stealing thunder studies and has offered an explanation for the stealing thunder phenomenon (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2001; Dolnik, Case & Williams, 2003). Change of meaning comes from the human need to resolve inconsistent incoming information (Hamilton & Zanna, 1974). Since many would not expect a person to knowingly reveal negative information about him or herself, the audience members’ likely attempt to understand why a person would
make such a disclosure. Audience members might subsequently change the meaning of the admission so that it aligns with what they already know about the person (Williams et al., 1993).

In their analysis of organizational disclosure of crises and stealing thunder, Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2001) tested the change of meaning hypothesis. In their study, respondents read an article in which either Coca-Cola or PepsiCo stole thunder or did not steal thunder about a preservative in their soft drinks making the drinker violently ill. In a pre-test it was determined that people had more positive feelings toward Coca-Cola than PepsiCo. Results indicated that participants changed the meaning of the crisis to support their previous beliefs about the organization. Dolnik, Case, and Williams (2003) found support for the change of meaning hypothesis when they asked mock jurors to recall the seriousness and relevance of the thunder evidence; i.e. the fact that the defendant had been drinking prior to killing a young mother in a car crash. When the driver admitted to having a few drinks (stolen thunder) jurors changed the meaning of the revelation and regarded it as less relevant and less serious than those jurors in the condition in which the prosecution led the defendant to the confession.

Despite the success of the change of meaning hypothesis in identifying the mechanism by which stealing thunder operates, increased credibility has offered the most robust results for the tactic’s effectiveness (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2001; Dolnik, Case & Williams, 2003; Dolnik & Williams, 2001; Ondrus, 1998; Williams et al., 1993). According to credibility research, people receive higher credibility ratings when they deliver information that seems contrary to their best interests (Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978). Furthermore, credible sources of information are more persuasive than those perceived as less credible (Kelman & Hovland, 1953). Most studies on stealing thunder have indicated that the person who steals thunder is typically rated as more credible, hence more positively evaluated when compared to the same individual who does not steal thunder (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2001; Ondrus, 1998; Dolnik, Case & Williams; Dolnik & Williams, 2001; Williams et al., 1993).
**Boundary Conditions**

Even though much of the previous stealing thunder research indicates that the tactic is highly effective in minimizing the effect of negative information, there are some conditions in which stealing thunder has not succeeded in minimizing negative information. The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (ELM) sheds light on one of the instances in which stealing thunder is not effective. ELM provides a structure for how the process of persuasive communication is facilitated (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). ELM suggests that there are two routes to persuasion: a central route and a peripheral route. Persuasion through the central route occurs as a result of careful attention to message components and argument quality, termed high elaboration. Persuasion through the peripheral route occurs as a result of simple cues in the context of the message such as credibility without much attention to message quality, termed low elaboration.

Stealing thunder’s effect on credibility points researchers toward the notion that the phenomenon is a peripheral cue and is most valuable under situations of low elaboration. According to ELM, the persuasive power of peripheral cues can be hindered by close scrutiny of message content or source characteristics. According to some studies, the ethnicity of the source who steals thunder can elicit higher levels of elaboration (White & Harkins, 1994). To determine if stealing thunder effects were augmented under situations of high elaboration, White and Williams (1998) created a 2 (race of political candidate) X 3 (no thunder, thunder, and stolen thunder) scenario in which respondents evaluated political candidates who did not pay child support. The researchers hypothesized that Black candidates would foster higher levels of elaboration from the White respondents and therefore stealing thunder would not be effective. According to the White participants, stealing thunder was not only ineffective for the Black candidate, but it backfired. Black candidates were less likely to be voted for if they stole thunder; a complete reversal of previous effects noted in the stealing thunder literature.

Dolnik, Case and Williams (2003) identified another limitation of stealing thunder when the tactic was revealed to mock jurors. Jurors who read a transcript in which thunder was stolen reported fewer guilty verdicts, a result that is consistent with previous findings. However, mock jurors who read a transcript in which thunder was stolen, but
the prosecuting attorney informed the jury that the defense was using the stealing thunder tactic, indicated as many guilty verdicts as the thunder condition. This also led to a significantly greater number of guilty verdicts than the no thunder condition.

Despite these boundary conditions, stealing thunder is a highly persuasive tactic aimed at minimizing negative information. It has been studied in courtroom, organizational and interpersonal contexts, and the research suggests the change of meaning hypothesis and increased credibility as reasons for why stealing thunder works. After robing the literature, it has become apparent that people view individuals who steal thunder differently than those individuals who do not steal thunder. Do they also view the causes of the individual’s behavior differently as well? Attribution theory extends the opportunity to examine such a question.

**Attribution Theory**

As perceivers of social behaviors, humans are constantly trying to make sense of the world around them; we want to know why a person performed a behavior. Attribution theory suggests that when a particular behavior is perceived, such as a romantic indiscretion, the perceiver attempts to assign causality and attributes the behavior more strongly to either internal or external causes (Kelley, 1973).

Attribution was first studied by Heider (1958), who referred to attribution as “naïve psychology” because people constantly infer the causes of other’s behavior (p. 5). Kelley (1973) recapitulated attribution referring to the theory as merely “common sense” (p. 108). According to Kelley, behaviors may be attributed to internal causes such as dispositional characteristics, traits, or attitudes or to external causes such as the situation the person was in.

Kelley offers two cases in which people attempt to assign causality. The first case occurs when the attributor has multiple observations of a person’s behavior with which to infer causality (termed covariation). This situation is ideal because the observer takes into account three dimensions of causal analysis: consensus, consistency and distinctiveness (Kelley, 1973). An example of covariation would occur if someone the observer knew or had contact with on multiple occasions, such as a close friend, was unfaithful to his or her partner. The observer would attempt to determine causality by analyzing whether the person’s actions were similar to other people in the same situation,
(consensus), consistent over time, and only occur as a result to that particular stimulus (Kelley, 1973). Based upon these considerations, the observer would determine whether the causes of the person’s behavior were due to internal characteristics or situational factors.

The second case in which an attribution attempts to assign causality occurs when he or she has only a single observation (termed configuration). Research on attribution, including the present study, usually involves this kind of single observation scenario in which the perceiver does not have the luxury of multiple accounts (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Without multiple observations the consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness are not as easily identifiable, but researchers add contextual clues to help establish them. Attribution is typically not measured as a dichotomous variable, but rather a continuum. When measuring causality, researchers do not ask a person wholly attribute a behavior to internal or external causes but rather to employ a scale in which both are considered.

Attribution theory offers a dimension to the stealing thunder research that has not yet been studied. Whether a confession is revealed by the transgressor first (stealing thunder) or by someone else (thunder), the individual perceiving the admission should make inferences about the causes of the transgressor’s behavior (Kelley, 1973). According to Eagly, Wood & Chaiken (1978), an evaluator will consider known communicator or situational characteristics and assume explanations for behaviors based upon these things. Researchers have suggested that when a person steals thunder, he or she is perceived as a more credible source (Williams et al., 1993; Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2003; Ondrus, 1998, Dolnik & Williams, 2001; Case, Dolnik, Case & Williams). Therefore, since greater credibility is a positive communicator characteristic (i.e., a positive attribute associated with the transgressor), in the stolen thunder condition in which credibility is increased, the perceiver should likely more strongly attribute the causes of the transgressor’s behavior to situational or external factors instead of negative internal traits, despite having no other knowledge of his or her personal characteristics.

According to Weiner’s (1995) extended attribution theory metaphor, life is a courtroom, and we are all judges with the ability to observe behavior and view people as right or wrong, guilty or innocent. Synthesizing previous research from the field of psychology, he describes the process of responsibility in which people observe an
outcome, determine the cause, assign responsibility, produce blame and eventually
punish the individual. In the event of personal causality, the perceiver will assign
responsibility to the transgressor. Responsibility for behavior means that the person is
accountable for the state of affairs and can be rightfully punished for this. Blame,
different than responsibility, not only makes the person accountable for the situation but
blame “conveys emotional negativity” and is the antecedent to punishment (p. 14).
“Responsibility presupposes guilt” and guilt is punishable (Ross, 1975, p. 46).

In contrast, in the event of situational causality, the perceiver will assign causality to
the circumstance(s) and the responsibility-to-punishment sequence stops. Therefore
when external attributions are made, and responsibility is taken from the individual and
placed upon the situation, guilt and punishment are less likely consequences. Apologia
becomes relevant once again because of its connection to external attribution. In two
aspects of apologia, differentiation and transcendence, the transgressor attempts to place
his or her actions into the realm of situational causes instead of personal characteristics.

Studies in which an individual stole thunder within a courtroom context resulted in
lower probability of guilt assigned to the defendant and fewer guilty verdicts (Dolnik,
Case & Williams, 2003; Williams, 1993). According to legal literature, a guilty verdict is
defined as responsibility for a crime or indiscretion (Oran, 1975). Furthermore, when a
guilty verdict is returned the crime is considered *blameworthy* and therefore punishable
(Ross, 1975).

Research on infidelity indicates that the method of discovery of an indiscretion has
powerful consequences for the future of the relationship and that the transgressor will be
blamed or punished for his or her actions. (Afifi, Falato, & Weiner, 2001). In this study,
the indiscretion or crime is identified as a romantic infidelity and the “guilty verdict”
would indicate that the infidel be held responsible for his or her transgression. In the case
of infidelity, a logical retaliation or punishment could be considered an end to the
relationship. Therefore, in the current study, the ultimate dependent variable or guilty
verdict is replaced by participant beliefs about whether the wronged party should
terminate the relationship.

Adding another element to attribution literature, previous research indicates that men
and women perceive unfaithful women as more responsible for their behaviors when
compared to men who are unfaithful (Mongeau, Hale, & Alles, 1994). This finding has been sustained despite the fact that studies of infidelity among Americans have supported the idea that men are more likely to cheat than women (Weiderman, 1997 in Knox, Zusman, Kaluzny, & Sturdivant, 2001).

Finally, research indicates that infidelity is an issue that is perceived differently by men and women. Previous work has suggested that men, more often than women, are indicate greater anger and hurt by sexual infidelity than by emotional infidelity. Conversely, women, more often than men, indicate greater anger and hurt by emotional infidelity than by sexual infidelity (Shackelford, LeBlanc & Drass, 2000). In addition, men are more likely to forgive a partner’s emotional infidelity than women and women are more likely to forgive a sexual infidelity than men (Shackelford, Buss, & Bennet (2002).

Based on the aforementioned literature, the following hypotheses are offered. According to previous stealing thunder research, increased credibility results when an individual steals thunder. Therefore:

**H$_1$:** Respondents in the stealing thunder condition will rate the stimulus character as more credible than will respondents in the thunder condition.

Attribution theory suggests that people constantly infer the causes of human behavior and will attribute those causes to internal factors such as dispositional characteristics, traits or attitudes or to external causes such as the person’s situation. Since stealing thunder results in increased credibility, a positive *communicator* characteristic, the following hypothesis is warranted:

**H$_2$:** Respondents in the stealing thunder condition will more strongly attribute stimulus character’s behavior to external causes than respondents in the thunder condition.

According to attribution theory, when a person’s behavior is attributed to internal causes, they are found responsible for the behavior, blamed and eventually punished. In contrast, when their behavior is attributed to external causes the responsibility to punishment sequence stops. Additionally, stealing thunder research indicates that a person who steals thunder is viewed as less guilty and fewer guilty verdicts are returned.
H₃: Respondents in the stealing thunder condition will more strongly indicate that the stimulus characters should remain together.

Since the literature suggests that the mechanism behind stealing thunder research is credibility, it is important to test the interaction between credibility and attribution.

H₄: Credibility ratings will be positively associated with external attribution, regardless of thunder condition.

Research has indicated that although women cheat less often than men do and that they are more often held personally responsible for their actions. In this study, a test between attribution and gender is warranted since the context is interpersonal indiscretion.

H₅: Respondents will indicate stronger internal attributions for the female infidels as compared to male infidels, regardless of thunder condition.

Infidelity is an issue that is perceived differently by men and women. This study sought to determine if men and women would also respond to the stealing thunder tactic differently in a situation of infidelity; therefore, the following research question is offered.

R₁: Will the stealing thunder tactic be more or less effective among women or men?
METHODOLOGY

Overview

Students were recruited from introductory communication classes at The Florida State University. They were randomly selected to read one of four scenarios that differed by thunder condition and gender of infidel. After reading the scenario, participants completed a questionnaire asking them to attribute the behavior to internal or external causes, rate stimulus character credibility and decide if the infidel should be forgiven and if the couple should break up over the infidelity.

Sample

Participants were 351 undergraduate students from communication classes. One hundred twenty-four (36%) of the participants were male, and 217 (64%) were female. Ages of the participants ranged from 18-35 with a mean of 21.4 and a standard deviation of 1.7.

Procedure

After approval from the Human Subjects Committee, the researcher, through prior consent with instructors, attended the class from which participants would be recruited. The researcher briefly announced that a research study was being conducted, that all students were invited to participate and that any students not interested could forgo participation without penalty. The researcher indicated that the study would assess the participant’s perception of behaviors in relationships. After willing participants completed the informed consent form, the forms were collected and put into an envelope (Appendix A).

To ensure that students would be unaware of the differences in stimuli, the researcher distributed scenarios and questionnaires by row so that students seated next to one another could not tell a difference between their materials and their classmates’ materials. Before arriving to the class, the researcher randomly assigned scenarios by rows. After participants completed the questionnaire, students were debriefed using the
debriefing script (Appendix C). The researcher indicated that all parties interested in results of the study should contact her once the study was complete.

**Experimental Stimuli**

A 2 (gender of infidel) X 2 (thunder or stolen thunder) design was created for this study. In the stolen thunder scenario, there were two stimulus characters, John and Sara, who were involved in an exclusive romantic relationship for 3 months. In the thunder scenario, in addition to John and Sara, there are two stimulus characters that serve as friends, Andy and Heidi.

A small amount of information is given about the characters’ relationship in order to engage the reader. Furthermore, the narrative indicates that midterms are approaching and that John and Sara are spending less quality time with one another. All conditions indicate that “one thing led to another” which was a purposefully ambiguous statement. In the stolen thunder condition, John or Sara comes to the other partner and reveals that he or she has cheated. In the thunder condition, the friend sees either John or Sara out at a party kissing another person and confronts him or her. In the thunder condition, the friend tells the wronged party about the indiscretion. In the stealing thunder condition, the infidel tells the wronged party about the indiscretion. In both the stolen thunder and the thunder conditions, the cheating partner says exactly the same phrase indicating that he or she cheated, he or she had a little too much to drink, it only happened once, and he or she hopes for forgiveness (Appendix B).

**Covariates**

To evaluate how past experience with infidelity might affect results, participants were asked to answer yes or no to the questions “Has someone that you’ve been romantically involved with ever cheated on you?” and “Do you personally know someone who has cheated in a relationship?” Participants who indicated that they knew someone who had cheated were asked to designate the number of men and the number of women they knew who had cheated. No interaction effect was found between these experiences and the main dependent variable; therefore, these covariates will not be discussed further.

**Dependent measures**

Credibility
Four items were based on the McCroskey and Young (1981) credibility scale, which uses a five point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Participants indicated the level of stimulus character honesty, trustworthiness, straightforwardness, and sincerity. A high score on the scale indicated high credibility, and a low score indicated low credibility. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .67 (M = 12.16; SD = 2.69).

Internal vs. external attribution

The McAuley, Duncan, and Russell (1992) Causal Dimension Scale II assessed participant attribution of stimulus character behavior. This is a 12-item semantic differential scale in which participants could indicate a 1 through 9 rating of character attribution. A low score indicated stronger internal attribution, and a high score indicated stronger external attribution. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .67 (M = 45.90; SD = 11.02).

Guilty verdict

To operationalize a guilty or non-guilty verdict, the respondents were asked whether or not the stimulus characters should break up over the infidelity and whether the partner should forgive the cheating partner. This was evaluated using a five point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A low score indicated that the stimulus characters should break up and a high score indicated that they should stay together. The mean for the Sara (John) should break up with John (Sara) item was 2.34 (SD = .93). The mean for the Sara (John) should forgive John (Sara) item was 3.07 (SD = 1.02).

Manipulation Checks

Scenarios for this study were intended to describe a transgression by either John or Sara that would be affected by stealing thunder, a persuasion tactic that may reduce the impact of negative information. The intention of the transgression was to be unsavory to the degree that the act was punishable. Manipulation checks were conducted to understand the extent to which participants perceived the act as a transgression. Two items served as manipulation checks: “What Sara (John) did with the other guy (girl) was wrong” and “Did Sara (John) cheat on John (Sara)?” The responses ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree for the first question. When asked to respond to “What Sara
(John) did with the other guy (girl) was wrong” 92% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that the act was wrong. When asked to respond to “Did Sara (John) cheat on John (Sara)?” 99% of the participants indicated that the party had cheated.

Since previous research indicates that infidelity is perceived differently by men and women, the data were also analyzed by gender. For the question “What Sara (John) did with the other guy (girl) was wrong” a one way analysis of variance indicated that female respondents (M=1.41, SD=.65) more strongly perceived the act as wrong than did male respondents (M=1.75, SD=.83; F(339) = 17.38, p < .001). For the question “Did Sara (John) cheat on John (Sara)?” a chi-square test indicated that there were no significant differences between male and female responses to the question ($\chi^2 = .02; p > .10$).
RESULTS

Credibility

Hypothesis one stated that respondents in the stealing thunder condition would rate the stimulus character as more credible than respondents in the thunder condition. An independent samples t-test indicated that respondents in the stealing thunder condition (M = 11.25, SD = 2.64) rated stimulus characters as significantly more credible than those respondents in the thunder condition (M = 13.14, SD = 2.40), (t (336) = -6.871, p< .001). Therefore, H₁ was supported.

Internal v. external attribution

Hypothesis two indicated that respondents in the stealing thunder condition would more strongly attribute stimulus character’s behavior to external causes than respondents in the thunder condition. An independent samples t-test was performed and although respondents in the stealing thunder condition (M = 46.65, SD =11.07) indicated stronger external attributions than respondents in the thunder condition (M = 45.18, SD = 10.96), the results were not statistically significant (t (336) = -1.226, p = .221). H₂ was not supported.

Guilty verdict

Hypothesis three stated that respondents in the stealing thunder condition would more often indicate that the stimulus characters remain together. As compared to respondents in the thunder conditions, respondents in the stealing thunder condition (M = 2.39, SD = .970) indicated more often that the characters not break up over the infidelity. (M = 2.30, SD = .884); however, the results were not statistically significant (t (336) = -.899, p = .370). H₃ was not supported.

Credibility and attribution

Hypothesis four stated credibility ratings would be positively associated with external attributions. A correlation analysis indicated that respondents who indicated increased levels of credibility more strongly associated the infidel’s behavior with external causes (r = .38, p <.001). H₄ was supported in this study.

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Gender of infidel and attribution

Hypothesis five indicated that respondents would more often indicate stronger internal attributions for the female infidel as compared to male infidels. An analysis of variance indicated that respondents who received the scenario in which John cheated more often made stronger external attributions (M = 46.46, SD = 11.06) than those who received the scenario in which Sara cheated (M=45.29, SD = 10.98). However the results were not statistically significant (t (336) = .969, p = .333). Therefore H₅ was not supported.

Gender of respondent and stealing thunder

The research question asked if male and female respondents would respond differently to the stealing thunder tactic. Manipulation checks indicated that women perceived the act as more wrong than men did. No main effects of gender were found for the “guilty verdict” questions (i.e., “Sara (John) should break up with John (Sara)” and “Sara (John) should forgive John (Sara”).) However, a one-way analysis of variance testing stealing thunder effects on attribution in female and male subgroups indicated that stealing thunder, as opposed to thunder led to stronger external attributions of the infidel among females (F (208) = 6.73, p < .05) but not among males (F (121) = 1.43, p =.25). Means and standard deviations are listed in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Attribution among female subgroups in the two conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thunder</td>
<td>43.09ᵃ</td>
<td>10.09</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing thunder</td>
<td>46.75ᵇ</td>
<td>10.33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Within column significant differences between means are indicated by different superscripts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thunder</td>
<td>48.82a</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing thunder</td>
<td>46.34a</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION

This study assessed the efficacy of the stealing thunder tactic in a situation of interpersonal infidelity. Differences in credibility ratings of the infidel were assessed. The study attempted to determine how respondents assign causality in situations when thunder is stolen and situations when thunder is not stolen. Furthermore, it assessed how stealing thunder affected the recommended punishment of those individuals who stole thunder. The study examined the extent to which individuals who rated the stimulus characters as more credible also indicated stronger external attributions. Finally, the study sought to determine if the attributions given to women who cheat on their partners differed from their male counterparts.

Hypothesis one stated that individuals in the stealing thunder condition would rate the stimulus character as more credible than individuals in the thunder condition. Consistent with previous findings, stealing thunder increased the credibility ratings of the characters that stole thunder and results were statistically significant.

Hypothesis two conjectured that respondents in the stealing thunder condition would more strongly attribute stimulus character behavior to external causes than respondents in the thunder condition. This hypothesis was not supported in the present study.

Hypothesis three indicated that respondents in the stealing thunder condition would more often indicate that the stimulus characters remain in their relationship and not break up over the infidelity. Again this hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis four predicted a possible correlation between increased credibility and stronger external attributions. This hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis five indicated that stronger internal attributions would be made for female infidels as compared to their male counterparts. The results were not statistically significant, and the hypothesis was not supported.

Finally, the research question asked if men and women would respond differently to the stealing thunder tactic. Results indicated that stealing thunder was more
effective for women than for their male counterparts in terms of assignment of external attribution.

Increased credibility in the stealing thunder scenario, a result that has been robust across most stealing thunder studies, was present in the preceding research. However, the hypothesized findings of stronger external attributions were not present. To understand why these findings were absent in this study, it is important to look back at the literature on attribution theory. As previously discussed, there are two cases in which people attempt to determine whether an individual’s behavior was due to internal or external causes: covariation and configuration (Kelly, 1973). In either situation, people depend on three elements, consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness to aid in their inference of causality. These elements are easily identifiable in the situation of covariation where the observer has multiple accounts of a person’s behavior. However, in a situation of a single account, configuration, the observer does not have multiple accounts of the person’s behavior; therefore, the consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness are not easily ascertained. In this study, a few contextual clues aid in establishing these factors; however, they are relatively absent as with most studies on attribution theory that rely on a single observation. Without the luxury of multiple accounts, the respondents had little information to help them determine whether the transgressor’s act was due to internal or external causes, regardless of scenario.

For example, in all scenarios, the transgressor had “a little too much to drink.” The respondents had limited information to help them determine the causality of the transgression that followed the drinking. In a real-life scenario, having “a little too much to drink” can be attributed to either internal or external causes depending on the individual’s previous behaviors. More information could be added to help with establishing the consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness; however, without multiple observations, it is difficult to determine if stealing thunder would have an effect on perception of causality.

In a 2000 study of college students, almost 70% reported that they would terminate the relationship if their romantic partner cheated on them (Knox, Zusman, Kaluzny, and Sturdivant, 2000). This study offers another reason why the perception of external attribution might be absent. When a partner cheats, the victim of the
transgression likely associates the act with internal causes. The research indicates that regardless of disclosure, an end to the relationship is likely.

Since the literature on stealing thunder offers overall support for this persuasion tactic, it is important to address the context of the study as a boundary condition of the tactic itself. Infidelity is considered a “major rule violation” within the parameters of a romantic relationship (Pittman, 1989). It is not an easy situation for either party to work through and often puts the future of the relationship in jeopardy. In the scenario used for this study, the nature of the relationship was purposefully ambiguous but research on infidelity suggests that men and women may differ in responses to infidelity based on whether it is emotional, sexual or both (Knox, Zusman, Kaluzny, & Sturdivant, 2000; Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002, Shackelford, LeBlanc, & Drass, 2000. Men find it more difficult to forgive a sexual infidelity whereas women find it more difficult to forgive an emotional infidelity (Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002).

Mitigating factors such as motivation to maintain the relationship and level of commitment affect the amount of responsibility and forgiveness of the transgressor (Mongeau & Schulz, 1997; Afifi, Falato & Weiner, 2001). In addition, the investment model suggests three components of the relationship, satisfaction, alternative quality, and investments predict the likelihood of dating infidelity (Drigotas, Safstrom, and Gentilia, 1999). Satisfaction is the reward one receives from the relationship, alternative quality is the next best alternative to the relationship, and investment is the loss that one would suffer if the relationship were terminated. The overall absence of such factors in these scenarios makes it difficult for respondents to judge relationship components that would affect the outcome of infidelity in a real life setting.

Interpersonal infidelity is a phenomenon that people, especially university undergraduates are likely to have experienced. It is not an easy context to isolate because of aforementioned factors that mitigate how people deal with partners who have cheated. This study did not support the hypotheses that stealing thunder leads to lower probability of relationship termination and stronger external attributions overall. However, stealing thunder did lead to stronger external attribution of the infidel among female respondents. Even though stealing thunder is not persuasive in a situation of interpersonal infidelity, it
is important to note that regardless of unsolicited confession (stolen thunder) or confrontation (thunder) “a fault confessed is half forgiven” (Weiner, 1995, p. 235).

Limitations

As with most research conducted with a convenience in the university setting, one limitation of this study is the lack of generalizability to situations beyond those involving undergraduate students. Secondly, although the questionnaire asked respondents if someone had cheated on them, or if they knew anyone who had cheated, the inability to ask respondents (due to possible self-incrimination) if they had cheated on a romantic partner limited the study’s ability to determine if their past cheating behavior influenced their responses. Female respondents outnumbered males in the experiment, which further limits the ability to generalize to the population. Also, this survey only tested two responses to infidelity: forgiveness of the transgressor and termination of the relationship. There are certainly other responses to infidelity that were not explored. Also, in previous stealing thunder research the implications of the confession (whether thunder is stolen or thunder is not stolen) are much greater. However, in this study the main dependent variable (the guilty verdict) only had a consequence of forgiveness or termination of a romantic relationship. Another study should create a scenario in which the consequences of the transgression are much greater to see if stealing thunder might be more effective in then. Also, the attractiveness of the person with whom the individual is unfaithful with might have an effect on the efficacy of stealing thunder. Finally, some students expressed slight concern over the semantic differential scale that measured attribution, although directions were provided and the scale is self-explanatory.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Human Subjects Committee
Informed Consent Form
Stealing Thunder and Attribution Theory

In the present study, the researcher Heather St. John is examining perceptions of behavior. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of age. If you are not at least 18, please inform the researcher at this time.

You will be asked to read a one-page scenario and complete a questionnaire. This should take no longer than 15 minutes.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, you may do so with no penalty. However, it is requested that you participate for the duration of the study.

Although you may not receive direct benefits from this project, the results of your participation will benefit the social scientific community by helping to better understand perceptions of human behavior.

The results of this study may be published in an academic journal or presented at an academic conference, but your name will not be used. No identifying personal information will be collected. No foreseeable risks or discomforts are associated with this study.

After the completion of this study, you may contact the researcher for information on the findings. If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact Heather St. John in the Department of Communication at 645-3310 or at hms0504@fsu.edu. Thank you for your participation.

I have read the above information and understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary. I am at least 18 years of age and may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time with no penalty.

I give my consent to participate in this study.

__________________________   ______________
Name (print)      Date

Signature

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a subject/participant, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President at the Office of Research at 850-644-8633.
APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRES AND SURVEYS
Sara and John are two Florida State University undergraduate students. They met in October in an introductory Communication class. After being paired up for a class project, they discovered that they had a lot of things in common. For instance, they both moved around a lot as kids, they both enjoy camping on the weekends, and they have similar musical interests. After a few dates, Sara and John were inseparable, even their friends became friends. They had been dating exclusively for a little more than three months.

Midterms were coming up, and Sara and John were seeing less and less of each other; they became busy with studying and working on various papers. Since they both had part-time jobs, they had pressure from school and work too. Sara had been noticing that John was somewhat distant during their time together and their conversations had been awkward, but she figured it was probably the demands of school. Although John had a cell phone, he hadn’t been returning Sara’s calls until the following day whereas before midterms she never had to wait more than a half hour for John to call her back.

Yesterday, John came to Sara looking severely upset. He took a deep breath and said “I’m sorry Sara, but I cheated on you with a girl from work. We were at a party last night, I had a little too much to drink and one thing led to another. It only happened once, and I’ll never, ever do it again. I really hope that we can work this out and that you’ll forgive me.”

Sara was heartbroken. She thought she had a good relationship with John and would never have expected this to happen.
Version: Sara cheats, stolen thunder

Please read the following scenario and answer the questions on the next page.

Sara and John are two Florida State University undergraduate students. They met in October in an introductory Communication class. After being paired up for a class project, they discovered that they had a lot of things in common. For instance, they both moved around a lot as kids, they both enjoy camping on the weekends, and they have similar musical interests. After a few dates, Sara and John were inseparable, even their friends became friends. They had been dating exclusively for a little more than three months.

Midterms were coming up, and Sara and John were seeing less and less of each other; they became busy with studying and working on various papers. Since they both had part-time jobs, they had pressure from school and work too. John had been noticing that Sara was somewhat distant during their time together and their conversations had been awkward, but he figured it was probably the demands of school. Although Sara had a cell phone, she hadn’t been returning John’s calls until the following day whereas before midterms he never had to wait more than a half hour for Sara to call him back.

Yesterday, Sara came to John looking severely upset. She took a deep breath and said “I’m sorry John, but I cheated on you with a guy from work. We were at a party last night, I had a little too much to drink and one thing led to another. It only happened once, and I’ll never, ever do it again. I really hope that we can work this out and that you’ll forgive me.”

John was heartbroken. He thought he had a good relationship with Sara and would never have expected this to happen.
Please read the following scenario and answer the questions on the next page.

Sara and John are two Florida State University undergraduate students. They met in October in an introductory Communication class. After being paired up for a class project, they discovered that they had a lot of things in common. For instance, they both moved around a lot as kids, they both enjoy camping on the weekends, and they have similar musical interests. After a few dates, Sara and John were inseparable, even their friends became friends. They had been dating exclusively for a little more than three months.

Midterms were coming up, and Sara and John were seeing less and less of each other; they became busy with studying and working on various papers. Since they both had part-time jobs, they had pressure from school and work too. Sara had been noticing that John was somewhat distant during their time together and their conversations had been awkward, but she figured it was probably the demands of school. Although John had a cell phone, he hadn’t been returning Sara’s calls until the following day whereas before midterms she never had to wait more than a half hour for John to call her back.

Last night, Sara’s roommate Heidi went to a party. She looked up and saw John kissing another girl! Heidi knew that Sara would be upset and would never expect this to happen. After Heidi got home from the party, she told Sara what she’d seen. Sara was devastated and the next day confronted John. John had only this to say: “I’m sorry, but I cheated on you with this girl from work. I had too much to drink last night and one thing just led to another. It only happened once, and I’ll never do it again. I hope that you and I can work this out, and that you’ll forgive me.”
Version: Sara cheats, thunder

Please read the following scenario and answer the questions on the next page.

Sara and John are two Florida State University undergraduate students. They met in October in an introductory Communication class. After being paired up for a class project, they discovered that they had a lot of things in common. For instance, they both moved around a lot as kids, they both enjoy camping on the weekends, and they have similar musical interests. After a few dates, Sara and John were inseparable, even their friends became friends. They had been dating exclusively for a little more than three months.

Midterms were coming up, and Sara and John were seeing less and less of each other; they became busy with studying and working on various papers. Since they both had part-time jobs, they had pressure from school and work too. John had been noticing that Sara was somewhat distant during their time together and their conversations had been awkward, but he figured it was probably the demands of school. Although Sara had a cell phone, she hadn’t been returning John’s calls until the following day whereas before midterms he never had to wait more than a half hour for Sara to call him back.

Last night, John’s roommate Andy went to a party. He looked up and saw Sara kissing another guy! Andy knew that John would be upset and would never expect this to happen. After Andy got home from the party, he told John what he’d seen. John was devastated and the next day confronted Sara. Sara had only this to say: “I’m sorry, but I cheated on you with this guy from work. I had too much to drink last night and one thing just led to another. It only happened once, and I’ll never do it again. I hope that you and I can work this out, and that you’ll forgive me.”
Please read the scenario and answer the questions to the best of your ability.

Please bubble in the answer that best reflects your opinions

1. John's behavior reflects an aspect of himself  
   ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
   John's behavior reflects an aspect of the situation

2. John's behavior is manageable by him  
   ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
   John's behavior is not manageable by him

3. John's behavior is permanent  
   ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
   John's behavior is temporary

4. John can regulate his behavior  
   ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
   John cannot regulate his behavior

5. The cause of John's behavior is something over which others have control  
   ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
   The cause of John's behavior is something over which others have no control

6. The reasons behind John's behavior are inside of him  
   ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
   The reasons behind John's behavior are outside of him

7. John's behavior is stable over time  
   ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
   John's behavior changes over time

8. John's behavior is under the power of other people  
   ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
   John's behavior is not under the power of other people

9. The cause of John's behavior is just something about him  
   ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
   The cause of John's behavior is something about others

10. John's behavior is something over which he has power  
    ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
    John's behavior is something over which he has no power

11. John's behavior is unchangeable  
    ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
    John's behavior is changeable

12. John's behavior is something that other people can regulate  
    ○ 1  ○ 2  ○ 3  ○ 4  ○ 5  ○ 6  ○ 7  ○ 8  ○ 9  
    John's behavior is something other people cannot regulate

13. John is an honest person
    ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Agree  ○ Neutral  ○ Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree

14. John is untrustworthy
    ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Agree  ○ Neutral  ○ Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree
15. John is straightforward
   - O Strongly Agree
   - O Agree
   - O Neutral
   - O Disagree
   - O Strongly Disagree

16. John is insincere
   - O Strongly Agree
   - O Agree
   - O Neutral
   - O Disagree
   - O Strongly Disagree

17. Sara should break up with John
   - O Strongly Agree
   - O Agree
   - O Neutral
   - O Disagree
   - O Strongly Disagree

18. Sara should forgive John
   - O Strongly Agree
   - O Agree
   - O Neutral
   - O Disagree
   - O Strongly Disagree

19. What John did with the other girl was wrong
   - O Strongly Agree
   - O Agree
   - O Neutral
   - O Disagree
   - O Strongly Disagree

20. Did John cheat on Sara?
    - O Yes
    - O No

21. Has someone that you've been romantically involved with ever cheated on you?
    - O Yes
    - O No

22. Do you know someone who has cheated in a relationship?
    - O Yes
    - O No

   If you answered Yes to Question 22, please answer the following two questions. If you answered No please skip to Question 25.

23. How many men do you know personally who have cheated? Indicate a number not a range. Please write the number in the boxes below.

24. How many women do you know personally who have cheated? Indicate a number not a range. Please write the number in the boxes below

25. What is your sex?
   - O Male
   - O Female

26. In what year were you born?
   19
   1
   2
   3
   4
   5
   6
   7
   8
   9
   0
Please read the scenario and answer the questions to the best of your ability.

Please bubble in the answer that best reflects your opinions

1. Sara's behavior reflects an aspect of herself  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
   Sara's behavior reflects an aspect of the situation
2. Sara's behavior is manageable by her  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
   Sara's behavior is not manageable by her
3. Sara's behavior is permanent  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
   Sara's behavior is temporary
4. Sara can regulate her behavior  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
   Sara cannot regulate her behavior
5. The cause of Sara's behavior is something over which others have control  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
   The cause of Sara's behavior is something over which others have no control
6. The reasons behind Sara's behavior are inside of her  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
   The reasons behind Sara's behavior are outside of her
7. Sara's behavior is stable over time  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
   Sara's behavior changes over time
8. Sara's behavior is under the power of other people  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
   Sara's behavior is not under the power of other people
9. The cause of Sara's behavior is just something about her  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
   The cause of Sara's behavior is something about others
10. Sara's behavior is something over which she has power  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
    Sara's behavior is something over which she has no power
11. Sara's behavior is changeable  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
    Sara's behavior is changeable
12. Sara's behavior is something that other people can regulate  01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
    Sara's behavior is something other people cannot regulate
13. Sara is an honest person
   O Strongly Agree O Agree O Neutral O Disagree O Strongly Disagree
14. Sara is untrustworthy
   O Strongly Agree O Agree O Neutral O Disagree O Strongly Disagree
15. Sara is straightforward  
   ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Agree  ○ Neutral  ○ Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree
16. Sara is insincere  
   ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Agree  ○ Neutral  ○ Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree
17. John should break up with Sara  
   ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Agree  ○ Neutral  ○ Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree
18. John should forgive Sara  
   ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Agree  ○ Neutral  ○ Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree
19. What Sara did with the other guy was wrong  
   ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Agree  ○ Neutral  ○ Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree
20. Did Sara cheat on John?  
   ○ Yes  ○ No
21. Has someone that you’ve been romantically involved with ever cheated on you?  
   ○ Yes  ○ No
22. Do you know someone who has cheated in a relationship?  
   ○ Yes  ○ No

If you answered Yes to Question 22, please answer the following two questions. If you answered No please skip to Question 25.

23. How many men do you know personally who have cheated? Indicate a number not a range. Please write the number in the boxes below.

24. How many women do you know personally who have cheated? Indicate a number not a range. Please write the number in the boxes below

25. What is your sex?
   ○ Male  ○ Female
26. In what year were you born?
   19  □
   1 □ □
   2 □ □
   3 □ □
   4 □ □
   5 □ □
   6 □ □
   7 □ □
   8 □ □
   9 □ □
   0 □ □
APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING SCRIPT
Thank you for your participation in this study. As mentioned, the purpose of this study was to assess perceptions of behavior in interpersonal relationships. There were four scenarios all of which involved infidelity in a romantic relationship. The scenarios varied by whether or not the person revealed that he or she had cheated and by gender. Only the aggregate of your responses will be scored and there was no identifying information collected so that you maintain anonymity.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me at hms0504@fsu.edu.

Thank you for your cooperation.
APPENDIX D

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER
APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 2/13/2004

To: Heather St. John
   MC 1831

Dept: COMMUNICATION

From: John Tomkowiak, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
   Stealing Thunder and Attribution Theory

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referred to above have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee at its meeting on 2/11/2004. Your project was approved by the Committee.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by 2/10/2005 you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review, protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000448.

cc: Laura Arpan
    HSC No. 2004.094
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Heather Michelle St. John was born in Americus, GA on October 12, 1979. She graduated Cum Laude with her Bachelor of Science degree in General Communication from Florida State University. While attending graduate school, Heather taught Public Speaking to undergraduate students and worked as a research assistant at the Florida Government Performance Survey Research Center. Currently, Heather is a Research Analyst for MGT of America and she looks forward to pursuing her doctorate in the near future.